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IRAQ: BAGHDAD THREATENS TO FREEZE KURDISTAN'S SHARE OF THE BUDGET

Despite the many meetings this winter between KRG delegations and the Iraqi Central government, the crisis over the budget and oil policy between Erbil and Baghdad has not calmed down but rather threatens to turn into a form of financial blackmail. At the beginning of February, the Kurdish Region's Minister for Natural Resources confirmed that the KRG had started delivering oil to Turkey (2 million barrels of crude in January with the aim of 12 million barrels a month by the end of the year) — which Baghdad still considers illegal.

On 18 February, another meeting between a Kurdish delegation (led by Nêçirvan Barzani, the Kurdish Prime Minister) and the

Central government took place in Baghdad and was just as ineffective as the previous ones. The Iraqi Prime Minister's office merely stated, in a communiqué, the wish of both parties "to reach an agreement" while the Iraqi Oil Minister, Abdul Karim Luaibi, confirmed that negotiations would continue "until the conflict with the KRG was resolved".

However, this conciliatory tone was oddly in contrast with the other aspect of the conflict, that over the portion of the budget allocated to the Kurdistan Region. Baghdad's reduction of this from 17% to 11% is strongly opposed by the Kurds, both those in the KRG and those in the Iraqi Cabinet. On the very day that Nêçirvan Barzani ended his meeting with the Iraqi government,

the Iraqi Assistant Minister of Finance, Fazil Nabil, a Kurd, threatened to resign from the government if the KRG did not receive "its fair share" of the budget. Fazil Nabi accused point blank Nuri al-Maliki and Hussein Sharistani (the Deputy Prime Minister, who has been fighting against Erbil on the oil issue for years past).

"Maliki has ordered the cut in the budget to get the population of the Kurdistan Region to revolt against the Regional Government", he declared in an interview with the Kurdish daily *Rudaw*. "Baghdad has never been as tough against the Kurds before — it has used threats before, but never to this extent".

The Assistant Minister explained that he had anticipated this mea-

sure by his own Minister and the Iraqi Deputy Premier, by rapidly sending to the KRG the money due for paying the Kurdish civil servants their wages for the month of January on the 8th of the month, before his superiors had decided to cut funds to his fellow countrymen — which happened soon after. Fazil Nabi said he had had “*a very tough*” argument with his Finance Minister, from which he had come convinced that Nuri al-Maliki and Hussein Sharistani “*were behind all this*”. According to him, Nuri Maliki had even insisted on cutting the Kurdish share of the budget saying “*Let the Kurds revolt against the KRG!*”.

If these remarks attributed to the Iraqi Prime Minister are exact, Nuri Maliki’s strategy in anticipating a revolt of the Kurds against their leaders because they had been “*punished*” by Baghdad says a lot about the psychological ignorance and blindness of the central government regarding Kurdish public opinion which, by an overwhelming majority, would rather opt for independence if given the opportunity.

Fazil Nabil’s “*preventive*” reflex also is a clear indication of Iraq’s internal disintegration, where Sunni Arabs are in a state of virtual insurrection and Kurdish Ministers in the Iraqi Cabinet engage in on the spot resistance to defend the Constitutional rights of their Region.

In direct reply to and basically confirming Fazil Nabil’s accusations, Hussein Sharistani stated in a televised interview on 20 February, that the Finance Minister had, in the end, sent enough funds to cover the wages of the Kurdish civil servants (but, as we know thanks to Fazil Nabil) but that he was facing “*a liquidity crisis*” and would not be

able to pay their February wages “*so long as the Region did not send its oil exports to Iraq*”.

Hussein Sharistani also announced, while he was at it, that the Kurds had finally accepted to export their crude through SOMO, the State organisation responsible for selling Iraqi oil and linked to the Iraqi Oil Ministry.

“After hours of discussion in our meeting we finally agreed that our Kurdish brothers be represented in the SOMO, which is the sole national outlet responsible for oil”.

Sharistani affirmed that his government had no “*objection*” to the KRG exporting its oil — on condition that SOMO controlled the sales mechanisms, the turnover and the revenues.

From the start of this conflict, triumphant statements regarding the resolution of problems made by one side were straight away contradicted by the other — and this was no exception to the rule . . . The KRG spokesman, Safeen Dizayee, immediately reacted to Hussein Sharistani’s remarks by retorting that his government had in no way agreed to the supervision of its crude exports by SOMO, which he considered equivalent to placing Kurdistan “*at Baghdad’s mercy*” and that “*discussions were continuing*” The Kurds proposed, on the contrary, to deposit Kurdistan’s oil revenues at the Iraqi Central Bank, on condition that they had free use of their account there, after the Kurdish Parliament had ratified the overall budget

Safeen Dizayee also accused Baghdad of acting in this way to satisfy the rank and file of certain “*influential parties*” with an eye to the coming Iraqi Parliamentary elections. The Kurdish Government’s

spokesman unsparingly taunted the Iraqi politicians, adding that many of them ought to thank the Region for providing an economic area in Iraq that was so favourable in terms of security and stability that many of them used it for their own personal ends, as for example settling their families there, far from Baghdad’s instability, insecurity and terrorism as well as that of other Iraqi towns.

“The bulk of Baghdad officials and politicians go there to work five days a week and spend their weekends in the Region”.

As for “*the Kurdish street*”, it was not in revolt against its government. Strikes had begun to take place in Suleimaniah Province, when some workers complained of not being paid at the end of January and a demonstration had been organised by the Kurdistan Communist Party and the Workers’ Party on 11 February in front of the city’s Parliamentary offices. The days before, the staff of the Suleimaniah Water and Electricity Departments had demonstrated for the same reason.

It was then that the Finance Ministry issued a communiqué stating that the cause of the delays in payment were due to the blocking of funds by the Central government.

The next day, 12 February, the Kurdistan Investors Union announced that it hoped to deposit 100 billion dinars at the Suleimaniah branch of the Kurdistan Central Bank after organising a collection among Kurdish investors and businessmen so as to pay the wages of local civil officials.

On 23 February, some Kurdistan representatives in the Iraqi Parliament and the Federal Government, representatives of the

Region's different political factions and the Regional Government met in a conference at Erbil to discuss the latest political developments and agree on a common four-point statement in response to the Iraqi economic sanctions. The statement was unanimously approved by those taking part:

"In accordance with the Constitution, Iraqi Kurdistan is part of Iraq and is thus endowed with all the rights and powers set forth in that constitution. This includes its share of the budget resulting from the national revenue. The government cannot, under any pretext, reduce wages as a means of putting pressure on the KRG.

Although the KRG has other options for meeting the population's wages and other needs, negotiations must take place between the Iraqi Federal Government and the KRG based on respect for the Constitutional rights of the Kurdistan Region.

We call on the Iraqi Prime Minister to put an end to this illegal and unconstitutional policy. The share of the budget and the wages of the Kurdistan Region are constitutional rights and must not be withheld. The outstanding issues with the KRG must be resolved by dialogue and negotiation.

We call on the religious authorities, the United Nations, the governments and countries having relations with Iraq, the member States of the Islamic Conference Organisation and the member States of the Arab League to assume their responsibility by using their influence to put an end to the policy of economic sanctions being conducted against the population and government of the Kurdistan Region. This policy is totally unjustified and in flagrant violation of the Constitutional Law and against the international agreements and fundamental principles of Human Rights.

ERBIL: FORMING THE NEW CABINET IS MARKING TIME

Six months after the September 2013 Parliamentary elections, which saw the victory of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the defeat of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) by Gorran, the principal opposition movement, the new Kurdish Regional Government still hasn't been formed.

On 5 February, a meeting took place between the Region's Prime Minister, Nêçirvan Barzani, and Nawshirwan Mustafa, the leader of Gorran, but it failed to reach an agreement and neither of the parties has made any official statement on the meeting's conclusions.

The principal block seems to come from the respective claims of the PUK and Gorran, the two rival parties many based on Suleimaniah, both claiming the right to several Key posts, such as the Region's Deputy Prime Minister, a position that previously had gone to a PUK member when the Prime Minister was KDP — which is the present situation.

Gorran is said to have begun by demanding this position because of its indisputable victory over the PUK, which it outvoted in the last elections. The PUK, however, advanced its long alliance with the KDP, considering that the latter should not deprive it of this position, which is perhaps also important in its view because it represents the principle of power-sharing between Minister and Assistant Minister. This was set up, for the first time after the 1992 elections in order to avoid (unsuccessfully) a civil war. To renounce this would publicly confirm the PUK's loss of influence and political weight as a result to dropping from 2nd to 3rd place.

Aram Sheikh Mohammed, head of Gorran's election committee, who has acted as Gorran spokesman in these negotiations and also as its press officer, accuses the KDP and, even more the PUK for this delay, saying they are incapable of dropping the forms of a compromise inherited from Kurdish political history, which have no weight today because of the new situation resulting from the elections.

On 11 February, when public opinion was getting impatient and protest demonstrations were being held in Suleimaniah by civil associations and organisations, the KDP and Gorran announced that an agreement had been reached — Mustafa's party accepting to have the post of Minister of the Interior, instead of that of Deputy Prime Minister, and to have the Speaker of Parliament instead of Vice President of the Region.

The PUK would thus retain the post of Deputy Prime Minister. With regard to the post of Minister of the Interior, which would go to Gorran, the agreement stipulated that this depended on the approval of all the political parties with members in the Cabinet.

However, no sooner had this agreement been announced in the press than Gorran denied, through Aram Sheikh Mohammed, any final decision: "*There is no official result of the discussions held between the movement (Gorran) and the KDP*".

On 13 February, a Gorran delegation, led by its head,

Nawshirwan Mustafa, arrived at Erbil this time to meet the Region's President. Masud Barzani. Nawshirwan Mustafa is said to have insisted that a Cabinet be formed "*as quickly as possible*", to which the President had assented, as Aram Sheikh Mohamed declared to the daily *Awene*.

What emerged from this meeting, according to KNN, was that the Ministry of Natural Resources (a key post at a time when the crisis with Baghdad was at its height) would go to the KDP while Gorran would be confirmed in its attribution of the Ministry of the Interior and of the post of Speaker of Parliament.

Discussions were still taking place in mid-February, however, when Dr. Ako Hama Karim, one of the members of the Gorran delegation, repeated that his party would never give way on the attribution of Minister of the Interior, "*a red line*" that would condition any future participation in this eighth Cabinet. According to the Sharpness Agency, the KDP had proposed that Gorran should give up the Ministry of the Interior and accept that of Finance in its place — unsuccessfully...

According to Shafaq News, Gorran's insistence on having the Interior (which is combined with that of the Peshmergas) comes from its desire to control Suleimaniah Province faced with a PUK that was balking at letting it take office. Gorran accuses the PUK (and, to some extent the KDP) of having put pressure on the electorate, through the police force and, especially, the local officials to reorient their vote. Thus, it affirms, the preceding government had fired 1000 members of the staff of several administrative departments suspected of being members or sympathisers of Gorran.

Will the understanding between the KDP and its former ally deteriorate as the negotiations drag out and Gorran gradually secures the positions that it is demanding? At any rate, the two parties are blaming one another for the deadlocks. The PUK does not seem ready to "*give up the Interior*", according to a member (anonymous so far) of its Political Committee, speaking in confidence to the daily *Hawlati*. According to him, his party had not accepted the attribution of the Interior to Gorran and would continue to put pressure on the KDP on this issue in the hope of either keeping the Interior or the Peshmergas (preferably the first).

Wasta Rasul, another PUK leader, is even said to have started that as his party had "*the military power*" the Interior was due to it by right.

As far as the Deputy Prime Minister's post is concerned, there are three PUK candidates standing: Hakim Qadir, a member of the Political Committee Executive, Imad Ahmed, also a member of the Political Committee and the outgoing Deputy PM and finally Qubad Talabani, the son of the Iraqi President and PUK General Secretary, Jalal Talabani.

Indeed, the PUK's political situation is further complicated by the party's internal differences, especially as its recent defeat has not eased the dissensions between its leaders, who were fighting over the succession to Jalal Talabani even before the elections.

Thus the PUK's Fourth Congress, which was due to take place on 31 January, was postponed *sine die* by the party's leading organs.

On 2 February, the PUK's Assistant General Secretary, Dr. Barham Salih, resigned from his position stating to the press that he was henceforth only "*an ordinary member of the party*" and would remain so until the party succeeded in resolving its internal problems and held its Fourth Congress.

Barham Salih's resignation and the postponing of the Fourth Congress to an undetermined date worried the Kurdish Government as this only worsened the poor security climate in Suleimaniah Province, which had recently been shaken by several political assassinations. On learning the news the Prime Minister, Nêçirvan Barzani, warned that any danger threatening the province's "*safety*" and "*stability*" would be a "*red line*". The daily paper *Rudaw* also reported that Iranian delegations were trying to act as mediators within the PUK. Iran, indeed, is worried at the "*descent to inferno*" of the Kurdish party with which it had closer relations than with the other Kurdish parties.

On 21 January Mrs Hero Talabani, the wife of President Talabani, had refuted rumours that she wanted to postpone the Fourth Congress, stating that, on the contrary she was doing her utmost to ensure it was held and successful. Nevertheless, five days later the PUK Managing Council and General Assembly decided to adjourn the Congress until the party's situation was "*more appropriate*" for it to be held.

The PUK's internal crisis is in danger of becoming a major political crisis for Kurdistan as a whole, hindering the formation of a government of national unity, which the population is expecting.

THE RIGHTS OF THE PRESS: THE 2013 REPORTS OF REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS AND THE COMMITTEE FOR DEFENDING JOURNALISTS

Two reports regarding freedom of the press and information in the world during the year 2013 were recently published. One is by *Reporters without Borders* (RSF) and the other is by the Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPJ).

Unsurprisingly, Syria is in the bottom ranks of Reporters without Borders' (RSF) classification. Coming in position 176 (out of 180). RSF points out that *"of all the countries classified, it is the one where abuses of power are the most frequent. Information professionals are take as targets by the different parties in the conflict, by the regular army and by the opposition factions that are waging a war on information"*.

CPJ also classes Syria as the deadliest country for journalists who since 2013 have also been faced with supplementary threats from some radical Islamic groups. The number of kidnappings trebled in 2013. Many of the kidnapped journalists are held by groups affiliated to al-Qaida or to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant. However, armed factions coming from the ranks of the Free Syrian Army or pro-government groups are also blamed for some violations of press freedom, detentions and murders. Many foreign correspondents now refuse to enter the country and Syrian journalists have a choice between exile or living in fear. At least 61 Syrian and foreign journalists were kidnapped in 2013 by different groups in the field, sometimes by non-Syrian fighters, (there were only 23 kidnappings of journalists in 2012). Some of these journalists were released or managed to escape

but, at the end of 2013, the fate of 30 of them remains unknown.

There were 29 journalists, foreign or Syrian, last year, including the photographer Olivier Voisin, who was wounded in Syria but died of wounds in Turkey soon after.

Iran comes in the 174th place in the RSF classification. The Ministry of Information and the Guardians of the Revolution continue to control all information, be it through the written press, Internet sites or audiovisual media. RSF also talks of an *"internationalisation of repression because the families of Iranian journalists working abroad or for Iranian-based foreign media are "taken as hostages"*. The Islamic Republic also earns the titled of the *"fifth largest prison in the world for agents of news and information"*.

Throughout the election period until the elections in June 2013, Ahmedinjad's government indulged in preventive arrests, closed down newspapers and banned publications, exerted pressure on the families of exiled journalists and deliberately slowed down Internet traffic. Foreign correspondents had difficulty in securing visas and those that were able to go to Iran faced all kinds of restrictions in the field.

Ahmedinjad's government also openly acknowledged its policy of repressing the media, arguing that it was a matter of thwarting *"a BBC plot against the Islamic Republic"*. Thus in March 2013 the Minister of Information, Heydar Moslehi, declared: *"600 Iranian journalists are part of a network of spies working against the*

State in association with the BBC. Their arrests were aimed at preventing the emergence of any sedition during the elections". Between 26 January and 6 March the CPJ recorded the arrest of 20 journalists in an extensive wave of repression aimed at stifling any dissent before polling day. At least 24 families of people working for the BBC or Radio Farda were subjected to harassment and intimidation from the authorities.

Over and above the usual censoring of Internet, the government took extraordinary measures to limit exchanges on line, using the closest surveillance instruments of private networks. In general, Twitter and Facebook were blocked in the country, even if, paradoxically many leading members of the regime have official or semi-official accounts on these networks.

Turkey (classed 154th by RSF) won first place as the *"biggest prison in the world for journalists"*. RSF attacked *"the State's security paranoia, which tends to see every criticism as the result of plots hatched by a variety of illegal organisations" which "became still more accentuated in the course of a year marked by a considerable increase in tension over the Kurdish question"*.

CPJ also describes Turkey as being *"the worst dungeon for the press"* with 40 journalists in jail — the overwhelming majority of whom being Kurds. The authorities continue to harass and censor any critical voice, for example be having people working in the media fired.

Thus nearly 80 journalists have been fired or forced to resign for having covered the events in

Gazi Park in June 2013. In general the Turkish government is highlighted for its attempts at censorship and its threats and restriction on the use of Internet.

The CPJ also notes that the process of negotiations begun with the PKK has not, for the moment, succeeded in freeing the Kurdish journalists. The legal amendments undertaken by the government have not brought about any effective reform of the laws hampering freedom of the press and expression of opinion other than “a timid advance” that may limit the use of the measures against “terrorist propaganda” — widely used against journalists, publishers and writers. However, the amendments have retained one of the most freedom-strangling articles against the press — the one that allows conviction for “membership of an armed organisation” of some 60% of the journalists imprisoned in Turkey as of 1st December 2013.

Amongst the cases of harassment and threats against journalists that are current in Turkey, the CPJ cited the campaign of attacks on Twitter waged by the Mayor of Ankara, Melih Gökçek, against a Turkish journalist working for the BBC, Selin Girit, in June 2013, publicly describing him as “a traitor and spy” on Internet for covering some anti-government demonstrations.

During the Gezi Park events, at least 22 journalists were fired and 37 others obliged to resign solely for having done their job according to the Union of Turkish Journalists. During those events the police used tear gas and water canons to disperse not only the demonstrators but also the journalists present.

However, it is not just the Gezi Park events that face State censorship. This Hasan Cemal, an editorial writer on the daily paper *Milliyet*, was fired a few weeks after the Turkish Prime Minister

had criticised, in March 2013, something the paper had published and this journalist’s work in particular. *Milliyet* had, in fact, published minutes of a meeting between the PKK leadership and some Members of Parliament of the pro-Kurdish BDP party. Hasan Cemal had, in his writings, had supported an approved of the decision to publish them.

In Iraq, 10 journalists were killed in 2013 in circumstances and for reasons that are not clear. However, of the hundred journalists killed in the last decade, not a single murderer has been sentenced. The country remains one of the worst in the world regarding the impunity for such murders, although many of these cases could have been resolved if the authorities had the will to do so.

The Iraqi authorities, like the Kurdish ones, continue to arrest journalists for short periods but, to December 2013, the CPJ has not recorded any who had been imprisoned.

PARIS:

A LECTURE BY DR. ISMAIL BEŞİKÇİ

At the invitation of the Kurdish Institute the famous Turkish sociologist, İsmail Beşikçi, who has spent seventeen years of his life in Turkish prisons for his historical and sociological works about the Kurds gave a lecture on “the fate of the Kurdish people in the 20th Century and future perspectives” on Saturday 22 February in Paris, at the Festive Hall of Paris’s 10th Arrondissement Town Hall.

Before a large audience of Kurds and Turks as well as Human Rights activists and French, European and other academics, Dr. Beşikçi analysed the reasons of the colonial division of

Kurdistan following WWI and the resulting collapse of the Ottoman Empire:

“Arbitrary borders were drawn by the great powers of the period, the French and British Empires, in accordance with their colonial interests with complete disregard of the aspirations of the local populations involved. The Turks accepted to cede the Wilayat of Mosul, inhabited by an overwhelming majority of Kurds, which was rich in oil, to the State of Iraq, a British mandate — but on condition that the British refused to give the Kurds any form of autonomy.

In consequence, although Britain, in its vast empire, often granted a status of region autonomy to local pop-

ulations, called “self rule”, it deprived the Kurds of this minimal status despite solemn undertakings given to the League of Nations.

Kemalist Turkey had started to apply a project of forced assimilation of the Kurds originally conceived in 1911 by the Pan-Turkic leaders of the “Union and Progress Committee” (the so-called Young Turks), who dreamed of a Turkish Empire stretching from the shores of the Adriatic sea to the steppes of Central Asia. To achieve this, they took advantage of the Great War to eliminate the indigenous Christian populations of Anatolia (Armenians and Syrians). This project was completed by the expulsion to Greece of the Greek population of Anatolia at the start of the Kemalist regime.

This was followed by a cycle of revolt-bloody repression –revolt in the States that carved up Kurdistan and who cooperated politically and militarily against their Kurdish populations by means of massacres and deportations with the complete silence of firstly the League of Nations and then its successor UNO.

Not being considered a colony, Kurdistan was unable to benefit from the UN measures in favour of decolonisation in the 60s. In fact these merely covered the overseas territories colonised by the European powers.

We are this faced with an implacable and absolute anti-Kurdish international order: of the 208 States that exist in the world today, two-thirds have a population smaller than that of Kurdistan. From UNO

to the Olympic games, some areas with barely a few tens of thousands inhabitants like Vanuatu, Andorra, Lichtenstein Monaco etc are recognised as states and represented whereas the 40 or 50 million Kurds, despite their ancient history and culture are absent. This is more than an injustice – it's a scandal for human conscience", concluded Dr, Beşikçi, to loud applause from the audience.

In the following discussion, moderated by Professor Hamit Bozarslan, many questions were put to Dr. Beşikçi, described as "the Kurds' Franz Fanon" and compared with Nelson Mandela and Andrei Sakharov. He replied to each speaker, in his flowing and calm voice, with great humanity, always making the point "That's my opinion".

In conclusion he asked the Kurdish intellectuals to winder about the reasons for the fragmentation of Kurdish society and policy, to examine the internal weaknesses that prevent this people from making a common front and drive, like a nation endowed with a State, despite the international order that fiercely defends the status quo — even when it is iniquitous and absurd.

After the lecture, the Kurdish Institute offered a dinner in Dr. Beşikçi's honour and a public appeal was launched to support a Foundation, baring his name that was recently founded in Istanbul with the aim of preserving, managing and opening to the public his library and archives.

ATHENS:

THE WORLD'S OLDEST REFUGEE IS PROBABLY A 107-YEAR OLD YEZIDI KURD

On 11 February, the Globalist published a report by Behzad Yaghmian, warning public opinion of the situation of the person who could be the world's oldest refugee.

Sabria Khalaf, a Yezidi Kurd who fled from Syria last January and has reached Athens was, in fact, born in 1907 under the Ottoman Empire. As a result, she has subsequently lived under the French mandate and the variety of regimes that have followed one another in Syria until now. Two of her daughters, her grandchildren and great-grand-children have been living in Germany for

years. This is the first time, however, that she has ever left her native region, as she and her son remained in their homeland until force to flee after the Islamist attacks on the Yezidis. Turkey was the first stage of their exodus, then after several months in an Istanbul shantytown into which migrants were crammed, Sabria and her son succeeded in buying places on an illegal boat that was supposed to take them to Italy, along with 90 other migrants from Syria, Afghanistan and Africa. However the boat ran aground in a storm on the Greek coast near Athens and the shipwrecked survivors were only just rescued by the Greek coastguards.

Housed with her son in a barely inhabitable flat rented by another Syrian refugee, the migrants live in constant fear of attacks from the xenophobic members of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn movement that has several times thrown Molotov cocktails at premises housing refugees.

As she has two daughters living in Germany, the right of family reunification should allow Sabria to obtain a visa, but the delays due to the red tape of European Union countries regarding the right of refugees to asylum added to her great age make it far from certain that she will be able to join her other children before dying, as she hopes.

Le Kurdistan irakien : *le défi des cartographes*

Dans l'Irak post-Saddam Hussein, une seule zone bénéficie d'une reconstruction politique viable et d'un boom économique dans un contexte sécuritaire stable : le Kurdistan. Pourtant, il n'est pas si aisé d'identifier ce territoire. Depuis 2011, une équipe de chercheurs tente de combler ce qui apparaît être une grande lacune : la méconnaissance du rôle de cette région dans les dynamiques en cours au Moyen-Orient.

Le Kurdistan d'Irak vit une phase de développement sans précédent (1). Les régions peuplées par les Kurdes dans le nord du pays sont entrées, notamment depuis 2003, dans un processus de construction et d'autonomisation politique qui n'est pas sans effets sur l'espace. À travers l'analyse spatiale, le géographe possède tous les outils nécessaires pour expliquer comment les mutations économiques et politiques récentes et les changements sociaux en cours sont en train de transformer ce territoire sous le contrôle de l'autorité kurde régionale. Toutefois, dans cette région du monde, l'accès aux données statistiques de base n'est pas chose aisée. Parfois même, elles sont inexistantes. L'analyse spatiale a besoin de s'appuyer sur un ensemble d'études qui s'effectuent dans un premier temps domaine par domaine – répartition de la population, sa dynamique, rapport rural-urbain, mouvements migratoires, critères socio-économiques (2), carte électorale, etc. – avant de pouvoir les relier pour rechercher des corrélations.

De plus, le Kurdistan se situe à la frontière des principales puissances régionales que sont la Turquie, l'Iran, la Syrie et le reste de l'Irak. Par sa position et son statut autonome, le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (GRK) est contraint de composer avec de puissants acteurs – étatiques ou non – qui l'entourent. Les frontières de la région kurde subissent des tensions (guérilla

du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), flux de réfugiés syriens, turcs et iraniens) et sont le théâtre de dynamiques (échanges transfrontaliers en hausse, commerce clandestin) qui mettent en lumière le rôle géopolitique et économique d'un territoire situé au cœur d'une zone en pleine reconfiguration.

Pour l'équipe de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient (IFPO) chargé du programme « Les cartes du Kurdistan d'Irak », composée de géographes, d'historiens, d'anthropologues, d'économistes et de politologues et qui a pour finalité la publication d'un atlas, l'objectif est de mieux comprendre le devenir de ce territoire (enjeux internes), mais aussi les implications et les interactions que cela suppose avec son environnement immédiat (enjeux externes).

Un territoire à reconstruire encore mal défini géographiquement

Entre l'indépendance de l'Irak en 1932 et l'intervention américaine de 1991, le Kurdistan irakien fut l'objet d'opérations militaires qui bouleversèrent la répartition de son peuplement et de son cadre de vie : exodes forcés, déplacement et réimplantation

des villageois, génocides. Dans les décennies 1970 et 1980, la violence et la répression de l'appareil militaire étatique modifièrent complètement le paysage kurde irakien en vidant les campagnes. Des milliers de villages furent rasés, les sources bouchées et les terres interdites d'exploitation. L'urbanisation se fit à marche forcée dans le but de contrôler les populations : les villageois kurdes furent relogés dans des bourgs de regroupement (*mujamma'at*), souvent sous la surveillance de l'armée. L'anéantissement du secteur agricole est une conséquence majeure de ces années de violence et de déstructuration du cadre sociospatial. De nos jours, l'un des enjeux les plus importants auxquels le GRK doit faire face demeure donc l'approvisionnement en pro-



Si les autorités d'Erbil exercent leur autorité sur 40643 kilomètres carrés dans le nord de l'Irak, le Kurdistan historique s'étend également en Iran, en Syrie et en Turquie.

duits alimentaires. Si les conditions naturelles sont réunies pour permettre à la région de devenir autosuffisante, voire exportatrice, de gros écueils empêchent la production agricole de décoller : plus de 80 % de la population (5,2 millions de personnes en 2013, selon l'exécutif d'Erbil) est urbaine ; la paysannerie a

été décimée ; les jeunes actifs ne sont pas attirés par le secteur agricole et préfèrent profiter de l'économie rentière en exerçant un emploi dans le public ; de riches terroirs sont situés dans des secteurs éloignés des grandes villes, parfois dans des zones instables au niveau sécuritaire – guérilla du PKK le long de la frontière turque –, rendant les investissements agricoles aléatoires.



La création et l'affirmation du GRK ne sont qu'une succession de pertes de contrôle par l'État central. En 1991, la guerre du Golfe a provoqué le retrait de l'armée irakienne du nord du pays derrière la *Green Line*, une zone immédiatement occupée par les combattants kurdes en rébellion contre Bagdad depuis trois décennies. Malgré une guerre civile entre les deux principaux mouvements kurdes irakiens, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), de 1994 à 1998, dont l'une des causes était les revenus générés par le commerce aux frontières externes (3), c'était la première fois que les Kurdes contrôlaient une partie du territoire kurde, qui couvre environ 60 % des terres peuplées par les Kurdes à l'intérieur de l'Irak.

En 2003, la guerre menée pour la seconde fois par les États-Unis a provoqué la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein. Une nouvelle ligne de démarcation, la *Trigger Line*, correspondant à la limite de l'avancée des *peshmerga* (combattants kurdes) dans les zones kurdes, devient une nouvelle frontière *de facto* du Kurdistan d'Irak. En 2005, lorsque la Région autonome du Kurdistan est officiellement reconnue dans la Constitution, c'est la *Green Line* qui est retenue comme frontière du GRK. Ce dernier s'étend ainsi sur les gouvernorats de Dohouk, Nineveh, Erbil, Sulaymaniyya, Tamim, Diyala et Salah ad-Din, mais des territoires comme la ville de Kirkouk restent contestés (4). L'article 140 de la Constitution prévoyait pourtant la mise en

place d'un processus de normalisation qui aurait dû prendre fin en décembre 2007, après la tenue d'un référendum permettant de choisir entre le rattachement à Erbil ou à Bagdad. Ce texte est l'élément clé pour le règlement du statut de ces zones litigieuses et en conflit entre les deux autorités. Conçu comme un processus en plusieurs étapes (résolution de la question de l'arabisation dans les zones en discussion, retour au découpage administratif de 1957, organisation d'un recensement, tenue d'un référendum), cet article 140 est toujours resté lettre morte. Si les Kurdes étaient en position de force en 2005 pour imposer à Bagdad leurs revendications, l'évolution politique de l'Irak avec le retour des sunnites, et surtout le poids des chiites autour du Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki (au pouvoir depuis 2006), ne permet plus l'application de cet accord. Derrière cette dispute territoriale se cachent des enjeux économiques colossaux : une importante partie de la richesse pétrolière du pays se trouve localisée dans ces zones, notamment près de Kirkouk.

Ainsi, les régions disputées (cf. carte 1) constituent en quelque sorte la frontière, certes d'une grande épaisseur, entre le Kurdistan autonome et le reste de l'Irak. Une frontière floue, non définie et extrêmement conflictuelle. En réalité, les territoires en discussion entre Erbil et Bagdad représentent un espace qui s'étire de la Syrie à l'Iran, soit près de 650 kilomètres d'est en ouest, et d'environ 50 à 100 kilomètres du nord au sud. Sans recensement précis et récent de la population, il

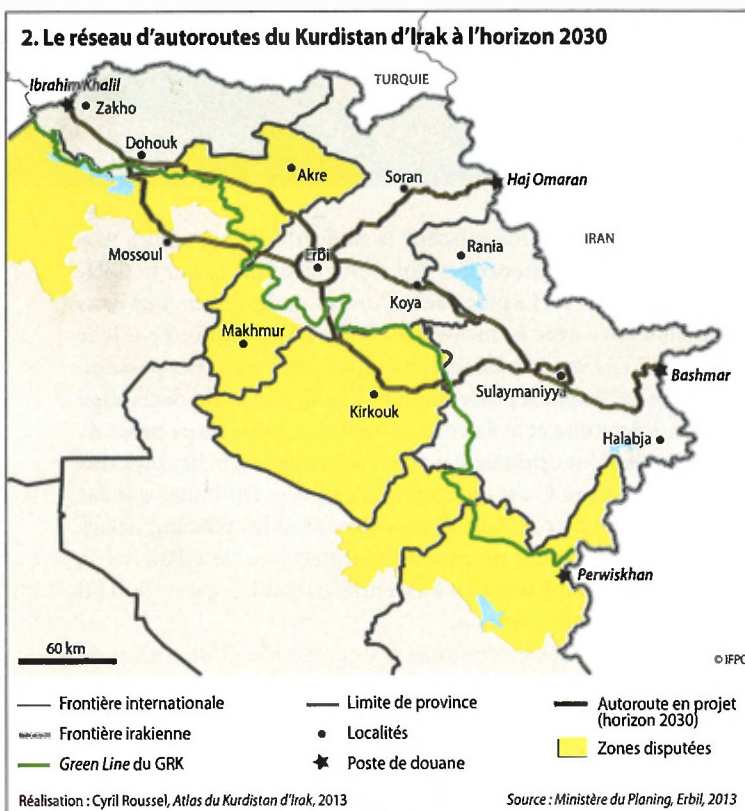
n'est pas possible de connaître la répartition ethnique exacte. Et la part entre Kurdes, Arabes et Turkmènes est variable dans chaque subdistrict. Les contrôles dans cette partie du territoire irakien sont particulièrement nombreux – surtout autour de Mossoul et de Kirkouk – et sont effectués, en fonction des zones où l'on se trouve, par les *peshmerga*, par l'armée irakienne ou par des patrouilles mixtes. Ainsi, le Kurdistan d'Irak se compose de deux territoires, pour le moment, bien distincts : l'un est parfaitement contrôlé par l'autorité kurde du GRK et il est relativement facile d'y effectuer des recherches ; l'autre est « incertain », un « entre-deux » dans lequel la collecte de données et l'accès au terrain sont difficiles.

Des données statistiques difficilement accessibles

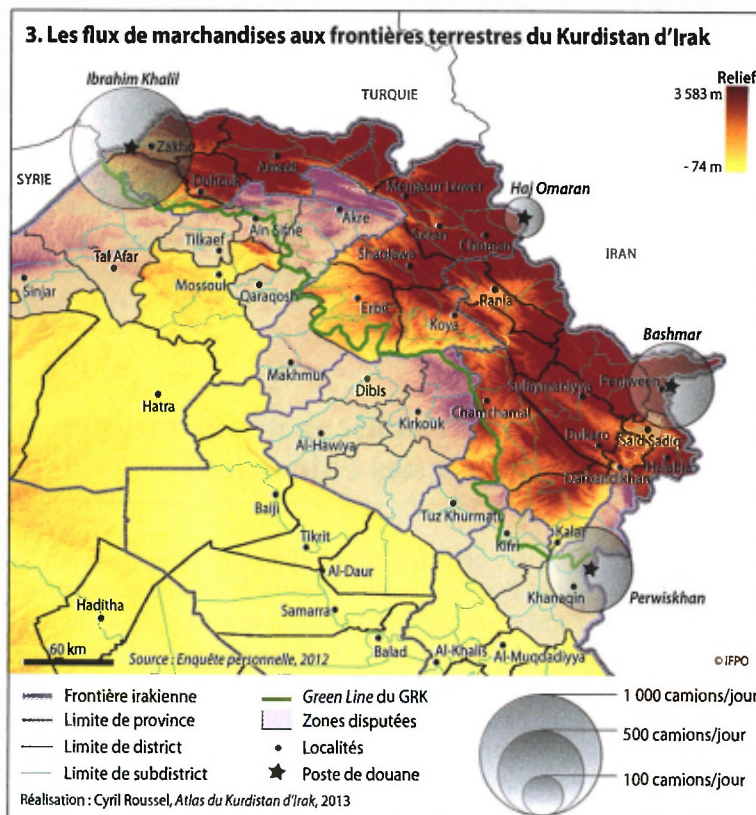
Le GRK est une entité politique dominée par les deux partis traditionnels qui se partagent le pouvoir militaire et administratif : le PDK de Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome, et l'UPK de Jalal Talabani, chef de l'État irakien. Son autorité couvre un territoire de 40 643 kilomètres carrés. Cette entité politique est autonome par rapport à Bagdad, mais pas indépendante. Cependant, et malgré la jeunesse de sa genèse,

elle forme un véritable État dans l'État puisqu'elle en possède presque tous les attributs : un président, un gouvernement, un Parlement, une cour de justice, une armée, des services de sécurité, le contrôle de ses frontières, un budget propre et donc, pour ainsi dire, l'ensemble des pouvoirs régaliens (judiciaire, militaire, fiscal et politique/décisionnel). Mais elle ne bat pas monnaie et ne délivre pas de passeport.

2. Le réseau d'autoroutes du Kurdistan d'Irak à l'horizon 2030



3. Les flux de marchandises aux frontières terrestres du Kurdistan d'Irak



Pour aménager le territoire, planifier les investissements et distribuer les budgets des régions jusqu'aux communes, de nombreux fonctionnaires sont envoyés sur le terrain, constituant une clientèle fidèle à l'une ou à l'autre des formations au pouvoir. Chaque famille politique est dominante sur une partie du territoire et les charges ministérielles et provinciales sont partagées. La gestion du Kurdistan autonome se fait donc sans l'intervention de Bagdad qui ne reconnaît pas les nouveaux

GÉOPOLITIQUE Le Kurdistan irakien : le défi des cartographes

UN TERRITOIRE MOUVANT ET DIFFICILE À GÉRER

Le territoire géré par le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan fait l'objet de nombreux litiges, notamment pour le contrôle des zones pétrolières de la région de Kirkouk, créant des tensions avec Bagdad. Les autorités d'Erbil se focalisent sur les axes qui structurent son espace utile selon une logique transversale est-ouest, pour assurer le développement de l'économie.



découpages administratifs auxquels se livre Erbil de manière unilatérale. Et ils sont nombreux. Plusieurs cas sont à noter :

~ Le redécoupage à l'intérieur de la *Green Line* de mailles administratives nouvelles qui faisaient partie de provinces extérieures au GRK et qui sont incorporées dans une entité provinciale recomposée sous contrôle kurde.

~ La gestion et l'intégration *de facto* d'entités administratives se trouvant à l'extérieur de la *Green Line*, mais qui sont peuplées en totalité par des Kurdes et contrôlées par les *peshmerga*.

~ La création d'une nouvelle grande entité administrative de premier rang – de type province, mais sans en avoir les attributs – qui incorpore de petites entités administratives de second rang situées de part et d'autre de la *Green Line*.

Le premier cas est illustré par l'exemple des districts d'Akre et de Sheikhan qui se trouvaient inclus dans la province de Nineveh. En 1993, ils sont rattachés à Dohouk, vu qu'ils se situaient sous contrôle total des *peshmerga*. En 2009, Akre est divisé en deux ; un nouveau district est créé avec comme chef-lieu Bardarash.

Le deuxième correspond au district de Makhmur. Détaché de la province d'Erbil en 1996 à la suite d'un marchandage entre le PDK, alors en difficulté dans la guerre civile contre l'UPK, et Saddam Hussein, il fait officiellement partie de Nineveh. Pourtant, aucune carte ne note ce changement. L'armée irakienne ne l'avait pas évacué en 1991, ce qui le place au sud de la *Green Line*, hors GRK. En 2003, l'avancée des troupes kurdes s'effectue dans tout le district ; les populations arabes installées durant la phase d'arabisation (années 1970 et 1980) s'enfuient. Depuis, le district est en gestion budgétaire mixte

Mossoul-Erbil et en principe, la sécurité est assurée par des patrouilles kurdo-arabes. Dans les faits, Makhmur demeure essentiellement sous contrôle administratif et militaire du Kurdistan, qui nomme les nouveaux fonctionnaires et fournit une part des budgets locaux.

Pour le troisième et dernier, on retiendra l'exemple du sud de la province de Sulaymaniyya, dont une partie constitue l'« administration de Garmian ». Cette nouvelle entité territoriale, créée en 2008, permet de gérer la zone méridionale de la province à laquelle viennent s'ajouter plusieurs subdistricts (le plus connu étant Kifri) qui se situent normalement dans les provinces voisines de Salah ad-Din et de Diyala, mais qui sont, de fait, à l'intérieur du GRK ou sur la *Green Line*.

L'hétérogénéité et la complexité de la gestion territoriale dans ces zones en discussion renforcent l'écartèlement des populations kurdes entre celles administrées par le GRK, celles gérées par Bagdad et celles placées sous l'autorité des deux entités. Dans ces conditions, la collecte de données statistiques relève généralement de la gageure.

Des enjeux économiques et politiques colossaux

Derrière cette frontière militaire *de facto* (la *Green Line*), un quasi-État kurde œuvre depuis 2003 à la reconfiguration et à l'aménagement de son territoire avec l'argent du pétrole irakien : le GRK reçoit 17 % du budget national, auxquels s'ajoutent les revenus de l'exploitation du pétrole se situant dans sa zone de contrôle – et qu'il exploite sans l'autorisation du pouvoir central – ainsi que ceux issus de la taxation à ses frontières internationales. Dans ces conditions, l'espace économique stratégique du Kurdistan d'Irak se réorganise autour de ces deux paramètres vitaux pour la région : le contrôle des frontières et d'une partie des ressources en hydrocarbures du pays.

Les pays voisins fournissent la majorité des produits manufacturés et alimentaires qui sont consommés par le GRK (cf. carte 3 p. 75). La place de la Turquie est hégémonique dans ce domaine : avec en moyenne 2 000 à 2 500 camions par jour en 2013 (5), le trafic de marchandises par fret routier passe en grande partie par le poste Ibrahim Khalil, seul point de passage entre l'Anatolie et le Kurdistan irakien. Le rôle de ce point de douane est donc primordial pour l'acheminement des produits d'importation. C'est également à ce poste frontalier que les taxes sur les marchandises importées sont les plus importantes, constituant des revenus substantiels pour le GRK (6). À ce titre, il occupe une place essentielle dans l'organisation du dispositif routier régional.

Pour faciliter cette économie d'importation et de transit de marchandises, le réseau routier kurde est en pleine reconfiguration (cf. carte 2 page 75). Les axes nord-sud, préexistants à l'autonomie de la région, sont moins fréquents qu'auparavant compte tenu des risques encourus par les compagnies de fret international à s'aventurer au sud des territoires disputés. L'ancien réseau, qui témoigne de l'organisation centralisée de l'époque baasiste (1968-2003) autour de Bagdad, avait pour



Des peshmerga, lors d'une démonstration à Erbil, en 2011.

but, dans le nord du pays, de relier les villes stratégiques de Kirkouk et de Mossoul à la capitale. Le Kurdistan, en rébellion depuis le début des années 1960, faisait figure d'angle mort. Dorénavant maître de son destin et de l'aménagement de son territoire, le GRK se focalise sur les axes qui structurent son espace utile selon une logique transversale est-ouest. Ainsi, une bonne part de la circulation commerciale suit un corridor Turquie-Dohouk-Erbil, *via* le poste-frontière Ibrahim Khalil, et se poursuit vers l'est, en direction de Sulaymaniyya et de la frontière iranienne.

Ainsi, les grands projets autoroutiers en cours et à venir au Kurdistan ont pour objectif de renforcer la circulation est-ouest au détriment de Bagdad et d'intégrer la Région autonome du Kurdistan dans un espace économique composé de la Turquie, du GRK et de l'Iran. Les frontières sont déjà et seront plus encore au cœur de cette nouvelle organisation économique spatiale qui émerge.

À l'horizon 2030, le Kurdistan devrait être pourvu d'un réseau d'autoroutes qui reliera les deux principaux postes frontaliers irano-irakiens au poste Ibrahim Khalil, en connectant entre elles les villes de Sulaymaniyya, d'Erbil, de Dohouk et de Zakho. Deux extensions vers le sud par-delà la *Green Line* intégreront Kirkouk et Mossoul au reste du Kurdistan. Dans le nord de l'Irak, les autorités kurdes tentent donc de mettre en place une organisation du territoire qui repose sur un système économique transfrontalier et qui tend à remplacer celle structurée autour de la capitale irakienne, toujours synonyme d'oppression pour les Kurdes.

Un Kurdistan dans le rôle de passeur au Moyen-Orient ?

Le projet d'atlas sur le Kurdistan d'Irak devra au final rendre compte des nouvelles cartes de tout un espace transfrontalier, de plus en plus intégré. Il apparaît composé de la Turquie, de l'Iran, du GRK, mais aussi du Kurdistan syrien, à condition que de nouveaux conflits ne viennent pas remettre en cause ces dynamiques en cours, comme c'est si souvent le cas dans cette zone du monde. Dans ces conditions, l'atlas ne pourra être un ouvrage sur un territoire défini et borné. Outre la difficulté à établir des frontières précises à ce Kurdistan, il devra prendre en compte l'ensemble des réseaux économiques, politiques et migratoires qui traverse le GRK et qui le relie à son voisinage.

Le pari scientifique est de produire un atlas des dynamiques en cours dans cette région en reconfiguration et qui apportera les clés pour comprendre les enjeux se profilant dans cette centralité méconnue du Moyen-Orient. Cela permettra également de saisir le devenir de ces territoires à l'interface entre mondes turc, arabe et persan, où les Kurdes auront peut-être l'occasion historique de jouer le rôle de passeurs.

CYRIL ROUSSEL

(1) Gilles Chenève, « Le Kurdistan irakien : vers le premier État kurde ? », in *Moyen-Orient* n°16, octobre-décembre 2012, p. 72-77.

(2) Ils peuvent être de plusieurs natures en fonction des données disponibles, comme le revenu moyen par ménage, le taux de chômage, le niveau de scolarisation, l'accès aux services de santé, etc.

(3) Dans son ouvrage *Conflit kurde : Le brasier oublié du Moyen-Orient* (Autrement, 2009), le chercheur français Hamit Bozarslan évoque les « tensions internes, alimentées [...] par l'accès inégal des deux parties aux revenus

douaniers, estimés à 100000 dollars par jour. L'UPK notamment, accuse le PDK de monopoliser les taxes douanières tirées d'un commerce transfrontalier illégal mais toléré, dont la contrebande du pétrole, et de privilégier ses propres ministères et fonctionnaires ».

(4) Arthur Quesnay, « Stratégies communautaires et politiques : le cas de Kirkouk », in *Moyen-Orient* n°18, avril-juin 2013, p. 42-47.

(5) Estimations de la Chambre du commerce de Zakho-Dohouk. Le chiffre pourrait être un peu surestimé, car

les statistiques officielles turques donnent 1500 camions par jour en 2011.

(6) Il est difficile de connaître les revenus engendrés par le fret routier à cette frontière. En décembre 2011, le responsable de la douane avait été emprisonné à la suite de fuites d'informations. Le poste Ibrahim Khalil se trouve sous le contrôle territorial du PDK et l'UPK accuse ce dernier de ne pas reverser l'intégralité des revenus au gouvernement d'Erbil. Pour ces raisons, la plus grande opacité règne sur ce sujet.

Gorran's Detailed Analysis of Iraq's 2014 Budget

<http://rudaw.net>

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – The Kurdistan Region's share from Iraq's 2014 budget is 9.9 percent, a report by the autonomous Kurdish enclave's Change Movement (Gorran) says, as Erbil continues efforts to win the 17 percent allocation specified in the constitution and resolve other oil and budget disputes with Baghdad.

The report titled "Analysis Report of the 2014 Budget Bill of Iraq and the Share of Kurdistan Region," and sent to the Kurdish parliament by Gorran, provides a detailed examination of the Iraqi budget.

It estimates the Iraqi budget for this year at more than 164.5 trillion Iraqi Dinars, exceeding the 2013 budget by 27 trillion ID.

National income in 2014 is estimated at about 139.6 trillion ID, with a deficit of some 20.8 billion ID.

The budget expects oil revenues to come from selling 3.4 million barrels per day, higher than the 2.9 million bpd specified for 2013, according to the Gorran report.

The Kurdistan Region needs to pump out 400,000 bpd in 2014, while in 2013 it was required to produce 250,000 bpd. The budget stipulates all Iraqi oil revenues – including Kurdistan's – to be deposited in the Development Funds of Iraq (DFI) in the United States.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has warned that the Iraqi budget contains "a structural problem" for relying too heavily on oil revenues, making it vulnerable to oil price variations.

The major portion of the budget – some 99.5 trillion ID -- is allocated for governance, with only about 59.3 trillion ID going to investment, the report says. It shows that 36 percent of the Iraqi budget is allocated for investments, while international standards call for investments between 65-70 percent.

The limited investment budget is expected to negatively impact the improvement of



The report estimates the Iraqi budget for this year at more than 164.5 trillion Iraqi Dinars, exceeding the 2013 budget by 27 trillion ID.

social services and economic infrastructure, which are major public demands.

The Kurdish share of the budget, after subtracting sovereign and governance costs, is 17 percent of the total, or about 16.5 trillion ID. That is 2.46 trillion ID higher than in 2013. Erbil's share comes from 15.4 trillion ID from the total Iraqi budget, and 933 billion ID from Kurdistan's share in the funds allocated to the Development Project of the Iraqi Governorates.

Gorran notes that the 2014 budget lacks any economic vision. It contains no initiatives to boost local production, decrease imports, create jobs and improving income for Iraqi citizens.

It adds that the bill is focused more on improving military and political strength, containing steep rises for governance, security and defense expenditures, and relatively small outlays for the agricultural and industrial sectors.

Defense and security expenditures take up 23.2 trillion ID of the budget, while agriculture outlay is a paltry 4 trillion ID. This means that the security and the defense expenditures are seven times greater than the agricultural sector. Industry receives only 415 billion ID – 14 times less than for defense and security.

Gorran notes that the Kurdish share of the budget is calculated after deducting gover-

nance and sovereignty costs. This means that Kurdistan's share will fall with every increase in the governance and sovereign expenditures. However, Kurdistan has its own share in governance and sovereign expenditures as well.

Sovereign costs in 2014 equal about 47.5 trillion ID. The 17 percent Kurdish share is calculated after subtracting this amount from the total budget.

Erbil should receive 17 of the allocation for governance costs. Part of this budget was not given to Kurdistan in the past, especially the costs of electricity production and pilgrimage to Mecca.

In 2012 the Kurdistan Region should have received 289 billion ID from the central government for fuel supplies and electricity generation, but this never happened. In 2013, the same expenditures totaled 302 billion ID, but were again withheld.

In 2014, about 12.6 trillion ID is allocated for governance expenditures. The Kurdistan Region constitutionally deserves more than 2 trillion ID, but is not expected to receive it.

Some articles in the budget bill are considered harmful to the Kurdistan Region if implemented, such as article 10, which is related to local Kurdish revenues.

It states that domestic Kurdish revenues will be identified and calculated by audit agencies in Erbil and Baghdad,

requiring the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to send the amount to Baghdad on a monthly basis.

"If Kurdistan Region failed to send its domestic revenues to the federal central bank, the central government shall subtract that money from the budget of the Kurdistan Region," according to a clause in the article, which was contained in previous budgets and can be activated by Baghdad at any time.

The Kurdistan Region has sent its revenues to the central bank in the past, but Baghdad has not agreed to the calculations.

The same article also holds the KRG or any other governorate responsible for damage to any telecommunications facilities, including Internet cables.

That means that the KRG could be penalized for damage done by companies owned by – or close to -- the Kurdish political parties.

Article One of the bill states that 400,000 bpd will be produced by the KRG, and that Baghdad will determine fines if that target is unmet, meaning that the Kurdish budget will suffer every time there is a dispute over production with the central government.

At \$100 a barrel, the production target should contribute \$14.6 billion (17.5 trillion ID) to the Iraqi budget, whereas the allocated budget for Kurdistan is 16.4 trillion ID.

Article 9 states that, "the expenditures of the guards of Kurdistan Region (Peshmarga) such as salaries, arms, and other necessities will be provided by the central government in a way that will not violate the Iraqi constitution."

Since 2007, this article has been repeated in the Iraqi budget laws in various ways, without being implemented. According to the estimates, the central government owes more than 10 trillion ID to the Ministry of Peshmarga. □

'We have been here longer than a thousand years': Kurdistan's fight for nationhood

<http://www.independent.co.uk>

Richard Hall

The frontiers of Kurdistan, as they were proposed at the Paris Peace conference in 1919, "begin in the north at Ziven, on the Caucasian frontier, and continue westwards to Erzurum, Erzincan, Kemah, Arapgir, Besni and Divick. In the south they follow the line from Harran, the Sinjihar Hills, Tel Asfar, Erbil, Süleymaniye, Akk-el-man, Sinne; in the east, Ravandiz, Başkale, Vezirkale, that is to say the frontier of Persia as far as Mount Ararat."

Almost 100 years later, the boundaries of a state for the Kurdish people exist only in the hearts and minds of those who live within them. Twenty-five million Kurds live in these invisible borders today. They are the world's largest stateless minority, and although they are divided by nationality, dialect, custom, allegiances and religion, they share a common desire: to be able to express their ethnic identity and to govern themselves in the areas in which they live.

In each of the countries they inhabit – Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran – that quest for self-rule has been suppressed. The history of the Kurdish people can be told in a cycle of uprisings, brutal reprisals and repression. Their struggle has truly been long and bloody, but today, while instability reigns throughout the Middle East, their prospects look brighter than they have done in a long time.

The fallout from the Arab revolutions that began in 2011 has prompted speculation on the precariousness of the borders imposed by the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement (when Britain and France divided up the Ottoman Empire), and for no one is that more true than the Kurds.

Travelling across Kurdistan, from Diyarbakir in the west to Erbil in the east, over mountains and numerous borders, it is impossible to ignore the sense that change is in the air.

TURKEY (NORTHERN KURDISTAN)

The Cigerxwin Cultural Centre in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in Turkey, is a good example of their progress. The imposing building of sand-coloured brick and large strip windows took its name from the late Kurdish writer, Sheikmose Hasan (known by his pen name Cigerxwin) – but the name itself was once a problem.

The repression of Turkey's Kurds has been particularly violent over the past half



century. One of the ways Turkish authorities suppressed calls for Kurdish autonomy was to ban any expression of ethnic identity – that included the use of the Kurdish alphabet on public buildings and documents, a ban on the teaching of the Kurdish language and even possession of Kurdish music. It was the policy of successive Turkish governments to deny the existence of the Kurdish people as distinct from Turks. They were referred to disparagingly as 'Mountain Turks'.

The name of this centre – Cigerxwin's name – contains two Kurdish letters. Ten years ago it would have been inconceivable that those letters would hang above the entrance to the building. But after a long battle, the gold metallic letters, each a foot tall, are displayed proudly.

"We have fought a long struggle over the past 100 years," says Gultan Kisanak, an MP and member of the Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), sitting in a small office of the building. "As a result of that struggle we have won important freedoms."

Kisanak strides through the corridors of the centre followed by admiring teenagers. She, too, is a symbol of the progress made in Turkey. There was a time when belonging to any organisation that identified as Kurdish would have been grounds for imprisonment. But Kisanak stands as an outspoken champion for her community and a favourite candidate for mayor in Diyarbakir – the "spiritual capital for Kurds," as she describes it.

The ancient sprawling city on the banks of the Tigris has become a centre for Kurdish nationalism. It has an independent spirit, evidenced by the graffiti that covers the narrow alley ways. When protests are held here, numbers reach to the hundreds of thousands. It is a poor city, in comparison to the rest of Turkey, as are most of the Kurdish provinces, but it is a symbol of hope for Kurds.

Gultan Kisanak's popularity, and the reason she has to pause every 10 metres to pose

for a photograph with a fan, comes in part from her fierce stand against abuses by the Turkish state. A powerful video of her admonishing the Turkish government in parliament, for failing to punish the air force commanders responsible for ordering an air strike against 34 Kurdish civilians, went viral last year.

"We have been here longer than a thousand years," she shouts in the video. "We are rooted in those cliffs, rocks, Mount Cudi, Mount Gabar, Mount Agri, Mount Munzur. We are here and we have been here since the beginning of time."

The struggle to which Kisanak refers has been a hard-fought one. Ever since the Ottoman General Mustafa Kemal Atatürk rejected a treaty which would have granted the Kurds a homeland at the Paris Peace conference in 1919, repression of Turkey's 15 million-strong Kurdish population has been brutal. Numerous rebellions were quashed by the state in the early part of the century and hundreds of thousands have been displaced and killed in an effort to pacify the south-east. Kurdish nationalism gathered pace after 1978 with the foundation, by Abdullah Öcalan, of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Marxist militant movement that aimed to create independent state from the Kurdish majority lands in Turkey (it later tempered its demands to calls for greater autonomy). Thousands of young Kurds went, and still go, "to the mountains" – a common refrain used to describe joining the PKK at their Qandil Mountains base in Iraqi Kurdistan.

A bitter war with the Turkish state followed the PKK's formation, with abuses on both sides. A fragile ceasefire now exists between the two sides following 30 years of war and more than 40,000 killed. Shortly after the ceasefire announcement in December, on the orders of Öcalan, PKK fighters began withdrawing from Turkey back to the Qandil Mountains. The peace between the two sides remains precarious. Days before I meet Kisanak, two Kurdish protesters were killed by security forces, prompting large protests in Diyarbakir and across the south-east.

Last year, on an overcast evening in the Qandil, the PKK's then military leader, Murat Karayilan, told me of disquiet in the ranks of his fighters. The leadership supported the ceasefire, he said. "But the PKK is a very large organisation. We cannot say that the middle ranks all feel the same way. We are having a problem convincing all of our comrades."

Though the peace is holding, many Kurds feel that the Turkish government is not serious about the peace process.

"The meetings are important," Kisanak says, "but they are not enough on their own." She chooses her words carefully – with reason. In the courthouse down the road, a number of her colleagues in the BDP are on trial for links to the PKK. "They haven't taken steps towards democracy, and have made no attempt to address the demands of Kurds."

In the mountains, too, there are signs of disquiet. Cemil Bayik, the head of the PKK's political wing, said recently that the group is ready to take up arms against Turkey once more if the peace process fails. But the →

⇒ PKK have reasons not to disturb the water too much. Like most Kurds, they are watching events over the border with a close eye.

SYRIA (WESTERN KURDISTAN)

Over the past year, the steady progress of Turkey's Kurds – long the centre of attention in the community – has taken a back seat. Many Kurds are now looking south to be inspired – to Kurdish-dominated, north-eastern Syria, or 'Rojava'.

"A few years ago, no one could have predicted what is happening now in Rojava [north-east Syria]," Kisanak says. "It has become an important symbol politically for Kurds in the four regions."

From the outset of civil war across the border, Syria's Kurds have pursued a difficult balancing act. The country's main Kurdish political party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which has ideological ties with PKK, and its affiliated fighting force, the People's Protection Units (YPG), have avoided major confrontation with Assad's forces, which withdrew from the vast majority of Kurdish areas early on in the conflict to avoid fighting a war on two fronts.

As a result of their disassociation, the Kurdish areas remained relatively quiet in the first two years of the war. The PYD paid lip service to the stated aims of the revolution, but, perhaps learning lessons from the brutal repression suffered by Iraqi Kurds under Saddam Hussein, they aimed to stay out of the fighting.

The relative quiet on the north-eastern front between Assad forces and the Kurdish militias has led to claims of collusion with the regime – a charge the YPG strenuously denies. Indeed, the Kurds had as much motivation to rise up against the government as other Syrians.

The same denial of ethnic and cultural rights that occurred in Turkey over the past 50 years was also being practised with gusto by the Syrian government. A 2009 Human Rights Watch report documented the arrests and trials of at least 15 prominent Syrian Kurdish political leaders since 2005. "Security agencies prevented political and cultural gatherings, and regularly detain and try Kurdish activists demanding increased political rights and recognition of Kurdish culture," the report noted.

Despite a desire to remain out of the conflict, Kurdish forces were, perhaps inevitably, dragged into the war – not by the Syrian army, but by the al-Qa'ida-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), an extremist Syrian rebel group comprised predominantly of foreign fighters. ISIS began launching attacks against Kurdish areas in July last

With a vast array of rebel groups having liberated much of northern Syria, it was inevitable that the Kurds would have to contend with the forces fighting against Assad in their quest for security and self-determination.

Polat Kan, a member of the YPG militia in the Syrian border city of Qamishli, speaks with disdain of "nasty, blind civil war," but insists the Kurds had to protect themselves. After losing some territory to jihadists, the



YPG eventually regained control of the majority of Rojava.

"From the city of Serekaniye to Ain Diwar village in the north-east is entirely liberated, except for Qamishli's airport, a security centre and some villages south of Qamishli," Polat says. "It can be said that 80 per cent of Rojava is liberated and now administered by the Kurds, together with Christians, Armenians, Assyrians and Syrians."

But Syria's Kurds have done much more than regain lost territory. What has inspired their neighbours in Turkey and beyond is the giant leaps the PYD has taken towards autonomy.

In mid-November, the PYD announced plans to create a transitional government in the Kurdish areas of Syria. On 21 January – the eve of peace talks between the Syrian opposition and Assad's government – the Kurds officially declared autonomy. The PYD have made it very clear that they will not accept a return to the status quo. "Assad cannot enter our area again," a spokesman told *The Independent* at the time.

That sentiment is echoed by Kan. "The Assad regime never had much power in our areas in a military sense. It was only through police, intelligence and agents," he says. "It will take Assad 10 years to build up his power again. Even if he wins, we are not the same Kurds we used to be. We have gained strength, experience and weapons. If the regime tries to re-occupy our areas, we will defend our people and our areas until the last YPG fighter. We will not allow any force [to] enslave us again."

While the borders that divide the Kurds grow fainter, the boundaries of Rojava grow more embedded by the day. With Assad and the main rebel forces consumed with fighting each other, it appears unlikely that either will be able to assert their authority over the north-east.

"We currently have no demand to secede from Syria and we do not seek to establish a mini-state in Rojava," Polat says. Betraying a vision that considers the next decade rather than the next year, he adds: "But if the Syrian state collapses along with the current borders that were drawn in the Sykes-Picot, and in case there is no longer a real link between the regions and areas of Syria, then we will not stand idly by. We will have our many choices."

IRAQ (SOUTH KURDISTAN)

Rojava has become a glimmer of hope for Kurds across the region. It was an unexpected source of inspiration for many, borne from a

deep morass. But perhaps the greatest success story for the Kurds in modern times lies to the east, in Iraq.

The drive from Diyarbakir to Erbil is long and well-travelled. The coaches run regularly and take around 12 hours through the mountainous terrain. There is a border to cross, of course, but the welcome one receives is more often than not, "Welcome to Kurdistan", rather than "Welcome to Iraq".

The landscape changes when one nears Erbil – the capital of the semi-autonomous region administered by the Kurds in northern Iraq. The buildings, too. The centre of the ancient city is a picture of modernisation. In the shadow of the centuries-old citadel lies a park with dozens of fountains and benches. At the other side of the park, not a few hundred yards away, looms another, altogether more modern, structure. A gleaming shopping mall with 67 outlets.

Iraqi Kurdistan could be viewed as something of a model for Kurds across the region. Whereas, previously, Kurdish movements had sought the creation of their own state, most have tempered demands now to a degree of autonomy similar to that in Iraqi Kurdistan. The region has its own parliament, its own police and security services. Perhaps most importantly for Kurds, it is the one place in which they live where they are free to express their cultural identity without hindrance.

Over the past year, large parts of Iraq have been affected by extreme levels of violence, with every indication that things will deteriorate further. But Iraqi Kurdistan has prospered. Its success in managing vast oil resources has made the 'semi' of semi-autonomous almost superfluous. The move towards energy independence – and thus greater autonomy from Baghdad – was made official at the end of 2013 by a deal with Turkey to build a pipeline between the two countries with the potential of exporting one million barrels of oil a day. More foreign businesses are flocking to Iraqi Kurdistan to invest in the coming energy boom.

The path Iraq's Kurds took to autonomy and prosperity is exactly the one that Syria's Kurds are now doing their best to avoid. After a number of failed uprisings throughout the 20th century, the Kurds under separatist leader Massoud Barzani sided with Iran in its war against Saddam Hussein, in the vain hope that their allies might triumph and grant the Kurds independence.

Hussein's vengeance was as committed as it was bloody. The Anfal Campaign, which began in the late stages of the Iran-Iraq War, was conceived with the aim of destroying the Kurdish population of northern Iraq and populating the area with Arab Iraqis. It was genocide. Anywhere up to 100,000 civilians were killed by air strikes and chemical weapons. Thousands of villages were destroyed – along with them churches, hospitals and schools. On 16 March 1988, a poison gas attack on the city of Halabja left an estimated 5,000 Kurdish people dead, most of them women and children.

As with Syria, it was the chaos of the wars in Iraq that gave the Kurds space to pursue autonomy. Saddam's heinous repression ⇒

⇒ of the Kurdish people prompted the Kurds to back the US in the first Gulf War in 1991. When the war concluded, the US implemented a no-fly zone over the Kurdistan region, paving the way for Kurdish self-rule. When the US invaded Iraq again in 2003, this time to remove Saddam Hussein from power, the Kurds welcomed the American troops as liberators.

While the US played a key role in Iraqi Kurdistan's path to autonomy, the same cannot be said for Rojava. The US has stated its opposition to the formation of an autonomous region for the Kurds of north-east Syria, and

has focused its attention on supporting moderate rebels fighting Bashar al-Assad.

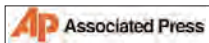
"I understand politically that what the Kurds did is a reaction to their experience," Robert Ford, the US ambassador to Syria, said recently. "But I have to say that from our point of view, the Kurdish questions in Syria are constitutional questions. They have to be negotiated and agreed by all Syrians; they cannot be fixed by unilateral measures."

At the moment, the Kurds have no powerful sponsor to ensure their rights or support their quest for independence. Neither the outcome of Rojava's experiment with autonomy,

the prosperity of Iraqi Kurdistan or Turkey's slow march towards autonomy is assured, but the Kurdish people are optimistic. It seems, at least for now, progress is in their hands.

"I feel as though the Kurdish nation has a historical opportunity," Kisanak says at the end of our meeting in Diyarbakir. "At the beginning of the 20th century, Kurdistan was divided into four parts. Kurds were told they did not exist, their language was denied, their rights were denied. Now at the beginning of this century the Kurds are reclaiming what they lost in the last"

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Biden talks oil exports with Iraqi Kurdish leader

WASHINGTON / February 01, 2014 / Associated Press

U.S. Vice President Joe Biden says Iraq's self-ruled northern Kurdish region must work with Iraq's government to resolve conflicts over revenues for exported oil.

Biden called President Massoud Barzani on Friday. It's at least the second time this month that the two have spoken.

The White House says Biden stressed the importance of close U.S. coop-

eration with the Kurdistan Regional Government and with Iraq's government.

The two also discussed efforts to fight terrorism in Iraq.

Iraq's Shiite-led government has said it intends to create three new provinces in an apparent attempt to address Sunni grievances and counter the expansion of the Kurdish self-rule region. Iraq's government and the Kurdish region have disagreed over the Kurdish region's decision to unilaterally start sending crude to Turkey. ●



FEBRUARY 4, 2014

Baghdad Legally Challenges Oil Exports from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey

by Dorian Jones
www.voanews.com

With oil now flowing from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey after the two sides signed a groundbreaking agreement late last year, Baghdad is mounting an international legal challenge to the deal.

In a deepening row over control of Iraq's energy, Baghdad has announced it is employing an international law firm to block the sale of oil piped from semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey. Last year, Ankara signed a wide-ranging energy agreement with the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, and last December, oil from the region started flowing through a newly-constructed pipeline to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan.



But Iraq's central government insisted only it had the right to sign agreements on exporting energy. Dr. Emre Iseri, an energy politics expert at Izmir's Yasar University, said the legal challenge posed a threat to the agreement.

"It's a problem. You are talking about international law, it's about legitimacy. If you act against international law, that means your maneuvering space is limited," he said.

Ankara has steadfastly defended its deal with the Iraqi Kurds, saying it complies with Iraq's constitution. The Turkish government has been working hard to bring Baghdad into the deal.

But Sinan Ulgen, a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, said Baghdad's decision to mount an international legal challenge underlined its concerns about the oil agreement.

"That would change the balance between the KRG and Baghdad. Baghdad also fears that other regions in Iraq will follow the same example -- like Basra. Therefore they don't want to set a precedent that in time would weaken the central control over the rest of

Iraq's territory," said Ulgen.

According to Iseri, the Iraqi government was not alone in having concerns over the energy deal. He said Baghdad's decision to mount a legal challenge was made in the knowledge that it had strong international support.

"More or less, the U.S. and Iranian positions are similar in the Iraqi case. The United States would like to see a unified Iraq, and also from the perspective of Iran, that would not like see a disintegrated Iraq ... And also Russia would not like to see alternative oil and natural gas sources in the market," said Iseri.

For Ankara, the energy deal with Iraqi Kurdistan has been an economic priority. With little energy reserves of its own, the Turkish government saw the deal as diversifying the country's energy sources as well as expanding trade, said Ulgen.

"The Turkish government will decide to push [forward] with the deal because it's a deal of critical importance to Turkey, given Turkey's quest for more energy resources and also the concessions that were granted to Turkish companies in the region. So there is lot of political capital attached to this deal as well," he said.

The Iraqi Kurdish region is already estimated to be Turkey's second largest trading partner. Ultimately, international lawyers and judges could decide the fate of Ankara's energy deal with Iraqi Kurdistan. Observers said Ankara was likely to respect any legal ruling, but will be hoping that during the protracted legal process, a three-way deal between Erbil, Baghdad and itself can ultimately hammered out. ●

Kurds from Iraq wage holy war in Syria with one eye on home

By Isabel Coles (Reuters)

HALABJA, Iraq / Twenty-five year old Ako Abd al-Qadir went to wage holy war in Syria vowing to return and conquer all of Iraqi Kurdistan in the name of Islam on the way back to his home town of Halabja.

"God willing, we will come back and trample over your dead bodies until we reach Halabja," he said, threatening the region's "infidel" ruling parties in a video made en route to Syria and posted on social media sites. "Just wait and see".

Ako is one of around 200 young Iraqi Kurds who have joined the ranks of militant Islamists in a conflict that has become a clarion call for home-grown jihadists across the world, keen to prove themselves amid fundamentalist fervor and war.

The trend is alarming for Iraqi Kurdistan, a region that has managed to shield itself from the violence afflicting the rest of Iraq and nearby Syria, and to attract investment from some of the world's largest oil companies.

"Definitely, it's a big concern," said a senior official with knowledge of security issues in the Kurdish capital Erbil, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "The danger is that they will be used as cells to mount attacks on targets here."

Kurdistan is not alone in worrying about jihadi backlash; the roll call of those drawn to the cause of Sunni Islamist rebels battling Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is long and diverse - from veterans of Iraq and Chechnya to young men from London and immigrants from Stockholm.

But the autonomous region's proximity to Syria makes it especially vulnerable. And whilst Kurdistan is used to dealing with external threats, not least along its tightly controlled border with majority Arab Iraq, this one is posed from within.

The region suffered its first major bombing in six years last September, which was claimed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) - a Sunni group also active in Syria.

Publicly, officials in Kurdistan play down the threat and insist that the region will remain safe, but oil companies operating here are taking extra precautions.

"We decided to restrict movements to shopping malls and other high-visibility target areas," said a source at an oil company in Kurdistan. "We're just going to lower our profile a little bit."

"LITTLE TORA BORA"

Famed for its poets and pomegranates, Halabja lies near the mountainous



Iraqi Kurdish men chat at a tea house in the Kurdish town of Halabja, near Sulaimaniya, 260 km (160 miles) northeast of Baghdad, February 1, 2014. Credit: REUTERS/Yahya Ahmad

border area between Iraq and Iran, which was once a haven for Sunni militants who formed a group there in 2001 that came to be called Ansar al-Islam.

Ansar al-Islam banned music and forced men to grow their beards in the enclave, named "little Tora Bora" after the Taliban stronghold in Afghanistan where al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden once sheltered.

Many of the young Kurds who have gone to Syria come from this area, including Ako, who joined Ansar al-Islam as a teenager.

One of the first targets of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was Ansar al-Islam. By that time, Ako had left the group and handed himself in to the security services because he felt the game was up, according to his friends.

Surviving members of Ansar al-Islam retreated into Iran, but continued to carry out attacks including a twin suicide bombing against Kurdistan's two ruling parties in 2004 that left more than 100 people dead.

Ako served time because authorities considered him to be a danger to national security. After being released from jail, he married and had a daughter. He got a job at an electricity generating plant and was working at a tea house in Halabja until the day he vanished last November.

The rest is played out on Facebook. On December 8, he wrote that he had joined ISIL in Syria and posted the group's black banner on his page. Earlier pictures show him smiling at Halabja's sports club, and he also posted a whole album of photographs of Barcelona football player Lionel Messi.

Despite Ako's history with militant Islam, his friends were shocked when they heard he was in Syria.

"I was very surprised because when he left Ansar al-Islam his views changed dramatically," said a friend of Ako's from school. "Maybe he still had contact with

them, or perhaps there is a cell that persuades these youths to go."

MOSQUE RAIDS

It is not clear whether the young men go to Syria on their own initiative or have been recruited and sent there. Mainstream Islamist parties deny involvement. A committee has been set up by the government to investigate the matter.

A spokesman for the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs said preachers at the region's more than 5,000 mosques, who are on the government payroll, were forbidden to incite violence and would be punished if found doing so.

"There is no evidence that any imam has incited people - directly or indirectly - to go to Syria," Mariwan Naqshbandi said. "We have asked the imams to advise worshippers not to go, but unfortunately they haven't managed to discourage everyone."

Kurdish security services however raided 11 mosques one night last December in the city of Sulaimaniyah on suspicion they were being used as recruitment centers, seizing identity papers and laptops. They have not disclosed what evidence they found.

Although Kurdistan shares a border with Syria, most of the young men travel there through Turkey, some via Lebanon, and others southern Iraq. Around 40 have come back to Kurdistan and are now either behind bars because they are considered a threat to national security, or are under close surveillance.

"I went there to be killed following the path of Allah," said one young Iraqi Kurd who returned from Syria because he was convinced the conflict was a western conspiracy to exterminate the world's Muslims.

But many believe these aspiring Kurdish jihadists are driven as much by the hardships of life as by their faith.

Asked why they thought Ako had gone to Syria, his friends and acquaintances ➔

→ all cited economic pressures, and the fact he grew up an orphan in Halabja, better known as the site of a 1988 chemical weapons attack under Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

The Kurds' fortunes have since changed, and their region is now Iraq's most stable and prosperous, but the people of Halabja often complain of neglect.

"The KRG (Kurdistan Regional Government) will need to focus on using its oil wealth to increase opportunities for employment and to reduce corruption if it is to address this threat effectively," IHS

Jane's said in a recent report about militancy in Kurdistan, assessing the risk as "serious".

RELIGION VS. ETHNICITY

Ako's jihad lasted less than two months. ISIL announced his "martyrdom" early this year in Syria, killed fighting not Assad's forces but fellow Kurds, who have taken advantage of the civil war to assert control in the country's northeast.

Kurds are predominantly Sunni Muslim, but identify overwhelmingly with their ethnicity - the defining factor in a long history of struggle in the four coun-

tries across which they are spread: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria.

ISIL and other Sunni armed groups in Syria have turned their weapons against a Marxist-inspired Kurdish militia that stands in the way of their vision of an Islamic state spanning from Iraq to the Mediterranean.

Wearing a black leather jacket over his Kurdish clothes, the young man who did return from Syria said he would have no qualms about fighting his ethnic kin in the name of Islam: "My religion comes before my Kurdishness - I make decisions

TheNational February 5, 2014

In setting energy policy, Kurds flex their independence

Orlando Crowcroft
www.thenational.ae

When a referendum on independence for the Kurdish region was held alongside the 2005 parliamentary elections in Iraq, the result was more than conclusive - 98.8 per cent of Kurds voted in favour of an independent Kurdistan.

Now, with Erbil and Baghdad at loggerheads over the former's independent oil exports to Turkey and the latter's threat to cut the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) funding in response, the issue of independence has raised its head again.

As an Islamist insurgency rages in the south, the KRG's control over the north has looked impressive by comparison, with little violence in the Kurdish region apart from last September's attack on Erbil, in which a number of soldiers were killed and dozens injured.

But increasingly, it is energy policy where the Kurds are able to demonstrate their growing independence. As oil exploration and development in the south is hampered by violence and economic malaise, Kurdish Iraq has pressed ahead with its pipeline link to Turkey and is increasing exports every week.

It has also signed agreements with many of the world's major international oil companies independently of Baghdad, much to the chagrin of the south.

"There is the sense that the Kurds feel that they should be getting a larger share of Iraq's overall wealth and should have more of it devolved for them to manage and spend, while Baghdad feels that the Kurds are not contributing their fair share to the economy and pushing for too much," said Richard Mallinson, a geopolitical analyst and Iraq expert at Energy Aspects in London.

"Both sides have an eye to the long term and the fact that independent oil sales would be another plank in the autonomy platform that the Kurds have been bulling up."

The KRG deputy finance minister, Rashid Tahir, was quoted by the local newspaper Rudaw earlier this year as saying that if a solution could not be reached with Baghdad over the budget then "we have no choice but to separate".

"It would be like a father who encourages his son to separate from the family. If they want us to separate, we thank them and we take our own path," he said.

Analysts say that Kurdish Iraq would struggle to support itself if a break with Iraq came tomorrow. An estimated 80 per cent of spending in the region goes to salaries, and the KRG could not switch exports on and overnight receive enough money to break all links with the south. "It wouldn't be able to pay the bills," said Shwan Zulul, head of Carduchi Consulting in London.

There are territorial issues too, Shwan says, with disputed regions such as the city of Kirkuk, with its sizeable Arab and Kurdish populations. These regions also contain the bulk of northern Iraq's oil, a guaranteed source of conflict between Iraq and a future Kurdish state. Iraq, for its part, would lose the Kurdish border with Turkey.

Then there is the international element, said Mr Mallinson, with sizeable Kurdish populations in Iran, Turkey and Syria.

"Some advocates of an independent Kurdistan argue that the desire has been suppressed for decades, if not longer, because they are spread among several countries, so any change in one of those countries would have big ramifications for its neighbours," he said.

He points out that while the Turkish

president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, reached a ceasefire with the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party last March - ending a bloody campaign in the south-east of Turkey - there has been no conclusion on what the future holds for Turkish Kurds. They will be looking at what happens in Iraq.

Others have said that the pipeline with Turkey demonstrates a willingness on the part of Mr Erdogan to deal with a separate Kurdish entity in Iraq.

"The recurrent, traditional argument against Kurdish independence was that there would be a reluctance on the part of Turkey to go all the way and let the Kurds export oil from the KRG area in the event of independence. That problem now seems significantly diminished," said Reidar Visser, a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs.

On the other hand, he said that the increasing federalist ambitions of Syrian Kurds - who have all but carved out their own state in eastern Syria as the civil war rages - could force a rethink of Turkish policy towards the Kurdish region.

"They may see the danger of a domino effect that could ultimately impact eastern Turkey itself," Mr Visser said.

In the end, it will be the international community that would need to get on board if the Kurdish region was to separate from Iraq. The recent involvement of the American vice president, Joe Biden, in the spat between Baghdad and Erbil suggest that the United States would prefer to see a compromise rather than a split, Mr Mallinson said.

"A big change in Iraq would not only have implications for Iraq's security, it would also have impacts elsewhere in the region. The US spent a lot of blood and treasure to get Iraq to where it is today, and it doesn't want that to fundamentally alter that or go backwards," he said.

" En Syrie, tous les équilibres religieux et politiques ont volé en éclats "

<http://www.fait-religieux.com>

Henri Garabed

La guerre civile syrienne est une arène impitoyable dans laquelle rivalisent grandes puissances et Etats rivaux de la région. Elle symbolise aussi la ruine des fragiles équilibres communautaires syriens. Directeur du Groupe de recherches et d'études sur la Méditerranée (GREMMO) et le Moyen-Orient à Sciences Po Lyon, le géographe Fabrice Balanche explore pour fait-religieux.com la situation des ces communautés, dont certaines sont clairement menacées dans leur existence même.

Comment évolue le conflit qui a éclaté il y a près de trois ans, en mars 2011 ?

Bachar El-Assad conserve le contrôle des points stratégiques et de la Syrie utile, c'est à dire l'axe Lattaquié-Tartous-Homs-Damas, jusqu'à la frontière jordanienne, malgré la persistance de poches rebelles dans cette bande de territoire. Le régime exerce son contrôle sur la majorité de la population syrienne. Un quart de la population lui échappe : les deux tiers sont sous le contrôle des groupes rebelles et un tiers sous celui des miliciens kurdes, alliés stratégiques du régime. Enfin, 15 à 20 % de la population se situe dans les zones disputées.

Le régime peut-il tenir sans le soutien du Hezbollah libanais ?

L'appareil militaire du régime syrien n'est pas intact, mais il fonctionne encore. Le régime ne manque ni de carburant, ni d'armes, ni de munitions. Son problème, ce sont les effectifs. Aux quelques milliers de déserteurs s'ajoute la méfiance du régime vis-à-vis d'une partie de l'armée, notamment dans les régiments de réservistes sunnites. Il s'appuie donc sur les minorités, alaouites, druzes et chrétiennes, dont il sait qu'elles lui seront fidèles. Pour toutes ces raisons, les combattants du Hezbollah sont indispensables au régime. Selon moi, il pourrait y en avoir entre 10.000 et 50.000 en Syrie.

Pourquoi le Hezbollah est-il à ce point impliqué ?

Le Hezbollah joue sa survie politique. Si le régime syrien tombe au profit d'une opposition sunnite, plus ou moins islamiste, il se retrouverait isolé au Liban, privé de son arrière-pays syrien et de sa

continuité territoriale avec l'Irak via l'Irak. Les sunnites libanais, l'Arabie saoudite et les Etats-Unis pourraient tirer profit d'une telle opportunité pour l'éliminer. L'Irak a sans doute demandé au Hezbollah d'intervenir massivement en Syrie, parce que ce pays est la clé de son dispositif vers l'ouest. Si le régime de Bachar al-Assad tombe, c'est l'influence de l'Irak au Liban qui s'effondre.

Qu'en est-il des Kurdes ?

Les Kurdes tirent profit de cette situation pour faire progresser leur autonomie. Ils préfèrent un Bachar Al-Assad faible plutôt que des sunnites forts. Au début, certains clans voulaient s'allier à l'opposition tandis que d'autres préféreraient un conseil national kurde indépendant. Finalement, les Kurdes ont complètement rompu avec l'opposition, concrétisant ainsi leur rapprochement stratégique avec le régime. C'est le PYD, la branche syrienne du PKK - le parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, fondé en Turquie - qui s'est imposé au détriment du PDK - parti démocratique du Kurdistan, fondé en Irak mais syrien.

En décembre 2012, la Turquie a poussé les djihadistes à l'assaut des bastions kurdes syriens. Équipés d'armes lourdes, les combattants du Front al Nosra ont pénétré dans la ville-frontière de Ras Al-Aïn. Les Kurdes sont parvenus à les repousser. D'autres combattants djihadistes ont pénétré en Syrie via l'Irak. Ils voulaient s'emparer du village de Malkiyé, à l'extrême nord-est de la Syrie. Là encore, les Kurdes les ont repoussés et ont réussi à couper la route entre Mossoul, en Irak, et Hassaké en Syrie. Des renforts de combattants du PKK ont sans doute été nécessaires, de même que le soutien logistique de l'armée syrienne.

Combien y-a-t-il de Kurdes en Syrie et sur quels territoires ?

Les Kurdes contrôlent près de 5 % du territoire, essentiellement au nord-est du pays. Avant la guerre, ils représentaient environ 15% de la population, c'est-à-dire 3 millions de personnes. Difficile d'être plus précis, car il y a beaucoup de Kurdes, notamment à Damas, qui sont issus de mariages mixtes, pour lesquels l'identité se dissout. Ceci étant, avec cette crise, il y a un retour identitaire.

Comment évolue la situation des chrétiens ?

Les rebelles veulent chasser les chrétiens. C'est très clair, malgré les discours de dénégation. Il n'y a pas de bataillon chrétien dans l'ASL, l'Armée syrienne libre, contrairement à une grossière mise



Fabrice Balanche. (Photo : GREMMO)

en scène véhiculée sur Internet. Les chrétiens issus des régions tombées aux mains des rebelles ont fui. Par exemple, les trois villages chrétiens de la campagne d'Idleb, dans le nord-ouest, ont été abandonnés. Autre exemple : au nord-ouest, près de Lattaquié, le village mixte arménien et alaouite de Aramo a été attaqué par le Front al Nosra et des bataillons soi-disant modérés de l'ASL. Il y a eu une centaine de morts et près de cent cinquante personnes enlevées, notamment des Arméniens. Mais qui en a parlé ? Plus au nord, la cité de Kessab, une enclave arménienne chrétienne avec une minorité alaouite, a été attaquée par des Turkmènes qui se battent au côté de l'ASL. Ils ont été repoussés par les milices d'autodéfense arméniennes. Au sud-est de Homs, le village de Sadad où vivaient trois mille chrétiens a été également attaqué par les rebelles. Des églises ont été profanées, des gens assassinés.

Globalement, parmi les chrétiens, certains défendent leur territoire en intégrant les milices de la défense nationale, d'autres soutiennent le régime de manière pacifique, mais tous savent que leur survie en Syrie dépend de son maintien. A Alep, une partie de la population arménienne est partie, vers la république d'Arménie et d'autres pays de la diaspora.

Dans l'est de la Syrie que reste-t-il des communautés chrétiennes ?

La moitié d'entre eux sont partis. On trouve encore des chrétiens dans les secteurs de Qamichli, Tel Tamar et Hassaké, dans le nord-est du pays. Dans cette dernière ville, il y a encore des combats, même s'il y a moins d'insécurité. Les évêques ont lancé des appels à l'aide parce qu'il n'y avait plus rien à manger. Les chrétiens s'exilent via le Kurdistan irakien et la Turquie. D'autres exilés chrétiens utilisent la ligne aérienne Qamichli-Lattaquié pour se rendre ensuite ➤

► au Liban et au-delà. Les Assyriens chrétiens utilisent les réseaux existants pour partir vers la Suède. La question est de savoir si cette émigration est provisoire ou définitive. Cette dernière option est la plus probable. Les jeunes adultes et ceux qui ont des enfants ne reviendront pas. On note très clairement en ce moment une accélération de l'émigration chrétienne de Syrie.

Les alaouites ont-ils une diaspora ?

Beaucoup ont émigré dans le passé, notamment durant le mandat français puis dans les années 50 et 60. Ils sont partis en Amérique du Sud, au Brésil, en Argentine et au Venezuela. En Australie aussi. Ils ont suivi les réseaux chrétiens libanais et syriens vers ces destinations. C'était une émigration de pauvreté, avant la révolution baassiste des années 60. Depuis, en Syrie, ils bénéficient des largesses du régime et accèdent aux emplois publics et à l'armée.

Y a-t-il plus d'alaouites en Syrie ou à l'étranger ?

Les alaouites sont environ 2,3 millions en Syrie. En Turquie, ils sont quelques centaines de milliers dans la province du Hatay, l'ancienne Antioche, une région connue également sous le nom de golfe d'Alexandrette. Au Liban, ils sont 100.000. Au-delà, difficile de savoir. Les liens ont été coupés. Ils n'ont pas forcément conservé d'attaches avec le pays d'origine.

Les druzes sont-ils affectés par la guerre ?

Il s'agit d'une minorité turbulente. Ils se sont rebellés à l'époque du mandat français en 1924. Ils ont eu des accrochages avec les alaouites en 1967 avant d'être marginalisés. Au début de la crise syrienne, il y a eu des mouvements anti-Bachar Al-Assad en leur sein, puis les

druzes ont été attaqués par les combattants d'Al-Nosra. Ils ont finalement accepté les armes du régime et se sont constitués en milices de quartier au sein de la défense nationale. Ils représenteraient 3 % de la population. Peut-être 700.000 autour de Soueïda, au sud, mais aussi à Damas et dans cinq villages d'un massif situé près d'Idleb. Dans ce secteur, ils ont donné des gages aux révolutionnaires, faute de choix.

Il existe aussi une communauté d'ismaéliens. Quel est leur place dans ce conflit ?

Les Ismaéliens, qui sont chiites, craignent l'islamisation des rebelles syriens. Ils comptent pour 1 % de la population, localisés dans le djebel Ansariyé et principalement à Salamiyeh à l'est de Hama. Ils ont participé au coup d'état baasiste, mais ont ensuite été éliminés parce qu'ils étaient perçus comme une opposition « communiste » au régime. Au début de la crise, ils ont manifesté pacifiquement à Salamiyeh contre le régime. Aujourd'hui, ils se sont constitués en milices de protection, tout comme les druzes.

Autre composante identitaire et religieuse : la communauté arabe sunnite. Comment réagit-elle ?

Dans le déroulement de cette crise, les Saoudiens et les Occidentaux ont complètement négligé la fragmentation des Arabes sunnites, qui représentent 65 % de la population. La grande bourgeoisie est du côté du régime. Elle a bénéficié de l'ouverture économique de ces vingt dernières années. Les commerçants et les industriels vouent de la haine aux rebelles qui ont pillé leurs usines à Alep et cassé la dynamique économique.

Un clivage très fort existe aussi entre ruraux et urbains. Alep en est l'exemple

type. Les citadins installés depuis des siècles ont vu d'un très mauvais oeil l'arrivée en ville des rebelles de la campagne. L'ouest de la ville reste fidèle au régime tandis que les quartiers informels à l'est et au sud sont des zones rebelles, car c'est à cet endroit que se sont implantées les populations sunnites rurales dans les années 70.

Il faut enfin y ajouter un troisième clivage, entre séculiers et religieux. Les laïques ne veulent pas se voir imposer un mode de vie islamiste. Les soufis sont opposés aux nouveaux imams salafistes, formés en Arabie saoudite et revenus en Syrie avec des fonds et un réseau. Les premières manifestations, il y a trois ans, ont débuté dans les mosquées salafistes.

Comment peut évoluer cette guerre ? Faut-il craindre un scénario à la libanaise, une guerre de 15 ans ?

Au Liban, l'armée libanaise avait éclaté et des factions s'étaient constituées. En Syrie, l'Etat et l'armée n'ont pas éclaté. Tant que cela tient, la sortie de crise pourrait être plus rapide qu'au Liban. D'autre part, on n'est plus à l'époque de la guerre comme au Liban. Tout dépend de la capacité des Etats-Unis à faire entendre raison à l'Arabie saoudite et à la Turquie. Les Américains ont pris conscience du danger d'un Etat failli dans la région, avec une forte prédominance du djihadisme d'Al-Qaïda. Cette situation pourrait affecter la sécurité d'Israël et leurs intérêts énergétiques.

Propos recueillis par Henri Garabed

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Bagdad critique l'intention des Kurdes d'exporter seuls leur pétrole

BAGDAD, 01 fév 2014 (AFP)

LE VICE-PREMIER ministre irakien en charge de l'énergie, Hussein Chahristani, a dénoncé samedi l'intention de la province autonome du Kurdistan irakien d'exporter son pétrole indépendamment des autorités de Bagdad.

Le gouvernement central et la province du Kurdistan se livrent depuis plusieurs mois une bataille sur cette question. Bagdad estime que l'énergie produite dans les régions appartient au pays tout entier, tandis que le Kurdistan souhaite traiter directement avec des compagnies pétrolières.

"Nous n'avons pas trouvé d'accord national sur l'extraction et la commercialisation du pétrole dans l'ensemble des territoires irakiens", a déclaré M. Chahristani lors d'une rencontre sur les évolutions du secteur énergétique.

"La situation avec le Kurdistan est toujours bloquée", a-t-il ajouté assurant qu'il "existe une zone floue, nous ne savons pas quelle quantité de pétrole cette région extrait, à quel prix elle le vend, et où vont les revenus".

En 2013, l'Irak a produit en moyenne 3,07 millions de barils par jour, selon l'Agence internationale de l'Energie (AIE), et les ventes de brut représentent 95%

des revenus du gouvernement et près de deux tiers du PIB.

En janvier, le gouvernement irakien avait menacé de boycotter les entreprises turques et d'annuler des contrats si du pétrole kurde était exporté à l'étranger via la Turquie sans son aval, après l'annonce d'un début d'acheminement de brut du Kurdistan irakien vers ce pays.

Un projet de contrat entre Ankara et le Kurdistan irakien prévoit notamment la construction d'un nouvel oléoduc d'une capacité de 300.000 barils par jour.

Le vice-président américain, Joe Biden, s'est entretenu sur la question lors d'une conversation téléphonique vendredi avec le président du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, selon la Maison Blanche.

MM. Barzani et Biden "ont confirmé qu'il est nécessaire d'avoir une importante coopération entre le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan et le gouvernement irakien pour trouver un accord sur les exports énergétiques et le partage des revenus", a précisé Washington.

Outre le différent sur le pétrole, un conflit territorial oppose le gouvernement central au Kurdistan irakien, qui jouit d'une importante autonomie et dispose de ses propres forces de sécurité, gouvernement et drapeau.

Après les négociations de Genève, l'armée syrienne repart à l'offensive contre Alep

Les rebelles sont affaiblis par les attaques des djihadistes de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant

Après avoir été bousculé par l'opposition durant les négociations de paix qui se sont déroulées la semaine dernière à Genève, le régime syrien n'a pas tardé à réagir. Depuis la suspension des pourparlers le 31 janvier, ses hélicoptères ont multiplié les raids contre les quartiers d'Alep acquis à l'insurrection, tuant près de 150 habitants, pour la plupart civils.

Lundi 3 février, au moins 26 personnes, dont 11 enfants, ont péri dans ces bombardements, menés à l'aide de barils d'explosifs largués depuis les airs. Des chiffres cités par l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH), une ONG basée à Londres qui dispose d'un vaste réseau d'informateurs sur le terrain. Selon cette même source, 85 personnes ont été tuées dans les bombardements de samedi et 36 autres dimanche. « Je suis passé à Al-Yasser, l'un des quartiers visés par le régime, quelques heures après les explosions, raconte Marouan Abou Omar, un militant révolutionnaire d'Alep, joint par Skype. Le niveau de destruction est terrifiant. Ça ressemble aux villes d'Europe rasées par l'aviation allemande durant la seconde guerre mondiale. »

L'hécatombe a provoqué un exode massif de la population de la partie orientale d'Alep, contrôlée par les rebelles. Une partie s'est réfugiée en Turquie, tandis qu'une autre a fui vers les secteurs ouest de la ville, toujours aux mains du régime syrien. Lundi, de longues files d'attente s'étiraient aux points de contrôle séparant les deux parties de la métropole.

Parallèlement, épaulée par ses alliés chiites libanais (le Hezbollah) et irakiens, l'armée syrienne progresse à petits pas dans l'est et le nord d'Alep. Selon le quotidien *Al-Watan*, proche du pouvoir, les forces loyalistes ambitionnent de prendre leurs ennemis en tenaille. « Bachar pense toujours qu'il peut l'emporter militairement, analyse Marouan Abou Omar. Mais il s'illu-



Des Alepins découvrent les dégâts infligés par les bombardements, dimanche 2 février. SAAD ABOBRAHIM/REUTERS

sionne. S'il n'est pas capable de reprendre une ville comme Daraya [une banlieue de Damas], située dans son arrière-cour, comment pourrait-il reconquérir une métropole comme Alep? »

Le camp pro-Assad profite en tout cas de la désorganisation qui règne parmi les rebelles, depuis le déclenchement, début janvier, d'une guerre dans la guerre. Elle oppose les djihadistes de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL), une émanation d'Al-Qaïda, à des brigades plus modérées, d'inspiration nationaliste ou islamiste, affiliées à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) et au Front islamique. Ces dernières, qui reprochent à Da'ech, l'acronyme arabe de l'EIL, sa volonté d'hégémonie et ses nombreuses exactions, ont d'abord gagné du terrain, en délogeant leurs adversaires de l'hôpital d'Alep qui leur servait de quartier général.

Mais à Alep comme dans le reste du pays, l'EIL, composé en grande partie de volontaires étrangers,

est loin d'avoir perdu la bataille. Ses membres ont frappé un grand coup dimanche, en tuant Adnan Bakkour, le commandant de la brigade Al-Tawhid, rattachée au Front islamique, dans un attentat à la voiture piégée, devant l'académie militaire d'Alep. Les djihadis-

Les raids aériens ont provoqué un exode de la population de la partie orientale d'Alep, contrôlée par les rebelles

tes se sont ensuite emparés d'une partie de cette base que la brigade avait ravie aux forces gouvernementales en décembre 2012.

Visiblement sûr de sa force, Da'ech a rejeté, fin janvier, une proposition de trêve émanant du cheikh saoudien Abdallah Ben Mohamed Al-Moheisini, un prédi-

cateur salafiste qui s'est établi en 2013 dans le nord de la Syrie. Omniprésent sur les réseaux sociaux, ce religieux a acquis une grande célébrité en officiant comme financier et guide spirituel des formations islamistes. Mais sa tentative de réconciliation a été torpillée par Da'ech, qui a exigé, au préalable, que ses opposants rompent avec leurs alliés occidentaux et arabes.

Cette fuite en avant intervient alors que la direction d'Al-Qaïda a une nouvelle fois désavoué l'Etat islamique. Désireux de se dissocier d'actions portant préjudice « aux moudjahidin, aux musulmans ou aux non-musulmans », le réseau fondé par Oussama Ben Laden a réitéré, dans un communiqué mis en ligne dimanche, que l'EIL « n'est pas une branche d'Al-Qaïda ». De toutes les formations djihadistes actives en Syrie, seul le Front Al-Nosra bénéficie de la reconnaissance officielle d'Ayman Al-Zawahiri, le chef d'Al-Qaïda. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

Turkish financial crisis adds to region's chaos

By David P Goldman
www.atimes.com

More than coincidence accounts for the visit to Iran by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan on January 28, the same day that his economic policy collapsed in a most humiliating way.

As the Turkish lira collapsed to levels that threatened to bankrupt many Turkish companies, the country's central bank raised interest rates, ignoring Erdogan's longstanding pledge to keep

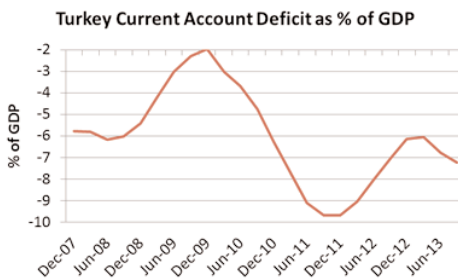
interest rates low and his almost-daily denunciation of an "interest rate lobby" that sought to bring down the Turkish economy. Erdogan's prestige was founded on Turkey's supposed economic miracle.

Hailed as "the next superpower" by John Feffer of the Institute for Policy Studies, and as "Europe's BRIC" by The Economist, Turkey has become the Sick Man of the Middle East. It now appears as a stock character in the comic-opera of Third World economics: a corrupt dictatorship that bought popularity through debt accumulation and cronyism, and now is suffering the same kind of economic hangover that hit Latin America during the 1980s.

That is not how Erdogan sees the matter, to be sure: for months he has denounced the "interest rate lobby". Writes the Hurriyet Daily News columnist Emre Deliveli, "He did not specify who the members of this lobby were, so I had to resort to pro-government newspapers. According to articles in a daily owned by the conglomerate where the PM's son-in-law is CEO, the lobby is a coalition of Jewish financiers associated with both Opus Dei and Illuminati. It seems the two sworn enemies have put aside their differences to ruin Turkey."

US President Barack Obama told an interviewer in 2012 that Erdogan was one of his five closest overseas friends, on par with the leaders of Britain, Germany, South Korea and India. Full disclosure: as the Jewish banker who has been most aggressive in forecasting Turkey's crisis during the past two years, I have had no contact with Opus Dei on this matter, much less the mythical Illuminati.

Erdogan was always a loose cannon. Now he has become unmoored. Paranoia is endemic in Turkish politics because so much of it is founded on conspiracy. The expression "paranoid Turk" is a pleonasm.



Source: Turkish Central Bank

Islamist followers of the self-styled prophet Fetullah Gulen infiltrated the security services and helped Erdogan jail some of the country's top military commanders on dubious allegations of a coup plot. Last August a Turkish court sentenced some 275 alleged members of the "Ergenekon" coup plot, including dozens of military officers, journalists, and secular leaders of civil society.

Now Gulen has broken with Erdogan and his security apparatus has uncovered massive documentation of corruption in the Erdogan administration. Erdogan is firing police and security officials as fast as they arrest his cronies.

There is a world difference, though, between a prosperous paranoid and an impecunious one. Turkey cannot fund its enormous current borrowing needs without offering interest rates so high that they will pop the construction-and-consumer bubble that masqueraded for a Turkish economic miracle during the past few years.

The conspiracy of international bankers, Opus Dei and Illuminati that rages in Erdogan's Anatolian imagination has triumphed, and the aggrieved prime minister will not go quietly. As Erdogan abhors old allies who in his imagined betrayed him and seeks new ones, the situation will get worse.

One of the worst ideas that ever occurred to Western planners was the hope that Turkey would provide a pillar of stability in an otherwise chaotic region, a prosperous Muslim democracy that would set an example to anti-authoritarian movements. The opposite has occurred: Erdogan's Turkey is not a source of stability but a spoiler allied to the most destructive and anti-Western forces in the region.

It seems unlikely that the central bank's

belated rate increase will forestall further devaluation of the lira. With inflation at 7.4% and rising, the central bank's 10% reference rate offers only a modest premium above the inflation rate. About two-fifths of Turkey's corporate debt is denominated in foreign currency, and the lira's decline translates into higher debt service costs. Turkey is likely to get the worst of both worlds, namely higher local interest rate and a weaker currency.

Now Erdogan's Cave of Wonders has sunk back into the sand. Few analysts asked how Turkey managed to sustain a current account deficit that ranged between 8% and 10% of gross domestic product during the past three years, as bad as the Greek deficit during the years before its financial collapse in 2011.

The likely answer is that Turkey drew on vast amounts of credit from Saudi and other Gulf state banks, with strategic as well as financial motives. Data from the Bank for International Settlements show that Turkey financed a large part of its enormous deficit through the interbank market, that is, through short-term loans to Turkish banks from other banks.

Western banks report no such exposure to Turkey; the Gulf banks do not report regional exposure, and anecdotal evidence suggests that Sunni solidarity had something to do with the Gulf states' willingness to take on Turkish exposure.

Relations between Turkey and the Gulf States are now in shambles. Saudi Arabia abhors the Muslim Brotherhood, which wants to replace the old Arab monarchies with Islamist regimes founded on modern totalitarian parties, while Erdogan embraced the Brotherhood. The Saudis are the main source of financial support for Egypt's military government, while Ankara has denounced the military's suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Whether the Gulf States simply ran out of patience or resources to support Erdogan's credit binge, or whether their displeasure at Turkey's misbehavior persuaded them to withdraw support, is hard to discern. Both factors probably were at work. In either case, Erdogan's rancor at Saudi Arabia has brought him closer to Teheran.

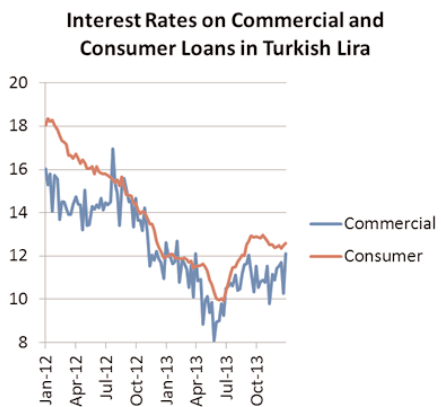
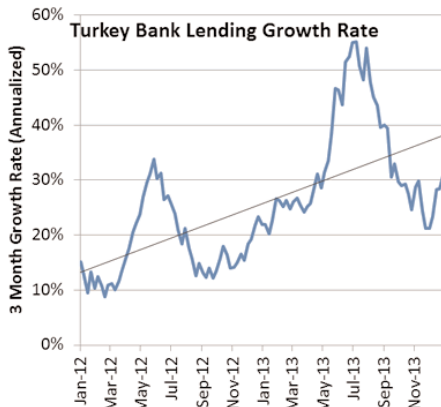
Turkey should have restricted credit growth and raised interest rates to reduce its current account deficit while it still had time. Erdogan, though, did the opposite: Turkish banks increased their rate of lending while reducing interest rates to businesses and consumers.

Given the country's enormous current account deficit, this constituted irresponsibility in the extreme. Erdogan evidently thought that his mandate depended on cheap and abundant credit. The credit bubble fed construction, where employment nearly doubled between 2009 and

➤ 2013. Construction jobs increased through 2013, after manufacturing and retail employment already had begun to shrink.

I predicted the end of Erdogan's supposed economic miracle in the Winter 2012 edition of Middle East Quarterly, comparing Erdogan's boomlet to the Latin American blowouts of the 1990s:

In some respects, Erdogan's bubble recalls the experiences of Argentina in 2000 and Mexico in 1994 where surging external debt produced short-lived bubbles of prosperity, followed by currency devaluations



and deep slumps. Both Latin American governments bought popularity by providing cheap consumer credit as did Erdogan in the months leading up to the June 2011 national election. Argentina defaulted on its \$132 billion public debt, and its economy contracted by 10 percent in real terms in 2002. Mexico ran a current account deficit equal to 8 percent of GDP in 1993, framing the 1994 peso devaluation and a subsequent 10 percent decline in consumption.

In the meantime, Turkey has entered a perfect storm. As its currency plunges, import costs soar, which means that a current account of 8% of GDP will shortly turn into 10% to 12% of GDP - unless the country stops importing, which means a drastic fall in economic activity. As its currency falls, its cost of borrowing jumps, which means that the cost of servicing existing debt will compound its current financing requirements. The only cure for Erdogan's debt addiction, to borrow a phrase, is cold turkey.

The vicious cycle will end when valuations are sufficiently low and the government is sufficiently cooperative to sell assets at low prices to foreign investors, and when Turkish workers accept lower wages to produce products for export.

One might envision a viable economic future for Turkey as the terminus on the "New Silk Road" that China proposes to build across Central Asia, with high-speed rail stretching from Beijing to Istanbul. Chinese manufacturers might ship container loads of components to Turkey for assembly and transshipment to the European and Middle Eastern markets, and European as well as Asian firms might build better factors in Turkey for export to China. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Turkey's path to Europe lies not through Brussels but through Beijing.

That is Turkey's future, but as the old joke goes, it can't get there from here.

Turkey has a small but highly competent professional class trained at a handful of good universities, but the Erdogan regime - the so-called "Anatolian tigers" - have disenfranchised them in favor of Third World corruption and cronyism. The secular parties that bear the faded inheritance of Kemal Ataturk lack credibility. They are tainted by years of dirty war against the Kurds, of collusion with military repression, and their own proclivity towards a paranoid form of nationalism.

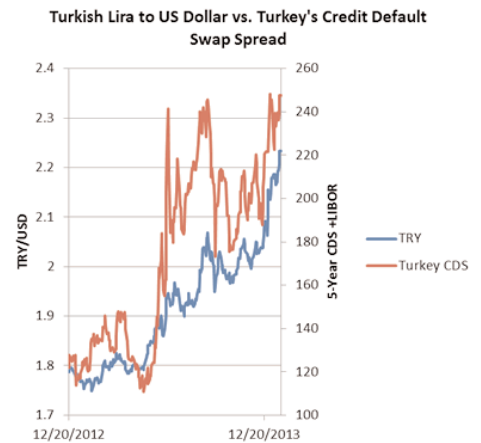
Erdogan's AKP is a patronage organization that has run out of cash and credit, and its fate is unclear. The highly influential Gulen organization has a big voice, including the Zaman media chain, but no political network on the ground.

No replacement for Erdogan stands in the wings, and the embattled prime minister will flail in all directions until the local elections on March 30.

The last thing to expect from Erdogan is a coherent policy response. On the contrary, the former Anatolian villager thrives on contradiction, the better to keep his adversaries guessing.

Turkish policy has flailed in every direction during recent weeks. Erdogan's Iran visit reportedly focused on Syria, where Turkey has been engaged in a proxy war with Iran's ally Basher al-Assad. Ankara's support for Syrian rebels dominated by al-Qaeda jihadists appears to have increased; in early January Turkish police stopped a Turkish truck headed for Syria, and Turkish intelligence agents seized it from the police. Allegedly the truck contained weapons sent by the IHH Foundation, the same group that sent the Mavi Marmara to Gaza in 2010. The Turkish opposition claims that the regime is backing al-Qaeda in Syria. One can only imagine what Erdogan discussed with his Syrian hosts.

Some 4,500 Turks reportedly are fighting alongside 14,000 Chechnyans and a total of 75,000 foreign fighters on the al-Qaeda side in Syria. Ankara's generosity to



the Syrian jihadists is a threat to Russia, which has to contend with terrorists from the Caucasus, as well as Azerbaijan, where terrorists are infiltrating through Turkish territory from Syria. Russia's generally cordial relations with Turkey were premised on Turkish help in suppressing Muslim terrorism in the Caucasus. There is a substantial Chechnyan Diaspora in Turkey, aided by Turkish Islamists, and Moscow has remonstrated with Turkey on occasion about its tolerance or even encouragement of Caucasian terrorists.

I doubt that Erdogan has any grand plan in the back of his mind. On the contrary: having attempted to manipulate everyone in the region, he has no friends left. But he is in a tight spot, and in full paranoid fury about perceived plots against him. The likelihood is that he will lean increasingly on his own hard core, that is, the most extreme elements in his own movement.

Erdogan has been in what might be called a pre-apocalyptic mood for some time. The long term has looked grim for some time, on demographic grounds: a generation from now, half of all military-age men in Turkey will hail from homes where Kurdish is the first language. "If we continue the existing [fertility] trend, 2038 will mark disaster for us," he warned in a May 10, 2010, speech reported by the Daily Zaman.

But disaster already has arrived. In some ways Turkey's decline is more dangerous than the Syrian civil war, or the low-intensity civil conflict in Iraq or Egypt. Turkey held the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's eastern flank for more than six decades, and all parties in the region - including Russia - counted on Turkey to help maintain regional stability. Turkey no longer contributes to crisis management. It is another crisis to be managed. □

Spengler is channeled by David P Goldman. He is Senior Fellow at the London Center for Policy Research and Associate Fellow at the Middle East Forum. His book How Civilizations Die (and why Islam is Dying, Too) was published by Regnery Press in September 2011. A volume of his essays on culture, religion and economics, It's Not the End of the World - It's Just the End of You, also appeared that fall, from Van Praag Press.

Iraqi budget battle brews over Kurdish oil exports

Orlando Crowcroft
www.thenational.ae

The tug of war between Baghdad and Erbil has become a traditional fixture in the Iraqi political calendar in the months before the debate on the country's budget, with both sides claiming that the other is failing to fulfil its constitutional commitments.

This year is no different, with Baghdad upping the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) oil export quota to an unfeasible 400,000 barrels per day, up from 250,000 bpd last year. Baghdad has threatened to cut the Kurds out of the budget if they do not hit that target on which, it claims, the annual budget relies.

The KRG, meanwhile, claims that it is not receiving the 17 per cent of Iraqi revenues to which it is entitled under the constitution to, among other commitments, pay salaries of the pesh-merga (armed forces).

Most recently, the Kurds have begun to export oil to Turkey through a new pipeline independently in direct defiance of Baghdad, which has angrily accused the KRG of stealing Iraqi oil in the international media.

"The spat is nothing new, but the difference this time is the amount of oil that can be exported by the KRG, which could turn the table on Baghdad in terms of economic dependence. Baghdad will have little or no leverage left if the KRG can sell oil independently," said Shwan Zula, the head of Carduchi Consulting in London.

The KRG ministry of natural resources exported two million barrels of crude through the pipeline in January, and it has a target of 10 million to 12 million barrels a month by the end of the year. Although for the time being Turkey has vowed not to sell Kurdish oil until it receives a green light from Baghdad, Mr Zula estimated that within 18 months the KRG could be exporting enough to sustain itself, at least in the short term.

Speaking to the local newspaper Rudaw earlier this year, the KRG deputy finance minister, Rashid Tahir, intimated that the Kurdish region of Iraq had an eye on self-sufficiency as the exports through the Turkey pipeline increase. He said the KRG made 10.5 trillion Iraqi dinars (Dh33.1 million) through oil



A flame rises from a pipeline at Tawke oil field. The Kurds have begun to export oil to Turkey through a new pipeline independently in direct defiance of Baghdad. Azad Lashkari / Reuters

exports and internal revenues last year.

It is little surprise, then, that Baghdad has been piling on the pressure, with Haider Al Abaidi, the head of the Iraqi parliament's treasury committee, saying last month that unless the Kurds upped their production to 400,000 bpd and pay export revenue to the national treasury this year, the budget will collapse.

He estimated that the Iraqi budget deficit would be as much as US\$18 billion this year even if the Kurds do meet this target – because of a sharp increase in public sector wages, student allowances, child benefit and pensions – and warned that the Kurdish region risked losing its cut of state spending if it did not pay Baghdad what it demands.

"They are not contributing, so why should they get something out of it? At the moment we have a deficit of 21tn dinars. If you add 15tn or 16tn dinars to it [the amount expected to be lost if the KRG does not pay its oil export revenue], the budget will collapse," he said.

But analysts are not convinced by such guilt-tripping on the part of the south. Richard Mallinson, a geopolitical analyst and Iraq expert at Energy Aspects in London, argued that the rhetoric over budget collapse is overblown, citing the fact that similar warnings were made last year with little drastic consequence for Iraq's finances.

"[The 2013 budget] supposed 250,000 bpd of exports going into the federal budget over the entire year. Kurdistan hasn't done that and the budget hasn't collapsed because oil prices

have been higher and because Baghdad hasn't spent as much as it was anticipating," Mr Mallinson said.

"So some of these statements are more about trying to apply pressure on the Kurds."

Mr Zula expects the final production targets to be lowered during negotiations over the budget, given that the current expectations are so unfeasible.

"[They are] setting the target high to negotiate down later. The KRG has no capacity at this moment to export 400,000 bpd. Even if they hit that level of production, the domestic market would be starved. It would not be practical," he said.

In terms of a resolution, it will likely be politics that forces a compromise between the north and the south.

Analysts point out that the parliamentary elections in Iraq in April have intensified the political dimension of the negotiations, with the prime minister, Nouri Al Maliki, needing to look tough on the Kurds to appease nationalists in the south as he vies for a third term in office.

"Baghdad is using it to play to the nationalists and ultranationalists in Iraq. He needs to show that he is not letting the Kurds get away with it," Mr Zula said.

Others said that the elections, along with being partly responsible for the spat, could also help to resolve it, with Mr Maliki coming to an agreement with the Kurds in return for their support for his leadership bid. Indeed, the Kurdish parties remain a powerful bloc in the perennially divided Iraqi parliament.

"There is then the question of the coalition building in the constitutional assembly and the fact that the Kurds are an important power bloc alongside the main Shia and Sunni parties – so certainly Mr Maliki and his government haven't been able to dismiss them completely. They have always tried by and large to work with them," Mr Mallinson said.

"I expect that somewhere around the election, either just before or just after, Baghdad will grudgingly agree to allow the KRG to manage its own oil exports, with some sort of revenue-sharing arrangement."

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February 9, 2014

Turkey leftist party releases jailed Kurdish leader Ocalan's video file

Abdulla Ocalan says the video is attempt to sabotage resolution process

February 9, 2014

<http://www.ekurd.net>

ANKARA,— Turkey leftist Workers Party released a video file that shows jailed Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan during an investigation in 1999.

Ocalan, in the file, has reportedly vowed to apply the Kurdistan workers' Party (PKK) power for Turkey.

Government cannot do everything directly and sometimes a force in needed for some affairs just like the US government, Ocalan has reportedly told the investigators, demanding Turkey should follow the policy.

The recent release of a video of jailed Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan is aimed at sabotaging the Kurdish peace process and confusing the voters before the March local elections in Turkey, said a Kurdish MP in the Turkish parliament.

"The release of the video is within the frame of the attempts to sabotage the peace and confuse the Kurdish voters," said Sirri Sureyya Onder, co-founder of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) in Turkey.

On Thursday, the vice chairman of the Workers' Party of Turkey, Hasan Basri Ozbey, released Ocalan's video at a press conference in Istanbul.

The video appears to show the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) being questioned by Hasan Atilla Ugur, a Turkish military colonel who was later arrested for a plot to overthrow the government, shortly after his arrest in 1999.

"Those who released the video belong to the deep state forces who are opposing a resolution of the Kurdish issue," Onder said. "The deep state forces have released the video just before the elections to put negative influence on Ocalan's status and role," he added.

Ugur, who appears to be questioning Ocalan in the video, was arrested in 2008 for alleged connection with the Ergenekon clandestine operation to overthrow the government. In 2013, a Turkish court sentenced Ugur to 29 years in jail for involvement in conspiracies against the government.

Ocalan video edited and montaged: PKK

The spokesman of the Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), the umbrella organization of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), has said that the video of jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan released last week, which dates back to 1999, has been edited and montaged.

Spokesman of the KCK Zagros Hiwa said the video of Ocalan dates back to February 1999 when he was arrested in Kenya. Hiwa said Ocalan's arrest was an international conspiracy and that the international plot against him is continuing with the recent release of the video.

"Those who are against the peace process between the Turkish government and Kurdish people in Turkey, especially the PKK, are willing to foil the process and it is the same people that released the edited Ocalan speeches and videos to spread false propaganda about him," Hiwa was quoted by Basnews as saying.

He noted that Turkish hostiles towards the PKK are continuing through these sort of actions.

Hiwa stressed that there is a montage in Ocalan's speech in the video and that it has been edited in a way that made the words give different meaning to what he says.

"This is directly related to the peace process in Turkey that Ocalan himself initiated and subsequently gained support from all parts of



Kurdistan due to the achievements of the process and its additional benefits for the Turkish government," Hiwa added.

He also acknowledged that, "All this propaganda is managed by one center-left party in Turkey."

Ocalan himself rejected the release of the video, claiming its intent is to damage the peace process between the PKK and the Turkish state.

Ocalan says the video is attempt to sabotage resolution process

The pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party BDP parliamentary group president Pervin Buldan, BDP deputy İdris Baluken and HDP vice co-chair and deputy Sirri Süreyya Önder have returned from İmralı where they have visited Kurdish people's leader Abdullah Öcalan in the afternoon.

In a statement to reporters the BDP-HDP delegation conveyed Öcalan's messages which primarily included his comments about a video of the Kurdish leader recently published on internet. Öcalan said the video was produced as a part of a sneaky plan aimed at ending or disgracing the resolution process. The Kurdish leader emphasized that the content of the video was distorted with a compilation of context-free extracted sentences, and had nothing to do with reality.

"Those who did this are actors that imperialist operation centers have bloodily used in dirty businesses. What is aimed here is to prevent the peace and alliance of Turkish-Kurdish and all other peoples. Those who edit this video, released it and are defending it politically are those who attribute their existence to the Kurdish war and the pro-coup mechanism of this war. My basic approach concerning this issue is present in the most evident way in my statements of self-defense, also showing consistency since the very beginning", Öcalan underlined and remarked that as the international conspiracy enters the 16th year, the conspiracy has substantially been shed light on and precautions have been taken against it in many aspects.

Öcalan pointed out that by exposing and condemning the international conspiracy, the İmralı process has created an important opportunity for a permanent peace of peoples. This exactly is why pro-coup powers are aiming the İmralı process, he underlined.

Putting emphasis on the need for democratization to be led by an assurance of social agreement, Öcalan remarked that the government's introduction of unilateral packages to ensure its own safety is not democratization but being provocateur at the point the resolution process has reached.

The Kurdish leader also stated that the government has grown away from the seriousness of the issue on the excuse of elections, noting that the government would primarily be responsible for the ending of the process unless it underwent an immediate change in its approach towards the resolution process. Öcalan suggested that negotiation delegations should be formed urgently and the process should be grounded on democratic law of contract to ensure the advancement of the process.

Öcalan extended his greetings to the Kurdish people, workers of the Kurdish press, sick prisoners, women in particular, all his comrades in prison and ranks of the Kurdish movement, and called on the Kurdish people to unite around their democratic peace politics. ■

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05 FEBRUARY 2014

Barzani: Fast solutions for Iraq's conditions is in the federal system

www.shafaq.com

Shafaq News / The President of Kurdistan region , Massoud Barzani said on Wednesday that the radical solutions of Iraq's situation is to comply with the federal system because it is the main base of the Constitution, stressing the need to speed up in its application.

A statement for the presidency of the region reported for "Shafaq News " , that " Barzani met with the delegation accompanying him (yesterday) in Berlin , Frank-Walter and the German foreign minister .

He added that Walter talked about the current situation in Iraq in general and Anbar province in particular and the process of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Iraq , expressing his expectations for the political map of Iraq after the elections .

The statement said the German minister put forward a series of questions and inquiries to Barzani .

The statement added that Barzani responded to questions from the German Foreign Minister in which President Barzani shed light on the security situation in Iraq and Anbar province in particular, pointing out that he believes that it is necessary to address this situation as soon as possible .



Barzani added that radical treatment is that Iraq must commit to the federal system , because this is the main basis in the Iraqi Constitution , as reported in the statement , adding that all parties must cooperate and coordinate to address "terrorism" because " terrorists " have promoted their strength and they are now pose a threat to all region.

Regarding the parliamentary elections in Iraq ; Barzani stressed , according to the same statement, the need for the commitment of all parties to conduct these elections in its timely manner .

On the relations between Kurdistan Region and Turkey; Barzani pointed out that these relations are in the interest of both parties at the same time in the interest of Iraq in general , as stated in the same statement .

About the internal situation of Kurdistan Region ; Barzani talked about the parliamentary elections , the continuation of the improved security situation and stability in the region , adding that there has been progress in strengthening the infrastructure of Kurdistan region in all respects.

The meeting also addressed the relations between Kurdistan Region and the Federal Republic of Germany and ways of enhancing them , as well as discuss the status of the Kurdish community in Europe and its role in the construction process in Kurdistan Region

It should be noted that the relations between Erbil and Baghdad and the oil policy of Kurdistan Region , as well as the political situation in the region and the situation in Syria was another aspect of this meeting.

The President of Kurdistan Region , Massoud Barzani had left Erbil mid of last month at the head of a high level delegation to visit a number of European countries and to participate in the World Economic Forum in Davos and to meeting with a number of presidents and senior officials in a number of foreign countries



February 5, 2014

Syrian Kurds reportedly seek to export oil via Turkey

February 5, 2014
<http://www.ekurd.net>

ANKARA,— Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) co-chair Asia Abdullah said that Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) was seeking good relations with Turkey.

Following the declaration of autonomous independence of three Kurdish regions in western Kurdistan [northern Syria], it has reportedly been announced that the Syrian Kurds are preparing to export their oil via Turkey, the world bulletin website reported.

Abdullah arrived in Turkey to attend in a Kurdish political conference in Ankara. Newly-established Turkey's Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) invited Abdullah to visit Turkey and attend in the party's conference titled "Kurds Policy in New Era." on Sunday.

Asia Abdullah, one of the leaders of the Syrian Kurdish PYD party, has been reported to have said that the PYD was in talks with



Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) co-chair Asia Abdullah (C) with the Pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) Co-chairperson Selahattin Demirtaş (L) and BDP Deputy Pervin Buldan (R) at the Turkish parliament in Ankara, February 4, 2014. Photo: Cihan

Turkey's Foreign Ministry to discuss the export of oil, according to the daily Milliyet.

Although Abdullah said that the meetings between PYD chief Salih Muslim and Turkey regarding the issue are currently on hold, he

reportedly said 'The more meetings there are the better. We see this as important for the future of Syria,' adding that they wanted to continue the dialogue process with Turkey.

Denying that the Syrian Kurds were after full independence, Abdullah added that two of the first three people in the first canton to declare autonomy, www.Ekurd.net Jazeera [Cizire], were non-Kurds -with one being an Arab and the other being a Syriac.

Speaking to BBC Turkish, Abdullah also said that Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) was seeking Turkey's support, reassuring that Rojava is not and would not be an opposing power to Turkey.

Asia Abdullah attended on Tuesday the BDP's group meeting at the Turkish Parliament in Ankara. PYD leader was welcomed with applause by the MPs upon his arrival at the hall before the group meeting started. Later, Abdullah and the Pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) Co-chairperson Selahattin Demirtaş took their seats.

Kicking off the meeting, BDP Deputy Pervin Buldan said "Greetings to Rojava [Syrian Kurdistan] revolution," referring to PYD leader's visit

which marks the first time in Parliament's history.

The autonomic administrations launched in Syrian Kurdistan [Rojava] by Syria Kurds are good models for Syria political structure, said Asia Abdullah. According to DIHA news agency, Abdullah told a Kurdish conference in Ankara on Sunday that Syria Kurds have created autonomic administrations with the participation of Kurds, Arabs, Armenians and Assyrians and the model can be a great example for Syria.

Political structures based on religious, racial and cultural differences can solve the problem in Syria in a way all Syrian elements can participate in, she added.

Abdullah also noted Syria Kurds are fighting against assaults of diverse groups and they have paid a big cost to save their identity and existence, reminding that Syria government has neglected the rights and demands of Kurds in the past 50 years. She continued that her party believes Kurds were not invited to Geneva II conference while they should have been invited to the gathering that was to find a solution to Syria civil war. ■



10 / February / 2014

KRG Says It Won't Deal With PYD Cantons in Syria

rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said it will not deal with the "cantons" declared by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, countering expressions of support by several parties in Iraqi Kurdistan.

A declaration of autonomy in Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava) has been rejected by the KRG, which is dominated by the Kurdistan Democratic Party. The PYD, on the other hand, is backed by the KDP's age-old rival the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

"Regarding the Rojava Cantons, KRG has decided to support a decision made by all the Kurdish groups and parties, and it won't deal with any unilateral decision," Falah Mustafa, head of the KRG's foreign relations, told Rudaw.

The KRG has refused to recognize the autonomy in Rojava because it accuses the PYD of sidelining other smaller parties in areas under its control.

With some of its local allies,



PYD's Asia Abdullah. Photo Rudaw

including Arabs and Christians, the PYD established three autonomous cantons -- Cizire, Afrin and Kobani -- last month to run the affairs of the Kurdish areas in northeastern Syria.

Mustafa noted that the KRG's position is clear and deals with this issue in the same way the European countries do.

The PYD's declared autonomy has received no Western backing, largely due to its links with the PKK, which is listed as a terrorist group both by the European Union and the United States.

PYD leaders, in turn, accuse most Kurdish and Arab opposition parties of being tools of

neighboring countries and implementing foreign agendas in Syria.

Mustafa's comments came just two days after a conference in Sulaimani, in which several Kurdish political parties expressed their official support for the PYD's declared autonomy.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), the Change Movement (Gorran) and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (Yekgirtu) have expressed official support for the PYD government.

Mustafa called on political parties in Kurdistan not to politicize the issue.

"It's not necessary for some parties to make a political bid out of this and the KRG is committed

to its position," he said.

Divisions over the issue are likely to become more complex once political parties end their current negotiations on forming the Kurdistan Region's new cabinet, which will place the KDP side-by-side with some of the parties that stand behind the PYD.

However, political differences over major issues within the KRG are nothing new.

The KDP and PKK each believes it should have the upper hand in Syria's Kurdish regions. Each has tried to have the greater influence among the country's Kurds, who make up about 10 percent of Syria's 22 million population.

Defending the autonomous cantons, senior PYD leader Asia Abdullah told Rudaw: "This is the project of the people. Everyone has the right to establish a democratic entity for their people in their country, no matter what others think."

"The project of democratic autonomy is a democratic process," she added. "Historically it has been a successful path."

Abdullah said that the autonomous cantons are based on the needs of the people, and that the views of towns, villages and municipalities are seriously considered in the administrations. □

Whose Turkey is it?

How an ideological battle over the country's future spilled into the streets

BY SUZY HANSEN

It is still a marvel to behold Recep Tayyip Erdogan's self-confidence, even after 11 years in power. In recent weeks, a new poster featuring Mr. Erdogan, Turkey's prime minister, has appeared on highway billboards and mass transit

Islam, democracy and growth
From The New York Times Magazine

throughout Istanbul. Wearing his usual dark suit, Mr. Erdogan looks to be in purposeful motion, like an action hero. Two large words in block letters, SAGLAM İRADE, Turkish for "Iron Will," accompany him. Surely some of his supporters appreciate this evocation of 1930s-era masculinity, but for others, it must feel like an invasion of personal space. The enormous billboards intensify the claustrophobia that many Turks have felt for years: that Mr. Erdogan is everywhere, in every tree or open space sacrificed for a building, in every traffic jam, in every newspaper column and pro-government tweet and call to prayer. The poster begs to be defaced, and Turks have torn at it or covered it with new slogans: "Iron Fascist," "Iron Corruption," "Iron Enemy of the People."

The public turn against Mr. Erdogan began last May, when protests in Istanbul escalated and pictures of police officers violently attacking the demonstrators circulated around the world. For the first time in a decade, Turkey did not look like one of the few Middle Eastern destinations where Westerners would take a vacation. The government was caught off guard. A couple of weeks later, Mr. Erdogan convened two meetings in the capital, Ankara, with assorted activists, artists and observers. In one meeting, he sat writing in a leather-bound notebook for five hours as activists gave testimony about their experiences in the previous weeks.

The protests began when activists gathered in Gezi Park to demonstrate against its demolition. İpek Akpınar, a professor of architecture, asked Mr. Erdogan if he gave orders during the brutal first days, when the police burned the tents of peaceful environmentalists and assaulted them with pepper spray and tear gas. "Somehow, in the last 10 years, he gave an image of being democratic, of trying to talk with everyone, to understand other groups," Professor Akpınar told me later. "We couldn't believe — we didn't want to believe, prob-

ably — that he would do this." The activists kept returning to this question. "Prime Minister Erdogan," the professor asked, "did you know what was happening in the first three days?"

He said he did not. "My team didn't take it very seriously," Mr. Erdogan said, according to several people who attended the meeting. "We thought it was just environmentalists, and so we didn't react. But yes, the police acted severely. I wasn't aware of the burning of the tents the first two nights. I was told about it on the third day, and then it was too late."

"And then what happened?" the professor asked. Several other activists joined in. "What did you do?" cried Nil Eyuboglu, a 20-year-old college student. "Tell us! They violently attacked us! How could you not know?"

"Don't worry," Mr. Erdogan said. "I brought the people responsible into my office and yelled at them. I made them cry."

Over the past decade, Mr. Erdogan has made himself the most powerful prime minister in Turkey's history, the most successful elected leader in the Middle East and the West's great hope for the Muslim world. In the past year, however, a thoroughly different figure has emerged: a symbol of authoritarianism, corruption and police brutality. The Gezi Park protests last spring challenged the enduring dysfunctions of the Turkish state, as well as the dubious economic policies of Mr. Erdogan's governing Justice and Development Party, known as the A.K.P. In December, extensive accusations of corruption were leveled at Mr. Erdogan by followers of an Islamic movement that propelled him and the A.K.P. to power. The threat to Mr. Erdogan posed by the Gezi Park protests has been largely photogenic, but the challenge raised by the corruption charges is existential.

Mr. Erdogan's response to both threats has been to punish those he considers disloyal. Thousands of activists have been detained. An estimated 5,000 police officers and prosecutors, who Mr. Erdogan claims are conspiring against him, have been dismissed from their jobs or reassigned. Internet sites have suddenly become inaccessible. The exchange rates for Turkey's currency, the lira, have plunged significantly, and predictions for the economy are dire. The feeling in Turkey is that, all of a sudden, the country that was a model for the modern Muslim world is on the verge of disintegration.

An Erdogan government was once synonymous with stability. One reason even skeptical secular Turks tolerated the A.K.P. was its hard-working officials. Even if people disliked their Islamist pasts or their headscarf-wearing wives, they liked their industriousness, and above all the rapid economic devel-

opment they facilitated in the 2000s.

Mr. Erdogan, who had been a member of the youth groups that later evolved into the A.K.P., was elected Istanbul's mayor in 1994 at age 40. The A.K.P. emerged from an Islamist movement called Milli Görüş, whose outlook was anti-Western and combative — the Turkish, watered-down version of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood. But in the late 1990s, Mr. Erdogan began preaching a pro-European Union, pro-American and pro-business worldview. Rather than espousing Islamist politics, he framed religious rights in terms of personal freedom. Mr. Erdogan's transformation won him the admiration of liberals at home and abroad. It also caught the attention



UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

Prime Minister Erdogan says he is the victim of a conspiracy by a "parallel state."

of another Islamic movement eager for power, one that followed the teachings of an imam named Fethullah Gulen.

Mr. Gulen is a Muslim preacher who in the 1960s began promoting a Sufi-inspired vision of Islam and a strategy for leading a modern and religious life that offered his followers a path to success in Turkey. The stated goal was spreading an emphatically peaceful expression of Islam, but a central ambition was also the expansion of the movement, which required amassing followers and capital. The Gulenists describe themselves as nonpolitical, antiviolenace, pro-business and deeply patriotic. Theirs is "cultural Islam," its adherents say, a religion-based civic movement. Instead of Quramic schools, the Gulenists have built secular ones emphasizing science, as well as colleges, media companies, publishing houses, tutoring centers for the college entrance exam and international nongovernmental organizations. The Gulenists run 2,000 schools in 160 countries. Mr. Gulen, who is 72, lives in a wooded area in Pennsylvania behind a security checkpoint.

An alliance in the early 2000s with the ascendant A.K.P. offered the Gulenists a way to extend their influence, even as they refrained from putting up their own candidates for Parliament. In Turkey,

"parties come and go, and any party isn't going to have a long shelf life," said Joshua Hendrick, an assistant professor at Loyola University in Maryland. But, he added, succeeding in business or receiving ministerial appointments or joining the police confers lasting power: "Affiliates of the Gulen community have been accruing influence in the Istanbul police force and other police forces, and in the judiciary and prosecuting offices around the country."

Mr. Erdogan welcomed the movement's international influence and media support. With its endorsements, he achieved real gains. He sidelined the military. He moved Turkey's laws significantly toward European Union norms. The economy flourished, as he pushed privatization and investors from abroad poured money into the country. The A.K.P. built hospitals, roads, bridges and luxury shopping malls. Turkey had been so dysfunctional that many of these initiatives were necessary.

Eventually, however, they seemed like a power grab. Around 2007, the A.K.P. and Gulenists in the judiciary and the police force put hundreds of journalists and former military generals on trial, charged with being members of a "deep state." Much of the evidence appeared to have been manufactured by Gulenists. At the same time, many Turks believed that the intelligence wing of the police force was wiretapping the phones of journalists and businessmen. Mr. Erdogan bullied the corporate owners of media outlets, and hundreds of journalists were muzzled or fired. And in 2010, a referendum on the Constitution revamped the judicial system to favor judges affiliated with Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Gulen.

Yet the Erdogan-Gulen media machine managed to portray Mr. Erdogan as the very incarnation of democracy. In 2011, Mr. Erdogan won his third national election with nearly 50 percent of the vote.

One of Mr. Erdogan's third-term promises was a package of vast construction projects, and he quickly got to work. He started construction of a third bridge over the Bosphorus, which meant removing a million trees. He flirted with a plan to build a second Bosphorus, as well as a second Istanbul. Then he announced a new project for Taksim Square.

Taksim, in the center of the city's European side, was considered the heart of Istanbul. The square surrounded tiny Gezi Park and was covered with concrete and filled with traffic, but the absence of buildings offered at least a sense of free space. Mr. Erdogan wanted to close the square to cars, build tunnels for them beneath it and replace Gezi Park with a shopping center designed to look like Ottoman-era military barracks. Putting anything Ottoman-like in Taksim, a symbol of the secular republic, felt like an assertion of Erdogan's neo-Islamic identity.

When a local committee composed of

academics, historians and municipal appointees unanimously voted against the plan, Mr. Erdogan had another committee made up of his own bureaucratic appointments override the vote.

The people reacted in a surprising and organic way. Many of the protesters were not activists; they were apolitical verging on apathetic members of the middle class. Guzin, a 35-year-old lawyer who did not want her last name to be used, was a typical case.

Guzin had heard that some 50 environmentalists had pitched tents in Gezi. "When I read about Gezi Park, for the first time I said, 'We should do something,'" she told me. "I got like five people, and we just went and sat on the grass. There were some tents, but it wasn't that crowded. I had wanted to see so many more, like 5,000 people. So I was a little disappointed, and we went home."

Around 4 the next morning, the police set tents on fire. Guzin said that when she read about it in the newspaper, she thought: They have no right to do that.

"I got really angry," she said, "and I called all my friends and said, 'Come on, let's go again.' We knew they had used tear gas before, so we went to the pharmacy to get masks, and they said: 'O.K., get ready, bring water, put on your gas mask. And come back safe.' We thought, What is happening? Then we saw a huge crowd walking toward Gezi Park. And suddenly I couldn't see anything, I couldn't breathe, I couldn't even put my mask on."

Guzin continued: "I started to breathe again, thankfully, but I saw the water cannon, and I was scared, and people got panicked. I kept checking be-

In a way, Mr. Erdogan's bad year is a result of a liberalizing society clashing with an inherently illiberal system.

hind me to see if it was going to hit me, and it did. But then I thought, O.K., we passed this, we can survive it. And I became braver. We went back maybe 10 times that night. When everyone in the neighborhoods began banging pots and pans from their windows for us, I was going to cry. I thought, Wow, we are doing something good."

Within a week, the activists' tiny sit-in spread to 70 cities. The occupation of Gezi Park lasted 19 days. Many participants described it as their first brush with political consciousness. Mr. Erdogan, meanwhile, called the protesters "terrorists" and "looters" and declared that a conspiracy was opposing him.

From Pennsylvania, Mr. Gulen chastised both Mr. Erdogan and the protesters. The Gulenists do not support street protests, but Mr. Erdogan was making Turkey look bad.

The quarrel between the two allies had been slowly brewing for years. It was financial, ideological and moral, but it was mostly about power. Fundamentally, Gulenists disagreed with Mr. Erdogan's political tactics. "Gulen doesn't cultivate influence through top-down reforms," Mr. Hendrick of Loyola said. "They encourage social change by winning hearts and minds through media, through education and through competitive market performance."

Mr. Erdogan attacked the Gulenists at that level. In November, his plans to close the college exam preparation schools, many of which are run by the Gulen movement, became public. Closing the multimillion-dollar industry has more than financial ramifications; those schools are where the Gulen movement recruits members.

Three weeks later, the Gulenists struck back. The authorities, presumably Gulenist sympathizers, brought corruption charges against the businessmen sons of three A.K.P. ministers and several businessmen tied to Mr. Erdogan, including his son, Bilal. Millions of dollars were said to have been discovered in shoe boxes in a closet belonging to the chief executive of a bank. Shady gold-for-oil schemes with Iran were exposed. Bribery for construction projects unexpectedly came to light.

Mr. Erdogan has declared that the Gulenists' corruption charges constitute a conspiracy against him by a "parallel state." To obstruct the investigation, he has purged thousands of supposed Gulenists from the police forces and reassigned the prosecutors on the corruption cases.

In a way, Mr. Erdogan's bad year is a result of a liberalizing society clashing with an inherently illiberal Turkish system. If a prime minister can co-opt the laws and the media, and if a self-interested group can prosecute trials of dubious legality, and if the citizens have nowhere to express themselves but in the streets, then the state institutions are broken. Someday Mr. Erdogan will be gone, but Turkey's system will still be a work in progress. Democratization takes a long time, and as Gezi Park and other global movements have proved, part of the process is figuring out what kind of country its citizens want.

Zeynel Gul, an activist, touched on this feeling when he spoke of Gezi Park: "It was important for us to experience that kind of life. If you were hungry, the food was free. If you were wounded, someone would carry you to the emergency tent. If you needed a lawyer, he is always there. Gezi gave us a powerful sense of a world based on solidarity and equality, which we could not imagine before. No one can take away what we experienced in the park."

Adapted from an article that appeared in The New York Times Magazine.

Erdogan Loses It

How the Islamists Forfeited Turkey

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com>

By Halil Karaveli

The Turkish state changed hands a decade ago, when Islamic conservatives (supported by the liberals) prevailed in elections against the country's old guard, the rightist nationalists known as Kemalists. It may be about to do so again. The conservative alliance of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the movement of Fethullah Gülen, a Muslim cleric who leads his congregation from self-imposed exile in the United States, has imploded. As it does, the military is gearing up to insert itself into politics once more.

The trouble started in 2011, when Erdogan decided to purge most Gülen supporters from the AKP party list ahead of the general election in June. No longer willing to share power with anyone else, Erdogan also ousted most liberals and supporters of the moderate President Abdullah Gül. Then, a subsequent reform of the public administration served as an excuse to remove many Gülenists from key bureaucratic posts.

The Gülenists' response came in February 2012, when a prosecutor believed to be affiliated with the movement tried to summon Hakan Fidan, the head of the National Intelligence Organization and a close confidant of Erdogan, for questioning over his role in then-secret negotiations between the Turkish government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Gülenists had made their opposition to talks with the Kurdish movement known and wanted to derail them by charging Erdogan's envoy -- and by implication the prime minister himself -- with treason.

Last summer, the rift between the two groups widened as protesters occupied Gezi Park. Gülen-affiliated media criticized Erdogan, comparing him to a "pharaoh." The government, with its reputation tarnished and Gülenists gaining the upper hand, announced in late 2013 that it would shut down Gülen-operated schools. That would have deprived the movement of its main source of revenue and recruits. Not ready to take the hit lying down, the Gülen movement retaliated by supporting a corruption probe, led by the prosecutor Celal Kara, against relatives of several cabinet ministers and businessmen with close ties to the government. Upping the ante, Erdogan launched a full-scale purge of any suspected

Gülen sympathizers from sensitive positions in the bureaucracy, judiciary, and police.

Gülen, of course, insists that he does not wield any power over state officials and claims that his only concern is for the public. Yet in an exceptionally fiery sermon last December, Gülen excoriated those "who turn a blind eye to the thief while punishing those who prosecute the thieves," beseeching God to "consume their homes with fire, destroy their nests, break their accords." Even Gülenists do not deny the existence of an informal network of devotees within the state. That was the bargain between the AKP and the Gülenists all along: In return for its support -- votes and the endorsement of the AKP by Gülenist media -- the Gülen movement would get to staff the state bureaucracy. In fact, the AKP needed the Gülenists' well-educated cadres to run Turkey, especially its police and judiciary. And since 2008, Gülenist sympathizers in the police and among prosecutors have helped put hundreds of regime opponents in prison.

Now, with the AKP-Gülenist relationship broken, Erdogan accuses his former allies of having established a parallel state that defies the authority of the elected government and of staging a coup against him. His most recent move against the so-called parallel state was his attempt last month to enact a law that would subordinate the judiciary to the executive, disabling his enemies from launching further probes. That will suit the Erdogan family just fine: A prosecutor tried to detain Erdogan's son at the end of last year. The police, instructed by the government, refused to carry out the order, and the prosecutor was subsequently reassigned. More than 2,000 police officers and nearly 100 prosecutors have been reassigned since last December.

The conflict between Erdogan and the Gülen movement might sound quite byzantine. But remember that this is the land that gave us the term. Indeed, the dispute follows a historical pattern. The Ottoman Sultans feared autonomous powers such as religious congregations. Mehmet II, the conqueror of Constantinople, was particularly repressive; he curtailed economic freedoms in a bid to disempower religious fraternities. Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the republic, was obsessed with pacifying religious congregations, wanting to ensure that they could never rival the state. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu even

defended the ongoing purges by pointing to history. Turkish state tradition, he said, includes the practice of "sacrificing sons for the state," to eliminate potential rivals for the throne.

Now, leading commentators in the AKP's media inform that the ruling party hopes to forge new alliances -- particularly with the military, its old enemy. But Erdogan should remember that turning to the military to help quash opposition is not risk-free. In 1971, conservative Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel solicited help from the military to quash the left, only to end up out of power. Erdogan has instructed the Ministry of Justice to prepare for a retrial of imprisoned military officers. The generals may very well be acquitted.

It is easy to see how this will play out. After several years of silence, the Turkish General Staff has once again taken to issuing political statements. The military high command has called the judiciary to task after Erdogan's chief adviser confessed that several military officers had been convicted on trumped-up charges. It has demanded a retrial of the officers and issued sharp condemnations of critics. Many observers fear that the state's institutional breakdown will invite the generals to intervene and "restore order," as they have done so many times before. Stoking those fears: In a letter to a newspaper editor last month, Necdet Özel, the chief of the General Staff, wrote that ensuring the functioning of the parliamentary system has been "the basic principle" of the armed forces, stressing that the military is determined to uphold it because "we want peace in our country." The statement begged the question of what the military will do if there is no peace in the country. Military interventions in the past have always been motivated by an alleged determination to ensure the preservation of democracy.

The return of the old military is not the only risk. There is also a new military to take into account. Since Islamic conservatives won control of the state apparatus and subdued the military in 2007 and 2008, purges from within the military of suspected Islamists -- which used to take place once a year -- have ceased. It may be inferred from this that there are now likely many within the military who sympathize with Gülen. His message, which combines Islam and Turkish patriotism particularly appeals to officers, who generally hail from conservative family backgrounds. And mass imprisonments of top generals, which have depleted the military's upper ranks, have made it possible for younger officers to rise further and faster than ever. The Gülenist clout within the military might be considerable. Erdogan would hope that the top brass, to whom he now appeals, will succeed in keeping Gülenists among the

► lower ranks in check. But he must also fear a move against him by younger officers acting outside the chain of command. That was what happened in 1960, when the authoritarian Prime Minister Adnan Menderes was toppled.

Beyond that, the AKP-Gülenist backbiting represents a massive and collective failure of the Islamic conservative movement, from which none of its components may be able to recover. The corruption charges have deprived the AKP of any remaining moral authority. And the turf

war has shattered the government's reputation for managerial competence. The Gülenists have lost moral capital, too. The movement has always taken pains to show itself as standing above petty politics. But revelations of the extent of its power within the state undermine that point. The Gülenists have shaken Erdogan, but they may have also undone themselves. Their maneuvering does not inspire confidence in all of Turkey: According to a recent poll, only six percent of the public supports the Gülenists' case against the AKP, whereas 28.5 percent supports the ruling party, and

45 percent thinks that both the AKP and the Gülenists are at fault.

Coalitions may come and go, but authoritarianism is forever -- or so it seems in Turkey. The Turkish Islamists' failure as managers of the state will most likely catapult the traditional custodians of the state, the rightist nationalists in the military and the bureaucracy who enjoy a considerable following in society, back to power.

★★★



February 11, 2014

Imprisoned Kurdish leader Ocalan's photo posted on billboards in Turkey

February 11, 2014

<http://www.ekurd.net>

DIYARBAKIR-AMED, Turkey's Kurdish region, — Pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) will start a series of protests demanding from Turkish government to release jailed outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan, Cihan news reported.

According to Cihan news, a three days campaign "Freedom for Ocalan" is planned and expected to end on February 15 with a mass march by BDP supporters in the Kurdish eastern province of Diyarbakir's Baglar district.

Within the scope of 15th anniversary of the PKK leader's arrest by Turkish security forces in Kenya's Nairobi, BDP will organize series of rallies. In a way to promote the campaign in Baglarbası district, pro-Kurdish party posted on billboards latest photos of Ocalan.

Party authorities also announced "freedom for Öcalan" as the main slogan of the campaign.

Experts say Ocalan has a high symbolic value for most Kurds, numbering to 22.5 million in Turkey, and openly sympathise with PKK rebels. He is frequently compared to south African Nelson Mandela.

Kurdish leader Ocalan, 65, the founder of the PKK, had been forced from his long-time home in Syria by Turkish pressure in 1998, embarked on an odyssey through several European countries and ended up in the residence of the Greek ambassador in Nairobi. He was on his way from there to the airport on February 15, 1999 when he was arrested by Turkish agents and put on a plane to Turkey.

Following the arrest, violent protests by Kurds erupted all over Europe. Ocalan was put on trial on the heavily guarded prison island of Imrali in the Sea of Marmara near Istanbul and sentenced to death.

His sentence was later commuted to life in prison, after Turkey abolished the death penalty in 2002 after Ankara abolished capital punishment as part of reforms to align with European Union norms.



Photo: Cihan

Ocalan was the only prisoner for a decade until new prisoners arrived on November 2009, after the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) criticised Ankara for violating Ocalan's human rights by keeping him in solitary confinement. He is allowed only visits from close relatives and his lawyers.

After Ocalan called for a peaceful solution from the dock, during his trial by Turkey, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire. But it ended the ceasefire in 2004. Since then, the PKK has resumed fighting, mostly against the Turkish military until 2012 when the Turkish state launched clandestine peace talks with the group.

A fragile peace process is underway between the rebel group and Ankara, after the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan called a historic ceasefire in March 2013.

Since it was established in 1984 the PKK has been fighting the Turkish state, which still denies the constitutional existence of Kurds, to establish an autonomous Kurdish region and more cultural rights for ethnic Kurds, its goal to political autonomy.

PKK's demands included releasing PKK detainees, lifting the ban on education in Kurdish, paving the way for an autonomous democrat Kurdish system within Turkey, reducing pressure on the detained leader Abdullah Öcalan, stopping military action against the Kurdish party and recomposing the Turkish constitution.

Turkey refuses to recognize its Kurdish population as a distinct minority. It has allowed some cultural rights such as limited broadcasts in the Kurdish language and private Kurdish language courses with the prodding of the European Union, but Kurdish politicians say the measures fall short of their expectations. ■

International New York Times FEBRUARY 10, 2014

Uncertain economy has Turkey on edge

ISTANBUL

BY JACK EWING AND SEBNEM ARSU

It was late afternoon in Istanbul. But seven time zones away, on Wall Street, the opening bell was ringing.

Seconds later, in a dingy alley of Istanbul's vast Grand Bazaar, several dozen men with cellphones pressed to their ears began gesturing and shouting loudly.

They were currency traders, who every day buy and sell tens of millions of dollars, euros and Turkish liras in a narrow space that is sheltered by a sagging blue-striped canopy and furnished with an old refrigerator and a few plastic stools.

The traders had been noisily plying their craft since early morning. But when they learned from the television screens inside the nearby gold shops that the Dow Jones industrial average had opened higher in New York, the trading turned even more tumultuous. The dealers locked in or unwound their bets on which direction the dollar would head in relation to the Turkish lira.

The frenzy was a demonstration of how the value of Turkey's money — which has broad implications for the national economy — is determined largely by events beyond the country's control. And lately the lira has been alarmingly weak.

The currency has lost a third of its value against the dollar, since the Federal Reserve in Washington began making noises last May about cutting back on its stimulus program, prompting investors to move their money from risky

emerging markets to the United States in anticipation of higher interest rates there. More recently, the steady exit of foreign money has been more of a stampee, with about half the lira's decline occurring since mid-December, as political turmoil engulfed the government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and violence raged in neighboring Syria and Iraq.

Investors' jitters about Turkey might grow after weekend clashes between the riot police and demonstrators protesting a new law that would allow the government to block web pages without a court order.

The lira's plunge has endangered the Turkish economy, which is heavily dependent on dollar- and euro-pegged transactions and loans for the country's everyday business. The decline has raised fears of a fresh financial crisis on the edge of Europe. On Friday the ratings agency Standard & Poor's lowered Turkey's credit rating to "negative," down from "stable."

The currency trading in the Grand Bazaar represents but a sliver of Turkey's multibillion-dollar foreign exchange market, in which most trades are conducted anonymously on electronic exchanges. Here in the bazaar, the trading is done mainly on behalf of money-changing shops.

No cash changes hands in the impromptu exchange. The sums are transferred among the traders' clients later.

But lately this narrow alleyway has become a microcosm of Turkish macroeconomics. While traders and some financial analysts say that Turkey is not in an economic crisis — not yet, anyway — there is an edgy sense of uncertainty

about the financial future.

Osman Atac, a 52-year-old currency trader known as Billiard Osman for his prowess with a pool cue, conceded that this slump in the lira was different — sharper and deeper — than others he had seen in the quarter century since he switched from selling used cars to trading money in an alley.

"We earned in '94, we earned in 2001," said Mr. Atac, referring to past global currency upheavals, when the lira plummeted but traders profited by arbitraging the exchange rates. But the steady, inexorable decline this time has provided fewer sharp swings that would give the traders opportunities for arbitrage.

"In this turbulence," Mr. Atac said, "no one is making any money."

Mr. Atac, clutching the battered Nokia cellphone he uses to keep in touch with his customers, said he thought the lira would not get any weaker than the record of 2.39 to the dollar it hit on Jan. 27. That is a sentiment shared widely in Turkey.

So far, Mr. Atac has been right. The lira has gained slightly since the low point, strengthening Friday to about 2.22 to the dollar.

But the consequences of a further decline would be serious. Turkish companies have borrowed \$130 billion in foreign currencies, according to the International Monetary Fund. Such loans offered lower interest rates, but came with a higher risk that is now materializing. When the lira goes down, it becomes more expensive for a Turkish company to make its payments on a dollar loan. If the lira weakens further, hundreds of companies could go bust.

"The depreciation of the lira has already eaten into revenues and profits," said Sinan Ulgen, chairman of the Center for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies, known by its Turkish initials EDAM, a research organization in Istanbul. "The next steps will be to force them toward a process of bankruptcy."

A steep rise in official interest rates, imposed by the Turkish central bank the week before last in an effort to halt the lira's decline, is likely to choke the easy credit that has fueled a boom in consumer spending.

"At the present time what we are looking at is not a meltdown but a sharp slowdown in growth," said Adam Slater, a senior economist at Oxford Economics in Oxford, England. But he added, "It's a moving target."

Turkey might seem to offer disturbing parallels to countries like Ireland or Spain at the beginning of the euro zone crisis four years ago. As in those countries, Turkish developers funneled foreign capital into construction projects,

"What we are looking at is not a meltdown but a sharp slowdown in growth. It's a moving target."



Traders bartering in a Grand Bazaar alley in Istanbul. Since May, the lira has lost a third of its value against the dollar, and the consequences of a further decline would be serious.

covering the dry hills surrounding Istanbul with endless tracts of high-rise apartments, office buildings and shopping centers connected by crowded freeways.

But many Turks insist there is no property bubble like the one that devastated Ireland and Spain.

Baris Dumankaya, vice chairman of a construction company that bears his family name, pointed out that half of Turkey's 81 million people are younger than 30, which he says should ensure steady demand for housing. Banks require high down payments, which means that prices would have a long way to fall before homeowners owed more than their properties were worth, Mr. Dumankaya said. Inflation, at more than 7 percent and rising, also makes declines in real estate prices less likely.

Nor does Turkey have the government debt and deficit problems that crippled the Greek economy and continue to threaten Italy's.

Mr. Dumankaya, whose family has been in the construction business for half a century, agreed that the flood of easy money attracted people into the industry who had little experience and

might be overextended. Sales of apartments in newly constructed buildings have slowed slightly, he said, and banks have become choosier about lending.

The plunge of the lira has already exposed the Turkish economy's dependence on short-term foreign investment. Most foreign capital is invested in Turkish stocks and bonds rather than longer-term projects.

All it takes is a phone call or a few clicks of a mouse for short-term investors to move their money elsewhere, and that is what foreign investors have been doing, not only in pulling money out of Turkey but from countries like Russia, Argentina and South Africa, whose currencies have also fallen as a result.

Mehmet Kutman, chief executive of Global Investment Holdings, a private equity firm in Istanbul that invests in assets like port facilities for cruise and cargo ships, said he thought the lira could still fall another 5 to 10 percent.

"The good thing is that it will stop excess leverage," Mr. Kutman said, referring to the country's high level of private debt.

Whatever the outcome, Turkey is

largely at the mercy of foreign investors and policies made in Washington. No one is more aware of that than the currency traders at the Grand Bazaar.

Mr. Atac, the trader, looked like an ordinary shopkeeper in his wool cap, long wool coat and fleece-lined snow boots to protect against the cold paving stones. But though his education stopped at high school, he is well versed in his chosen field. He could recite the calendar of upcoming U.S. economic data releases and talk at length on the likely direction of Fed policy as Janet L. Yellen takes over as chairman from Ben S. Bernanke.

"Yellen was Bernanke's strongest supporter and is going to stick with his plan," Mr. Atac said.

Yet, in an ominous sign, some of the traders in the bazaar had already burned up their capital and gone bankrupt as the lira plunged, Mr. Atac said.

Whether that proves to be a metaphor for the Turkish economy will be revealed in coming months.

Le Monde

Samedi 8 février 2014

Accord Syrie-ONU pour évacuer les assiégés d'Homs

De l'aide humanitaire est censée parvenir au bastion de la rébellion, encerclé depuis juin 2012

New York (Nations unies)
Correspondante

Nouveau coup de bluff de Damas? Alors que le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU examinait, jeudi 6 février, le retard pris par le régime syrien dans le processus de destruction de ses armes chimiques, la Syrie annonçait un accord humanitaire en faveur des assiégés d'Homs. «C'est ce qui s'appelle un bon timing», commentait une source diplomatique, incrédule.

Selon l'agence officielle SANA, l'accord passé entre le gouverneur de la ville, Talal Barazi, et le coordinateur résident des Nations unies, Yacoub Helou, «garantit la sortie imminente des civils innocents de la vieille ville (...) et l'entrée d'aides humanitaires pour ceux qui ont choisi de rester». L'ONU s'est «félicitée» de cette entente, devant déboucher sur la livraison d'aide à 2500 civils. L'armée syrienne assiège la vieille ville d'Homs depuis

juin 2012, privant plusieurs milliers de résidents d'eau potable, de vivres et de médicaments. Selon le département d'Etat américain, l'accord devait entrer en vigueur vendredi et inclure une «pause humanitaire» dans les combats.

A quatre jours d'une possible reprise des négociations de «Genève 2», encore suspendue à la participation de Damas, l'annonce de ce déblocage laisse les diplomates occidentaux sceptiques.

L'ambassadrice américaine à l'ONU, Samantha Power, a été la première à mettre en doute la sincérité des autorités syriennes. «Etant donné que le régime a jusqu'ici décrit toute personne vivant dans les territoires contrôlés par l'opposition comme un terroriste, et qu'il les a attaqués en tant que tels, (...) nous avons quelques raisons d'être très sceptiques», a affirmé la diplomate. Elle a rappelé le précédent de l'évacuation des habitants de Mouadamiya Al-Cham (une banlieue de Damas) au cours de laquelle «plu-

sieurs hommes ont disparu».

Décidés à accroître la pression sur le régime, des pays européens et arabes réfléchissent dans les coulisses de l'ONU à une résolution en faveur d'un meilleur accès humanitaire à l'échelle de toute la Syrie. Si la France et le Royaume-Uni estiment que Genève 2 oblige Damas et Moscou à faire bonne figure, les Etats-Unis jugent le moment malvenu.

Priorité à «Genève 2»

L'ambassadeur russe Vitali Tchourkine s'est, quant à lui, dit «opposé» à l'examen d'une telle résolution «à présent», mais n'a pas menacé explicitement d'un veto. Des diplomates font même le pari du contexte «favorable» des Jeux olympiques de Sotchi, convaincus que «les Russes n'oseront pas sortir l'arme du veto contre une résolution humanitaire pendant les Jeux», dont ils sont hôtes.

Faute de consensus, aucun texte ne sera soumis au Conseil de

sécurité avant plusieurs jours. La priorité du moment est de donner toutes ses chances à Genève 2. Le retard pris par le programme de destruction de l'arsenal chimique syrien, qui impose à Damas d'éliminer tout son stock d'ici au 30 juin sous peine de sanctions, voire d'un recours à la force, «n'est pas insurmontable», a ainsi estimé Sigrid Kaag, la chef de la mission conjointe de l'ONU et de l'Organisation pour l'interdiction des armes chimiques (OIAC) en Syrie.

Moins de 5% des agents chimiques les plus dangereux ont jusqu'à présent été évacués de Syrie. Mais selon M^{me} Kaag, ce retard n'est pas imputable aux autorités de Damas, dont elle a loué la «coopération». A l'issue de son exposé, le Conseil de sécurité a demandé au régime syrien d'«accélérer» le rythme, sans fixer d'ultimatum ou brandir de sanction au cas où le calendrier élaboré par l'ONU continuerait à ne pas être respecté. ■

ALEXANDRA GENESTE

International New York Times

FEBRUARY 11, 2014

GENEVA

Shelling and sniper fire in Homs underscore difficulties for aid effort

BY NICK CUMMING-BRUCE

As fighting raged unabated in Syria, a second round of peace negotiations began in Geneva between government and opposition representatives in hopes of moving away from the inconclusive and often fractious exchanges in the first round that ended 10 days ago.

Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations mediator guiding the peace process, prepared the ground by meeting the opposition's chief negotiator on Saturday and then holding talks with Syria's foreign minister, Walid al-Moallem, after his arrival in Geneva on Sunday. The preliminary discussion did not lead to immediate face-to-face negotiations. Mr. Brahimi began Monday's discussions with another separate meeting with the opposition, to be followed by talks with the government delegation.

After the first round of talks ended on Jan. 31, Mr. Brahimi acknowledged that "we haven't made any progress to speak of." He identified some common ground between the two sides that he said could provide a platform for this week's talks, adding the crucial caveat, "if there is good faith and political will."

There was scant evidence of either on Sunday as mortar shelling and sniper fire erupted in the city of Homs, inflicting civilian casualties and damaging aid agency vehicles. The vehicles had arrived under a United Nations-brokered humanitarian pause intended to enable aid agencies to deliver food and medicine to the blockaded Old City, where civilians have been trapped for the past two years.

Several hundred civilians described by aid workers as in frail health were able to get out of the Old City. But the gunfire that reportedly killed at least six civilians and forced aid agency staff members to take cover for several hours in the ruins of the Old City starkly exposed the hazards that have hindered international relief efforts. Agencies are struggling to open up humanitarian access to more than a quarter of a million people believed to be living in areas under siege by government and rebel forces, and to millions of Syrians in other areas where insecurity has obstructed aid deliveries.

Valerie Amos, the United Nations chief aid coordinator, said in a statement Monday that Syrian government and opposition leaders had agreed to extend the humanitarian pause for three more days.

She expressed anger, however, that the cease-fire did not hold. "It is absolutely unacceptable that U.N. and Syri-

As Syrian war rages, Geneva talks resume

an Arab Red Crescent aid workers were deliberately targeted," she said.

A Syrian Red Crescent official said that around 300 people were evacuated from rebel-held area of Homs on Monday, bringing the total to 1,000 since Friday, when the truce began, The Associated Press reported.

While human rights groups say the government is responsible for most of the sieges, the rebels, too, have tried to starve out their enemies.

"We have entire areas of the country where the ability to transport food and other materials is severely hampered because of deliberate blockades and constraints on trucks and convoys," Matthew Hollingworth, the director of the World Food Program's Syria effort, said by telephone from Homs on Sunday. "It is a tactic that everybody is using, and it has a massive impact."

Reflecting the toll of such tactics, one older man evacuated in Homs on Sunday said he had survived on one spoon of bulgur a day for the past week and that his wife had died, malnourished and unable to get medical treatment, according to Dina Elkassaby, a spokeswoman for the World Food Program.

"Some people were living off roots and weeds and grass and olives if they were lucky," Ms. Elkassaby said.

The pressure for results at the Geneva talks was further underscored by reports of scores of casualties on Monday in an attack attributed to jihadist rebels on an Alawite village in the central province of Hama. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is based in London, said that 20 civilians, including women, and about 20 men defending the village were killed in the assault, The Associated Press reported.

The only common ground between the government and the opposition visible at the end of the first round of talks was an agreement to negotiate within the framework of a communiqué that called for the creation of a transitional government with full executive powers and based on mutual consent.

But that position left ample room for interpretation. Opposition delegates have said they want to focus immediately on the composition of a transitional government and timelines for creating it. Mr. Moallem, before leaving Syria, said the government was prepared to negotiate the communiqué article by article, but it has denied any suggestion that it is ready to negotiate a transfer of power and wants the Geneva talks to focus instead on tackling what it calls "terrorism."

In the interval since the first round of meetings, Mr. Brahimi and the Syrian parties to the talks have conferred with

the United States and Russia, the sponsors of the Geneva process. Moscow said Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov had conferred with Secretary of State John Kerry by phone over the weekend. No details have emerged of any initiatives to steer the warring parties toward carrying out cease-fires, prisoner exchanges or better access for aid agencies.

Modest progress was reported on Monday in the international effort to destroy the Syrian government's chemical weapons arsenal, which has been underway since October. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Hague-based group that has been collaborating with the United

"Some people were living off roots and weeds and grass and olives if they were lucky."

Nations in overseeing that effort, reported on its website that a third shipment of chemicals was exported on Monday from the port of Latakia.

The group also said that some of the chemical compounds in the stockpile had been destroyed inside Syria, but it provided no further details on precisely what or was destroyed, or where.

Syria amassed an estimated 1,200 tons of toxic chemical materials in its stockpile, half of it considered especially dangerous. The United States, which had threatened missile strikes on Syria before President Bashar al-Assad agreed last September to destroy the chemical arsenal, has complained in recent weeks that the Syrian government appears to be stalling. Two deadlines for exporting the chemicals have been missed.

Mr. Assad and his subordinates have attributed delays in the export to security problems related to the war. But the director general of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, Ahmet Uzumcu, said on Jan. 31 that "the need for the process to pick up pace is obvious." Last week, Russia, which helped negotiate the agreement that averted the American missile strikes, said it expected the Syrian government to complete all chemical weapons exports by March 1.

The exported chemicals are to be transferred at a southern Italian port to an American vessel, the Cape Ray, which is equipped with technology to neutralize them.

Under Syria's agreement, backed by a United Nations Security Council resolution, the entire arsenal is to be destroyed by the middle of this year.

International New York Times

FEBRUARY 13, 2014

Prison breaks fuel conflict in Syria and Iraq

BAGHDAD

Fighters once rounded up by American forces fuel wars in Iraq and Syria

BY TIM ARANGO AND ERIC SCHMITT

Iraq after the departure of American troops in 2011 has been plagued by prison breaks that have allowed hundreds of hard-core jihadis to escape, fueling sectarian warfare on the battlefields of Syria and, increasingly, in Iraq itself.

Many of the insurgents, rounded up by the United States military in the years of the occupation, now fill the top ranks of the Sunni militant groups destabilizing the region, including Al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS.

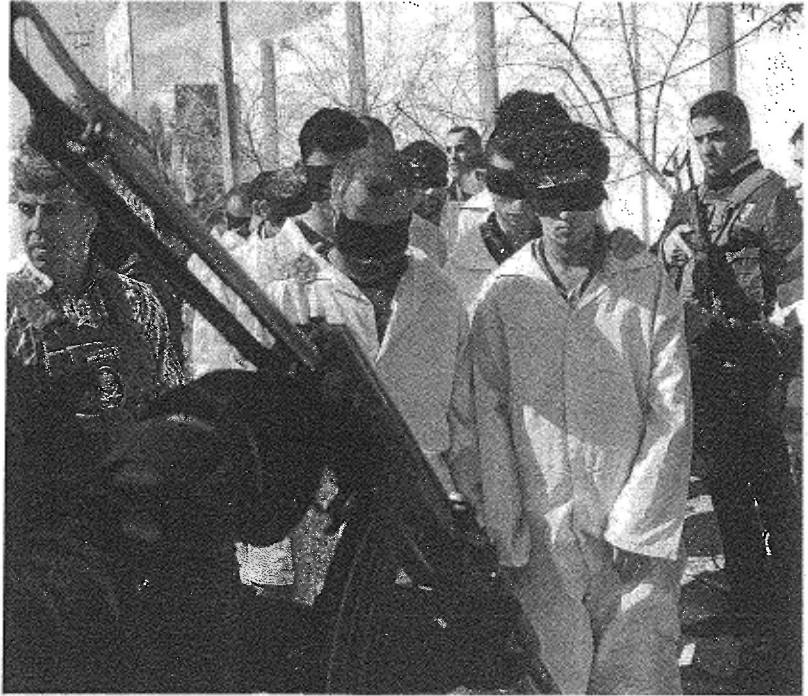
The breakouts, little remarked on at the time, were a critical aspect of the military strategy of ISIS, so much so that the primary 12-month campaign from July 2012 to July 2013 had a name, "Operation Breaking the Walls." In all, American officials estimated, a few hundred of the escapees have joined ISIS, several in senior leadership roles.

While ISIS was already gaining strength in this period, an American counterterrorism official said, "the influx of these terrorists, who collectively have decades of battlefield experience, probably has strengthened the group and deepened its leadership bench."

One of those was Abu Aisha, who late one night last July sat in his cell at the Abu Ghraib prison on the western outskirts of Baghdad waiting, as he did each day, for his date with the executioner.

That night, though, explosions and gunfire erupted and, just as suddenly, a familiar prison guard opened the doors to his cell and told him to leave immediately. With hundreds of others he ran through the prison's corridors until he escaped through a hole that had been blasted through a wall and hopped into a waiting Kia truck that took him to freedom — and back to the battlefield.

Abu Aisha, who declined to be identified by his full name, is now leading a group of Qaeda fighters on the western edge of Falluja, his hometown, which for nearly six weeks has been held by anti-government Sunni fighters. With Falluja under siege, the United States government has been rushing guns, ammunition and missiles to Iraq to help the Shiite-dominated Iraqi security forces and allied tribal fighters retake the city, where so many American Marines once fought — and died — nearly 10 years ago.



A roundup in Basra, Iraq, this week of people suspected of being members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a militant group.

Abu Aisha was an auto mechanic before 2003 but found new purpose in fighting the Americans. Many detainees, himself included, he said, spent their time in prison learning the ways of militant Islam, studying the Koran and Shariah and preparing to continue to wage jihad once free.

Abu Aisha was set free by the Americans in 2008 but rearrested by the Iraqis in 2010 and sent to the main Iraqi prison, he said.

"Finally they put me in Abu Ghraib, and I again met some of the leaders and fighters I knew, including princes from Al Qaeda — Iraqis, Arabs and other nationalities," he said. "Most of them had been at Bucca, as well."

After escaping, Abu Aisha said he was given the choice by ISIS leaders of going to Syria or staying and fighting in Iraq.

"They asked us if we wanted to leave and fight with ISIS in Syria," he said in a recent interview. "Many of the leaders that I know went to Syria and the jihad there once they fled from Abu Ghraib. Other fighters went there after a while because they felt they would be freer in Syria. I decided to stay with my group."

The prison breaks, and the mayhem they helped fuel in Syria, also had the effect of altering the calculus of many Western officials toward the war there. In the beginning, many Western officials saw the conflict as the brutal op-

pression by a dictator — President Bashar al-Assad — of his largely peaceful opponents.

But ISIS took on an increasingly important role in the fighting there — often battling against other, more moderate insurgent groups, to the dismay of Al Qaeda, which broke ties with ISIS over the issue — adding to the reluctance of Western powers to intervene.

Osama al-Nujaifi, the speaker of Iraq's Parliament and the country's most important Sunni politician, said that the escaped fighters "went to Syria to lead large fighting groups there. So, people started thinking, is Bashar better, or is Qaeda better?"

Many Western experts have blamed Turkey's open-door policy along its southern border with Syria for fostering the growth of ISIS and other extremist groups. But Turkish officials have pushed back, citing intelligence reports that trace the growth of ISIS to the Iraqi prison breaks.

More than 600 prisoners are believed to have escaped in the largest of these sophisticated attacks, facilitated by corrupt prison guards who were easily bought, the officials said. Two prison breaks in particular — the one at Abu Ghraib and another, in September 2012, in Tikrit — have had a significant impact on ISIS' overall capacity to undermine Iraqi security and have contributed to the group's

expansion in Syria, the officials said.

The attack in Tikrit, for instance, resulted in the release of 47 death-row detainees and now appears to have been instrumental in facilitating ISIS' significant escalation of operations throughout 2013, according to Charles Lister, a visiting scholar at the Brookings Doha Center in Qatar. American officials said more than 500 prisoners escaped in the Abu Ghraib operation alone.

"The majority" of the prisoners who escaped had been originally detained by Iraqi forces, American officials said, but they acknowledged that large numbers — perhaps scores — had been captured during American operations in Iraq before the United States military left the country at the end of 2011.

One of them was Shaker Waheeb, perhaps the most dangerous Qaeda figure to emerge here recently. Before the United States' invasion of Iraq, Mr. Waheeb was studying computer science at a university in Anbar. He quickly changed paths and fought the Americans, and was detained and held in Camp Bucca in southern Iraq before being turned over to the Iraqis. He escaped from prison in Tikrit in late 2012.

In Iraq, Mr. Waheeb has become something of a cult figure for up-and-coming jihadists — he has been referred to as heir apparent of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the brutal Qaeda leader who was killed by American forces in 2006 — and Public Enemy No. 1 to the broader Iraqi public. Iraqi officials have claimed more than once to have killed him, but today he is a key figure leading the fighting within Falluja, and last summer was

seen on a grisly video executing three Shiite truck drivers on the side of a highway in the deserts of Anbar Province. He has also been linked to an attack last summer in which 14 Shiite truck drivers in Iraq were found be-headed.

Among the more moderate fighting groups within Syria, which have lately been fighting against ISIS, the prison breaks helped stoke conspiracy theories that ISIS is a pawn of the Assad government. While there is no evidence to back up the claim, some said they believed that the Syrian government — with assistance from the Iraqi government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, which has largely sided with Mr. Assad — helped orchestrate the escapes.

"By doing this, exporting more foreign fighters to Syrian territory, the Maliki government did Assad's regime a favor by supporting his claim of fighting terrorism inside Syria," said Abduljabbar Osso, a rebel leader in Aleppo who has been fighting ISIS.

Another rebel commander, Lt. Col. Ahmad al-Aboud, recalled hearing about the Abu Ghraib escape last summer, and the Tikrit operation before that, and said that "the moment we heard about the prison escape in Iraq, we knew we would face more trouble after that. We have always faced difficulties smuggling light weapons from Iraq to Syria through the Iraq border, but it was very easy for ISIS to get full patrols of vehicles, weapons and fighters across to Syria."

The Iraqi government has done little to explain how the prison breaks happened, although most are in agree-

ment that they relied on help from the inside. When Parliament tried to investigate the Abu Ghraib attack, it was stymied by the security forces and top government officials, lawmakers say.

"Unfortunately, the government did

"The moment we heard about the prison escape in Iraq, we knew we would face more trouble after that."

not allow us to even get close to the prison for a week," said Shwan Muhammed, a member of Parliament and one of the investigators.

Not all of the escaped prisoners returned to the fight. Ahmed al-Dulaymi, 31, also escaped from Abu Ghraib and, under fake identification documents, is working as a farmer in Diyala Province, another Qaeda stronghold. Like many Sunnis in Iraq, he explains the recent resurgence of Sunni extremism as a reaction to the policies of the Shiite-dominated government, including broad security sweeps that have landed many innocent Sunni men in prison.

"Many of my friends were good people, but because of the government's actions, my friends have become dangerous people and leaders in Al Qaeda," he said. "Injustice is what gives birth to Al Qaeda."

Duraïd Adnan and Yasir Ghazi contributed reporting from Baghdad, Karam Shoumali contributed reporting from Istanbul, and employees of The New York Times contributed reporting from Anbar and Diyala Provinces in Iraq.

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WHAT NEXT FOR SYRIA?

As peace talks collapse, the carnage continues and the flood of refugees swells.

With the apparent collapse of the United Nations-mediated peace talks on Syria, the United States and its allies find themselves in a difficult spot. Absent a diplomatic and political option, what can the world do about a civil war that has killed an estimated 136,000 people, produced nine million refugees, displaced 4.25 million civilians internally and now threatens to destabilize several other countries in the region?

President Obama has to be frustrated over the failure of the talks; a second and largely fruitless round ended last week in Geneva. Having said, rightly, that there is no military solution, he has struggled to get the negotiations off the ground. The opposition forces, though weak, at least proposed a transitional government. President Bashar al-Assad of Syria not only resisted any compromise but actually intensified the bombing of rebel neighborhoods; 5,000 more people have reportedly been killed.

American officials say that Mr. Assad's grip has grown stronger over the past year, thanks largely to the reliable support of his patrons in Russia and Iran. Now that peace talks have run aground, Mr. Obama has asked his advisers to review old and new options for bolstering opposition forces and easing the desperate humanitarian crisis.

These tasks have grown even more complicated as Syria has increasingly become a breeding ground for a new generation of terrorists and as ever-larger refugee flows threaten to destabilize the region. Such threats may at some point require bolder steps. But, so far, no one has come up with surefire remedies or even new ideas that would not draw the United States into war. Options under consideration include providing money, transportation and intelligence to some rebel fighters. But such moves are unlikely to change the military balance.

The administration is reportedly not considering strategies that have already been rejected, such as airstrikes or directly supplying the rebels with weapons beyond the limited arms and training available to them under a program led by the Central Intelligence Agency. It is unclear whether the administration has dropped its objections to Saudi Arabia supplying vetted rebel groups with more advanced weapons.

Mr. Obama has resisted being pushed into a war by critics who seem to believe that force is the ultimate sign of leadership. Leadership sometimes means not going to war. It also means, in this case, persisting in the frustrating search for a peaceful solution and, short of that, some means of lessening the misery of the Syrian people.

Irak : le discret retour des mercenaires



Début février, des membres des forces de sécurité irakiennes se préparent à attaquer des positions d'al-Qaida à Ramadi, une ville qui échappe en partie au contrôle de Bagdad depuis plus d'un mois. AP

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MOYEN-ORIENT Plusieurs centaines d'agents de sécurité américains vont faire leur retour en Irak pour former les forces de sécurité locales au maniement des nouvelles armes que Bagdad s'apprête à recevoir des États-Unis, afin de mieux lutter contre l'insurrection sunnite autour d'al-Qaida. « Mais ce n'est pas Faloudja en 2004 », prévient depuis le Kurdistan l'universitaire franco-irakien Hosham Dawood, en allusion à la présence massive des mercenaires américains aux côtés de l'armée irakienne, quand il avait fallu soumettre le bastion de l'insurrection, hostile à l'occupation américaine du pays, un an

après le renversement de Saddam Hussein. Ces nouveaux mercenaires « ne sortiront pas dans les rues et ils ne participeront pas aux combats, sauf rares exceptions », ajoute Hosham Dawood.

Les Irakiens gardent en mémoire les exactions perpétrées par certains gros bras de Blackwater, après la chute de la dictature. Mais face à la flambée de violence auquel le premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki est confronté dans la ville de Faloudja - tenue depuis un mois par les djihadistes sunnites - le pouvoir a un besoin urgent de formateurs pour les 24 hélicoptères de combat Apache, et les quelque 500 missiles Hellfire que les compagnies américaines Boeing and Co et Lockheed Martin lui livreront prochainement. « Les officiers irakiens, qui ont été habitués à travailler avec des équipements russes ou français, ne savent pas utiliser le matériel américain », constate un haut gradé français, actif à Bagdad.

Au total, même si le Congrès dénonce sa politique antisunnite qui a enflammé l'ouest de l'Irak depuis un an, Washington a tout de même prévu de fournir pour plus de 6 milliards de dollars d'aide militaire à Nouri al-Maliki.

Encore 12 000 contractants

Officiellement, depuis le retrait de leurs troupes fin 2011, les États-Unis ne comptent plus que 200 militaires environ en Irak. « Mais grâce aux contractants privés, les Américains ont largement maintenu leur présence dans le pays », souligne la chercheuse Myriam Benraad. Selon le Wall Street Journal, ces contractants étaient encore plus de

12 000 début 2013, dont une petite moitié - 5 000 environ - en soutien auprès de la très imposante ambassade américaine dans la « zone internationale » de Bagdad. D'autres sont déployés au nord, chez les Kurdes, où la sécurité se détériore, mais aussi au sud, où Washington a décidé mercredi de renforcer leur présence pour mieux sécuriser les installations pétrolières, cibles là encore d'attaques de plus en plus fréquentes.

Pourtant depuis dix ans la donne a bien changé. « Les autorités irakiennes veulent continuer de réduire la part des étrangers dans le marché de la sécurité », affirme Frédéric Gallois, patron de Gallice, une société française implantée à Bagdad depuis de nombreuses années. « Nous dissuadons nos clients qui tiennent à avoir des Français pour les protéger, car ils sont plus un problème qu'un atout, ajoute-t-il. Les locaux supportent mal les compagnies étrangères, y compris américaines. »

Le jeu du premier ministre

Face à un allié américain qui ne le ménage pas, Nouri al-Maliki a compris tout le parti qu'il pouvait tirer du retour de mercenaires, cantonnés dans leurs bases. « En laissant revenir des privés dans le sillage des armes que les Américains lui vendent, le premier ministre cherche à améliorer son image aux États-Unis et obtenir ainsi l'appui de Washington pour les élections législatives prévues fin avril », décrypte le haut gradé français.

Côté américain, la mise en avant des privés permet de ne pas exposer les soldats de l'US Army. « Le Pentagone a des problèmes avec le Congrès, qui est réticent à aider Maliki, constate un proche du premier ministre irakien. Mais des mercenaires passent mieux, et pour nous peu importe la couleur du chat pourvu qu'il prenne des rats. » Il y a urgence : seules, les forces irakiennes ne pourront pas vaincre al-Qaida et ses sicaires de l'État islamique au Levant. Vendredi, ils ont encore perpétré plusieurs attentats, tuant au moins neuf personnes à Bagdad. Tandis que l'assaut contre Faloudja n'a toujours pas été lancé. Sans doute Maliki attend-il les renforts américains, en armes et en conseillers, pour attaquer le repaire djihadiste qui menace son pouvoir. ■



Une loi Internet « liberticide » en Turquie

L'opposition dénonce une nouvelle atteinte à la liberté d'expression de la part du pouvoir d'Erdogan.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

TURQUIE « Big brother » a les Turcs à l'œil. Le gouvernement islamo-conservateur a toujours eu Internet dans le collimateur mais de là à placer sous surveillance tous ses utilisateurs, il y a un pas... qui a été franchi. En dépit des inquiétudes des organisations des droits de l'homme, des partis de l'opposition à l'unisson ou de l'Union européenne, qui la jugent liberticide, une loi contrôlant strictement le Web a été votée par les députés turcs.

Adopté mercredi, le texte donne à l'Autorité de régulation des télécommunications (TIB) compétence pour bloquer un site dès lors qu'il porte atteinte « à la vie privée » ou est « insultant ou discriminatoire ». L'appréciation est laissée à l'entière discrétion de l'instance administrative, sans passer par une dé-

cision de justice. Autre disposition qui alarme les défenseurs de la liberté d'expression, les fournisseurs d'accès auront obligation de conserver pendant deux ans les données des internautes et de les fournir aux autorités si ces dernières en font la demande. Là encore, un juge n'aura pas besoin de donner son feu vert.

Cette loi « ne vise qu'à renforcer la censure, le contrôle gouvernemental d'Internet et la surveillance des citoyens », s'alarme Reporters sans frontières. D'autant que, selon la Chambre des ingénieurs informatiques, le directeur de la TIB est nommé par les services de renseignements turcs, eux-mêmes sous l'autorité du premier ministre.

Réseaux sociaux en accusation

Bruxelles s'inquiète également de restrictions qui ne sont pas compatibles avec les standards démocratiques européens et demande au pays candidat la révision du texte. Pour Stefan Füle,

commissaire à l'Élargissement, « le public a besoin de plus de transparence et d'informations, pas de restrictions ». De son côté, le Parti républicain du peuple, la principale formation de l'opposition, dénonce « des interdictions qui existent pendant la période des coups d'État », en référence aux putschs militaires passés. Le dernier recours est désormais le président de la République, Abdullah Gül, qui peut opposer son veto à la loi.

Alors que le gouvernement se débat face à un gigantesque scandale politico-financier, cette loi est perçue par ses détracteurs comme la manifestation de sa volonté d'empêcher toute information critique. Déjà au mois de juin, lors de la révolte de Gezi dénonçant ses dérives autoritaires, le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, s'en était pris aux utilisateurs des réseaux sociaux qu'il avait qualifiés de « fauteurs de trouble ». La Turquie possède un arsenal législatif très coercitif concernant Internet. YouTube avait même été interdit entre 2008 et 2010 à cause d'une vidéo jugée insultante pour Mustafa Kemal, le fondateur de la République, et qui avait été postée par des Grecs. Selon le site engelliweb.com, 40 000 sites sont déjà interdits par la justice, notamment ceux ayant un rapport avec les Kurdes ou l'homosexualité. Et l'augmentation de la censure est préoccupante dans un pays qui est le premier géolier de journalistes dans le monde : les demandes de retrait de pages de Google par le gouvernement ont bondi de près de 1 000 % les six premiers mois de 2013. ■

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TURKEY'S INTERNET CRACKDOWN

A new curb on free expression is an assault on democracy.

President Abdullah Gul, Turkey's head of state, has now joined Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the government's assault on free speech. On Tuesday, Mr. Gul approved a new law, passed earlier by Parliament, that is intended to help protect Mr. Erdogan and his allies from a widening corruption scandal by tightening government control of the Internet. It would allow the authorities, without a court order, to block web pages under the guise of protecting personal privacy, and to collect users' browsing histories.

Even before Mr. Gul acted, Turkey already had tough laws blocking thousands of websites, including gay dating sites and news portals considered favorable to Kurdish militants. According to Reuters, Google reported in December that requests from Turkish authorities to remove content from its sites had risen nearly 10 times during the first half of 2012. In the first six months of 2013, Google was asked to delete more than 12,000 items, making Turkey the No. 1 country seeking to excise Google content.

The new law is a transparent effort to prevent social media and other sites from reporting on a corruption scandal that reportedly involves bid-rigging and money laundering. In one audio recording, leaked last month to

SoundCloud, the file-sharing site, Mr. Erdogan is said to be heard talking about easing zoning laws for a construction tycoon in exchange for two villas for his family.

The law is just the latest blow to Turkey's democracy. After more than a decade in power, Mr. Erdogan has become more authoritarian and, as a result, increasingly embattled. The legislature has done little to stop him. Last Saturday, the Parliament, in a 20-hour session that involved a bloody fistfight, approved a bill that would tighten the government's grip on the judiciary. On Thursday, Reuters reported that Mr. Erdogan had drafted a new law that would expand powers for his intelligence agency, including eavesdropping.

The European Union and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have spoken out against these developments. The United States has also weighed in but not strongly enough. President Obama, who once had a close relationship with Mr. Erdogan, finally spoke to him on Wednesday after months of indirect communication. It was unclear from a White House statement, however, whether Mr. Obama had explicitly pointed out the perilous course Mr. Erdogan is on, a message he needs to hear.

Paris Investigation: Tensions Grow over Murder of Kurdish Activists

By Jörg Diehl, Özlem Gezer and
Fidelius Schmid
<http://www.spiegel.de>

Did Turkey's secret service order the killing of three Kurdistan Worker's Party activists in Paris last year? Suspicion is growing that it did, and Germany's domestic intelligence agency has curtailed its cooperation with the Turks as a result.

The triple murders in January 2014 of Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) activists in Paris may ultimately emerge as one of the most audacious political killings to take place in Western Europe in years. New suspicions -- although they are still only that -- suggest there may be Turkish intelligence links to the slayings, a development that, if proven, could have serious repercussions for relations between Ankara and Europe. The case has numerous links to Germany, and officials here are closely monitoring the investigation as it unfolds in France.

At the center of the explosive new details is a recording -- a purported conversation between Ömer Güney, the man accused of murdering the three female activists, and what are alleged to be two members of Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT). The recording was posted on the Internet on Jan. 12, ostensibly by a friend of Güney, who has since been charged by French prosecutors in the killing. Güney, who lived in Bavaria in Southern Germany from 2003 to 2011, had left the recording with the friend in case something happened to him.

The recording is 10 minutes long and includes what are purported to be



details about the planned killings. "Are you thinking of using gloves?" a suspected MIT agent asks. "Yes," the alleged shooter answers. "No traces on the gun."

In the recording, the men discuss the fact that the killer needs two guns in case one of them fails. And that he wants to purchase his weapons and ammunition from an Arab in Belgium, but hasn't done so yet. Also that he has already had one opportunity to strike.

They talk about escape routes and about the possible risks. "Can they follow the trail of who obtained it?" one of the alleged officers asks. "No, it'll be in a blank package," the suspected hit man ensures. "Let's talk again. Let's review your plan," the men warn. "May God protect us from the smallest mistake, because you're important to us. The others aren't."

WERE KILLINGS A HIT JOB?

Together with other circumstantial evidence, the recording is fueling the suspicion currently being pursued by French investigators. It is one that has also unsettled German security agencies. They suspect that Güney may have murdered the three PKK activists in a hit ordered by Turkey's MIT. The PKK is banned in the European Union as a terrorist organization.

The main piece of evidence supporting the theory is a document allegedly originating from MIT. The document discusses one of the three female activists being "rendered ineffective."

Is it possible that a country that

wants to become a member of the EU allowed a contract killing to be conducted on EU territory?

Of course, it is still only a suspicion. But if proven, it could have dramatic consequences -- not only on the ties Germany and France have with Turkey, but between all of Europe and Ankara. The domestic political situation in Turkey is already fragile, and the developments could place even greater pressure on beleaguered Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Intelligence chief Hakan Fidan is a close confidant of the Turkish leader.

It also has the potential to trigger violent clashes in countries outside Turkey that are home to large Kurdish populations, including Germany. Security authorities in Germany will be observing the outcome of the investigations with great interest.

A year has passed since PKK activists Sakine Cansız, Fidan Doğan and Leyla Söylemez were murdered in a Kurdish information office near the Gare du Nord train station in Paris. They were killed with shots fired into their heads and stomachs from a 7.65 millimeter caliber pistol equipped with a silencer. Video camera footage shows Güney arriving at 11:30 a.m. in a car together with Cansız in front of the office before disappearing again. At 12:11 p.m., he can be seen again. According to French media reports, the conversation that the three PKK activists were holding in the office ended abruptly at 12:43 p.m. At 12:56 p.m., Güney left the site. Gun powder traces →

⇒ were later detected on the bag he was carrying when he left.

INVESTIGATORS HAD DOUBTS EARLY ON

Police arrested Güney a short time later -- and discovered traces of blood on his shoes as well as the DNA of one of the victims on his jacket. Given the evidence, he has emerged as the prime suspect in the murder investigation. A rumor spread quickly of a feud among PKK members that ended in the death of the three women. But investigators soon began to question that version of events.

After around eight years of living in Germany, in November 2011, Güney had offered his assistance as a fellow sympathizer to the Kurds in Villiers-le-Bel, a Paris suburb. He helped out as a translator and driver at the Kurdish cultural center there.

Yet during his time in Schliersee southeast of Munich, Güney had never attracted the attention of German authorities as a member of the Kurdish movement. On the contrary. They believed he had greater sympathies for Turkish nationalist circles. Friends have confirmed as much and say it is extremely unlikely he was a member of the PKK.

French investigators found other contradictions as well. Güney, for example, abandoned a part-time job, allegedly due to epileptic fits. Although he was then forced to live on around €900 (\$1,228) in monthly welfare payments, investigators found dozens of suits at his home. They also discovered that he had taken at least nine trips to Turkey and stayed in expensive hotels.

According to an application for legal assistance from France, Güney entered Turkey for the last time on Dec. 25, 2012. During his stay, he telephoned with certain numbers particularly often, numbers that he began dialling again in the period shortly before the attack. He apparently used three different mobile phone numbers, two French ones and a Turkish number. Conspicuously, however, one of the French numbers was used for calls to a single Turkish number.

The analysis of one of his mobile phones also revealed that on the night of Jan. 7, 2013 -- one day prior to the attack -- more than 300 mem-

bership applications from the Villiers-le-Bel cultural centers were photographed. The data was sent out, and then deleted. Güney, who denies responsibility for the murder, offered a simple explanation to Paris Public Prosecutor Jeanne Duvé and her investigators: He said he is a member of the PKK and photographed the files because the PKK was concerned that a police raid was imminent and the files were to be destroyed. He told the skeptical investigators that he was just "following orders." From whom, they wanted to know. "From superiors," came the response.

One year after the murder, on Jan. 12, alleged recordings from Güney's conversation with the two suspected agents appeared in a blog. The URL ended in ".de", but the site is apparently operated from Turkey. According to the French media, investigators are certain that it is Güney's voice on the recordings, a claim that Güney himself denies. A forensic analysis is pending.

A NEW EXPLOSIVE DOCUMENT

Only two days later, a further, potentially explosive document appeared on the web. The note, which allegedly comes from the Turkish intelligence service MIT, is labeled "secret." It was composed on Nov. 18, 2012 and carries the heading "Sara Sakine Cansiz." And it may be nothing less than the order that resulted in the liquidation of the well-known PKK activist.

In the document, an agent with the alias "Legionnaire" is tasked with the "rendering ineffective" of high-ranking members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

During his most recent stay in Turkey, the assassin was instructed to make preparations to undertake as "attack ... against the organization targets in Europe." He was given €6,000 in payment.

According to the document, the agent spied on the victim's apartment and researched her social contacts. The alleged MIT note says that the agent could be used "to render ineffective the mentioned member of the organization." In addition, it says that plans existed "to instruct" the source "for a move against Sakine Cansiz, codenamed Sara, by means of the formerly designated coded state-

ments."

It cannot be excluded that the paper is a forgery, but French investigators don't believe that to be the case. Germany security personnel have likewise examined the document.

They say that the language used in the document as well as the watermark it bears both testify to its authenticity. The names listed on the document are all members of the Turkish secret services and are in fact entrusted with issues relating to the PKK. Among them is a department head who German officials know personally: Not long ago, secret service officer Ugur Kaan A. visited Germany with a delegation from Ankara.

GERMAN INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS ALARMED

What makes German authorities wary, however, are handwritten notes on the document. They consider such notes to be "rather unusual." Still, there are plenty of indications that it is real. "If it is a forgery, it is extremely well done," says one high-ranking official. "Plenty of insider knowledge" would be necessary to fake such a document. The Turkish government declined to respond to inquiries.

Normally, German security officials cooperate with MIT, also when it comes to keeping an eye on PKK activists. After all, the Kurdistan Workers' Party is banned in the EU as a terrorist organization. But now, the suspicion that MIT might have orchestrated the execution of PKK members within the EU has alarmed Germany's domestic intelligence agency. Officers have noted the need for "particular care when passing on data relating to specific individuals."

That could, of course, be rephrased as follows: Cooperation on cases relating to Kurds has been put on hold for the time being. Nobody wants to be responsible for passing on information that could lead to an execution.





Kurdish Independence: Sooner Rather than Later?

February 10, 2014
By Greg Ohannessian
<http://www.eurasiareview.com>

Iraqi Kurds have achieved incredible growth as a semi-autonomous region in post-war Iraq. But their ultimate goal of independence has just been given a five-year plan. How can this fledgling region become a state in just a few short years? A recent article published on the Kurdish news network Rudaw's English website expanded on the claims of a senior energy advisor in the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) that the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq will declare independence as a Kurdish state in five years' time. Ali Balu, formerly in charge of the Iraqi parliament's oil and gas committee was quoted as saying that "Kurdistan is going to be [sic] rid of its status as a region within Iraq. A plan is underway for Kurdistan to be an independent state in the near future".

Balu's statements may not have received much international attention but they are indicative of the sentiment felt in Iraqi Kurdistan today. Unprecedented growth on the back of the region's tremendous oil reserves has thrust the Iraqi Kurdish region onto the world stage. The stateless Kurds have long been a footnote in Middle Eastern history, and the new found attention casts the Kurds in a new light. International media, policy makers and investors no longer see the Kurds as the forgotten minority but as the upstart story of the decade, carving out a peaceful and prosperous region in a neighborhood rife with conflict.

The question left unanswered is what challenges the Kurdish region must overcome in the coming years to have a chance at creating a viable state.

THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

Currently, the KRG is focused on realizing the full potential of its oil reserves. The estimated 45 billion barrels of oil proved so lucrative that the threat of being kicked out of southern Iraq was not enough to dissuade oil companies from signing contracts directly with the KRG, in direct violation of Iraqi law. When the world's largest oil company signed a contract with the KRG, and still managed to continue operating in southern Iraq no less, the Kurdish leaders knew they had emerged as major players.

In January 2014, a new pipeline between the KRG and Turkey began shuttling crude across the border, creating a sorely needed outlet for their reserves but also compounding the ongoing crisis with Baghdad. Constitutionally, KRG oil sales must go through Baghdad coffers (and pipelines), and, in return, the KRG is allotted a significant portion of the federal budget. Today, that tranche of the budget sits at seventeen percent (although KRG officials assert they have never received more than 10%) and the KRG is required to produce a minimum amount of oil that injects capital into the Iraqi economy. According to the Iraqi ministry of oil, the Kurds failed to meet their minimum oil output in 2013 and are threatening to withhold the region's share of the budget. The January announcement that crude had begun to flow into Turkey could not have come at a more politically sensitive moment. The beginning of the year is always the scene of renewed tension between Erbil and Baghdad on budgetary issues, and the Turkish pipeline gave more than enough ammunition to Baghdad for being reticent in budgetary talks.

The biggest sticking point for the Kurds today is that they are entitled to a rather good deal from Baghdad. Seventeen percent of the overall federal budget (as stated in the constitution) contributes far more to the region than its current oil output. As upstream and transport capacity grows, that balance will certainly shift, but the Kurds will simply be trading reliance on Baghdad for reliance on Ankara. Until oil output, after profit sharing and sweetheart deals for domestic Turkish sales are taken into account, can outstrip the federal entitlement, it would seem that the old adage, better the devil you know than the devil you don't, may hold water.

However, with independence in mind, Kurdistan must be able to throw off the shackles of any devil. The only way to do so is to focus growth efforts on diversifying the economy, leveraging the manifold capabilities of their people and the fruits of the land on the surface, rather than exclusively the fruits found underground.

The Kurds have opened their cityscape to one of the largest Emirati developers, Emaar, which is led by the overarching strategy set forth by the Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum.

Diversification of the economy and creating a space for tourism could be even more successful in a Kurdistan full of idyllic scenery, ski resorts, and mountainscapes screaming for eco-tourism.

MOSUL AND KIRKUK

Regional security is also a point that cannot go without mention. Iraqi Kurdistan is in a rough neighborhood and has been successful in minimizing disturbances within its controlled territories. One high-profile attack on security forces in Erbil stands in stark contrast to the daily bombings in other parts of Iraq and the brutal civil war raging in Syria to the west. However, Kurdish irredentist claims on Kirkuk, Nineveh and Diyala are likely to be the toughest issue to tackle with Baghdad.

The city of Kirkuk has tremendous historic significance for Iraqi Kurds, as it was once the capital of a Kurdish principality that enjoyed significant autonomy in exchange for providing a front line of defense for the Ottoman empire along the Persian border. Today, Kirkuk is home to nearly half of Iraq's total oil reserves as well as significant unrest. Al Qaeda affiliates regularly carry out bombings in public spaces and well over a hundred attacks have been carried out on the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline alone.

The Kurds hold a slight majority within Kirkuk, unlike the majority Arab Sunni population of Mosul, but those numbers are mixed with significant Assyrian, Arab and Turkmen populations. In both cities, tensions are very high between the Kurds and the federal government. Through 2011 and 2012, clashes in Kirkuk between Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army brought the Kurdish-Iraqi relationship to the precipice. More recently, the Iraqi military established the Tigris Operations Command in Kirkuk as a direct response to Peshmerga forces in the area. The battle lines have been drawn, but solving the seemingly intractable issue of Kurdish expansion will leave the broader and more elusive security threat of terrorism squarely on the Kurdish government's plate.

UNEQUAL GAINS

Looking within the current Kurdish borders, there is the looming threat of unequal growth between provinces. This issue is magnified as the provinces in question

are split between the two major political parties.

The KRG is more than just Erbil. The province's oil contracts, still wet with ink and dripping with zeros, its fashionable shopping centers and its glistening Emaar developments are the jewel in the Kurdish crown. But just a few hours' drive to the second city of Suleimaniya paints a different picture altogether. Crumbling infrastructure, pervasive corruption and a year-long power vacuum threaten the unified growth of Kurdistan.

In short, the KRG was effectively carved up between the two primary parties, Barzani's KDP and former Iraqi President Jalal Talabani's PUK. This power sharing agreement allowed each party to realize their own vision of Kurdistan in their respective corners of the region. Nechirvan Barzani, the

KRG Prime Minister, was able to propel Erbil by giving a wide berth to policy planners and highly qualified advisors that realized his strategy for growth with efficient and effective development that has allowed Erbil to become a strikingly modern city. This is not to say that Erbil has done away with corruption. Both cities, and thus both parties, are home to significant corruption; The KDP has simply found a way to keep citizens and the politically relevant elite equally happy.

However, the growth between these two cities, along with the rural areas, must be more closely aligned for a self-sustaining state to form. The threat of regional disparity along political lines will only be amplified over time and the two parties, along with the emerging Gorran party, must work together to generate equality for all Iraqi Kurds.

INDEPENDENCE IN 2019?

If Kurdish leaders truly hope to achieve independence in five years, the three issues described above must be tackled first. Kurdistan is pushing, and often breaking, the boundaries of what a semi-autonomous Iraqi region can do. The Kurds now have the world's attention, their influence is on the rise and the reality of a state seems to have outpaced recognition of one. Kurdish leadership must take the coming years to realign their strategy with the realities of a fledgling state and re-gear their relationships, both domestically and regionally, in order to achieve durable and lasting statehood.

□ □ □

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the guardian 12 February 2014

Iraqi Kurdistan president refuses to meet Obama in protest over terror list

Massoud Barzani will not meet US president until Kurdistan region's two main parties are removed from blacklist, says official

Orlando Crowcroft in Irbil
theguardian.com

The president of Iraqi Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, will refuse to meet the US president, Barack Obama, until America removes the Kurdistan region's two main political parties from its terrorist blacklist, a senior official has said.

Falah Mustafa, head of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) department of foreign relations, told the US embassy in Irbil that until the classification of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was changed, Barzani would not take up the invitation to visit Obama.

The KDP and PUK have been on the US blacklist since 2001. Barzani – the current KDP chief and a former guerrilla leader in the Kurdish resistance against Saddam Hussein – did not make a scheduled visit to Washington on 27 January and speculation has grown about his motives.

Mustafa told the Guardian that he personally had been pressing for a change in classification of the KDP and PUK, describing their terrorist categorisation as "unfair, unjust and psychologically damaging to the people of the region".

"The moment the invitation was sent [in January] I spoke to the [American] ambassador personally and said that the



Massoud Barzani, president of Iraqi Kurdistan, is a former guerrilla leader in the Kurdish resistance against Saddam Hussein. Photograph: Mustafa Ozer/AFP/Getty

president would not visit the US until this was sorted out," Mustafa said from his office in Irbil.

"I wrote to them last year and the year before and we were promised at the highest levels that this issue would be sorted out. [It has not] and that is the only reason that President Barzani is not visiting the US ... He will not go until it is sorted out."

Mustafa said Iraq's Kurds were one of the only groups in the Middle East to appreciate the sacrifices made by US troops in overthrowing Saddam in 2003. The US and British invasion of Iraq and subsequent overthrow of Saddam gave the

Kurds the degree of autonomy that they have today.

"America did not receive a single casualty here in this region dominated by the PUK and KDP, which they consider terrorists. The question that needs to be asked of the American government and Congress is how can you allow this to continue? It is wrong, it is unfair and it has to be remedied," Mustafa said.

"We were the only group in Iraq that shed blood for the sake of [the country's] liberation. Our peshmerga [Kurdish militia] fought side by side with the American special forces to liberate the northern front ... and we are the only people throughout Iraq to tell America thank you," he added.

America is popular by Middle East standards in Iraqi Kurdistan, where it is not unusual to see American flags draped across the back seats of cars and US dollars are widely accepted as an alternative to the Iraqi dinar.

Over the past decade the KRG has secured increasing autonomy from the south, while foreign money has flooded in from thousands of US, British and Turkish companies.

The US embassy in Irbil said the Consular Affairs Bureau (CAB) in Washington handled all visa-related inquiries. The CAB did not respond to requests for comment. ■

Iraqi Kurdistan: Old structures, new realities



Namo Abdulla

www.aljazeera.com

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani has been in hospital in Germany for more than a year after he suffered a stroke in December 2012. Because of the highly restrictive access to his private place, nobody really knows how he is doing except for a few people including his immediate family members who claim his health condition is "improving".

If that is the case, then it is certainly not advisable for him to be informed of what his political party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), has become since he left Iraq. PUK is no longer the strong and united party that enjoyed the support of nearly half of Iraqi Kurds for decades. In 1992, it won 49 percent of the votes and would, for two decades, remain a neck-and-neck rival of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the tribal-based group of Mullah Mustafa Barzani from which it splintered in 1975.

But last September's regional parliamentary elections showed PUK's popularity had hit an all-time low. It won only one-sixth of the votes, meaning the secular nationalist party is now only a third party whose participation is not even technically needed to form a cabinet. KDP, which Talabani fought against for much of his political life, has emerged as the strongest force with near-absolute control over the region's abundant oil wealth.

As more serious conflicts in Syria and elsewhere shifted international attention from Iraqi Kurdistan's elections, PUK's defeat was a serious event that went largely unnoticed.

It was nothing like the kind of electoral defeat of a modern political party we see in Western nations. The devastating defeat of this Kurdish group may also represent the failure of a certain ideological worldview and a change in the Iraqi Kurdish region's demographics, but more importantly in practice, it threatens to alter the region's political landscape and its much-admired stability.

First of all, the elections made it all clear that PUK's survival was closely tied to the 81-year-old Talabani's personal charisma. That has become even clearer after the elections as top PUK leaders engaged in a dispute over who should assume the party leadership after Talabani. The only thing that has helped the defeated PUK maintain its relevance at this time is the thousands-strong militia wing it controls.

MILITIAS POSE BIGGEST THREAT

The presence of well-armed militias including that of the KDP is the primary reason we might be seeing the onset of an even bigger crisis in Iraqi Kurdistan. The fact that the two parties have been allies for more than a



How Talabani's continued absence from the political scene and the PUK's decline may rock the peace in Iraqi Kurdistan.

decade but never agreed to dissolve their loyalist militias and replace them with an institutionalised police and armed force shows how much distrust continues to exist in the Kurdish political arena.

More than four months after the elections, Iraqi Kurdistan continues to be without a government. As is the case with political deadlock, ordinary people are the primary victims. Critical public projects have come to a halt. This oil-rich region, which has attracted investment from global giants such as Exxon-Mobil, has not even been able to pay the salaries of its public employees on time.

As the political crisis unfolds, there is an increasing sense of insecurity in Sulaimaniyah, PUK's stronghold, which witnessed several assassinations and explosions over the past year. Most notable has been the mysterious death of Talabani's chief bodyguard and a critical magazine editor.

In October, Shaswar Abdul-Wahid, owner of Iraqi Kurdistan's first independent television network, NRT, was shot and badly wounded. Disappointed at Iraqi Kurdistan's largely dysfunctional legal system, he has threatened to sue a number of PUK officials over the shooting in an international court.

The reasons for the current political deadlock are two-fold. Firstly, even though PUK leaders, some more openly than others, have accepted their electoral defeat in words, but not in practice. The stubbornness they have shown in jockeying for key government positions such as deputy prime minister, vice president, and speaker of parliament, is a clear indication of their unwillingness to compromise. The only real power existing behind PUK's persistence is, of course, not the public but a loyal militia.

A SLICE OF THE PIE

The second reason is Gorran, a newly established self-proclaimed "reformist" party that came second in the latest elections. Gorran's leader is Nawshirwan Mustafa, co-founder of the PUK who splintered from the party and

established his own group in 2009. Mustafa has made it clear he does not want to remain as an opposition party like it has been over the past four years. It also wants to join the government and get a slice of the pie of the oil-rich enclave.

But since it finished second, Gorran, unlike the PUK, has the right to demand for the second most important government positions. Even though KDP, which won nearly 38 percent of the votes, can technically go ahead and form a government with Gorran alone, it is afraid to do so without PUK's approval. Nobody has more to lose than the KDP leadership should Iraqi Kurdistan become unstable. Directly or indirectly, KDP leaders have virtual monopoly over most lucrative business and investment projects including oil and construction in both the regional capital Erbil and Duhok.

Ergo, the current challenge is how to form a cabinet that pleases at least three groups: PUK, Gorran, and KDP. That's of course if we don't mention Islamists, who have gained more than 15 percent of the votes. As the global trend of political Islam- from Egypt to Turkey- is not currently having its best day - Iraqi Kurdistan's Islamists have largely remained silent in all the jockeying made for power and, in turn, wealth in Kurdistan.

Combining the three parties, which have different agendas and ideas, in one coalition is as difficult to achieve in the first place, as it is to maintain in the long run. How would they agree, for example, on controversial and not-so-transparent policies such as oil? Will the government be similar to the Iraqi central government, where Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish leaders disagree on almost everything?

But the risk would be greater if the government was not inclusive. The exclusion of either Gorran or PUK puts the stability of the region in jeopardy. Because Gorran does not operate an armed wing, it may not pose a threat as big as PUK. But it will no doubt see any attempt to exclude it as unfair and it has the ability to mobilise tens of thousands of people on the street for months. That is exactly what it did in 2011 for months when it realised change was impossible to achieve through a rubberstamp parliament.

To know how serious this crisis could get, one need not look back farther than 1990s when KDP and PUK militias fought a bloody civil war for more than three years.

Iraqi Kurdistan might look good to outsiders as a peaceful region in a turbulent Iraq, but when compared to a relatively stable and institutionalised society, there's certainly a long way to go.

Nobody is now in control of the Kurdish future more than the Kurds themselves. It is hoped that members of the ruling elite have learned a lesson from history and realise they have too much to lose should they fail to reach a meaningful compromise. □

in the Namo Abdulla is Washington bureau chief for Rudaw, a 24-hour news channel in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. He hosts an English-language show on Rudaw called Inside America, which discusses US foreign policy Middle East.

Kurds who became 'village guards' and fought PKK rebels in Turkey to be disbanded – but they fear a betrayal

Frédérique Geerdink

www.independent.co.uk

Dressed immaculately in a dark blue suit and with his hair perfectly combed, Seymus Akbulut was sitting in front of a portrait of Kemal Ataturk, Turkey's founding father, and a huge Turkish flag. On his desk were two more Ataturks: one on a silver plate, one a glass statuette in a red velvet box. "We love Ataturk," he said. "Whatever the state wants us to do, we do it."

Mr Akbulut, from the south-eastern town of Midyat, is one of many Kurds who in the early 1990s were branded traitors when the conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which wanted to carve out an independent Kurdistan, and the Turkish army was getting more violent every day.

The state needed helpers, and in the late 1980s started to set up the so called "village guard" system: citizens were given a weapon and a salary to help fight the PKK. Mr Akbulut, who became a village guard in 1992, was one of tens of thousands of Kurds who, sometimes voluntarily but mostly under heavy state pressure, accepted the Kalashnikovs and started fighting against their own people.

The system kept growing, and currently there are some 80,000 village guards in Turkey's southeast. Most of them earn about 900 Turkish lira (£235) per month, others get only the weapon and no salary.

Now in his late fifties, Mr Akbulut is head of an association of village guards that advocates their rights and supports the families of guards who died in the conflict. "Before, I worked in tourism," he said. "I made more money in a week than as a village guard in a month, but I did it willingly. We had to defend our lands. Nobody but the state can control our lands."

However, the end of the village guard system is approaching – at least if the peace process in Turkey continues. Almost a year ago, the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, announced that the group would withdraw from Turkey. "We have now reached the point where weapons must be silent," he said.

The withdrawal had, by all accounts, been very well prepared. Turkish authori-



Tens of thousands, often under heavy state pressure, accepted the Kalashnikovs and started fighting against their own people

ties for the first time admitted talking directly to Mr Ocalan, who is serving a life sentence in prison for high treason. And the development now means that the village guards must be disarmed.

Nesrin Ucarlar, a political scientist at Bilgi University in Istanbul who investigated the system, said: "Such a system has no place in a democracy."

But disarming the guards will not be an easy matter, Ms Ucarlar said, adding that the system had penetrated every layer of society in the region.

"In the past, many political parties have vowed to abolish the system if they came to power, but nobody did," she said. "They need it. The guards don't want to give up their arms without the PKK doing the same."

There is also the not insignificant matter of finding alternative employment for thousands of people in a region that already has a high unemployment rate.

"It needs a comprehensive plan to abolish the system," Ms Ucarlar said. "But the state is not working on it. It has even employed more village guards since the peace process started."

In Midyat, Mr Akbulut told The Independent on Sunday that he was not intending to give up his weapons easily. "I will not turn in my weapon until there is real peace," he said. "Peace for everybody."

In a small building which serves as the guards' headquarters, many said they were scared of what might happen to them if they disarmed.

"We want peace, but we want to be safe too," said one guard in his fifties who was unwilling to provide his name. "What

if anybody wants to take revenge on us? We have to keep our weapons to be able to defend ourselves."

Ms Ucarlar says the fear is probably without foundation: "The PKK has been very harsh against village guards, but that is over now. It became more realistic and I don't think there is any danger. But their fears should be taken seriously." However, the village guards in Midyat do not trust the PKK. The head guard compared the state and the PKK to a father and son: "Imagine you have a child, and you take good care of him, you educate and feed him. And then, when he grows up, he betrays you by turning against you. That is unacceptable, right?"

Kurds who refused to become village guards often paid for it by having their villages burnt down in the 1990s and were forced to migrate to the cities.

Those who were pressured into the group despise the guards who took up the state's weapons willingly. They see them as traitors to the Kurdish cause of greater political and cultural rights. But Mr Akbulut and his men dismiss that criticism: "It is a lie," they say.

"There is no suppression of Kurds," Mr Akbulut adds. "Father State has always been good to us."

Ouverture d'une enquête pénale sur un "Etat parallèle" en Turquie

par Nick Tattersall et Ayla Jean Yackley

<http://www.challenges.fr>

ISTANBUL (Reuters) - Une enquête pénale va être ouverte en Turquie pour vérifier l'existence d'un "Etat dans l'Etat" organisé par l'influent dignitaire musulman en exil Fethullah Gülen, a-t-on appris auprès de responsables turcs.

Fethullah Gülen, qui vit aux Etats-Unis, est accusé par le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan d'avoir manœuvré pour faire éclater une importante affaire de corruption qui a éclaboussé le gouvernement dans le but de le faire tomber.

L'enquête permettra d'établir l'influence exacte du Hizmet (Service), le mouvement de Fethullah Gülen, sur les institutions publiques et d'inculper le cas échéant ceux qui seraient responsables de "la formation d'une organisation illégale au sein de l'Etat", explique une des personnes interrogées.

Elle estime que toutes les preuves vont dans le sens d'une "organisation parallèle qui essaie de renverser le gouvernement".

Selon un autre responsable, deux informations judiciaires ont été ouvertes par le parquet, l'une à Istanbul et l'autre à Adana, une ville du sud de la Turquie. Les auditions officielles doivent commencer sous peu.

"Une structure de ce genre au sein de l'Etat (...) : nous ne pouvons autoriser cela et ferons tout ce qui est nécessaire", a déclaré le Premier ministre en parlant de "question de survie pour nous" lors d'une conférence de presse à l'aéroport d'Istanbul.



Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan accuse Fethullah Gülen, qui vit aux Etats-Unis, d'avoir manœuvré dans le but de faire tomber le gouvernement. Une enquête pénale va être ouverte en Turquie pour vérifier l'existence d'un "Etat dans l'Etat" organisé par l'influent dignitaire musulman en exil, selon des responsables turcs. /Photo prise le 3 février 2014/REUTERS/Osman Orsal

En réponse à l'affaire de corruption qui a éclaboussé son gouvernement, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a fait procéder à une purge au sein de la police et de l'appareil judiciaire.

Plus de 5.000 policiers et 200 procureurs ont été révoqués ou mutés depuis que l'affaire a éclaté au grand jour le 17 décembre avec l'arrestation d'hommes d'affaires et de trois fils de ministres.

Cette purge a entraîné vendredi la démission d'un huitième député du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), le parti du Premier ministre. L'AKP s'était appuyé à l'origine sur Fethullah Gülen pour arriver au

pouvoir il y a 11 ans.

"LYNCHAGE"

Fethullah Gülen dément être à l'origine du scandale de corruption. Il dit que son mouvement, qui gère un réseau international d'établissements scolaires et se considère comme une force modérée de l'islam favorable à l'Occident, est utilisé comme bouc émissaire.

"Une partie de l'orientation antidémocratique du pays est une intense campagne de lynchage contre le Hizmet", déclare Mustafa Yesil, président de la Fondation des journalistes et des écrivains, dont Fethullah Gülen est président d'honneur.

Il s'agit, a expliqué Mustafa Yesil lors d'une conférence de presse à Istanbul, de détourner l'attention de l'enquête pour corruption.

Les anti-Erdogan disent que cette histoire d'Etat parallèle n'est pas nouvelle et que le chef du gouvernement se retourne désormais contre les forces qu'il avait lui-même utilisées pour desserrer l'emprise de l'armée sur la vie politique turque, sans doute la réalisation la plus marquante de la dernière décennie.

L'influence du Hizmet sur la justice est effectivement considérée en Turquie comme ayant contribué à aider les tribunaux à condamner des centaines d'officiers pour tentative de coup d'Etat dans un pays où les généraux, gardiens autoproclamés de la laïcité, sont intervenus pour renverser quatre gouvernements dans la seconde moitié du XXe siècle. ♦



Kurdes assassinées à Paris: la justice refuse d'interroger la DCRI

PARIS, 10 fév 2014 (AFP)

LES JUGES enquêtant sur l'assassinat à Paris en janvier 2013 de trois militantes kurdes n'interrogeront pas dans l'immédiat les services de renseignements français sur ce qu'ils pouvaient savoir du meurtrier présumé, a-t-on appris lundi de source proche du dossier.

La cour d'appel de Paris vient de refuser d'examiner la demande des proches des victimes qui souhaitaient que les magistrats instructeurs sondent notamment la Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur (DCRI), selon cette source.

"Au moment où tout porte vers une implication des services turcs dans ces assassinats, comment imaginer qu'on puisse refuser des investigations sur ce que savaient les services français sur la présence en France d'un possible agent turc ?", s'est indigné auprès de l'AFP Me Antoine Comte, un des avocats des proches des militantes assassinées.

Sakine Cansiz, Fidan Dogan et Leyla Saylemez avaient été tuées par balles le 9 janvier 2013 au Centre d'information kurde (CIK) à Paris. Quelques jours plus tard, la police avait arrêté le tireur présumé, Ömer Güney, qui demeure à ce jour le seul mis en examen dans cette enquête antiterroriste.

Les interrogations sur son éventuelle relation avec le service de renseignement turc (MIT) ont été récemment relancées par la diffusion d'un enregistrement sur internet susceptible de le mettre en cause.

Ce Turc de 30 ans, qui était le chauffeur d'une des trois victimes et nie être leur meurtrier, a récemment réfuté devant les juges être l'homme qui s'adresse dans cet enregistrement à deux interlocuteurs présentés comme des agents turcs. Le MIT a démenti toute implication dans ces meurtres. Une expertise est en cours sur cet enregistrement.

L'été dernier, les avocats des proches des victimes avaient demandé aux juges d'instruction de sonder la DCRI, mais également les renseignements de la Préfecture de police de Paris, pour savoir ce que les services français savaient de M. Güney.

S'appuyant sur des révélations du Monde sur l'espionnage généralisé des communications par les services secrets français, les avocats estimaient que les signaux électromagnétiques émis par les portables du suspect pouvaient avoir été collectés de façon systématique et que ces données pouvaient aider l'enquête.

Les juges avaient cependant refusé le 20 septembre cette demande d'acte, un refus contre lequel les avocats ont fait appel.

Le président de la chambre de l'instruction de la cour d'appel a cependant refusé ➔

⇒ le 22 janvier d'examiner cet appel, dans une décision qui est sans recours possible, selon une source proche du dossier.

Les demandes des avocats, "si elles peuvent s'inscrire dans le prolongement de l'enquête journalistique, ne sont en effet étayées par aucune justification touchant à leur réel intérêt au titre de leur contribution à l'établissement de la vérité dans la procédure en cause", a estimé le président de la chambre, selon une source proche du dossier.

"Il est incompréhensible que l'on refuse des vérifications qui, aujourd'hui, s'imposent

encore plus que quand notre demande d'acte avait été faite", a réagi Me Comte.

Dans leur enquête, les magistrats instructeurs s'intéressent notamment à l'itinéraire de Güney, en particulier avant son arrivée en France et durant son séjour en Allemagne.

Ils tentent de retracer les nombreux échanges téléphoniques vers la Turquie d'un homme qui disposait de nombreuses cartes SIM, y compris turques, avait indiqué une autre source proche du dossier, confirmant des révélations de L'Express.



15 février 2014

Syrie, la guerre sans fin

Syrie: Brahimi annonce la fin des négociations de Genève

www.libération.fr

Le médiateur de l'ONU, Lakhdar Brahimi, a mis fin samedi aux discussions entre l'opposition et le gouvernement syriens qui étaient dans l'impasse depuis trois semaines à Genève et n'a fixé aucune date pour une reprise.

«Je pense qu'il est préférable que chaque partie rentre et réfléchisse à ses responsabilités, et (dise) si elle veut que ce processus continue ou non», a déclaré M. Brahimi à la presse.

Il était prévu que ce deuxième cycle de discussions, commencé lundi dernier, s'achève samedi mais le médiateur en accord avec les deux délégations devait fixer une date pour une nouvelle réunion.

Après le rejet de l'ordre du jour par la délégation du gouvernement syrien M. Brahimi a choisi



Lakhdar Brahimi face à la presse le 15 février 2014 à Genève
Lakhdar Brahimi face à la presse le 15 février 2014 à Genève
(Photo Philippe Desmazes. AFP)

de renvoyer tout le monde sans date de retour pour donner à chacun un temps de réflexion.

«Le gouvernement considère que la question la plus importante est le terrorisme, l'opposition considère que la question la plus importante est l'autorité gouvernementale de transition (...) nous avons suggéré que le premier jour nous parlions de la violence et de combattre le terrorisme, et le second jour de l'autorité gouvernementale, étant bien clair

qu'une journée sur chaque sujet ne saurait suffire», a expliqué M. Brahimi.

«Malheureusement le gouvernement a refusé, provoquant chez l'opposition le soupçon qu'ils ne veulent absolument pas parler de l'autorité gouvernementale de transition», a ajouté le médiateur.

M. Brahimi s'est dit «tout à fait désolé» et s'est excusé «auprès du peuple syrien dont les espoirs étaient si grands».

«J'espère que les deux parties

vont réfléchir un peu mieux et reviendront pour appliquer le communiqué de Genève», adopté en juin 2012 par les grandes puissances comme plan de règlement politique de ce conflit qui dure depuis près de trois ans.

«J'espère que ce temps de réflexion conduira en particulier le gouvernement à rassurer l'autre partie (sur le fait) que quand ils parlent d'appliquer le communiqué de Genève ils comprennent que l'autorité gouvernementale transitoire doit exercer les pleins pouvoirs exécutifs. Bien sûr combattre la violence est indispensable», a ajouté M. Brahimi.

L'exercice des «pleins pouvoirs exécutifs» reviendrait à priver le président Bachar al Assad de ses pouvoirs, même si cela n'est pas écrit explicitement dans le communiqué, d'où le blocage de Damas sur ce point.(AFP) ♦



Strasbourg: plus de 8.000 Kurdes manifestent pour la libération d'Öcalan

STRASBOURG, 15 fév 2014 (AFP)

QUELQUE 8.800 Kurdes, selon la police, 30.000 selon les organisateurs, ont défilé sans incident samedi à Strasbourg pour réclamer la libération du leader du PKK Abdullah Öcalan, emprisonné en Turquie, et des progrès dans l'enquête sur l'assassinat de trois militants kurdes.

Les Kurdes ont choisi de manifester une nouvelle fois dans la ville du Conseil de l'Europe et du Parlement européen, quinze ans jour pour jour après l'arrestation du chef du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Un portrait géant du chef du PKK, tenu par des femmes aux foulards bigarrés, était visible en tête du cortège qui s'est ébranlé vers 11H00 sous une pluie fine, a constaté l'AFP. "Libérez Öcalan", "Indépendance du Kurdistan", scandait la foule des manifestants qui avançaient derrière des banderoles clamant les mêmes slogans.

Venus pour la plupart à bord de bus spécialement affrétés d'Allemagne, de France, de Belgique, des Pays-Bas et de Suisse, les manifestants avaient commencé à se rassembler dès l'aube dans le quartier de la gare.

"Le problème du Kurdistan ne peut être résolu sans (Öcalan). Il est notre symbole et notre leader. Le peuple kurde ne baissera pas les bras", a prévenu Hélène Erin, l'une

des organisatrices de la manifestation. Abdullah Öcalan a appelé en mars 2013 ses troupes à un cessez-le-feu pour permettre aux discussions avec Ankara d'aboutir à un règlement pacifique du conflit kurde.

Concernant l'assassinat de trois militantes kurdes à Paris, le 9 janvier 2013, perpétré dans les locaux du Centre d'information kurde (CIK), Hélène Erin a appelé la France "à jouer son rôle" en faisant avancer l'enquête. "Plus il y a du silence de la France, plus le peuple kurde pense que l'Etat français y est pour quelque chose", a-t-elle affirmé.

Le tireur présumé, Ömer Güney, demeure à ce jour le seul mis en examen dans cette enquête antiterroriste.

Les Kurdes d'Europe ont l'habitude de manifester en nombre chaque année à la mi-février à Strasbourg, pour commémorer l'arrestation d'Abdullah Öcalan le 15 février 1999.

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 pauvre et sous-développée, peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis cette date, selon l'armée turque.

Malgré l'urgence, Russes et Occidentaux s'affrontent sur l'humanitaire en Syrie

Un projet de résolution au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU est bloqué par la question des sanctions

New York (Nations unies)
Correspondante

Enlisement à Genève, frustrations à New York, et petits pas à Homs. Après trois ans de conflit, le dossier syrien semble ne jamais devoir sortir de l'impasse. Alors que le deuxième round des négociations de paix de Genève II tire à sa fin, sans avoir produit le moindre résultat, le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU est, lui, désespérément en quête de consensus en vue de l'adoption d'une première résolution sur l'accès de l'aide humanitaire.

L'initiative, lancée par l'Australie, le Luxembourg et la Jordanie, n'en est pas à son premier ballon d'essai. Les Occidentaux siégeant au sein de l'organe exécutif des Nations unies parlent de cette éventualité depuis un an déjà. Le texte, selon l'ambassadeur français Gérard Araud, est « modéré, n'a rien de provocateur », et demande « la fin des sièges des villes où les civils sont bloqués, la fin des bombardements indiscriminés par le régime syrien, la démilitarisation des hôpitaux, des écoles, et de toutes les infrastructures civiles, des pauses humanitaires et l'autorisation d'accès de l'aide humanitaire à travers les frontières de la Syrie ».

En 2013, après des mois de discussions, et pour venir à bout de la résistance des Russes et des Chinois – à l'origine de trois doubles veto contre des résolutions jugées trop « hostiles » à leur allié syrien –, le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies s'était résolu à adopter une déclaration non contraignante appelant à faciliter l'accès des agences humanitaires. C'était le 2 octobre 2013.

Depuis, seules des avancées mineures ont été enregistrées, dont l'octroi au compte-gouttes de visas à des équipes humanitaires qu'autorisations à quelques convois. Selon l'ONU, 9,3 millions de Syriens, soit près de la moitié de la population, ont besoin d'une aide humanitaire. Parmi eux, 250 000 civils pris au piège dans des villes assiégées. « Les civils sont pris entre deux feux et privés d'as-



Des civils syriens évacués lors d'une opération humanitaire, à Homs, le 10 février. BASSEL TAWIL/AFP

sistance humanitaire depuis trop longtemps, déclare José Luis Díaz, responsable du bureau d'Amnesty International auprès des Nations unies à New York. Les pourparlers de Genève s'enlisent, le Conseil de sécurité n'a plus de temps à perdre pour garantir une aide humanitaire à tous les civils qui en ont besoin.»

Selon l'ONU, 9,3 millions de Syriens ont besoin d'une aide humanitaire

Si elle qualifie de « succès, étant donné les circonstances extrêmement difficiles », l'évacuation de près de 1400 civils de la ville d'Homs, la patronne des opérations humanitaires de l'ONU, Valerie Amos, refuse l'idée d'en faire un « modèle ». Devant le Conseil de sécurité, jeudi 13 février, la haute responsable a souligné que cette opération n'avait été rendue possible qu'après quatorze mois d'après négociations avec le gou-

vernement syrien. « Il faut que nous ayons les moyens de faire notre travail sur le front humanitaire », a-t-elle martelé avant d'appeler les quinze pays membres à « user de leur influence sur les parties [au conflit] pour qu'elles respectent des pauses [humanitaires], facilitent la fourniture d'aide (...) et évitent à nos équipes d'être prises pour cibles quand elles livrent cette aide. »

Les parrains de la résolution humanitaire comptaient sur son appui pour valider la légitimité de leur initiative. La déclaration adoptée en octobre 2013 « n'a pas marché », a déploré la coordinatrice des secours. « Je vous exhorte à agir maintenant pour faire respecter les principes de la Charte des Nations unies. »

Son appel sera-t-il entendu par les Russes, qui viennent de déposer un contre-projet au texte occidental, qualifié par Moscou d'« inacceptable », car « biaisé » et « politisé » ? « Nous n'avons pas senti d'opposition fondamentale de leur part », affirme une source diplomatique à l'issue de discus-

sions menées jeudi avec la Russie, en vue de fusionner les deux ébauches de résolution.

La seule vraie résistance de la Russie concerne la possibilité de sanctions ultérieures, citée dans le projet occidental, dans le cas où les belligérants bloqueraient l'aide humanitaire. Une menace dont elle ne veut pas entendre parler. « Le terrorisme n'est pas un problème moins aigu [que celui de la crise humanitaire] », a estimé le chef de la diplomatie russe Sergueï Lavrov, reprenant le terme employé par Dainas pour désigner la rébellion.

Car le texte russe met l'accent sur la montée du terrorisme en Syrie, l'objectif étant de mettre sur un même plan les violations du droit international perpétrées par l'opposition armée et celles commises par les forces du régime syrien. « Nous ne pourrions accepter un tel amalgame », prévient une source du Conseil de sécurité, soulignant que 80 % des villes assiégées le sont par l'armée syrienne. ■

ALEXANDRA GENESTE

Kurdistan parties gear up for government formation

Barzani and Mustafa meet to discuss cabinet formation; PUK, Gorran move closer on deal over Interior Ministry portfolio

by : Mohamed Zangeneh
<http://www.aawsat.net>

Erbil, Asharq Al-Awsat—Kurdistan region government parties moved closer to forming a new cabinet this week following high-level meetings between Kurdish political leaders.

Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani, representing the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), met with Gorran (Movement for Change) leader Nawshirwan Mustafa to discuss the formation of the new cabinet, particularly a deal that would see Gorran forego the post of deputy prime minister in return for the Interior Ministry portfolio. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which Gorran supplanted as Kurdistan's second party, had previously held the post.

PUK spokesman and MP Salar Mahmud told Asharq Al-Awsat: "The post of deputy prime minister has nothing to do with the Interior Ministry, particularly as the post of deputy prime minister is not marginal and has powers."



Kurdish Regional Government President Massoud Barzani smiles during an interview with Reuters in Erbil, about 220 miles (350 kilometers) north of Baghdad, on June 2, 2013. (REUTERS/Azad Lashkari)

"The Pashmerga ministry is no less important than the interior ministry. This is a sovereign ministry and our party is looking at all ministerial posts equally."

He affirmed that the parties are moving closer to reaching an agreement on the formation of a new government, adding that the PUK will support the formation of a "strong government with a broad base and real participation of the parties that secured a strong parliamen-

tary electoral mandate."

Mahmud told Asharq Al-Awsat that the meeting between Barzani and Mustafa "is the beginning of the road towards reaching a breakthrough on the issue of the government formation . . . The Gorran movement broke the boycott and is now negotiating directly with the PUK and KDP"

He did not rule out the meeting serving as a "prelude to a long-term strategic deal between the KDP and Gorran," adding that the details of this deal have yet to be revealed and that it is being discussed behind closed doors.

Kurdistan Islamic Movement spokesman Shwan Qaladizayee MP told Asharq Al-Awsat: "My party's participation in the forthcoming government formation is important, and cannot be underestimated or ignored," adding that "our presence in government will be important to preserve governmental and ministerial balance, in addition to our role in decision-making and supporting all the services that the government will provide to the people of the Iraqi Kurdistan region."

MP Abdullah Hajj Mahmoud, a member of the Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party, told Asharq Al-Awsat that a political party's participation in the government formation process cannot be viewed solely in terms of the number of parliamentary seats won by the party. He added that the Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party had sacrificed much for the sake of the region.

□ □ □



Iraq says Kurds agree to export oil via central marketing body

February 20, 2014 / By Ahmed Rasheed (Reuters) -

IRAQI KURDISTAN has agreed to export crude via the country's main oil marketing body, Deputy Prime Minister for energy Hussain al-Shahristani said, potentially removing a major sticking point in a resource row with the central government.

The autonomous region's prime minister and top energy official travelled to Baghdad earlier this week, intensifying efforts to settle the long-running dispute over exports of oil from Kurdistan via a new independent pipeline to Turkey.

The region has previously insisted it will export crude on its own terms, bypassing Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organisation (SOMO), but Shahristani said the Kurds had finally relented.

"After hours of meetings, we have agreed that our brothers in the region will be represented in SOMO and agreed that this is the sole national outlet responsible for exporting oil," Shahristani said in an interview on Iraqi state television late on Wednesday. "This is an important step forward".

Baghdad has repeatedly threatened to sue Ankara and slash Kurdistan's share of the national budget if exports go ahead through the pipeline without its consent.

The pipeline was completed late last year, and oil has since been pumped through it into storage tanks at Turkey's Ceyhan, but exports from the Mediterranean port are on hold to give diplomacy a chance.

Negotiations have carried on for months with little progress and Shahristani said differences remained over revenue-sharing.

"The second issue that is still unresolved is that they want the revenue from oil exports to be deposited in a private account for the region in the DFI (Development Fund for Iraq)," Shahristani said.

Revenue from the sale of Iraq's oil is paid into the DFI in New York for Baghdad to disburse.

Kurdistan is entitled to a 17 percent share, but says it in fact receives far less than that, and in recent weeks has accused Baghdad of withholding funds, leaving civil servants in the region unpaid.

Shahristani said the finance ministry had now sent enough cash to cover the salaries of Kurdish government employees for January, but faced a liquidity crisis and would not be able to pay in February or after that unless the region resumed oil exports.

"The Finance Ministry said it will not be able to keep paying salaries whilst the region is still not delivering oil," he said. "The ministry has stopped payments to the region and the only solution for this real problem is for the region to start exporting oil"

Crude from Kurdistan used to reach world markets through a Baghdad-controlled pipeline, but exports via that channel dried up due to a row over payments for oil companies operating in the northern enclave.

Since then, the Kurds have been exporting smaller quantities by truck across the border whilst building the pipeline to Turkey and negotiating a multi-billion dollar energy deal with Ankara. ○



Turkey is the only viable route for KRG oil

14 February 2014

ANKARA / By Selen Tonkus, Oguzhan Ozsoy - Anadolu Agency
<http://www.aa.com.tr>

Turkey is the only secure and feasible route for transferring oil from Iraqi Kurdistan to Europe according to energy experts.

Iraq's Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) is expected to have more than 45 billion barrels of oil - the largest untapped oil reserves in the world. The KRG is to export its oil to meet its own energy demand, while becoming a major player in the regional and global energy sector.

Energy experts from Turkey and the KRG told Anadolu Agency (AA) that Turkey emerged as the only viable corridor due to its geographical proximity, stability and security.

"Iran could be alternative to Turkey, if the negotiations between Iran and the US lead to an end of the embargo," Dr. Sardar Aziz, a Kurdish journalist and researcher focused on the KRG oil policy and Turkey-KRG relationship, said.

"The KRG is more inclined to use Turkey, for both political and logistical reasons," Aziz added.

Aziz also pointed to the abundant natural resources in the Kurdish region of Syria, saying Turkey could end up being the only corridor for both the KRG and Syrian Kurdistan once the situation in the country stabilizes.

Energy expert Shwan Zulal noted that the KRG had no other options but Turkey.

"Iraq has the Basra port and is planning to build



pipeline through Jordan to the Red Sea but still in the planning phase. Even if there is an agreement between Baghdad and the KRG...the KRG's oil will flow through that way does not make any sense because of bottlenecks and lack of adequate capacity," Zulal said.

Zulal added, "It is up to Turkey now to decide what to do. If Turkey is willing to have Kurdish crude flowing, it will happen, otherwise the current state of affairs will remain."

- A GLOBAL PROJECT -

Turkish experts believe that the oil export project between Turkey and the KRG is vital for Europe's energy security.

Erdal Tanas Karagol, Economy Director at the Ankara-based SETA Foundation said, supply security is the most important aspect of the energy project.

"An oil agreement between Turkey and the KRG is a global project that will have repercussions not only for the domestic markets of both countries, but also for Europe," Karagol said.

He added that the world's largest energy companies competed for shares from the KRG's energy reserves, and added, "Some circles do not want Turkey to be a player in such a huge project.

Ali Semin, from Istanbul-based think tank BILGESAM, said, "The KRG needs Turkey to realize its goal of being an active participant in the global energy sector."

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's government, however, would prefer to see the project fail, Semin said.

The KRG started to sell oil to Turkey from the Taq Taq oil field, near Kirkuk, in January 2013. The central administration in Baghdad, in a bid to control oil revenues, opposed the supplies claiming it violated the Iraqi constitution. The KRG did not withdraw its demands, saying that it could never get its 17 percent share from the Iraqi budget.

In November 2013, Turkish and KRG officials signed an agreement that would enable Kurdish oil to flow from Taq Taq to the Ceyhan port on Turkey's south-eastern Mediterranean coast. The agreement allows Iraqi Kurdish oil to be stored and exported at times when no oil is pumped by the central Iraqi administration.

Baghdad, however, says the agreement would violate the constitution had the oil not been exported via Iraq's national oil company (SOMO).

Currently, 400,000 barrels of oil are stored in Ceyhan while awaiting Baghdad's approval to be exported, the Turkish Energy and Natural Resources Ministry said on February 12.

Irbil and Baghdad have carried out a series of meetings to reach an agreement on the issue.

The Iraqi constitution states that the country's oil and gas is owned by "the people of Iraq in all regions and governorates." ■



Nearly 30 Die as Kurds Take a Syrian Town

BEIRUT, Lebanon — FEBRUARY 22, 2014 — REUTERS

A KURDISH group captured a town in Syria from Islamists fighting in Syria's civil war on Saturday in a battle that killed 28 fighters, most of them Islamists, a monitoring group reported.

If the Kurds can hold on to the town, Tell Brak, on a highway between the cities of Hasaka and Qamishli, it will be a significant advance in their quest for wider control in the northeast.

Islamist activists said online that fighting was still going on, but the Britain-based opposition monitoring group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said Kurdish groups known as People's Protection Units had taken the town.

Syrian Kurds have expanded their sway in the northeast, where they are setting up their own administration, since the revolt against President

Bashar al-Assad began three years ago.

The People's Protection Units said in a statement that they had taken Tell Brak after a midnight assault on fighters belonging to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and other militants.

The Kurdish fighters are holding the bodies of 16 "armed mercenaries" and have taken 42 prisoners, the statement said. It said three Kurdish fighters had also been killed.

The Syrian Observatory said at least 25 Islamists had been killed.

Redur Xelil, a spokesman for the People's Protection Units, said, "The operation was over at 5 a.m. and the armed groups and mercenaries that were there were expelled.

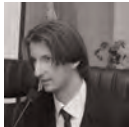
"The town is completely controlled by the People's Protection Units," he told Reuters by phone, adding that nearby villages were also under the group's control.

Islamists have eclipsed secular groups in the revolt against Mr. Assad, but are also now at war with each other in much of Syria, with the Nusra Front and other Islamists fighting the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, a jihadist group that had been allied with Al Qaeda until Al Qaeda severed ties this month. They have also fought the Kurds.

Long oppressed by the Syrian government, the Kurds have been largely left to their own devices by Syrian government forces fighting rebels elsewhere. ○

Iraqi Kurdish government snubs Syrian Kurdish group

Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government refused to receive an official delegation of a Kurdish group that has claimed autonomy in northern Syria.



Author Wladimir van Wilgenburg
<http://www.al-monitor.com>

AMSTERDAM — On Feb. 3, Salih Gedo, the unofficial foreign minister of the new Kurdish administration in Syria, announced a diplomatic mission to open relations between the Kurdish administration in Syria with Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Iran and Turkey. But the KRG refused to meet the new minister and rejected the recently announced Kurdish administration in Syria.

KRG spokesman Safin Dizayee told Rudaw that the KRG wouldn't meet any official of the Kurdish administrations in northern Syria — which were announced by the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and its allies — since it does not recognize them.

Previously, KRG Foreign Minister Falah Mustafa had told Rudaw, "Regarding the Rojava cantons, the KRG has decided to support a decision made by all the Kurdish groups and parties, and it won't deal with any unilateral decision." He added that the KRG deals with the issue as Europe does.

It is also likely that Turkey will not receive the administration's foreign minister since the country has opposed the PYD's autonomy declarations before. Furthermore, in November 2013, KRG President Massoud Barzani condemned the PYD's autonomy declaration.

The Kurdish news agency Firat News, which is sympathetic to the PYD, questioned Mustafa's statement, since leaders of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the opposition party Change (Gorran) supported the administration. Also, leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Kurdistan Islamic Union backed the administration, despite their Islamist background.

"It is thus currently unclear if the decision against recognition was made by the government as a whole, or was simply the decision of the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) — the senior partner in the current KRG government," the news agency stated.

Dizayee and Mustafa are both members of Barzani's KDP, which has economic relations with Turkey, while President Jalal Talabani's PUK is closer to Iran. In a PUK statement of support for the PYD, the party accused Gulf countries and Turkey of supporting "terrorist groups."

Firat News also pointed out that European countries were responsible for historically dividing the Kurdish territories across Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey after World War I and ignoring Saddam Hussein's human rights abuses during the genocidal Anfal campaign against the Kurds in the mid-1980s.

Western countries have lobbied for the Kurds to become part of the Syrian National Coalition, but only the Kurdish National Council (KNC) — backed by Barzani — and the leader of the KDP, joined the coalition and are now a part of the opposition delegation in Geneva II.

But the PYD refused to join the Syrian National Coalition delegation, preferring an independent delegation to Geneva II. Western officials have accused the PYD of working with the Syrian government.

The Kurdish diplomatic delegation reportedly crossed into Iraq through the Yaroubiya border crossing. The People's Protection Units (YPG)



Vehicles pass a Kurdish People's Protection Units' (YPG) checkpoint in the town of Tell Tamer in Hassakeh, Syria, Nov. 30, 2013. The text on the barrier reads in Arabic "YPG are everywhere, YPG don't sleep." (photo by REUTERS/Rodi Said)

captured this border crossing in cooperation with local Arab tribes on Oct. 24, 2013, after KDP security forces allegedly refused PYD leader Salih Muslim entry into the Kurdish regions of Iraq through the Semalka border crossing.

Reportedly, the PYD started to import food from Iraq into Syria to feed the local population.

Most likely, the delegation used the Yaroubiya crossing to enter into Iraqi territory under control of the Iraqi government to avoid being rejected by the KDP security forces.

Gedo told Kurdish news website Welati that the delegation used the Yaroubiya crossing since using the Semalka crossing would take longer and require coordination with the KRG. According to Welati's sources, the delegation crossed from Mosul to Kirkuk and then to Sulaimaniyah, avoiding any territory controlled by Barzani's KDP.

The delegation — comprising Gedo, his assistants Emine Ose and Semiran Samul and advisers Fadil Misa and Polat Can — arrived at the Titanic Hotel in Sulaimaniyah on the evening of Feb. 11 to meet with PUK officials, who have been supportive of both the PYD and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Gedo told Welati that the Kurdish administration in Syria is still open to relations with the KRG, and that they will attempt to travel to Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Concerning the KRG statements of not working with the autonomous administration, Gedo said it would not deter them from communicating with the regional government, and that they "respect" Barzani.

US-based Kurdish analyst Yerevan Saeed told Al-Monitor that the Kurdish parties' different approaches toward autonomy in Syria underline the rivalries between Talabani's PUK, Barzani's KDP and the Gorran list for votes and power in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

"The PUK has come out quite weak, especially after Kurdistan legislative elections in September 2013. The PUK ... thinks that by supporting other Kurds, it can elevate its popularity curve in the Kurdistan Region [of Iraq]. It's true for Gorran as well. They don't want to follow the KDP in every step, and want to appear different," he said.

According to Saeed, the KRG "refused to meet with Gedo because it has stated it would not recognize one-sided actions by the PYD." He pointed out that things could change as the peace process in Turkey — between the PKK and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) — progresses and changes the ties between the affiliated parties. "This may not happen soon, but all the indicators are pushing toward an understanding between these three groups [the KDP, PKK and the AKP]."

Recently, Kurdish politicians from Turkey visited Barzani and delivered a letter from imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. "We witnessed that [Ocalan and Barzani] have similar opinions regarding the region and the liberties of Kurds," the two deputies said, according to Hurriyet. ♦

Wladimir van Wilgenburg is a columnist for Al-Monitor and a political analyst specializing in Kurdish politics. He has written extensively for Jamestown Foundation publications and other journals, such as the Near East Quarterly and the World Affairs Journal. On Twitter: @vvanwilgenburg

Future of Syrian talks in doubt

GENEVA

After a dispiriting finish, U.N. mediator declines to set a date for a 3rd round

BY ANNE BARNARD
AND NICK CUMMING-BRUCE

The United Nations mediator for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, has wrapped up the second round of peace talks in Geneva without breaking a longstanding deadlock or setting a date for a third round, and urged the parties to think seriously about their commitment to the negotiations.

Mr. Brahimi said the talks had broken down primarily because the Syrian government had balked at his suggestion that the negotiators discuss both sides' top demands in the first two days of negotiations, rather than spending days on the government's priorities.

"I am very, very sorry, and I apologize to the Syrian people," Mr. Brahimi, an Algerian diplomat who has spent decades negotiating thorny conflicts, said on Saturday after a last-ditch 45-minute meeting ended in disagreement. "I apologize to them that on these two rounds we haven't helped them very much."

The dispiriting finish called into question the future of the talks. Two week-long rounds have produced no actual negotiations on resolving a conflict that has killed more than 135,000 people and driven 9.5 million from their homes, even though the talks are sponsored by Russia and the United States, which support opposing sides, and are backed by dozens of other countries. The meetings have instead focused on what to discuss and how to discuss it.

"It's not good for Syria that we come back for another round and fall in the same trap that we have been struggling with this week and most of the first round," Mr. Brahimi said. "So I think it is better that every side goes back and reflect and take their responsibility: Do they want this process to take place or not? I will do the same."

He said he would report to the United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, and push for a meeting with Mr. Ban; the American secretary of state, John Kerry; and the Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov. Some Western diplomats have suggested that Mr. Brahimi, 80, might be worried about harming his legacy by presiding over empty talks, and so might recommend ending them. But others pointed out that he was famous for his patience.

Both the government and the opposition said they would return if another



A boy held his sister, who was saved from the rubble after an airstrike on Aleppo.

Lakhdar Brahimi, the United Nations mediator, apologized to Syrians for the failure of the talks.

round were called. Western officials were quick to call for new pressure on the Syrian government.

Minutes after Mr. Brahimi spoke, the British foreign secretary, William Hague, wrote in a Twitter message that the United Nations Security Council "must now act to address the humanitarian crisis urgently." But Russia, the Syrian government's most powerful backer, sees Western attempts to require access for aid workers as a pretext for military action, and has blocked previous Security Council measures on Syria.

One area where the Security Council did reach unanimous agreement was in deciding to dismantle Syria's stockpile of chemical weapons. That resolution passed after a chemical weapons attack near Damascus on Aug. 21 for which the government and insurgents blamed each other.

The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which polices compliance with the global treaty that bans such munitions, said Friday that two companies — Veolia Environmental Services Technical Solutions, which is an American subsidiary of Veolia Environnement of France, and Ekokem OY AB of Finland — were awarded contracts to help incinerate the chemicals after a review of the 14 bids submitted last month.

It remained unclear, however, precisely when the destruction of the chemicals would start, partly because the vast majority remain in Syria despite

pressure on the government there to expedite their export. Denisse Ike, a spokeswoman for Veolia, said, "We have not been notified of the timeline." Only three shipments have been exported so far.

Mr. Brahimi said the two sides had agreed that a third round of talks would address both the opposition's top-priority issue (political transition) and the government's (the ending of terrorism, which it says includes all armed opposition). But then, he said, the government rejected his proposal that the negotiators spend the first day on terrorism and the second on transition.

Both are contentious issues: The government recently placed all the opposition coalition members, even the civilians across the negotiating table, on a list of terrorists, and for the opposition, transition implies an end to the government of which its interlocutors are members.

Bashar al-Jaafari, the Syrian ambas-

"It's not good for Syria that we come back for another round and fall in the same trap that we have been struggling with."

sador to the United Nations in New York and the government's lead negotiator, said it would be impossible to resolve the issue of terrorism in one day and that the government wanted to reach "a common vision" on the subject before

Political debate over Turkish power turns into physical brawl

moving on to others.

But Mr. Brahimi said he had made it "very clear" that both topics would take far more than one day, and that his aim was simply to ensure that the two sides at least began to discuss each other's demands. He said he had told government negotiators that this would reassure the opposition, which is "very suspicious" of the government and believes that it does not want to discuss a transition at all.

"I hope that this time of reflection will lead the government side in particular to reassure the other side that when they speak of implementing the Geneva communiqué," they mean that "the main objective" is a transitional governing body with full executive powers, Mr. Brahimi said, referring to the June 2012 document that is the basis for the talks.

"Ending violence, combating terrorism is extremely important, indispensable," he said. "But I think that every side has to be convinced that, yes, we are going to implement all the elements in the communiqué."

Each side blamed the other and its international backers for the lack of progress. "We are here to negotiate," said Louay Safi, a spokesman for the opposition. "We have been disappointed completely, not only by the regime."

Russian officials "have not prevailed over the regime that wants to stall," Mr. Safi said, adding that Russia continued to supply the weapons the Syrian government was using to bombard rebel-held towns and neighborhoods.

Mr. Jaafari said comments by President Obama and members of his administration, who had mentioned the possibility of greater efforts to help the opposition, meant American officials were "not committed" to the success of the negotiations.

The Syrian government has long said that the first step toward ending the conflict must be the end of support for insurgent groups by the United States and allies, including Qatar and Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Jaafari said the government recognized that the opposition delegation could not single-handedly stop terrorism in Syria, because it does not control many of the insurgent groups. But, he added, officials want to hear that the opposition is committed to stopping it.

The opposition has condemned violence against civilians and has pointed to its affiliated fighters' recent battles against jihadist groups.

Members of the opposition delegation said they hoped that the talks in Geneva had highlighted the government's inflexibility and might prompt a stronger international response — perhaps pressure from Russia, increased military aid for the opposition, Security Council resolutions or even a no-fly zone to stop government airstrikes.

As the delegates prepared to leave on Saturday, Mr. Jaafari turned prickly when asked what would entice Mr. Assad's team back to the table.

"Your nice face," he shot back.

ISTANBUL

BY SEBNEM ARSU AND TIM ARANGO

The Turkish Parliament met through the night, Friday into Saturday, and passed a controversial new bill that gives the government greater control over the judiciary — but not before a brawl on the floor of the assembly left one lawmaker with a broken finger and another with a bloodied nose.

The raucous scene, as well as the fistcuffs that broke out during a previous debate on the bill, was emblematic of the messy turn Turkish politics has taken recently, as a corruption investigation targeting Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his inner circle has thrust the government into crisis.

Critics charged that the judicial bill was the latest attempt by Mr. Erdogan to survive the corruption investigation. Experts say the legislation, which still needs to be signed by the president and is sure to face challenges in the constitutional court, would eviscerate any measure of a separation of powers in the Turkish political system.

Mr. Erdogan has blamed the investigation on supporters of the Islamic cleric Fethullah Gulen, who lives in exile in Pennsylvania and whose followers have, over the years, built up deep influence in Turkey's police and judiciary. The prime minister has referred to Mr. Gulen's followers as a "parallel state" that has engineered the graft inquiry to overthrow the government and has reassigned thousands of police officers and hundreds of prosecutors to lesser posts.

Amid the purges, Turkey's justice system has become gridlocked. In the absence of a functioning legal process, the corruption inquiry has played out through a series of leaked telephone conversations, apparently obtained through wiretaps, that have shown up on social media. The Turkish public has heard conversations in which Mr. Erdogan interfered with the news media coverage of last summer's antigovernment protests — something he has acknowledged — as well as conversations that seem to show that he agreed to alter zoning laws for a well-connected businessman in exchange for two villas for his family, claims that Mr. Erdogan has denied.

The judicial bill, critics say, is Mr. Erdogan's boldest step yet in trying to secure control over the state because it would effectively give the government

control of the Higher Council of Judges and Prosecutors, which makes judicial appointments.

"The government should consider its citizens' rights to fair justice, as well as their own, and should do the right thing," said Metin Feyzioğlu, the chairman of the Turkish bar associations. "We have to break the cycle in which the judiciary functions as a revenge mechanism."

Mr. Erdogan and other officials in his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party have argued that the new



Ali İhsan Kocaturk of the Republican People's Party was bloodied during a fight.

rules on the judiciary are necessary to root out the influence of Gulen supporters within the state. Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Gulen's backers were once allies in a governing coalition, and while it is difficult to quantify the amount of influence Mr. Gulen's network holds over the judiciary and the police, most analysts say it is substantial.

As allies, the two sides, which represent different Turkish Islamic traditions, led a series of controversial trials in recent years against military officers that secured civilian control over the military. But the methods used in those trials, which numerous experts have said relied on fabricated evidence, have now increasingly come under scrutiny.

The accumulation of Mr. Erdogan's steps to push back against the corruption investigation have given more ammunition to critics who have worried that Mr. Erdogan was becoming more authoritarian.

On the floor of Parliament during the debate over the judiciary bill, one opposition lawmaker referred to the prime minister as a dictator and said, according to the semi-official Anadolu Agency, "you want to purge democracy and control the entire system."

Members of Mr. Erdogan's party could be heard calling the opposition politician a "drunk." Then the fight was on, as lawmakers rushed the speaker's podium.

Le Monde

Mercredi 19 février 2014

Début du marathon sur le nucléaire iranien

Après dix ans de crise, Téhéran et les Occidentaux ouvrent, à Vienne, les négociations sur un accord définitif

Un mauvais présage ? A la veille de l'ouverture des négociations pour un accord final sur le programme nucléaire iranien, mardi 18 février à Vienne, le Guide suprême, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a semé le trouble en affirmant qu'elles « ne mènent nulle part ».

Une déclaration à usage interne qui permet au numéro un du régime de se prémunir contre un éventuel échec, mais reflète aussi la nervosité qui entoure le coup d'envoi de cette course d'obstacles diplomatique. Les uns et les autres n'ont pas manqué de surenchérir à l'approche de ce rendez-vous de trois jours qui marque le vrai début des pourparlers sur le nucléaire iranien.

Le premier pas avait été franchi le 24 novembre 2013 par la signature, à Genève, d'un texte inédit après une décennie de crise entre Téhéran et les Occidentaux. Il a fixé le cadre général de l'accord à atteindre entre l'Iran et le groupe des « 5+1 » (Etats-Unis, Russie, Chine, France, Royaume-Uni plus Allemagne) et a ouvert, à compter du 20 janvier, une phase de négociations de six mois, éventuellement renouvelable, au cours de laquelle sera testée la bonne foi des deux parties : durant cette période, Téhéran s'est notamment engagé à ralentir son programme d'enrichissement d'uranium en échange d'une levée limitée des sanctions internationales qui frappent le pays depuis huit ans.

C'est un premier geste, mais l'es-

sentiel reste à faire. Les négociations de Vienne entrent maintenant dans le vif du sujet. L'objectif est de parvenir à un accord définitif avant la fin de l'année. Un calendrier « court », juge un diplomate occidental, « tant les sujets sur la table sont politiquement graves et techniquement complexes », dit-il.

Car il s'agit de parvenir à un compromis introuvable depuis dix ans qui permettrait à l'Iran de conserver certaines activités nucléaires tout en assurant les Occidentaux sur son caractère purement civil. L'un des premiers écueils à éviter porte sur la longévité d'un futur accord. Les Occidentaux parlent de vingt ans, les Iraniens veulent une période plus réduite, de l'ordre de cinq ans. « Plus la durée sera courte, plus les Iraniens seront enclins à accepter des restrictions », remarque George Perkovich, expert de la non-prolifération à la fondation Carnegie de Washington.

Mais la grande différence par rapport au précédent cycle de négociations, lancé en 2003 à Téhéran à l'initiative de la France, est que les deux principaux protagonistes, l'Iran et les Etats-Unis, sont aujourd'hui pressés d'aboutir. Tant Hassan Rohani, le nouveau président iranien, que Barack Obama savent que le temps joue en leur défaveur. Pour conforter son assise face aux « durs » du régime de Téhéran, M. Rohani doit rapidement obtenir la levée des sanctions qui asphyxient l'économie du pays et alimentent le malaise social.

L'enrichissement de l'uranium au cœur des débats

Centrifugeuses Elles permettent d'enrichir l'uranium qui peut ensuite être utilisé pour alimenter une centrale civile ou pour fabriquer une bombe atomique. L'Iran dispose de 19 000 centrifugeuses. Les Occidentaux voudraient que leur nombre soit compris entre 2 000 et 5 000.

Plafonnement Pour fabriquer une bombe, il faut de l'uranium enrichi à 90 %. Un seuil rapidement atteignable dès lors que l'uranium a déjà été enrichi à

20 %. L'Iran a accepté, pendant six mois, de réduire son stock d'uranium enrichi à 20 %. Les Occidentaux veulent que l'enrichissement de l'uranium soit plafonné à 5 % et aimeraient réduire le stock enrichi à 20 %.

Stock L'Iran dispose d'à peu près 7 tonnes d'uranium enrichi à des degrés divers. Pour fabriquer une bombe, il faut environ une tonne d'uranium fortement enrichi. Les Occidentaux aimeraient ramener ce stock au-dessous de la tonne.



Discours du président iranien, Hassan Rohani à Téhéran, devant la tour Azadi.

Quant à M. Obama, soucieux de parvenir à un succès diplomatique majeur avant la fin de son mandat, il sait que plus le processus traîne, plus il lui sera difficile de résister à un Congrès sceptique, qui menace d'imposer de nouvelles sanctions à l'Iran. Une mesure qui ferait aussitôt dérailler les négociations.

Mais cette convergence d'intérêts tactiques est loin d'être suffisante. Alors que s'ouvre la réunion de Vienne, les positions de départ des uns et des autres sont aux antipodes. Le groupe des « 5+1 » veut obtenir une réduction substantielle du dispositif nucléaire iranien, note un expert occidental : « Nous leur disons : "Vos capacités d'enrichissement d'uranium sont démesurées, étant donné que vous affirmez ne pas avoir d'objectifs militaires". »

Les Occidentaux, poursuit un diplomate, « ont obtenu de bloquer la pendule à minuit moins cinq. Il faut maintenant la faire reculer et s'assurer que l'Iran renonce à la bombe atomique ». Pour cela, ils vont présenter un long catalogue d'exigences aux Iraniens : diminution conséquente du nombre de

centrifugeuses, plafonnement de l'enrichissement à 5 %, réduction du stock d'uranium déjà enrichi, fermeture du site souterrain d'enrichissement de Fordow et démantèlement du réacteur à eau lourde d'Arak.

A cela s'ajoute un renforcement des mesures de surveillance. A commencer par l'adoption du protocole additionnel de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique.

« Plus la durée [des discussions] sera courte, plus Téhéran sera enclin à accepter des restrictions »

George Perkovich
Fondation Carnegie

que (AIEA), signé par Téhéran en 2003 mais non ratifié par le Parlement iranien. Il permet d'effectuer des contrôles beaucoup plus intrusifs sur l'ensemble du territoire.

D'entrée de jeu, les Occidentaux affichent une position ferme. Tout dépendra ensuite de l'inter-

prétation. Notamment sur la question cruciale des centrifugeuses, qui permettent d'enrichir l'uranium. L'Iran en possède aujourd'hui 19 000. C'est un nombre à la fois nettement insuffisant pour alimenter un programme civil ambi-

tieux, mais largement suffisant pour fabriquer une bombe.

Pour sortir de cette ambiguïté, « les Iraniens doivent d'abord exposer de façon crédible et détaillée leurs besoins, ce qu'ils n'ont jamais fait. La négociation pourra ensuite

se concentrer sur les capacités à mettre en face », relève François Nicoulaud, ancien ambassadeur de France en Iran au moment des négociations de 2003. Toutefois, prévient-il, « si les Iraniens sont prêts à plafonner à son niveau actuel leur activité

d'enrichissement, ils n'accepteront jamais de démanteler leur programme ». D'où le constat d'un diplomate occidental : « Les négociations de Vienne ne sont que le premier kilomètre d'un long marathon. » ■

YVES-MICHEL RIOLS

Le Monde

Mercredi 19 février 2014

L'échec de Genève 2 renvoie les Occidentaux à leur impuissance sur le dossier syrien

Les Etats-Unis réfléchissent à de nouveaux gestes de soutien à l'opposition alors que le débat reprend sur une intervention militaire contre Damas

Il est trop tôt pour prononcer l'acte de décès de « Genève 2 ». Personne ne peut assurer que les pourparlers entre l'opposition et le régime syrien, suspendus samedi 15 février, après deux rounds parfaitement stériles, ne reprendront pas dans quelques semaines ou quelques mois. On peut en revanche certifier qu'en l'état actuel du rapport de forces, sur le terrain comme sur la scène diplomatique, ce processus fait le jeu du régime de Bachar Al-Assad. L'empressement des capitales occidentales à lui imputer l'échec des discussions, les dénégations indignées de son protecteur russe, qui appelle à les poursuivre, et l'autosatisfaction de Damas, qui a évoqué contre toute évidence « d'important progrès », en apportent la preuve.

A la fin de la semaine dernière, un diplomate occidental se félicitait du fait que les débats aient ouvert les yeux à « tous ces dirigeants européens et ses responsables au sein de la machine des Nations unies qui pensaient que le régime était prêt à négocier et que le blocage était le fait de l'opposition ». De fait, sortant de la neutralité à laquelle ils s'étaient jusque-là scrupuleusement tenu, le médiateur des négociations, Lakhdar Brahi-

mi, a esquissé samedi, lors de sa dernière conférence de presse, une critique de la politique d'obstruction pratiquée par la délégation gouvernementale syrienne.

Il a notamment déploré le fait que celle-ci ait « refusé » d'aborder la question de la formation d'une autorité de transition – qui est pourtant la finalité de Genève 2 – et incité le régime à « rassurer l'autre partie » sur ses intentions.

Et après ? L'avancée des troupes loyalistes autour d'Alep et dans le massif du Qalamoun a vite fait déchanter ceux qui avaient crié victoire après la première manche des négociations, pour avoir mis à nu « l'hypocrisie du régime ». Même l'évacuation des civils de Homs, qui ressemble à une semi- reddition et que les autorités syriennes ont négociée en court-circuitant les opposants présents à Genève, a laissé un goût amer. « A quoi bon gagner la confiance de Brahimi, soupire un conseiller de la délégation de l'opposition. La solution n'est pas dans ses mains. »

En marge des négociations, à mesure qu'il apparaissait de manière flagrante que le régime ne cherchait qu'à gagner du temps, les anti-Assad ont donc exhorté leurs parrains occidentaux et arabes à accroître leur soutien. Parmi

les mesures qu'ils réclament de manière pressante : l'octroi à la Coalition nationale syrienne (CNS), vitrine politique de l'insurrection, du siège de la Syrie à la Ligue arabe et à l'Organisation de la conférence islamique, le transfert à la CNS des ambassades toujours contrôlées par les représentants de Damas, ou bien, à défaut, la restriction de la liberté de mouvement de ces derniers, à un rayon de quelques kilomètres autour des capitales.

Du côté des chancelleries occidentales, renvoyées à leur impuissance sur le dossier syrien, on réfléchit aussi au coup d'après. Pour la première fois depuis l'été, la Maison Blanche a reconnu qu'une évolution de son approche était néces-

« Nous sommes face à un problème régional. Si nous intervenons, ce sera notre problème régional »

Zbigniew Brzezinski
ancien conseiller de Jimmy Carter

saire, sans tout de même aller jusqu'à admettre l'échec de sa stratégie. Une nouvelle fois, le Pentagone a été sollicité pour apporter de « nouvelles idées », a affirmé le *Los Angeles Times*.

L'administration Obama envisagerait-elle de nouveau des frappes, en particulier contre l'aviation du régime, comme l'a réclamé Sandy Berger, l'ancien conseiller de Bill Clinton ? Le débat qui avait suivi l'utilisation d'armes chimiques par le régime Assad au mois d'août a repris à l'identique. Il oppose

ceux qui estiment que le bilan de Barack Obama risque d'être terni s'il laisse se poursuivre un conflit qui a fait plus de 140 000 morts, à ceux qui jugent que toute intervention unilatérale plongerait les Etats-Unis au beau milieu d'une guerre confessionnelle. « Nous sommes face à un problème régional. Si nous intervenons, ce sera notre problème régional », a de nouveau mis en garde Zbigniew Brzezinski, l'ancien conseiller de Jimmy Carter.

Le secrétaire d'Etat, John Kerry, a réaffirmé qu'il n'y avait « pas de solution militaire » et que la solution diplomatique restait l'option privilégiée, tout en mettant violemment en cause la Russie. Une attitude désapprouvée par M. Brzezinski, pour qui affronter Moscou est contre-productif : « Si nous faisons exploser l'accord sur l'Iran (...), qu'aurons-nous accompli ? », a-t-il estimé.

A court terme, l'option retenue par les Occidentaux semble consister en une relance de l'aide à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), la branche modérée de la rébellion. Selon le *Wall Street Journal*, des missiles sol-air portatifs seraient parvenus pour la première fois, dans les dépôts de l'ASL en Jordanie et en Turquie. La nouvelle laisse un activiste de l'opposition dubitatif. « Il y a suffisamment d'armes sur le terrain, dit-il. Notre problème, c'est un manque d'organisation. Pas une seule brigade n'a fait la preuve de son efficacité. » Et en évoquant l'état qui se resserre sur les rebelles d'Alep, il conclut : « Nous vivons l'une des heures les plus sombres depuis le début de la révolution. » ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE
ET CORINE LESNES (À WASHINGTON)

Pro et anti-Assad négocient des trêves autour de Damas

L'armée syrienne et les rebelles ont conclu ces derniers jours des accords dans plusieurs secteurs en périphérie et banlieues de Damas. Ces trêves concernent pour l'instant le quartier de Barzé, le camp palestinien de Yarmouk, et dans la proche banlieue, les localités de Qoudsaya (nord-est), Mouadamiyat Al-Cham (sud-ouest), Beit

Sahem, Yalda (sud), et dernière-ment Babbila (sud). Ces compromis, négociés par des personnalités originaires des lieux, prévoient l'entrée de nourriture dans ces zones assiégées par l'armée syrienne. En échange, les rebelles ont rendu leurs armes lourdes et hissé le drapeau officiel syrien à la place de l'étendard de la révolution.

Le premier ministre turc compromis par des écoutes

Dans un enregistrement anonyme, qu'il dénonce comme un montage, Erdogan cherche à cacher 30 millions.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

AFFAIRES Les récentes restrictions imposées sur l'accès à Internet n'ont pas empêché la publication d'une nouvelle affaire embarrassante pour le pouvoir. Un énième rebondissement dans le scandale de corruption qui éclabousse l'entourage du chef du gouvernement turc. La révélation, lundi soir, par un internaute anonyme, d'un document sonore présenté comme les conversations téléphoniques entre le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et son fils, Bilal, provoque un nouveau mouvement de panique à Ankara. Les échanges présumés entre les deux hommes auraient été enregistrés le 17 décembre, date du déclenchement des opérations anticorruption par la police.

« Tu es à la maison ? » demande la voix

de celui qui serait le premier ministre, le matin des arrestations. « Oui papa », répond l'autre. « Maintenant je te dis de sortir tout ce que tu as à la maison, OK ? » ajoute la première voix. « Que veux-tu

que j'aie sur moi, papa, ton argent est dans le coffre. » « C'est de cela que je parle, je t'envoie ta sœur OK ? »

Au fil des appels tout au long de la journée, les Erdogan père et fils évoqueraient la manière de faire disparaître du domicile des dizaines de millions d'euros en liquide, obtenus grâce à des arrangements avec plusieurs entrepreneurs amis. « Nous n'avons pas pu entièrement les éra-

Les échanges présumés entre les deux hommes auraient été enregistrés le 17 décembre



Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'adresse aux élus de son parti, mardi, lors d'une session du Parlement turc à Ankara.

UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

diquer, dit le fils dans la soirée. Nous avons encore 30 millions d'euros que nous n'avons pas pu dissoudre. » L'apparition de ce document a aussitôt renforcé les soupçons de corruption contre le fils du premier ministre, dont le nom a été cité dans une affaire le 25 décembre et qui a été entendu comme témoin par la justice début février. Le bureau du chef du gouvernement a parlé d'un « montage immoral ». Mardi matin, devant ses députés, Recep Erdogan a contre-attaqué, accusant une nouvelle fois « le lobby du prédicateur » Fethullah Gülen d'être à l'origine de cette campagne. Pour le chef du gouvernement, ce leader d'une puissante confrérie religieuse est l'instigateur des opérations qui le déstabilisent.

Faux grossier ou retranscription fidèle, ces conversations font partie de l'affrontement fratricide entre les pro-Erdogan et les pro-Gülen, dont la guerre des écoutes est devenue le symbole. Leur mise en ligne arrive juste après que les médias gouvernementaux affirment que les magistrats, qui remplacent ceux limogés parce que réputés proches de la confrérie, ont mis au jour un gigantesque scandale d'écoutes. Les téléphones de 7000 personnes, dont ceux du chef du gouvernement, de ministres, de personnalités de l'opposition ou d'intellectuels, auraient été placés sous surveillance par les anciens procureurs, selon le quotidien Star. Lundi, le nouveau procureur en chef d'Istanbul a revu le chiffre à la baisse, à 2280. Depuis les raids anticorruption lancés à la fin de l'année dernière, des documents sonores mettant en cause le premier ministre sont mis en ligne anonymement avec une régularité orchestrée.

La loi Internet qui vient d'être votée a justement pour fonction d'endiguer ces fuites, estiment ses détracteurs. Elle autorise l'administration chargée de la régulation des télécommunications à bloquer un site dès lors qu'un contenu est considéré comme portant atteinte à la vie privée. Dans la foulée, les députés sont en train d'examiner un texte qui dotera le MIT, les services de renseignements turcs, de superpouvoirs. Dirigé par Hakan Fidan, fidèle du premier ministre, ils auront notamment les coudées franches pour les écoutes téléphoniques. Son adoption ne fait guère de doute. Ce dispositif s'ajoute à la mise sous tutelle des magistrats par l'exécutif, s'inquiète Ahmet Insel. « La contre-attaque du gouvernement (face aux accusations de corruption, NDLR), déclare cet intellectuel, conduit à la mise en place d'une sorte de régime d'exception. » ■

Open the door to the Kurds

<http://www.washingtonpost.com>
By Editorial Board

AS BLOODSHED in Iraq and Syria has steadily escalated, the importance to the United States of one regional ally has been growing. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, which controls an autonomous enclave bordering Iran, Turkey and Syria, is democratic, secular, pro-Western and a determined enemy of the al-Qaeda forces that operate on both sides of the Iraq-Syrian border. It wasn't surprising that KRG President Massoud Barzani was booked for a visit to Washington and a likely meeting with President Obama last month. By the same token, his abrupt decision to postpone the trip is cause for concern.

Mr. Barzani stayed home because the Obama administration and Congress have failed to fix an enduring irritant in the U.S.-Kurdish relationship: the presence of the region's two leading political parties on a U.S. list of sanctioned organizations. Both Mr. Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party and the rival Patriotic Union of Kurdistan were added after 2001 to a "Tier 3" group of organizations deemed to have provided material support to terrorism under the Patriot Act. The reason: Both parties supported the resistance to the regime of Saddam Hussein before the 2002 U.S. invasion of Iraq.

This absurd anomaly is the result of overly broad Patriot Act language matched with excessively cautious U.S. government lawyers.

The two political parties aren't the only victims. Many people who have inadvertently done business with terrorists or al-Qaeda-linked groups around the world, or who fought against repressive regimes, have unjustly been swept onto the Tier 3 list. The designation is more than symbolic, since those named cannot obtain visas to enter the United States without a waiver. That includes Mr. Barzani and virtually every other senior official in a territory of 3.7 million people.

U.S. administrations have promised the Kurds relief from the sanctions for years, but have failed to deliver. The Obama administration contends that a legislative fix is needed and proposes language specifically exempting the Kurdish parties from the Patriot Act provisions. That solution has encountered resistance in the Senate Judiciary committee, where some are pressing for a more general repair of the Patriot Act language rather than a case-by-case approach. The Kurds and their Washington lobbyists argue, in turn, that Congress and its chronic gridlock could be bypassed with a simple executive branch decision.

What's clear is that the impasse is damaging an important U.S. relationship at a critical moment — and that the fault lies entirely in Washington. Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.), who has led efforts in the Senate to end the sanctions on the Kurds, is planning to introduce a stand-alone bill on the matter in the coming weeks, with the Obama administration's support. Congress should act quickly — and Mr. Barzani should reschedule his visit. ●



February 19, 2014

Iraqi army aviation provoked Kurdistan's Peshmerga forces: Kurdish officials

Peshmerga: No clashes took place between our troops and the Iraqi army

<http://www.ekurd.net>

TUZ KHURMATU,— According to Kurdish officials in Tuz Khurmatu district, on Wednesday, the Iraqi Army Aviation provoked the Kurdish Peshmerga forces stationed in one of the mountain slopes within the boundaries of the district.

Tuz Khurmatu district is located in the, Kurdish areas outside Kurdistan region, east of Tikrit city, the center of Salahuddin province, one of the disputed areas between the federal government and Kurdistan Regional Government, which dealt with the Iraqi constitution, in accordance with Article 140, which have not been implemented till now.

An official at the Peshmerga said that "the two Iraqi army pierced at medium level on one of the slopes of the mountain where the Peshmerga forces are stationed, as one of them fired above the forces prompting which forced Peshmerga to respond by fire from (PKC) weapons towards the planes."

He pointed out that " Peshmerga forces have resistor aircraft, but did not use them despite the fact that aviation flew above Peshmerga and provoked it".

For his part, Tuz Khurmatu deputy Mayor, Shalal Abdul confirmed the incident.

Abdul said "the Iraqi air force flew at night over the Peshmerga forces fired Enlightenment, which provoked the forces

Iraqi warplanes bombed some areas where Peshmerga forces resided, Tuesday night, February 18, 2014, PUK media reported.

According to a security source from Khormato, Peshmerga forces were residing in the mountains and heights around Khormato, and when they were bombed by the warplanes, Peshmerga forces answered quickly to the bombardment, warning the Iraqi forces they have crossed bombing borders.

Sources believe this incident is the result of a mistake on the Iraqi side!



Kurdish Peshmerga troops and tanks on the outskirts of Kirkuk, December 4, 2012. Photo: Reuter

Soon after the warplanes realized their mistake, they changed route and withdrew from the location.

Meanwhile the Ministry of Peshmerga in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) denied on Wednesday, the occurrence of any clashes or confrontations between Kurdish Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army in Tuz Khumato district in Salahuddin province .

"Reports of clashes between our troops and the Iraqi army are not true, there were no clashes between Peshmerga forces and the Iraqi army," The Secretary General of the Ministry of Peshmerga in KRG, Jabbar Yawar said in a statement.

The press reports have indicated the occurrence of clashes between Peshmerga forces and a number of Iraqi army helicopters Tuesday.

Tuz Khurmatu district is of the disputed areas between Kurdistan Region and the Iraqi government that suffers constantly from unstable security situation and witness almost daily bombings and armed attacks. ■

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An Autonomous Nineveh Region Strengthens Kurdistan

By Yerevan Saeed
http://rudaw.net

Last week, Nineveh Governor Athil Nujaifi announced that the provisional administration has started negotiations with the Kurdistan Region "for implementing the project of turning Nineveh into an autonomous region."

He said the purpose is to offer better services for the population of his province, not to form a Sunni region in Iraq.

The governor's declaration comes at a time when Sunnis in the country have been pushed to the corner by the Shiite-led government in Baghdad. Sunni-majority provinces, such as Nineveh, are struggling to find ways to escape Baghdad's domination, and to provide better protection and services for their constituents.

Not long ago, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Nineveh relations were strained enough that many believed it would lead to violence between the two sides.

The 2009 provincial elections shifted the balance of power to the Sunni Arabs in Nineveh, when Nujaifi's Hadba bloc won 19 out of 37 seats. Tensions with Kurdistan hit new highs after Nujaifi called for the unconditional withdrawal of Kurdish forces, in return for allowing the Kurds to participate in the local administration and be given the deputy governor position.

The governor's actions seemed to have been fueled by the fear that Kurds want to control Nineveh and the only way to prevent this is to purge the province from the Kurdish forces. For this, he had the backing of Baghdad.

Consequently, the Sunnis did not see any reason why they should cooperate with the Kurds and accommodate their demands in an Arab majority province.

Officials in the Nineveh administration believed they could have Baghdad on their side, not only to have the upper hand in provincial politics, but also in the row over disputed territories between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Nineveh.

In the last two years, KRG



A Kurdish flag by the road in a stretch of land controlled by the Peshmarga near the Syrian border and Nineveh. Photo: Rudaw
A Kurdish flag by the road in a stretch of land controlled by the Peshmarga near the Syrian border and Nineveh. Photo: Rudaw

and Nineveh relations have pacified through negotiations and the unfolding events in Iraq, including complaints by Sunni provinces that they are being neglected and marginalized by the Shiite-led Baghdad government.

Events in western Anbar province, where Baghdad has been trying to push Shiite influence through military means, has made a large impact on other Sunni provinces like Nineveh, where the governor fears Baghdad is not ready to develop the natural resources of his province.

In the meantime, the KRG and the administration in Nineveh have taken steps towards recognizing the other's interests. For example, the KRG has provided fuel and electricity to the province. It has also informed Nineveh authorities about the oil concessions granted to ExxonMobil in their disputed areas.

In return, the governor has quit his calls for withdrawal of Kurdish forces in Nineveh. He has been more accommodating, especially after the April 2013 provincial elections, where Kurds won important posts in his administration. Most importantly, he has recognized the oil concessions the KRG has granted to Exxon.

Furthermore, KRG's adoption of an open door policy to the persecuted Sunni politicians and refugees has built enough trust for

the Sunnis and the Kurds to cooperate to counter the Shiite-led government in Baghdad. Currently, dozens of Sunni dissidents and thousands of refugees fleeing the terror of the Iraqi army have found an unexpected welcome in the long-oppressed Kurdish enclave of Iraq.

As the matter of fact, unlike Anbar and Salaheddin provinces, Nineveh has the potential to become another successful autonomous region like Kurdistan.

In the first instance, it can benefit from its stable eastern border with Kurdistan. This can be a gateway to international markets, bolstering Nineveh's economic viability. Nineveh can duplicate the success of the KRG's oil contracts on its own territories. It has already held talks with oil companies in the past, though agreements have remained pending.

The Nineveh region also can establish its own guards to protect its borders. Regional guards create loyalty among the population and the locals feel part of the security force. No longer will there be the resentment that rises when army brigades are dispatched from the Shiite provinces to provide security for a Sunni area of the country.

Should Nineveh announce autonomy from Baghdad, the KRG can provide training and help in forming the regional guards.

Cooperation between KRG and Nineveh would be mutually beneficial because, at the end of the day, the stability and security of KRG depends more on the Sunni provinces than on Baghdad or Basra. The future of the Kurds and the Sunnis will also depend on a weak central authority. So it is in the best interest of KRG and Nineveh to work together than to grant Baghdad a space to maneuver to reassert its power on them.

Nineveh should go ahead and declare autonomy. This will prevent Baghdad from carving out two more provinces out of Nineveh, which aims at further divide and weaken local Sunni rule against the central authority.

Even though the new governorate law gives more powers to the provinces, Nineveh should not be misled by this illusion, because historically Iraq has no precedence of commitment and respect for the laws it adopts.

Instead of dealing with the mess of Baghdad, it is time for Nineveh to capitalize on its relations with the KRG and benefit from its experience and stability to connect itself with Turkey and Europe.

In the meantime, through economic and population integration, the KRG and Nineveh can build an economic powerhouse in the north, where the combined population of both regions would add up to more than eight million people.

Of course, this is no easy task. It has to be done when Nineveh can protect its southern and western borders. Nevertheless, this is a new approach, following a decade of policy failures by the central government, and assurances to the non-Shiite populations that Iraq belongs to all Iraqis. □

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Syria's Kurds struggle with Islamist factions for control of oil

Kurds in the al-Jazeera region of Syria are producing their own oil, as armed Islamist factions try to sabotage production.

Author Bahzad Haj Hamo
<http://www.al-monitor.com>

In early November last year [2013], the Kurdish security forces, known as the Asayish, arrested Ayed al-Hamada, the associate director of the Rmelan oil fields in the Hasakeh province. He was detained on charges of cooperating and collaborating with the "forces of the radical armed opposition," and in particular the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS).

Hamada spent nearly a month in Asayish prisons without any party, not even the Syrian government, making a statement. This signals that the Asayish has "quasi-absolute" control over the region in general, and the oil fields and the local administration in particular.

Furthermore, the concerned Hasakeh security authorities, which control the Rmelan oil fields, fired Hamada from his job upon his release from prison. That showcased that the Democratic Union Party (PYD) is controlling and administering the oil in areas under its control in northeastern Syria, which the PYD calls Rojava ("the west" in Kurdish, short for "western Kurdistan"). The PYD announced the "democratic autonomy" project January 2013 in partnership with Kurdish parties and Arab powers, in the absence of any formal representation of the Kurdish National Council in Syria.

The oil-producing area of Rmelan

The British/Dutch company Shell started extracting oil from Rmelan in 1960, using modest production equipment. In 2010, before the Syrian events started, oil production had reached 90,000 barrels a day. According to estimates of sources in charge of this well, the production capacity reached up to 167,000 barrels per day.

The Syrians, however, are circulating a conversation that took place between a Syrian member of parliament and the speaker of the parliament in the 1990s, about how Syrian oil revenues are being spent, on the grounds that it was already well known that the product did not enter the country's budget. The speaker [allegedly] replied, "Do not worry, oil is in good hands."

The Rmelan oil fields directorate has 1,322 oil wells and 25 gas wells, all of which are under the control of the so-called People's Protection Units (YPG). That happened after deals and negotiations were concluded between the YPG and the factions of the armed Islamist opposition, led by Jabhat al-Nusra. Later, fierce battles erupted between the two sides and ended with the Kurds controlling the entire region, including the oil wells.

Mr. Aldar Khalil is a leading figure in the Movement of the Democratic Society TEV-DEM, which includes a group of civil organizations and political parties, including the PYD, the party thought to control the decision-making of Syria's Kurds. About the essence of these agreements, Khalil said, "It was a military tactic aimed at neutralizing the [western Kurdistan - northeast Syria] fighting. ... Those agreements started when the armed opposition invaded the Kurdish city of Ras al-Ain/Siri last November. So we decided to hold tactical peace agreements with these undisciplined factions to spare our areas from danger."

He added, "But these factions — after we ignored their control of some wells in our areas and their extraction of oil in such a way that



People stand on trucks near oil fields in Rmelan, Nov. 11, 2013. (photo by REUTERS)

they are stealing and selling it — have gone too far in their plans and started targeting us within our regions, which forced us to exercise our legitimate right in defending our people and towns."

Then the YPG, deemed by its spokesman Redor Khali "the seed of the Syrian National Army," finally managed to expel these armed factions and extend its full control over the region. The YPG strengthened its control by "liberating" the Tall Kojar/al-Yaarabiya border crossing with Iraq last October. Redor asserted that his forces "represent the real spirit of the Syrian revolution."

A Kurdish oil company

Nearly eight months ago, the TEV-DEM organization founded the Distributing al-Jazeera's Fuel organization, or KSC for short, to perform the same activity that used to be carried out by the former government company Sadcop. The latter company stopped working with the cessation of oil production on March 8, 2013.

Alwan Mustafa, an administrative officer at KSC, asserted, "There's a group of self-powered wells from which we extract crude oil that we refine in several electric refineries. We bought [those refineries] at our own expense and sold them to civilian gas stations at symbolic prices."

The company has recently brought several refineries to the region of Girziro/Tall Adas, which are affiliated with al-Malikiyya on the far northeast of the country. And according to Alwan, the company is currently working to bring in more modern electric refineries to develop and increase production. He noted that these refineries "have ended the phenomenon of primitive burners managed by citizens."

The last period has seen an increasing number of these burners that rely on primitive methods to burn crude oil in large boilers and extract oil derivatives in the absence of security controls because the combatants are busy fighting. Experts in the region described that matter as "dangerous" because of its negative effects on the environment and health — with deaths being witnessed as a result of direct exposure to the toxic gases during the combustion. This is not to mention the wealth being wasted by the use of non-scientific methods.

These self-powered wells produce about 400,000 liters of diesel fuel per day (the liter is sold for 30 Syrian pounds). That's in addition to 150,000 liters of benzene, whose quality Mr. Alwan described as "super" (which sells for 150 Syrian pounds per liter). Mr. Alwan said that this price is "symbolic, and intended to face the blockade imposed by armed opposition forces on the Kurdish areas."

Late last year, armed Islamist factions, including ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra, issued a statement announcing the imposition of a blockade on the regions of Afrin and Ain Arab/Kobani in the Aleppo countryside, which are under the control of the PYD. The statement accused these areas of "supplying the Kurdish forces with money and weapons, which they use to fight [the Islamists]."

About how the oil money is being spent, Khalil said, "We actually manage an area stretching hundreds of kilometers. [We provide it with] services, security, and military support. And this administration needs a lot of funding. ... We have sought to pump oil through →

⇒ pipelines to government refineries in exchange for obtaining gas and other fuels that benefit the people of the region. But the armed groups have bombed these pipelines as part of their policy to suffocate the region.”

However, the Kurdish oil expert H.A. prefers to see the Syrian state controlling the oil wells instead of the Kurdish forces. He said that the latter forces are “draining the region’s resources in a scary way.”

The ambiguous fate of oil

Oil experts in al-Jazeera are afraid of what will happen to the oil wealth in the future. Official reports confirm that the oil reserves in al-Jazeera will be depleted in 2025, in accordance with the production plans set for them before the events started in Syria. Sources in the fields, who asked not be identified, helped us check [these plans].

Syria used to export nearly 100,000 barrels per day to world markets after refining the crude oil in the refineries of Homs and Baniyas, which have also stopped working.

“We don’t exactly know what will happen to the oil in these areas in the future.” With these words, Khalil summarized the confusion he

has about the fate of oil in the region. He added, “We will certainly not move back, and we will not allow any party to act and monopolize the people’s money and country’s wealth from now on.”

To what extent can Khalil, and the Kurdish political and military forces he represents, commit to the fulfillment of the promise that “we will not allow any party to act and monopolize the country’s wealth ...” in light of talk that the PYD is already monopolizing this wealth, not to mention the military and political domination?

Close to the oil wells in the northeast of Syria, and before “heaven” announces the depletion of its resources, the poor are fighting and their blood is being shed, amid concentrated efforts by both conflicting parties to prove their eligibility, and therefore to firmly establish themselves in the region, in light of the Syrian regime losing grip. The oil card is undoubtedly important as it moves its holder from “partisan militia,” “armed battalion” or even “the people’s committees,” to a political-military horizon that better accommodates the dreams. ♦



February 21, 2014

European Christians fighting with Syria Kurdish factions

A few European Christians, mostly of Syriac origin, are fighting alongside Kurdish groups and seeking autonomy for the Christians in Syria.

Author Muhieddeen Hamish
www.al-monitor.com

A BBC Arabic report revealed that Christian European fighters are flocking to Syria to fight alongside the Kurdish factions in the face of al-Qaeda groups.

The report pointed out that the conflict is no longer confined to jihadist groups fighting alongside the Syrian opposition under the banner of Jabhat al-Nusra or the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), but a recent phenomenon saw the participation of Christian young men who left European countries to join the armed groups in Syria.

The report cited a group calling itself Sotero, which is fighting in the Hassakeh province in northeastern Syria alongside Kurdish factions against al-Qaeda gunmen.

According to the report, the Agenfor Group has been following this issue and has uncovered these groups. This phenomenon is the first of its kind because the groups that have been flocking to Syria have been al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamic groups.

Sergio Bianchi, head of the Swiss Agenfor center, said, “There are different Christian visions in the region. While some [Christians] support [Syrian President Bashar] al-Assad, others support the Free Syrian Army, and others are fighting for autonomy.”

Regarding Sotero, Bianchi said, “The name of this group goes back to ancient Aramaic. One of the trainers in this group is a former sergeant in the Swiss Army named Johan Kosar. He is one of the volunteers among the European Christians.” Bianchi added, “Kosar is of Syriac origins and Turkish roots. He grew up in Syria. He left Locarno, Switzerland, to go to Qamishli. He holds three passports.”

“There are other Swiss nationals having various capabilities and skills, alongside Germans and Swedes,” said Bianchi.

The report stated, “The Syriac minority in Europe views the participation of those persons [in the Syrian war] as aimed at defending the Christians, but [the Syriacs] don’t hide their concerns about how [the fighters] will be treated when they return to their home countries.”



Kurdish female fighters of the Kurdish People’s Protection Units are seen in training at a military camp in Hassakeh, Dec. 9, 2013. (photo by REUTERS/Rodi Said)

Yasem Otblogim, spokesman for the Rafidain Cultural Center in Locarno, said there is “no precise figure” of European Christians in Syria, but that “there are 10 or 20 Europeans.” He stressed that “the numbers are not that high anyway.” He pointed out that the fighters “came to defend the Syriac presence in Syria, and we don’t want them to be treated as mercenaries when they return to their home countries.”

Media and foreign intelligence reports revealed that foreign nationals, mostly from European countries, are fighting alongside the Syrian opposition, the armed Islamic battalions and al-Qaeda-affiliated groups.

European countries have promised to take strict measures toward their nationals who are fighting in the ranks of ISIS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Britain vowed to try and jail residents who go to fight abroad regardless of their nationalities. France alluded to holding accountable any citizen who leaves to train and fight overseas under penalty of law. Belgium left the matter to the municipalities, which have the power to delete the name of any citizen from the population’s civil registry, and thus deprive him or her of social grants.

Although the number of foreign fighters in the Syrian war is not precise, Western intelligence sources estimate them to be in the thousands, coming from neighboring countries, Central Asia, the Caucasus and even Europe and the United States. ♦

Mis en cause dans un scandale d'écoutes, Erdogan accuse le « lobby du prédicateur »

Le premier ministre turc tient Fethullah Gülen pour responsable des opérations anticorruption



Portraits de l'imam Fethullah Gülen et du premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, en janvier, à Gaziantep (sud du pays).

Istanbul
Correspondance

Une voix faible et hésitante, attribuée à Recep Tayyip Erdogan, explique à l'autre : « Ils sont en train de perquisitionner les maisons de dix-huit personnes pour une grosse opération anti-corruption. » Au bout du fil, dans cet enregistrement d'une conversation supposée du premier ministre turc, se trouverait son fils Bilal, visiblement mal réveillé, au domicile familial, à Istanbul. « Maintenant, ce que je te dis, c'est qu'il faut faire disparaître tout ce qu'il y a à la maison. D'accord ? »

Quelques heures plus tard en ce 17 décembre, alors qu'éclate un gigantesque scandale de corruption dans l'entourage de M. Erdogan et que des fils de ministres sont placés en garde à vue, Bilal rappelle : « Papa, nous avons presque terminé. (...) Nous ne l'avons pas encore réduit à zéro, laisse-moi t'expliquer... Il y a encore 30 millions d'euros que nous n'avons pas éliminés. »

Publié lundi 24 février au soir par un internaute anonyme, ce document, non authentifié, a aussitôt enflammé les réseaux sociaux,

et obligé le bureau du premier ministre à réagir à une heure tardive, pour dénoncer « un montage immoral et totalement faux ».

Devant ses députés, mardi, M. Erdogan a dénoncé les attaques du « lobby du prédicateur », désignant le mouvement de l'imam Fethullah Gülen, avec lequel il est en conflit. Il le tient pour responsable des opérations anticorruption déclenchées le 17 décembre et l'accuse d'avoir pratiqué des milliers d'écoutes illégales grâce à son noyautage de la police.

Pour l'opposition et pour les sympathisants de la confrérie Gülen, aucun doute sur l'authenticité de la conversation téléphonique n'est permis : le premier ministre a été pris la main dans le sac et son gouvernement « a perdu toute légitimité ». Dirigeant du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, kéraliste), Kemal Kılıçdaroglu a lancé à M. Erdogan : « J'ai un conseil pour vous : prenez un hélicoptère, fuyez à l'étranger et démissionnez ! »

Assailli d'accusations mêlant fuites judiciaires, rumeurs et manipulations, qu'il dit orchestrées selon « un scénario sans faille », le premier ministre promet de faire la

sourde oreille jusqu'aux élections municipales du 30 mars, qu'il veut transformer en plébiscite : « Le peuple décidera dans les urnes. »

Son parti, l'AKP, pourrait voir sa domination s'éroder mais il tentera de conserver sa mainmise sur les grandes villes, et notamment sur Istanbul et Ankara. La campagne électorale, d'ores et déjà marquée par les affaires, promet d'être chaotique. D'autres enregistrements compromettants pourraient en effet émerger dans les semaines à venir. Mehmet Baransu, un journaliste d'investigation aux méthodes controversées, dit avoir des dizaines de dossiers en réserve.

« Changement de régime »

La presse pro-gouvernementale accuse les partisans de M. Gülen d'avoir mis sur écoute des milliers de personnalités politiques et médiatiques et de se livrer à un « chantage ». Les lignes de plusieurs ministres et du premier d'entre eux auraient été placées sous surveillance depuis trois ans. « Même les téléphones cryptés de l'Etat ont été écoutés », a tempêté mardi M. Erdogan. Pour tenter de contenir le scandale, le pouvoir ten-

te de verrouiller les libertés. Depuis décembre, Ankara a voté plusieurs changements législatifs cruciaux, procédant selon l'opposition à un « changement de régime ».

Les statuts du Haut Conseil des juges et des procureurs ont d'abord été modifiés pour renforcer le rôle du gouvernement sur la nomination des magistrats et pour neutraliser les enquêtes en cours. Une vaste purge a lieu dans l'administration policière et judiciaire, soupçonnée d'être infiltrée par la confrérie Gülen ; plusieurs milliers de fonctionnaires ont déjà été limogés.

Depuis la semaine dernière, le contrôle d'Internet a été renforcé et un site peut désormais être interdit d'accès sur simple décision administrative. Un bon moyen de censurer rapidement de futures fuites. Le premier ministre turc a fustigé mardi le « lobby du robot », qui manipulerait les réseaux sociaux pour lui nuire. L'assemblée nationale s'apprête également à voter un élargissement des pouvoirs des services de renseignement, le MIT, dirigés par des proches de M. Erdogan. Pour en faire son ultime rempart. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Syrian child refugees find light relief skiing in Kurdish mountains of Iraq

Spanish ski instructor Igor Urizar set up scheme to bring children from refugee camps to help cope with the trauma of war

theguardian.com,
Jewan Abdi for IPS

No one here has heard of the Sochi Winter Olympics, but the snow conditions are perfect in the Kurdish mountains of Iraq and 11-year-old Syrian refugee Hassan Khishman is thrilled to glide on skis for the first time.

"It's brought back the good times with friends in Syria," he says after sliding down a tiny slope.

The mountain village Penjwin on the Iranian border, around 185 miles (300km) north-east of Baghdad, was a major hub for refugees fleeing Saddam Hussein's campaigns. Smugglers' mule caravans still cross the rugged border valleys, and mines continue to be a threat.

The area where locals ski has been carefully chosen to avoid cruel surprises, and for some children like Hassan, the slopes have been a happy surprise.

They have been brought here from refugee camps at the initiative of ski instructor Igor Urizar, a Spaniard who set up Iraq's first ski school, to help them escape the bitter memory of war.

"We fled Syria because of the war. There were many among us who died, and the food became very expensive," says Hassan, who left his native town of Hasakah and crossed the border almost a year ago.

He now lives in the Arbad refugee camp in Sulaymaniya province, 160 miles north-east of Baghdad. It is one of six refugee settlements in the Kurdish autonomous region.

According to the UN, more than 200,000 Syrian refugees have taken shelter in Iraq's stable northern region. Huddled in tents, they are facing one of the coldest winters ever recorded there.

Helin Kaseer is three years older than Hassan and could identify those who forced her family to flee the Kurdish village of Girke Lege.

"We left Syria eight months ago because of the growing presence of Islamists in our area. There was a lot of fighting and several of my friends were kidnapped, so we couldn't go to school," she says.

For her, too, the chance to ski has come as a huge surprise. She wishes there were more opportunities because "many

Igor Urizar teaches Syrian child refugees to ski on the slopes of northern Iraq.

Photograph: Nuzha Ezzat/IPS



more children from the camp wanted to come, but did not get the chance".

Urizar, 38, explains why the other children had to be left out.

"We have just enough equipment for a few dozen. Besides, getting the necessary permission for them to leave the camp for just one day has been a real nightmare," he says.

Before his first visit to Penjwin in 2010, Urizar was a ski instructor in the Basque region of Navarra, where every year about 5,000 schoolchildren enjoy a week of skiing in the Pyrenees.

With the support of the Tigris Association, a Basque-Kurdish NGO, his dream of exporting this project to the Kurdish mountains seems to be on the right track.

Local villagers and government officials are thrilled with Iraq's first ski school and the second set up in Ranya, 270 miles north-east of Baghdad.

Falah Salah, Tigris's local co-ordinator, has ensured that the project continues for a second year with the personal backing of Hero Khan, the wife of the Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani.

Salah is planning to run for the Iraqi parliament in elections in April, so he is passing on the baton to Khalid Mohamad Qadir, the head of Penjwin's youth centre.

"Three years ago, Tigris invited us to the Pyrenees to check the possibilities of cross-country skiing as part of sustainable development," Qadir says, as he tries to manage a group of anxious children waiting for their turn.

"Over the past two years, the Roncal

valley ski school has trained young Kurds who are now teaching a growing number of visitors in our area. Most of them are Kurdish, but we have recently had people from France and Holland too," he says.

After putting on his boots over three pairs of socks, Mohamed Ibrahim is ready. The 13-year-old native of Tirbespiye, 370 miles north-east of Damascus, smiles but says that nothing can help him forget what he witnessed in Syria.

"The jihadists began to harass and kill us in our area. There was no food, no oil. So we left at the first opportunity to escape. I've never been so scared in my life," he says.

As the children get on to the bus that will take them back to their camp as the sun sets behind the snow-capped peaks, Urizar seems relaxed. It has been a hectic and stressful week as a result of bureaucratic hurdles and a forecast of rain, which thankfully proved wrong.

"I cannot help thinking that these kids will have to sleep in those tents again," says Urizar, drying the skis before putting them away.

"I only hope that they will be able to do this again, or any other activity that helps bring back their childhood, even if it is just for a few hours."



Écoutes, purges, affaires : tout comprendre de la crise en Turquie

lemonde.fr
Par Héléne Sallon

Le « système AKP », bâti par Recep Tayyip Erdogan autour du parti turc islamo-conservateur, qu'il dirige sans partage depuis douze ans, est en train de vaciller. Alliée de l'AKP depuis son arrivée au pouvoir en 2002, la confrérie Gülen est entrée en 2013 en guerre contre le gouvernement. Exaspérée par la dérive autoritariste du premier ministre, la confrérie a vu dans le projet de suppression des « dersane », les établissements de soutien scolaire privés dont le mouvement tire une part substantielle de ses revenus, un irréversible affront.

Cette décision aurait conduit au déclenchement, le 17 décembre, d'un vaste coup de filet anticorruption diligenté par le procureur d'Istanbul, Zekeriya Öz, réputé proche des réseaux « gülenistes ». Depuis, rumeurs, fuites et révélations alimentent des scandales au sommet. Dénonçant « un complot », le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a lancé la contre-offensive, bien décidé à remporter la bataille électorale qui s'annonce avec les élections municipales et présidentielle de 2014.

1/ QU'EST CE QUE LA CONFRÉRIE GÜLEN ?

Secte musulmane, lobby socioreligieux, la confrérie Gülen revendique plusieurs millions de sympathisants dans le monde entier. Elle est incarnée par son fondateur, Fethullah Gülen, un penseur mystique exilé aux Etats-Unis en 1999 afin d'échapper aux poursuites de la justice turque pour activités anti-laïques. Agé de 73 ans, cet imam est à la tête d'un puissant réseau d'écoles qui diffusent la culture turque à travers le monde, soutenu par des chaînes de télévision et le quotidien le plus vendu de Turquie, Zaman. Libéral, Fethullah Gülen prône en même temps la foi islamique et l'esprit du capitalisme.

Bien qu'elle s'en défende, la confrérie, née dans les années 1970, prospère depuis vingt ans dans les coulisses du pouvoir. Officiellement apolitique, elle est soupçonnée d'avoir infiltré la bureaucratie turque, de contrôler la police et une partie de l'appareil judiciaire. Au moment de sa réélection en 2011, Erdogan avait reçu l'appui décisif de ce puissant lobby. Leur alliance depuis dix ans repose sur une opposition commune à l'armée turque et à l'appareil bureaucratique que tient l'intelligentsia kémaliste. Mais lors des manifestations qu'a connues la Turquie au printemps, la confrérie a pris ses



Portraits de l'imam Fethullah Gülen et du premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, en janvier, à Gaziantep (sud du pays).

distances, désapprouvant la répression menée par le gouvernement.

2/ QUI EST VISÉ DANS LE SCANDALE POLITICO-FINANCIER ?

Le 17 décembre, un vaste coup de filet anticorruption a été mené par la direction financière de la police à Istanbul et Ankara. Cinquante-six personnes ont été placées en garde à vue, parmi lesquelles les fils de trois ministres proches d'Erdogan, le maire (AKP) du quartier Fatih à Istanbul, des bureaucrates de premier plan et des hommes d'affaires liés au secteur de la construction et de la promotion immobilière. Vingt-trois personnes ont été inculpées et placées en détention préventive.

Cette affaire en plusieurs volets, qualifiée de « plus gros scandale de l'histoire de la Turquie » par l'opposition, a abouti le 25 décembre à la démission de plusieurs ministres, obligeant Erdogan à procéder à un vaste remaniement ministériel.

Un premier volet de l'enquête concerne des ventes illégales d'or de Turquie vers l'Iran, malgré l'embargo international. L'organisateur présumé de ce trafic, l'homme d'affaires iranien issu de la minorité azérie Reza Zarrab, aurait maquillé des transactions financières liées à ces ventes grâce à la banque publique turque Halk Bank. L'établissement a démenti. M. Zarrab aurait également monnayé des facilités auprès des fils de deux ministres démissionnaires (le ministre de l'intérieur, Muammer Güler, et celui chargé de l'économie, Zafer Caglayan).

Deux autres enquêtes visent des malversations et des irrégularités commises lors d'appels d'offres publics immobiliers. Au centre des investigations, se trouve l'Administration de développement de l'habitat collectif (TOKI), qui a engrangé d'importants bénéfices lors de la vente de terrains publics à des promoteurs immobiliers et dans des projets de logements collectifs. L'entreprise parapublique est au cœur de la politique urbaine initiée par M. Erdogan à Istanbul.

Le fils de l'ancien ministre de l'environnement, Abdullah Oguz Bayraktar, et plu-

sieurs responsables du ministère, ainsi que le maire AKP du district stambouliote de Fatih, Mustafa Demir, sont soupçonnés d'avoir truqué ces marchés publics. La justice s'intéresse également à la Fondation turque pour le service des jeunes et de l'éducation (Turgev), dont le premier des deux fils de M. Erdogan, Bilal, est l'un des dirigeants.

3/ QU'EST CE QUE LA « GUERRE DES ÉCOUTES » ?

Une impitoyable « guerre des écoutes » a été lancée entre le gouvernement et la confrérie Gülen, mettant directement en cause M. Erdogan. L'authenticité des extraits diffusés sur les réseaux sociaux est contestée par le pouvoir.

Un an après l'assassinat de trois militantes kurdes, Sakine Cansiz, Fidan Dogan et Leyla Soylemez, le 9 janvier 2013 à Paris, un enregistrement sonore mis en ligne sur YouTube, le 12 janvier, a renforcé la thèse d'un agent infiltré, en service commandé pour l'Etat turc.

Plusieurs extraits de conversations téléphoniques, diffusés sur les réseaux sociaux en février, ont mis au jour les pressions exercées sur les médias par le premier ministre. M. Erdogan n'a pas nié ces conversations, notamment celle qu'il aurait eue avec un des dirigeants de la télévision privée Habertürk, Fatih Saraç, au moment des manifestations antigouvernementales de juin 2013, lui demandant de « faire le nécessaire » pour censurer un opposant.

La dernière fuite sur la plateforme YouTube, le 24 février, concerne un enregistrement d'une conversation supposée entre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et son fils, Bilal. Lors de cet appel, présumé passé le 17 décembre, le premier ministre demanderait à son fils de faire disparaître plusieurs millions d'euros et de dollars dissimulés chez des proches. Le premier ministre a dénoncé « un montage immoral et totalement faux ».

Dans la foulée, le régime a accusé des partisans de la confrérie Gülen d'avoir mis sur écoute plus de 2 000 personnes depuis 2011. Parmi eux, M. Erdogan, mais aussi des ministres, leurs conseillers, le chef des →

⇒ services secrets (MIT), Hakan Fidan, des élus de l'opposition comme de la majorité, mais aussi des responsables d'ONG et des journalistes.

4/ COMMENT LE POUVOIR TURC SE DÉFEND-IL ?

Pour tenter de contenir le scandale initié par le vaste coup de filet anticorruption, le pouvoir a procédé à une purge des appareils policier et judiciaire, accusés d'abriter « un Etat dans l'Etat » et d'être noyautés par des partisans du mouvement Gülen. En deux mois, quelque 6 000 policiers, dont près de 2 000 à Ankara, ont été sanctionnés notamment pour avoir « outrepassé leurs pouvoirs », selon le décompte de la presse turque.

Parmi eux, le chef adjoint de la sûreté nationale, des préfets de police et des chefs des services chargés de la lutte contre les crimes financiers, contre la contrebande, la piraterie informatique et le crime organisé.

Par ailleurs, une vingtaine de procureurs ont été mutés et le Haut Conseil des juges et procureurs (HSYK), chargé de nommer les plus hauts magistrats, mis sous la coupe du ministère de la justice. Le contrôle de l'Etat sur la nomination des juges et des procureurs a été entériné par une loi adoptée le 15 février au Parlement, jugée anticonstitutionnelle par l'opposition.

Le gouvernement turc tente également de verrouiller les libertés. Depuis décembre, Ankara a voté plusieurs changements légis-

latifs cruciaux, procédant selon l'opposition à un « changement de régime ». Dernière en date, la loi controversée sur le contrôle d'Internet, promulguée le 18 février, qui permet à l'autorité gouvernementale des télécommunications (TIB) de bloquer un site sur simple décision administrative. Pour l'opposition et de nombreuses ONG, le texte servira à étouffer les enquêtes judiciaires visant le pouvoir.

L'Assemblée nationale s'apprête également à voter un élargissement des pouvoirs des services de renseignement, le MIT, dirigé par des proches de M. Erdogan, notamment en matière d'écoutes téléphoniques. ■

Le Monde 26 février 2014

En Turquie, le gouvernement renforce son emprise sur la justice

Le Monde.fr avec AFP

Le chef de l'Etat turc, Abdullah Gül, a promulgué, mercredi 26 février, une loi très controversée renforçant l'emprise du gouvernement sur la justice, sur fond de scandale politico-financier visant le régime.

Ce texte remanie notamment l'organisation et les compétences du Haut Conseil des juges et procureurs (HSYK), l'une des plus hautes instances judiciaires du pays, en y renforçant les pouvoirs du ministre de la justice, notamment dans la nomination des magistrats. La loi autorise également le ministre de la justice à ouvrir des enquêtes sur les membres du HSKY, et à imposer à l'instance judiciaire son ordre du jour.

Le texte avait été voté le 15 février par le Parlement, au terme d'une nuit houleuse où un député a été blessé et a dû être hospitalisé. L'opposition avait rejeté ce texte, le jugeant contraire à la Constitution et exclusivement destiné à étouffer les enquêtes en cours. Cette loi complète une vague de purges sans précédent dans la police et la justice turques, que le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan accuse d'être au cœur d'un complot ourdi par la confrérie du prédicateur musulman Fethullah Gülen pour le déstabiliser.



Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et le président turc, Abdullah Gül, le 21 février dans le cockpit d'un avion à la base de Konya.

LES JUSTIFICATIONS DU PRÉSIDENT

L'opposition avait sommé de M. Gül de mettre son veto à ce texte, alors que l'Union européenne s'était publiquement inquiétée auprès d'Ankara, candidat à l'intégration, d'une remise en cause de « l'indépendance de la justice ».

Pour tenter d'apaiser ces critiques, le chef de l'Etat a, fait inhabituel, justifié dans une déclaration son feu vert à la nouvelle loi. M. Gül y a souligné avoir exprimé ses objections « sur 15 dispositions, clairement contraires à la Constitution », mais a assuré qu'elles avaient été prises en compte lors des débats au Parlement. « J'ai ainsi décidé de l'approuver, jugeant que les autres ar... e examinés par la Cour constitutionnelle », a estimé le chef de l'Etat.

Ces amendements n'ont pas calmé la colère de l'opposition, qui a immédiatement confirmé son intention de saisir dès mercredi la Cour constitutionnelle.

LA LOI INTERNET AMENDÉE

Mercredi, les députés ont également discuté d'une autre loi controversée, consacrée au contrôle d'Internet. Les députés ont finalement adopté les amendements exigés par le chef de l'Etat, Abdullah Gül, sans toutefois remettre en cause le renforcement de son contrôle administratif.

Deux changements ont été proposés par la majorité gouvernementale de M. Erdogan, a-t-on appris de source parlementaire.

— Le premier impose à l'autorité gouvernementale des télécommunications (TIB) de solliciter dans un délai de quarante-

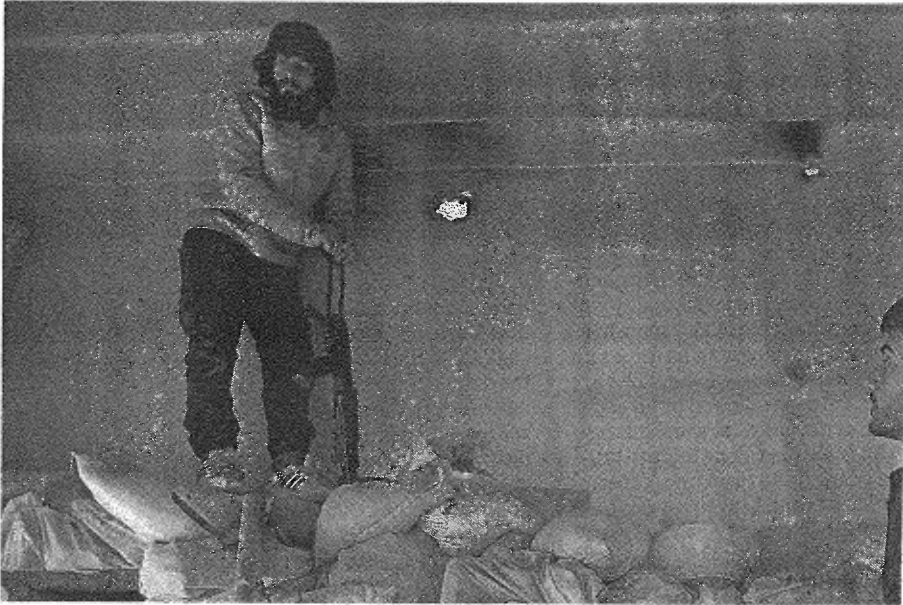
huit heures la confirmation par un juge de son ordre de blocage d'un site Internet, alors qu'il pouvait s'en dispenser dans le texte initial.

— Le second n'autorise le stockage pendant deux ans des données recensant les activités des internautes que sur la base des adresses IP et non plus des sites visités.

Le président Gül avait promulgué la semaine dernière cette loi, jugée « liberticide » par l'opposition, de nombreuses ONG et plusieurs capitales étrangères, à la condition que ces deux modifications soient votées par le Parlement, où le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), au pouvoir, dispose d'une majorité absolue.

Ce nouveau texte n'a pu empêcher la diffusion en ligne lundi soir d'une conversation téléphonique présumée entre M. Erdogan et son fils Bilal, dans laquelle ils évoquaient les moyens de faire disparaître une forte somme d'argent le jour où a éclaté le scandale de corruption qui vise des dizaines de proches du régime.

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Free Syrian Army fighters on Wednesday in Deir al-Zour, an eastern city. The coalition's credibility in peace talks is diminished by its lack of control over extremist factions.

Reorganized Syrian coalition seeks arms

GENEVA

It wants Western powers to provide missiles as a defense against bombing

BY ANNE BARNARD

In a crowd of suits in the softly lighted lobby of the InterContinental Hotel here, the military men stood out, wearing leather jackets, overcoats and skeptical expressions. They represent the dominant surviving faction of the Free Syrian Army, the first active leaders of that military arm of the moderate, pro-Western exile coalition to attend peace talks here — a milestone, since many insurgents view the talks with the Syrian government as tantamount to treason.

More important, they hope also to represent the future for the coalition and its military allies, who are staking their case for more military support from the United States and others on fighters like these. In recent weeks, the coalition has undertaken a major reorganization to bring them under an effective command.

The four men had no doubt about their mission in coming to the talks. They were there to prove that the coalition is not completely detached from forces on the ground, a major sticking point with the West, which has resisted giving the coalition advanced weapons

for fear they would fall into the hands of Islamic militant groups.

The military leaders were adamant that their relatively secular forces were still potent, motivated by legitimate political goals rather than Islamic extremism, and willing to negotiate. Precisely for those reasons, they said, it is time for the United States and its allies to deliver the substantive military aid they have so far lacked.

“We have full conviction that the regime will not give away anything,” said one rebel commander, Arafat Hammoud, who, with his towering height, oval, balding head, stubbly jaw and bulky leather jacket, bore a resemblance to a slimmer Tony Soprano. “But we want to show that the people who are against a political solution are the regime, and to tell the world: It’s time to live up to your responsibility.”

Vowing to press ahead to topple President Bashar al-Assad, with or without increased American support, they say their fate depends on re-energizing their armed campaign, wooing or defeating rival insurgents and persuading potential backers and Syrian fence-sitters that they remain a significant military force, with a democratic, inclusive, and non-threatening vision of Syria’s future.

The reorganization aims to make the coalition’s provisional Defense Ministry a real command center and conduit for arms. Commanders on Sunday ousted

Gen. Salim Idris, the head of the coalition’s Supreme Military Command, who they said failed in that task amid infighting between Saudi- and Qatari-backed factions and American reluctance to provide arms that could fall into hostile hands.

The coalition is now pinning its hopes on Mr. Hammoud’s faction, a new grouping of former Free Syrian Army fighters called the Syrian Revolutionary Front. Coalition members say it has received significant new financing and weapons from Saudi Arabia to help it box out extremist groups. Led by Col. Jamal Maarouf, a Syrian Army defector who is close to General Idris’s replacement, Brig. Gen. Abdul-Ilah al-Bashir al-Noeimi, it claims to command 40,000 fighters, mostly in the north.

But enormous challenges loom. While peace talks have stalled, the government has raced ahead with a dual strategy of localized truces and heavy bombardments, aiming to crush some opponents and unilaterally settle with others, while avoiding wider political concessions.

For now, the United States still opposes giving Syrian rebels the arms they most want, surface-to-air missiles that could stop so-called barrel-bomb attacks, even though Saudi Arabia is moving to do so. The impact of General Idris’s ouster on American support is unclear.

The coalition must walk a formidably, critics say impossibly, thin line to build effective alliances with fighters on the ground while distancing itself from well-financed extremist groups. Even as the Revolutionary Front battles some extremists, parts of the fragmented Free Syrian Army coordinate closely with others, including the Nusra Front.

Some in the coalition hope to woo the Islamic Front, a powerful grouping that calls for an Islamic state but rejects Al Qaeda and includes major former elements of the Free Syrian Army.

The coalition’s credibility in peace talks is diminished by its lack of control over the extremists, who have struck civilians in suicide bombings across Syria and even, as on Thursday, in neighboring Lebanon.

Some civilian members left the talks energized, declaring that support

“We came here because our revolution is rightful. We want to move this. If we can do it by saving blood, why not?”

should be galvanized by their willingness to negotiate, compared with the Syrian government’s intransigence even as it was unleashing aerial bombardments on Aleppo that were driving floods of refugees toward Turkey.

“Getting surface-to-air missiles will save lives immediately,” said Monzer Akbik, the coalition president’s chief of staff. “Any country in the world who has such equipment has a legal and human-

itarian and moral responsibility to deliver that to the Free Syrian Army.”

But across the lobby, the hunched body language of the fighters suggested a certain tense impatience. Unlike younger rebels who deride the exiles as a “five-star opposition,” they said they accepted the coalition as “our political wing.” They had no objections to exiles like Mr. Akbik, a Dubai-based roofing contractor whose father fled Syria in the 1970s after trying to mount political opposition.

“They were Syrians, they had to leave the country,” said Mr. Hammoud, the lone fighter who had come straight from a battlefield inside Syria, nodding at coalition members sipping coffee in the glow of a faux fireplace.

“But our needs are not met,” he said.

“Although they are well-connected, they have passports, they can travel and talk, they have not managed to do that.”

They had kept a low profile, he said, because of their ambivalence about declaring their presence at talks they believed would go nowhere. But he said more rebels, perhaps even part of the Islamic Front, would join the Geneva talks if they bore fruit.

“We came here because our revolution is rightful,” Mr. Hammoud said. “We want to move this. If we can do it by saving blood, why not?”

Mr. Hammoud fights in Idlib Province with the Syrian Revolutionary Front. Another fighter, Col. Asaad al-Zoubi, defected from the Air Force Academy and commands forces in the south. A third, Hameed Moustafa, belonged to the

Turkmen Front; fighters from an ethnic minority. The fourth defected from Syrian military intelligence.

One opposition activist from Aleppo, Adnan Hadad, said he suspected the coalition had kept the fighters under wraps for fear they would sound sectarian, politically naïve or overly Islamist. “When they talk,” he said, some fighters “say a lot of wrong things.”

But for the coalition, the men could not have been more on message. They said they were not fighting Mr. Assad’s Alawite sect, but a repressive government. Colonel Zoubi, a Sunni whose mother is Alawite, said, “They are my relatives.”

Mohammad Ghannam contributed reporting from Beirut, Lebanon.

International New York Times FEBRUARY 21, 2014

Iran and 6 powers agree on form for nuclear talks

VIENNA

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

In what officials described as a serious, workmanlike and conversational atmosphere, Iran and six world powers agreed on Thursday on a timetable and framework for negotiating a comprehensive agreement to end the confrontation over Iran’s nuclear program, the European Union’s foreign policy chief and Iran’s foreign minister said.

While details were vague and the two delegation leaders declined to take any questions at a closing news conference at the opening round of nuclear talks, they said that groups of experts would meet early in March and that the full delegations would meet here again on March 17, with the expectation that they would meet monthly.

Catherine Ashton, the European Union foreign policy chief, said in brief remarks: “We had three very productive days during which we have identified all the issues we need to address to reach a comprehensive and final agreement. There is a lot to do, it won’t be easy, but we have made a good start.”

Officials refused to describe the topics for the expert meetings, but a senior American official, speaking on the condition of anonymity under the session’s

“This is going to be both a marathon and a sprint.”

ground rules, said that “every issue of concern to us is on the table,” including uranium enrichment, Iran’s heavy-water reactor project and its suspected nuclear military research and ballistic missile program. All these issues, the official

said, including clarifying the issue of Iran’s past military research, are at least mentioned in a joint plan of action agreed upon with Iran in November in Geneva.

“All our concerns must be met to get an agreement,” said the American official. Washington’s goals, the official said, are defined as ensuring that Iran does not develop a nuclear weapon and that world powers can be confident that Iran’s nuclear program has no military aspect or intent, as Iran maintains.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said in a report that Iran was meeting its commitments under a six-month deal that went into effect on Jan. 20. The report said that enrichment of uranium to “medium levels” had stopped and that a part of Iran’s stockpile of that uranium “is being downblended and the remainder is being converted to uranium oxide,” as the deal required.

The care that officials on all sides took not to say anything very specific was striking, as was the positive atmosphere they described in the meetings themselves, which were said by one official to have no element of political rhetoric or posturing, even over “areas of difficulty.”

It was clear that neither side wanted any note of failure in this first round of talks on a comprehensive deal, but it was also clear that most of the work here was about setting an agenda and establishing the priority of the issues at stake, without entering into a substantive discussion of those issues.

Iranian officials have said publicly that only their nuclear program is on the agenda, not their larger military structure, and that they will not “dismantle” any part of their nuclear program or give up efforts to modernize it. Ameri-

can officials have emphasized that large parts of Iran’s “nuclear infrastructure” will have to be dismantled, as opposed to simply disabled, as part of a final deal.

The six-month deal, essentially freezing Iran’s program in return for modest relief from sanctions and the release of some frozen assets, expires on July 20. The officials said they had planned meetings throughout the next four months but wanted to leave the last month free, because negotiations tend to accelerate and intensify closer to deadlines.

“This is going to be both a marathon and a sprint at the same time,” the American official said. The six-month deal can be extended if both sides agree.

The Iranians suggested that Ms. Ashton might visit Iran before the March 17 meeting. She leads the talks for the six world powers: the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States — plus Germany.

Western officials and experts concede that Iran will have an enrichment program, but they want to constrain it to ensure that Iran cannot build a nuclear weapon quickly or undetected. They want some formula that limits the level of enrichment; caps the stockpiles of enriched uranium; dismantles or decommissions a large number of Iran’s centrifuges, which enrich uranium; removes the possibility that the heavy-water reactor will produce plutonium; and allows a deeper level of inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency, which monitors compliance with the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, signed by Iran.

Iran, for its part, wants the removal of crippling economic sanctions imposed upon it by the United Nations, the European Union and the United States. At the same time, Tehran wants to preserve its dignity and what it calls its right to enrich uranium and to have a peaceful nuclear program like other signatories to the nonproliferation treaty.

Turquie : vers la paix avec les kurdes ?

<http://www.amnesty.fr>
27 février 2014

Entretien avec Hamit Bozarslan, directeur d'études à l'EHESS. Ankara et le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont engagé depuis un an des pourparlers pour mettre un terme au conflit kurde, qui a fait plus de 40 000 morts depuis 1984. Un processus fragilisé puisque le PKK a suspendu cet automne le retrait de ses rebelles de Turquie pour dénoncer des promesses non tenues par le gouvernement.

Le processus de paix engagé entre le gouvernement turc et le PKK a-t-il un avenir ?

Personne ne le sait vraiment. Aujourd'hui, il y a des frictions considérables au sein du pouvoir entre le courant Gülen (voir ci-contre « Bras de fer »), une sorte d'Opus Dei de l'Islam, et le parti AKP. Une partie de ces tensions peut avoir un impact sur le dossier kurde. Très influent au sein du ministère de l'Intérieur, le mouvement Gülen ne veut pas de ces négociations. Par ailleurs, certains acteurs de l'opposition kémaliste adoptent ouvertement une position anti-kurde. Enfin, l'Iran, qui compte également une forte minorité kurde, tente lui aussi d'entraver ce processus de paix. La situation est donc extrêmement complexe.

Pour quelles raisons le gouvernement a-t-il ouvert ces négociations ?

En février 2008, l'opération Soleil lancée par l'armée turque au Kurdistan irakien contre les militants du PKK s'est soldée par un fiasco, ce qui a considérablement ébranlé le prestige de l'institution militaire dans la gestion de la question kurde. Cette même année, le parti AKP au pouvoir a mis au pas la très puissante armée turque à travers une série de procès. Par conséquent, l'AKP avait les mains libres pour « résoudre » cette question. Je pense aussi, qu'il y avait une volonté gouvernementale de renégocier une sorte de contrat avec les Kurdes, lesquels représentent tout de même quelque 20 % de la population. Enfin, bien sûr la situation syrienne a joué un rôle, la Turquie craignant de voir les Kurdes syriens « s'autonomiser » complètement pour constituer un État à ses frontières.

Ces négociations ont-elles commencé à porter des fruits ?

Cela fait un an qu'il n'y a pas eu d'affrontement lié à la question kurde. Le 21 mars dernier, Abdullah Öcalan, le dirigeant emprisonné du PKK, a annoncé un cessez-le-feu. Cette situation de paix prolongée a permis le déploiement d'une société civile extrêmement dynamique et de classes moyennes kurdes avec des attentes en termes de confort matériel, de services culturels, d'éducation. On assiste ainsi à une floraison de cafés littéraires, de groupes de théâtre, de clubs de danse, de maisons d'édition... Dans les villes du Sud-Est Mardin, Van, Hakkari, les universités sont en pleine effervescence. Avant même le lancement des négociations, les Kurdes avaient obtenu certains droits : une radio et une télévision émettant en kurde, un site dans leur langue au sein de l'agence de presse nationale (Anatolie), des centres de recherche dans plusieurs villes. On peut aussi noter de facto la banalisation du terme Kurdistan ou l'érection de statues à la mémoire de leaders kurdes exécutés, ce qui était inimaginable il y a quelques années.

Connaît-on les termes de la négociation ?

Rien n'est écrit. Les revendications du PKK semblent cependant



La population kurde à cheval sur quatre pays ©ARTE avec le Lepac

plus claires. Elles recouvrent une autonomie réelle, la possibilité pour les hommes et les femmes politiques kurdes d'agir dans un cadre légal, la reconnaissance du kurde comme langue du Kurdistan, et sans doute la légalisation du PKK ou au moins la possibilité offerte à ses militants d'agir en toute légalité. Du côté du gouvernement, le programme de démocratisation annoncé le 30 septembre par le Premier ministre Erdogan contenait quelques dispositions concernant les Kurdes, notamment la permission de pratiquer une éducation en langue maternelle dans les établissements privés, la possibilité d'user officiellement des lettres spécifiques de leur alphabet (q, x, w), la suppression du serment que les écoliers doivent réciter chaque matin : « Je suis turc, je suis juste, je suis travailleur... Heureux qui se dit Turc ». Mais ce paquet de réformes est jugé très insuffisant par le PKK qui s'était engagé à se retirer derrière les frontières à condition d'obtenir des concessions. En octobre dernier, le retrait des combattants kurdes a été stoppé : quelque 20 % de ses combattants (sur un total d'environ 5 000) se seraient pour le moment retirés dans le Kurdistan irakien.

Quel est le bilan de la guerre entre les Kurdes et l'État Turc ?

Ce conflit a fait plus de 40 000 morts combattants et civils kurdes. Près de 4 000 hameaux et villages dans l'Est et le Sud-Est ont été détruits. En 2009 un ministre turc a déclaré que la guerre avait coûté 300 milliards de dollars au pays. Par le passé, le PKK a également commis certaines exactions en particulier des massacres dans certains villages en 1986 et 1987. Il y a aussi des purges internes dans les rangs du parti.

On a souvent reproché au PKK de ne pas accepter le pluralisme...

Le PKK est désormais capable de construire un bloc hégémonique, à l'instar de celui que l'AKP a établi en Turquie. Aujourd'hui, il n'est plus besoin d'utiliser la force pour s'imposer comme la référence dominante de l'espace kurde. Du coup, il accepte davantage de pluralisme, que ce soit en termes politiques, dans la presse ou dans la vie culturelle.

La paix entre le PKK et le gouvernement est souvent présentée comme indispensable à un approfondissement de la démocratisation du pays. Qu'en pensez-vous ?

C'est vrai à ceci près que la démocratisation n'est pas l'objectif de l'AKP qui est davantage dans une logique de projection de puissance.

Propos recueillis par Aurélie Carton



FEBRUARY 23, 2014

Kurdish Al-Akrad front commander: Turkey pursuing new intrigues in Syria

<http://www.ekurd.net>
February 23, 2014

AFRIN, Syrian Kurdistan,— Kurdish (Jabhat al-Akrad) Al-Akrad front commander Haji Ahmet Al-Kurdi has spoken to ANF about recent developments in the Syrian Civil War, including about Turkey's role in the conflict. Kurdi told ANF that Turkey's attempt to destroy the gains made by Kurds in Syria that began 7 months ago in partnership with al-Qaeda and the al-Nusra Front has failed.

However Kurdi also emphasized that Turkey is looking for new angles in Syria, saying "Turkey is telling the remaining groups to go and make an agreement with the Kurds and to pull them into the war. It wants to provoke renewed fighting between Kurds and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria and strengthen those groups still remaining in tact, and it wants to drive the Kurds from power."

"Our goal is to not allow those coming to our lands and country from outside and those playing with our revolution [to accomplish this]. For this reason we as the Al-Akrad Front were the first inside the Free Syrian Army (FSA) to fire at the ISIS. This fighting began in Tel Abyad. An important commander by the name of Ebu Mushap Şişani was taken prisoner. A group used this as an excuse and in the name of the mujahedeen it united the FSA against the Kurds. This decision was taken at a meeting which took place in Gaziantep under Turkish sponsorship and which FSA as well as ISIS officials attended. The Gaziantep meeting was organized to create a great alliance between these groups and the ISIS against the Kurds. And that is what happened."

We Are Working To Defeat These Alliances

"The product of this alliance was to make all Kurds a target and above all in the area of Tel Abyad, Tel Aran, Tel Hasil, and Bab-Azaz. Of course Turkey was the main planner behind this and coordinated it. The goal was to drive all Kurds from that region and to create a Kurdish free zone. To destroy those resisting and to encourage those not resisting to work with them. There is information concerning these plans from reliable sources. In fact it was a plan for genocide. They did a part of it in Tel Hasil and Tel Aran. We realized their plan when the attacks began. But we had not realized how deep it went. When we realized this we pulled our forces from the region in order to prevent the murder of civilians. Because the military forces were the justification for the massacres. When we pulled back our forces it fell apart. There is information about those who worked with them and later returned [to our side]. They asked who decided to pull back the military forces and stopped. Many people could not put a meaning on our withdrawal. It was understood a classical pull back. In fact it was judged by some that we had abandoned the warzone. Some were pleased when they said this. If that plan had been put into action the direction of massacres would have turned toward Efrin and Kobanê. It was a general plan that was to be implemented in pieces."

The Plan Wanted To Make Kurds Into A Common Enemy

Kurdi went on to explain how the plan was an attempt to destroy both Kurdistan and the real revolutionary will in Syria, saying "Kurds demonstrated that they were a third-way together with the real revolutionary forces of Syria. The problem was here. For this reason international powers and some Kurdish collaborators did not accept this and wanted to break it. In fact they wanted to put an end to the Syrian Revolution."

They Came Face To Face

"As Kurds faded from the scene they went after each other. They began a war over power and how it would be shared. They all wanted to be in power. In order to be in power the ISIS destroyed all smaller groups. They allied with groups such as Liva Tevhid and Ehrar Şam that claim to be larger. The situation of Ehrar Şam was different. This group and the al-Nusra Front are coming from the same source. That is to say it was a group with roots in al-Qaeda. Either it attached them to itself or it destroyed them. And here in an important way Turkey supported the ISIS, increased its size and provided it with every kind of possibility."

Turkey Is Reaping What It Has Sown



Photo: ANF

"The Bad area is a large area. Turkey put this region under the control of Turkmen groups. However the ISIS took those areas from them in two days. In fact it was be more correct to say they surrendered themselves to them. At only one place in the region there were 800 Liva Tevhid fighters. They surrendered this area to the ISIS without fighting a thousand or eight hundred shots. Turkey is mentoring them. Turkey wanted them to surrender without fighting. Because Turkey founded Liva Tevhid. But later the ISIS came to such a point that now they do not attach themselves to a Turkey giving them endless support. The ISIS finished the Liva Tevhid without fighting. Groups from the Tevhid were put into combat against the ISIS and were liquidated but the leaders of the Tevhid did not make a single statement. The Tevhid and other groups mentored by Turkey have been reduced to this."

Kurdi went on to discuss the situation along the border, the increasing strength of the ISIS in important sectors – such as the zone between Tel Abyad and Azaz saying "Turkey came to realize this when they saw the strategic areas in which they had established Turkmen and groups like the Liva Tevhid along the border attacked and taken over by the ISIS. Turkey wanted to protect that area with these groups. However the ISIS began to attack those regions. They started an attack on the very strategically important town of Çobanbey. They took Çobanbey in two days. Turkey was telling Liva Tevhid and the other Turkmen group there to do what they wanted and that they would give them what was necessary but to protect those areas. They used planes to support them. They gave around 40 rockets and some rocket fuzes. But the ISIS took that place in two days. Those groups left all the weapons and rockets Turkey had given them without fighting and fled. Now Turkey is reaping the harvest. The ISIS which it had supported and grew turned against the Turkmen groups in the FSA under its own control. They took the villages of Çobanbey, İğde and Hawar. These villages were very important places for Turkey. That is as things are now Turkey and the ISIS share a border."

Turkey In Search Of New Alliances

Finally Kurdi explained that as Turkey has lost all its old allies it is now in pursuit of new ones, saying "Now Turkey is planning a new game. Turkey is telling the remaining groups to go and make an agreement with the Kurds and to pull them into the war. It wants to provoke renewed fighting between Kurds and the ISIS -and strengthen those groups still remaining in tact. It wants to drive the Kurds from power. This is certainly happening through the hands of intelligence officers In fact intelligence officers are swarming around the region. Some of those were shot in attacks directed against us." ■

Ekurd.net Note: The Kurdish (Jabhat al-Akrad) front was formed as a brigade of the Free Syrian Army. al-Akrad operates in Kurdish and ethnically-mixed areas in Syria's Aleppo and Raqqqa provinces, mainly outside Syrian Kurdistan region.

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Iraq's Deputy Finance Minister: Kurdistan Budget Blocked Directly by Maliki

By HEVIDAR AHMED
18/2/2014
<http://rudaw.net>

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Iraq's Kurdish deputy finance minister Fazil Nabi has submitted his resignation and returned home in anger at the central government's failure to send the autonomous Kurdistan Region its fair share of this year's budget.

Nabi told Rudaw that the decision to hold up the budget – causing severe financial problems for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) – had been made by Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and his deputy for energy affairs, Hussein al-Shahristani.

"Maliki and Shahristani are not willing to send the share of the Kurdistan Region of the budget," he said.

"Maliki ordered to stop the budget so that the people of Kurdistan Region will revolt against the Kurdistan Regional Government," Nabi accused.

As Erbil and Baghdad have locked horns over the intractable budget issue, the last three months have been the hardest financial period for the Kurdistan Region since the 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad, some officials say.

One KRG official said things were getting so bad that the local government could have problems paying salaries next month. Some

government employees already have not received their salaries for the last two months, sparking several demonstrations.

"Baghdad has never been so tough towards Kurds," Nabi said in the interview with Rudaw. "Baghdad used to make threats in the past as well, but it has never been like now."

He said he had no doubt the budget issue was being used by Maliki as pressure to force Erbil to hand over control of its oil exports to the central government.

An oil row, over Erbil saying it is ready to begin oil exports through a pipeline to Turkey and Baghdad forbidding independent crude sales – has gone hand-in-hand with the month's old budget dispute.

"Maliki is pressing the Kurdistan Region in every possible way in order to have Baghdad control the oil policy of the Kurdistan Region," according to Nabi, who said he had anticipated Maliki's intention to squeeze Erbil through the budget.

"That is why I sent the January payments on January 8, 2014. Later on, the (finance) minister decided not to send anymore payments for the Kurdistan Region, after he was informed of my action."

Nabi said he had exchanged harsh words with the minister, which had strained their relations. After hearing the minister, Nabi said he was "convinced that the



Maliki at a cabinet meeting. Photo: pmo.iq

issue is out of the minister's control. Maliki and Shahristani are the ones who have made the decision."

At a ministerial meeting Maliki had insisted on holding up payments to the Kurdistan government, Nabi said. He claimed Maliki had said, "let the people revolt against the Kurdistan Regional Government."

"I am very serious. If the issues are not resolved by the end of this week, will not return to Baghdad, even if Maliki does not accept my resignation," Nabi vowed.

This is not the first time Nabi has threatened to resign. "Five months ago I got upset over some issues and I threatened to resign. Maliki told me that he would do everything for me if I don't resign," Nabi explained.

A KRG delegation, headed by Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, is scheduled to visit Baghdad for the third time in two months to resume discussions over the oil and budget issues.

"This is going to be a decisive week for the budget and oil issues," Nabi predicted.

Kurdish officials insist that Baghdad has never paid the KRG the full 17 percent of the national budget specified under the constitution. "So far, we have never received our budget from Baghdad completely," KRG deputy finance minister Rashid Tahir said recently.

But Nabi said: "Since the end of 2007, when I have been in Baghdad, we have sent the share of Kurdistan budget."

Nabi also provided the latest figures of the Iraqi national budget and Kurdistan's share:

"The Iraqi budget is 163 trillion dinars. The share of Kurdistan Region from the budget is 19.7 trillion dinars. Also, Kurdistan Region is entitled to 2.14 trillion dinars from the sovereign budget. In total, the share of Kurdistan Region from the budget is around 22 trillion dinars." □

Kurdish demonstration demand to stop exporting oil to Kirkuk, until paying the region's salaries



www.shafaq.com
Wednesday, 26 February 2014

Shafaq News / Kurdish organizations belonging to Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud Barzani, President of Kurdistan Region demanded on Wednesday, during a demonstration organized in front of the North Oil Company in Arafat area in central Kirkuk with the participation of dozens of people to stop the export of oil from Kirkuk until the disposal of the region's salaries.

Those organizations made several demands addressed to the provincial government and the administration of Kirkuk to implement them, including stop Kirkuk oil exports to the Turkish port of

► Ceyhan and cut Kurdistan's' water from other Iraqi cities .

One of the activists and participants in the demonstration, named , Sttar Jabari said in an interview with " Shafaq News " that " the Iraqi government should not exploit salaries as pressure on the region and exploit in the elections , pointing out that this is unacceptable " .

He added that the Kurds are demanding administrations of Kirkuk province to stop Kirkuk oil exports , which constitute 20% of the Iraqi oil exports from Kurdistan 's share of 17 % from the budget.

The organizations hold Maliki's government the responsibility of its "negligence "in this file , it also raised slogans calling to make Kirkuk's oil for Kurdistan .

The Directorate of Kirkuk Asaish affiliated of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan tightened security to protect the protesters .

The two negotiations conducted by the head of Kurdistan Regional Government , Nechirvan Barzani at the head of a high level

delegation with Prime Minister , Nuri al-Maliki and other senior officials in the federal government did not result in an agreement on the outstanding issues between Baghdad and Erbil , including the problem of the general budget and the export of oil from the region to Turkey via the new pipeline , As a result of Baghdad 's insistence on Erbil to export 400 000 barrels of oil per day from Kurdistan fields daily where the latter rejected this demand .

Baghdad has cut salaries for the employees of the region for the current and previous two months in unprecedented move and Erbil responded to resort to the Federal Court , while Kurdish bodies and organizations demanded the regional government to take steps to respond , including cutting off water on the rest of the Iraqi provinces .



26 / February / 2014

President Barzani: Cutting Budget Equals 'Declaration of War' by Baghdad

rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani said Tuesday that the recent decision by the Iraqi federal government to block Erbil's share of the annual budget amounts to "a declaration of war against the people of Kurdistan."

"Not sending Kurdistan's budget is an illegal act," he declared.

For weeks, Baghdad has blocked payments from the national budget to the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in order to prevent Kurdish control over oil exports to Turkey and beyond.

Baghdad and Erbil are locked in a complex political feud. The Kurds insist that their autonomy gives them constitutional rights to exploit and export their own vast oil and gas resources, and have signed a comprehensive oil and gas deal with energy-hungry Turkey next door.

To force Erbil to concede control over revenues to the federal government, Baghdad has frozen the KRG's monthly deposits from the national budget, which go to pay for things like government salaries.

Since last December, the KRG and Baghdad have held three rounds of high-level meetings to agree on the terms of the Erbil-Ankara energy deal. But

talks failed over who should be in charge of marketing and selling Kurdish oil internationally.

Barzani insisted that the Kurdistan Region is acting within the boundaries of the Iraqi constitution.

"The Kurdistan Region hasn't taken a single step in violation of the constitution," he said. "We are only practicing our rights."

The Kurdish president went on to blame the political and security crisis in Iraq on the "wrong policies of Iraqi leaders."

He said that Baghdad has no excuse to impose sanctions on Kurdistan and to refuse payments from the national budget.

According to the Iraqi constitution, the autonomous Kurdistan Region is entitled to 17 percent of Iraq's annual budget. The Kurds have long said that Baghdad has never sent more than 10 percent of the budget.

The KRG has condemned Baghdad's budget tactic as both illegal and immoral, saying it puts pressure on average employees.

Meanwhile, Iraq's parliament speaker Osama Nujaifi told Rudaw that he has started mediating between the two governments to find a solution. He said that cutting off Kurdistan from the budget is unacceptable.

"We have made an initiative to solve the problems between the Kurdistan Region and Baghdad, in particular the issue of not sen-



'Not sending Kurdistan's budget is an illegal act,' Barzani declared. Photo: KRP

ding the salaries of the employees," Nujaifi said.

"The budget is a constitutional and legal right of the Kurdistan Region, we are against halting it and no unilateral decisions should be made about this," he added.

For his part, Kurdistan Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said Tuesday that his government is willing to negotiate with Baghdad on all issues, except the budget cut.

"The KRG hopes that the problems are solved through dialogue," he said. But he warned that, "absolutely, the KRG will not negotiate with Baghdad on not sending the budget and cutting the salaries of employees, because this is unacceptable."

"The Iraqi government should

not use employees' salaries as a political card against the Kurdistan Region," he insisted.

Also on Tuesday, the finance ministry in Erbil announced it would start paying all government salaries over the next few days.

Earlier this month, Kurdish businessmen and investors reportedly gave \$85 million to the Central Bank of Kurdistan to help bridge an immediate cash crisis. Reports said the money would pay the salaries of teachers, laborers and other workers, some of whom have staged week-long strikes.

"The people of Kurdistan have no issues with the Shiite people," said President Barzani. "The problem is the behavior of the leaders in Baghdad." □

Syrian rebels backed by West face disarray

ANTAKYA, TURKEY

Replacement of general underscores Supreme Military Council's chaos

BY BEN HUBBARD
AND KARAM SHOUMALI

It appeared to be a huge step forward for the scattered rebel groups fighting to topple President Bashar al-Assad of Syria: the creation of a central body of top insurgent commanders who would coordinate military campaigns, direct foreign support and serve as a unifying force for their diverse movement.

But 14 months after its creation, the body, the Supreme Military Council, is in disarray. Islamist groups have seized its weapons storerooms, its members have stolen or sold its supplies, and one commander it armed and equipped has publicly joined an offshoot of Al Qaeda.

The council's full dysfunction spilled into public view recently when a group of its members decided at a secret meeting to remove its chief of staff, Gen. Salim Idris, and put another man in his place.

While the opposition's exiled leadership, the Syrian National Coalition, quickly congratulated the new leader, the move baffled many in the opposition, including the new leader himself, who had not even known he was in the running for the top job.

"My friend called and told me, 'Congratulations,'" the new leader, Brig. Gen. Abdul-lah al-Bashir, said in an interview after his appointment. "I asked him, 'Good news?' He said to turn on the television."

"I swear to God, no one was in touch with me," he added. "I knew nothing about it."

The chaos within the opposition council reflects the wider mistrust and internal rivalries between Syria's rebels and their powerful foreign backers that have consistently undermined their ability to form a united front against Mr. Assad.

While rebels across Syria share the goal of regime change and often cooperate in battle, recent interviews with nearly 20 rebel commanders, fighters, activists and logistics officers paint a picture of a movement handicapped by infighting, with many players accusing their colleagues of choosing the expansion of their own power over the fight against the government.

The new chaos in the rebel leadership comes as internationally backed talks aimed at ending the war have failed to make progress and as the Obama administration searches for ways to put more pressure on Mr. Assad.

The disorder within the council, the umbrella group for moderate, Western-backed rebels, leaves the United States and its allies with one fewer reliable partner to work with to try to affect the course of the war.

Since its formation in December 2012, the Supreme Military Council has never lived up to its name. Although it served as a conduit for foreign military support flowing into Syria, it never received enough aid to fully equip its brigades. This left fighting groups scrambling for support and developing independent networks of wealthy Syrians or Persian Gulf patrons, granting them independence from the council's leadership.

Throughout the war, the Syrian government has called the rebel movement a terrorist plot backed by foreign powers. The Supreme Military Council's operations lend some credence to this argument. Qatar and Saudi Arabia, the uprising's two largest backers, pushed for the body's creation and provided most of its support. And Tur-

key has allowed fighters and regular weapons shipments to cross its southern border.

But many rebels said foreign support has often exacerbated tensions between groups. Persian Gulf states earmarked portions of each shipment for their preferred brigades, making others jealous and giving the council little control.

The Supreme Military Council "became nothing more than a storeroom," said Col. Ziad Obeid, a council member who helped receive foreign support. "It was a distribution point, not a military institution operating on its own."

As the council failed to turn the tide against Mr. Assad, many rebels blamed General Idris, accusing him of failing to prevent rebel losses and the rise of groups with links to Al Qaeda.

Ibrahim al-Hamwe, an arms coordinator for the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, said, "There was no battle you could point to and say, 'The S.M.C. did this,' or a force you could say was funded by the S.M.C."

Others accused the group's members of distributing arms to their friends or selling them.

Safi al-Safi, who leads a rebel brigade

near Hama, said he had bought 22,000 bullets and 80 assault rifles from a Supreme Military Council member and sold them for a profit of more than \$20,000. "How else was I supposed to feed my men?" he said.

Even prominent council members sometimes helped themselves to its arms. Last summer, fighters loyal to Jamal Maarouf, a rebel commander based in Idlib, seized a shipment of weapons from the council's storehouses on the Turkish border, according to people present at the time. While Mr.

The council's disorder leaves Washington and its allies with one fewer reliable partner in confronting Damascus.

Maarouf did not respond to requests for comment, one of his allies, Mohammed Zaatar, confirmed the account.

Notable defections have also marred the council's image. Late last year, Saddam al-Jamal, a commander who had received arms from the group, publicly announced that he had joined the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, an offshoot of Al Qaeda.

General Idris's aides declined to make him available for an interview, but Col. Fateh Hassoun, his deputy, acknowledged the criticisms.

"All of that talk is 100 percent true," he said. "The S.M.C. didn't give the fighters what they needed because it never got enough support."

For now, the future of the Supreme Military Council remains unclear.

Last week, a group of its members met while General Idris was abroad and made the announcement that he had been replaced, citing the "dysfunction that the S.M.C. has gone through in recent months." General Idris called the move "illegal" and a "coup."

The move was backed by Ahmed al-Jarba, the president of the Syrian National Coalition, and his supporters have said it will pave the way for a restructuring of the council to make it more effective.

After his appointment to replace General Idris, General Bashir said he would cooperate with anyone fighting to topple the regime. But he had no concrete plans that might turn the council's fate around.

"We'll do what we can," he said, "and we'll talk to the fighters on the ground and, God willing, we'll live up to our responsibilities."

Turkmen caught between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan

Iraqi Turkmen are getting pressure from the Turkish government to work more closely with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq.



Author Fehim Taştekin
February 27, 2014
www.al-monitor.com

While Iraq's April 30 general elections approach, the bets are slowly coming up for grabs. The polls matter not only for the Iraqis. The vote, the first since the end of the US occupation, is as crucial for regional actors Turkey and Iran as it is for the United States' so-called "democracy project."

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's re-election is Turkey's nightmare scenario. Turkey believes that bilateral ties stand no chance of improvement as long as Maliki stays in office, diplomatic sources in Baghdad told Al-Monitor. Maliki's own feelings are no different. He thinks relations cannot be restored with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in charge in Ankara.

Turkey counts on a scenario where Maliki is sidelined by Shiite rivals of his State of Law Coalition, including Ibrahim al-Jaafari's National Reform, Ammar al-Hakim's Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq and the Sadr movement. Yet, predictions are difficult to make in a political landscape where 270 parties and 70 coalitions contest the polls, and Maliki still has room to maneuver.

Moreover, the Iraqis I talked to point out that Shiite perceptions of Turkey have soured after the Justice and development Party (AKP) government granted asylum to Iraq's former Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi. Thus, even a Shiite-led government without Maliki does not guarantee a new chapter with Baghdad for Ankara.

There are other serious obstacles, too. Both Shiites and Sunnis have come increasingly to believe that Ankara's strategic ties with Erbil are a major factor emboldening the Kurdistan Regional Government to drift away from Baghdad. Turkish officials, on the other hand, say privately that too much foot-dragging by Baghdad over a pipeline to carry Basra's oil to Turkey compelled Ankara to "force certain things" and opt for an oil deal with Kurdistan, braving Maliki's ire.

Backfiring cards

What is even more intriguing, Turkey — while courting Erbil to get what it lost in Baghdad — is also about to waste its Turkmen card, which it has already misused for years. Both Turkmen representatives and diplomatic sources say that Turkey, due to its pro-Sunni leaning, has already alienated the Shiite Turkmen.

A Turkmen academic in Baghdad told Al-Monitor, "Turkey's sectarian policy has pushed the Shiite Turkmen under Iran's influence." According to the academic, "Sunni Turkmen are present in the ranks of al-Qaeda, which has been attacking Shiite Turkmen in recent years. Some al-Qaeda-linked people have used buildings of the Turkey-backed Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF). As a result, the Shiite Turkmen's attitude toward Turkey has changed."

Fevzi Ekrem, a former Shiite Turkmen parliament member from the Sadr movement, dismissed allegations that the ITF made its buildings available for al-Qaeda's use. Yet, he, too, criticized Turkey for acting as if all Turkmen were Sunni. "The Shiite Turkmen feel they are treated as a stepchild," he told Al-Monitor.

Ekrem, who identifies himself as "a patriot and nationalist above sects," said the Turkmen had lost ground not only because of the

Kurds, al-Qaeda and the Maliki government but also regional players such as Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Born to a Sunni-Shiite couple, Ekrem described the gloom in Tuz Khormato to illustrate the Turkmen resentment: "Over the past two years, we have lost 1,000 people in bomb attacks in Tuz Khormato. Another 4,000 have been wounded. Another 165 people have been kidnapped on their way home or to school, and remain unaccounted for. The attacks target the Turkmen neighborhoods in particular. Turkmen who fled the town have formed two whole neighborhoods in Karbala and Najaf. Some have fled to Baghdad as well. Christian Turkmen — the so-called 'fortress infidels' — have also fled the town. The truth is that no one really helped the Turkmen — neither neighboring countries nor the Sunni and Shiite political groups in Iraq. ... The neighboring countries are playing a grave game; they want to make Iraq a second Syria. The Turkmen are the big losers, be they Sunni or Shiite. I'll try to expose this tragedy at an exhibition I'm planning to open soon on al-Mutenebbi Avenue."

Certainly, not all Turkmen are as pessimistic as Ekrem. A Turkmen employee at a construction company in Baghdad argued that all Iraqi communities were hit by violence and suffered. He underscored that the Turkmen were represented by seven lawmakers and three ministers, and that the government was taking steps for broadcasts and education in the Turkmen language. He was optimistic the community's conditions would further improve.

Turkmen-Kurdish rapprochement suggested

For years, Turkey used the Turkmen card both against the central Iraqi government and the Kurds. Now the nature of the card appears to be changing. "Turkey is now advising us to get closer to the Kurdistan administration. This has sparked serious reactions among the Turkmen," a Turkmen official said.

A small Turkmen faction, including the Iraqi Turkmen Fraternity Party, favors cooperation with the Kurds. Yet, their favorable stance stems from skepticism toward both Iran, which uses the Shiite card, and Turkey, which counts on the Sunni card.

However, neither the ITF, which Turkey has not only backed but used as a tool, nor Shiite Turkmen groups such as the Iraqi Turkmen Islamic Union that aligns with Shiite Arab parties promoting Iraq's integrity, are likely to engage with Kurdistan.

Even Turkmen currently in touch with the Kurdish region become agitated when it comes to Kurdish claims over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, the much-coveted "Kurdish Jerusalem."

Ekrem was equally resentful: "We are being advised to take advantage of the Turkey-Kurdistan rapprochement, but the Kurdish administration has never reached out to us. They have had an eye on our lands, and nothing has changed since 2003. This is not an easy problem to solve. We've been through a lot. Those who usurped our lands are out there. The Turkmen population in Erbil has melted away. [Iraqi President] Jalal Talabani does not have a single Turkmen [on his team]. How are we supposed to engage in dialogue under these circumstances?"

Iran's outstanding policies

While Turkey's Kurdish and Turkmen cards are failing to yield the desired results, Iran's maneuvering ability stands out on the Iraqi scene. Despite Turkey's regional ambitions, it is Iran that has stepped in to settle the in-house rift at the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) when it plunged into a leadership crisis after Talabani bowed out. When it comes to efforts to end the political impasse in Kurdistan — without a government for six months — it is again Iran out on the field. The most influential of the Turkmen card is similarly in Iran's hands.

Having taken the Turkmen for granted, Turkey has only recently realized why they have entered the Iranian sphere of influence. According to a Turkish diplomat, lessons have been learned from past mistakes and a new approach is under way vis-a-vis the Shiite Turkmen. Yet, it seems hard for Ankara to make up, given the perceptions its regional policies have created in Iraq. Gestures like visits to religious shrines appear to just not be enough. ♦

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Iraq's budget problems go beyond Erbil-Baghdad crisis

As the conflict continues between Baghdad and Erbil regarding Iraqi Kurdistan's share in the state budget, there is a pressing need for the government to address other budget-related issues, namely its near total dependence on oil.



Author Harith Hasan

February 28, 2014

www.al-monitor.com

The Iraqi parliament still has not been able to approve the draft general budget for 2014, prompting Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to warn of the possibility of a major financial crisis and a disruption of state institutions.

This delay in ratifying the budget is mainly because of the continuing dispute between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) regarding Iraqi Kurdistan's share of the budget. According to a member of the Maliki-led State of Law Coalition, the Kurds are demanding a 17% share of the budget, without deducting the revenues they obtain from the approximately 400,000 barrels of oil the region exports daily according to Iraqi government's calculations.

Baghdad is demanding that Iraqi Kurdistan places its oil exports under the direct supervision of the State Organization for Marketing of Oil (SOMO), which is under the authority of the central Iraqi government. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq, however, refuses to do this. For their part, the Kurdish forces argue that the central government is disregarding the constitution, which grants the region the authority to supervise its own resources, and that Baghdad is trying to deduct from Iraqi Kurdistan's share, which was decided upon in previous budgets. These forces held a meeting in Erbil on Feb. 23 and issued a statement confirming the region's right to "receive its share of Iraq's revenues." The statement noted that negotiations with Baghdad on this issue are ongoing and called on Maliki to abandon this "illegal and unconstitutional policy."

An "independent" report on the Iraqi budget prepared by the Movement for Change (Gorran) noted that the actual share the budget grants to Iraqi Kurdistan is 9.9%, and that the government expects the region to export what amounted to 400,000 barrels per day under its supervision, compared to 250,000 a day last year. According to the report, the government is demanding that auditing agencies from both Baghdad and Erbil identify and calculate Kurdish oil revenues, and that Erbil sends the amount to Baghdad on a monthly basis. These are conditions that the KRG considers to be unfair.

Furthermore, the problem has been fueled by the central government's delay in releasing the budget used to pay the salaries of public officials in Iraqi Kurdistan. This reached the point that KRG President Massoud Barzani described the measures as "a declaration of war" and claimed that the government was imposing a blockade on the region. These Kurdish accusations led Barzani to issue a statement on Feb. 28 denying the responsibility of his government for the delay of public employees' salaries. The statement asserted that in the last years these salaries were paid by the KRG from its budget allocations, but it offered to deliver February salaries as a temporal solution and to prevent some from exploiting this issue to "instigate nationalist feelings."

It seems that negotiations between the two sides will continue, in light of each side sticking to its position and with the approach of the general elections scheduled for April of this year. Electoral seasons in Iraq usually push political forces to avoid flexible positions, to win the support of their constituencies. The KRG's rhetoric emphasizes the injustice the region is subjected to and focuses on the emotional aspect with regard to the interruption or delay in the payment of public servant salaries. Yet, on the other hand, media outlets close to the central govern-



A staff member points at a screen showing a map of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline off the coast of Adana, Feb. 19, 2014. (photo by REUTERS/Umit Bektas)

ment speak of the need to confront the Kurds' attempts to get more of the budget than they deserve and fund their "semi-autonomous" region with oil from southern Iraq.

However, these positions do not hide the existence of divisions, particularly between the Kurdish forces themselves. Some members of parliament belonging to the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) warned that Iraqi Kurdistan will make its "own decisions" if the central government does not change its stance, in reference to a threat to withdraw from the political process or secede. Meanwhile, it seemed that officials associated with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) were cautious regarding these hard-line positions, and one PUK official went as far as stating that the KRG is responsible for the crisis because of its "failed oil policies." Furthermore, some PUK leaders met with Maliki independently to discuss the budget issue.

However, the current problems relating to the budget are not limited to the crisis between Baghdad and Erbil, as there are other aspects that could be called "structural problems." An official from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) noted that the current draft budget does not solve the problem of Iraq's near-total dependence on oil revenues, and the potential risks this entails in the event of a drop in oil prices. The budget, which amounts to about \$150 billion, assumes that oil prices will remain at \$106.10 per barrel. However, it is likely that prices will drop this year, resulting in a continuation of the budget deficit. This deficit occurred for the first time last year, after multiple years of a financial surplus. The IMF official also expressed his concern that the Iraqi government may think about using cash reserves in the Central Bank to compensate for this deficit, which would weaken the currency and stimulate inflation.

In addition, there is a near consensus about the existence of another negative indicator, represented by a decrease in investments — to about 36% of the budget — alongside an increase in expenditures relating to governance. This could adversely affect efforts to improve public services and economic infrastructure. According to Gorran's report, the draft budget is devoid of an economic vision and lacks any initiatives to promote local production, diversify income sources, reduce imports and create new jobs. The budget also includes an increase in military spending at the expense of industrial and agricultural expenditure.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that the problems concerning the Iraqi budget are reproducing traditional conflicts witnessed by rentier states that are highly dependent on oil revenues. The conflict between Baghdad and Erbil is a conflict for each party's share of oil resources and how to manage them — it is not a conflict between two different economic visions. Today, the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is nothing more than a rentier region within a rentier state. The problem relating to a dependency on oil resources reveals that the financial recovery witnessed in Iraq in recent years — due to increased oil exports and high oil prices — is merely a temporary recovery. The continuation of prevailing spending methods and the absence of strategic solutions to the problem of dependence on oil will pave the way for severe economic crises in the near future. ♦

Harith Hasan has a PhD in political science and his main research interests are the state, sectarianism and political transition in Iraq and the Middle East. He has written extensively for various English and Arabic publications. On Twitter: @harith_hasan



POINTS CHAUDS

- ANALYSE Irak : entre État failli et chaos régional
- PORTFOLIO Le Kurdistan irakien revendique le droit d'exporter son pétrole via la Turquie
- ANALYSE Aux origines du conflit syrien



analyse

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Aix-en-Provence).
Auteur de *L'Irak* (Paris,
Le Cavalier Bleu, 2010).

Irak : entre État failli et chaos régional

Dans un contexte d'intenses turbulences régionales depuis le printemps 2011, la reconstruction irakienne peine toujours à se concrétiser. Entre remise en cause de son État-nation, poussée du communautarisme, résilience de l'ordre politique passé et omniprésence de la violence, l'avenir de l'Irak se pose avec acuité.

Photo ci-dessus :
Le 22 janvier 2013 à
Ramadi en Irak, des
manifestants protestent
contre le Premier ministre
Nouri Al-Maliki en coupant
une route stratégique qui
relie Bagdad à la Jordanie
et la Syrie. Durant cette
période, des milliers de
sunnites ont manifesté
dans plusieurs régions
d'Irak contre la politique
gouvernementale qu'ils
jugent discriminatoire à
leur endroit. Cette tension
s'ajoute à la crise larvée
qui oppose depuis plusieurs
mois le gouvernement à la
région autonome kurde.
(© AFP/Azhar Shallal)

Plus d'une décennie après le renversement du régime de Saddam Hussein par les États-Unis, l'Irak reste engagé dans un laborieux processus de transition et de reconstruction qui, malgré ses indéniables promesses, se heurte à de nombreux obstacles. D'une part, le pays s'est efforcé de poser les jalons d'un nouveau système politique démocratique. Depuis janvier 2005, six élections nationales et provinciales se sont ainsi tenues, mobilisant une pluralité d'acteurs et de citoyens. D'autre part, l'Irak a amorcé une relance de son économie à travers la

remise en état de ses installations pétrolières et la reprise progressive de sa production d'hydrocarbures qui désormais génère plusieurs milliards de dollars chaque année. Bagdad tente enfin d'opérer son retour sur la scène régionale et internationale après avoir recouvré sa pleine indépendance.

Or, sur fond d'importants dysfonctionnements politico-institutionnels, l'Irak a également traversé ces dernières années l'un des conflits les plus meurtriers du nouveau millénaire, dont les nombreuses séquelles se font encore sentir. Les cycles de



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violence se poursuivent quotidiennement tandis que l'option du « tout pétrole » apparaît intenable face à la nécessité d'une diversification économique cruciale pour relancer la croissance et créer des emplois. En 2013, le fléau du chômage frappe en effet près de la moitié de la population irakienne. L'instabilité régionale depuis le début des soulèvements arabes, notamment la descente de la Syrie dans les affres du chaos, n'est pas non plus sans peser sur la dégradation de la situation intérieure irakienne et l'incapacité des autorités en place à rétablir la sécurité.

“ Sur fond d'importants dysfonctionnements politico-institutionnels, l'Irak a traversé ces dernières années l'un des conflits les plus meurtriers du nouveau millénaire. ”

Au terme d'une longue séquence d'occupation étrangère et dans le contexte des bouleversements agitant le monde arabe et musulman dans son ensemble, vers quel avenir politique l'Irak se dirige-t-il ? Peut-on véritablement évoquer une transition « démocratique », ou est-ce au contraire le spectre d'un nouvel ordre autoritaire qui se profile ?

Un nationalisme moribond

L'Irak a longtemps été considéré comme l'un des hauts lieux du nationalisme arabe, héraut de la solidarité et de l'unité entre les peuples de la région. Mais paradoxalement, la nation irakienne a elle-même fait l'objet d'une longue et douloureuse déconstruction à partir des années 1960 et de l'accession au pouvoir du parti Baas. Dès 2003, le gouvernement transitoire formé sous tutelle américaine est venu parfaire cette logique en instaurant un système de quotas ethniques et religieux dont la résultante essentielle est d'avoir exacerbé des réflexes communautaires déjà présents. Par leur participation aux différents scrutins, les Irakiens ont démontré leur courage, bravant dans bien des cas un contexte sécuritaire chaotique et les menaces des milices et de l'insurrection. Dès les élections de janvier 2005, ce sont huit millions d'entre eux qui se sont rendus aux bureaux de vote éparpillés sur le territoire pour élire les membres de l'Assemblée constituante et leurs représentants locaux. Soucieux de protéger l'unité du pays face à l'occupation, beaucoup nourrissaient alors l'aspiration d'une refondation nationale de l'Irak et la percée des formations laïques et progressistes encore porteuses de cet idéal unitaire. L'horizon d'un pacte social renouvelé a néanmoins vite laissé place à un réordonnement politique à la faveur des chiïtes et des Kurdes, majoritaires parmi l'ancienne opposition et victorieux à toutes les élections. Collectivement associés à l'ancien régime, les sunnites se sont vus pour leur part durablement mis à l'écart du pouvoir (1). Outre la remise en cause du registre national qui avait traditionnellement présidé à la vie politique, l'enracinement du communautarisme a vidé de sa substance la jeune démocratie irakienne en permettant aux particularismes de supplanter tout débat authentiquement citoyen. La nouvelle formule de partage du pouvoir issue des élections n'a d'ailleurs pas foncièrement évolué depuis 2005 : le Premier ministre est dorénavant chiïte (Ibrahim al-Jaafari

en 2005 et Nouri al-Maliki depuis 2006, tous deux issus du parti islamiste Dawa), le président kurde (Jalal Talabani, dirigeant de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan) et le chef du Parlement sunnite (Oussama al-Noujaïfi depuis 2010).

Cette formule n'est évidemment pas sans avoir charrié son lot de frustrations et de ressentiment. De fait, face à la prédominance qui est aujourd'hui celle des chiïtes et des Kurdes, les sunnites demeurent marginalisés, ce qui les a poussés tantôt à boycotter la dynamique politique dans son ensemble, comme en 2004 au lendemain des sièges militaires américains dans la ville de Fallouja, bastion de la résistance sunnite, tantôt à rejoindre le soulèvement, y compris sa composante la plus radicale. Ces mêmes sunnites avaient placé de nombreux espoirs dans le dernier scrutin législatif tenu sous occupation en mars 2010, apportant leur soutien massif au chiïte laïc et ancien Premier ministre par intérim, Iyad Allawi (2004-2005). Ils ont toutefois vu leur exigence de réintégration s'effondrer avec le coup de force opéré par Al-Maliki pour être reconduit au pouvoir, puis le délitement de la base partisane de son principal adversaire, la liste Iraqiyya (2).

Conséquence de cette mise en marge structurelle, les sunnites manifestent dans leurs provinces (Al-Anbar, Diyala, Salahaddin, Ninive, Tamim) contre les autorités centrales depuis décembre 2012. Après la condamnation à mort par contumace de l'ancien vice-président sunnite Tarek al-Hachémi (2006-2011), actuellement réfugié en Turquie, c'est la décision du gouvernement d'arrêter les gardes du corps du ministre sunnite Rafi al-Issawi qui a mis le feu aux poudres. En mars 2003, ce dernier remettait sa démission au gouvernement en dénonçant un usage disproportionné de la force contre les manifestants, dont la cause n'a depuis cessé de se radicaliser autour d'appels croissants à la sécession (3).

Bagdad face à ses périphéries

L'ancrage du communautarisme en Irak a eu pour autre conséquence la montée en force des séparatismes identitaires et territo-

Photo ci-dessous :

En décembre 2006 à Najaf en Irak, des policiers irakiens défilent dans les rues de la ville avec des pancartes représentant le président irakien, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, et le Premier ministre, le chiïte Nouri al-Maliki. En poste respectivement depuis le 6 avril 2005 et le 20 mai 2006, la Constitution irakienne procure l'essentiel du pouvoir au Premier ministre, le président ne disposant que d'une autorité limitée. (© DoD/Bryan Beach)





Photo ci-dessus :

En 1979, le président irakien, Saddam Hussein, discute avec Michel Aflaq, homme politique syrien et fondateur du parti Baas, un parti nationaliste panarabe qui prône le dépassement des clivages religieux et la réunification de tous les pays arabes en une vaste fédération moderne. La cause du nationalisme arabe sera progressivement vidée de sa substance et le parti deviendra uniquement un instrument de contrôle social et politique. (© DR)

riaux, facilités par l'inscription du fédéralisme comme principe phare dans la nouvelle Constitution de 2005. De fait, la réorganisation fédérale de l'Irak constituait, en amont de l'intervention américaine, une exigence fondamentale des exilés kurdes et chiïtes. Au terme de décennies d'une concentration absolue du pouvoir par Saddam Hussein et le parti Baas, ces derniers considéraient que le fédéralisme serait le seul moyen de débarrasser définitivement l'Irak de la dictature et d'édifier une démocratie synonyme d'une répartition plus juste des prérogatives politiques et économiques. Mais les contours et subdivisions de cette réorganisation sont restés relativement flous, laissant libre cours à l'émergence de projets autonomistes, tel que celui porté par les Kurdes au nord (provinces de Soulaïmaniyya, Erbil et Dohouk) et dans plusieurs territoires disputés avec les Arabes (dont au premier plan Kirkouk).

De toute évidence, la question du contrôle des hydrocarbures (pétrole et gaz) qui représentent les quatrièmes plus importantes réserves énergétiques au monde après l'Arabie saoudite, le Canada et l'Iran, n'est pas étrangère non plus à cette polémique fédérale. Inégalement réparties sur le sol irakien et surtout concentrées à l'est, à la fois dans le sud chiïte à proximité de Bassora et dans les régions kurdes du nord, ces richesses ont une incidence directe sur les dynamiques séparatistes à l'œuvre. Le gouvernement régional kurde considère ainsi le pétrole situé dans ses zones comme une carte maîtresse pour affirmer et consolider son autonomie face au souhait émis par Bagdad de recentraliser le secteur pétrolier. Les Kurdes ont clairement fait de la mainmise sur leurs réserves un instrument de délimitation positive de leurs frontières, visant à garantir leur sécurité tant interne que régionale. En l'absence d'une loi nationale sur le pétrole, qui devait théoriquement être votée en 2007, les Kurdes se sont dotés de leur propre législation et ont signé une série de contrats juteux avec plusieurs majors (Exxon-Mobil, Chevron, Gazprom Neft, Total).

Au sud, malgré certaines disputes énergétiques entre forces locales, les chiïtes refusent eux aussi toute recentralisation de l'industrie pétrolière qui entraverait leur désir d'autonomie et profiterait en premier lieu au gouvernement central. Plusieurs conseils de province ont ainsi menacé à plusieurs reprises d'interrompre leur production d'hydrocarbures si Bagdad persistait à s'ingérer dans leurs affaires. D'ardents défenseurs d'un État national fort,

les sunnites ont pour leur part fini par amorcer un virage fédéraliste courant 2011, convaincus de l'impératif de disposer de leurs propres territoires et institutions, mais aussi de leurs propres ressources économiques s'ils venaient à être exclus du futur schéma de répartition de la rente. Symptomatiquement, ils annonçaient au même moment la découverte de nouveaux gisements gaziers dans leurs provinces (4).

Démocratie sans démocrates ?

En toile de fond de ces querelles politiques et énergétiques se trouve une faiblesse généralisée des nouvelles institutions irakiennes (administrations, forces armées), exacerbée par des niveaux endémiques de corruption. Phénomène intimement lié à l'absence d'État de droit, on assiste à un regain manifeste de l'autoritarisme dans le pays. Sous les apparences d'une démocratie électorale, les anciens leviers du pouvoir baasiste – caractérisés par l'usage systématique de la violence, un système rentier fondé sur la prédation et une soumission quasi totale de la société – demeurent en effet des traits dominants de la sphère politique. Les nouveaux « démocrates » irakiens ont fini par exhiber leur profonde socialisation par l'ère baasiste puis leurs années d'exil, exprimant une défiance constante à l'encontre de leurs rivaux et répliquant les stratégies clientélistes et répressives naguère utilisées par le parti Baas (5).

“ Le recours systématique au passé comme stratégie de politique politicienne et non comme outil de justice transitionnelle en dit long quant au rapport encore épineux des Irakiens à leur histoire, récente et plus lointaine. ”

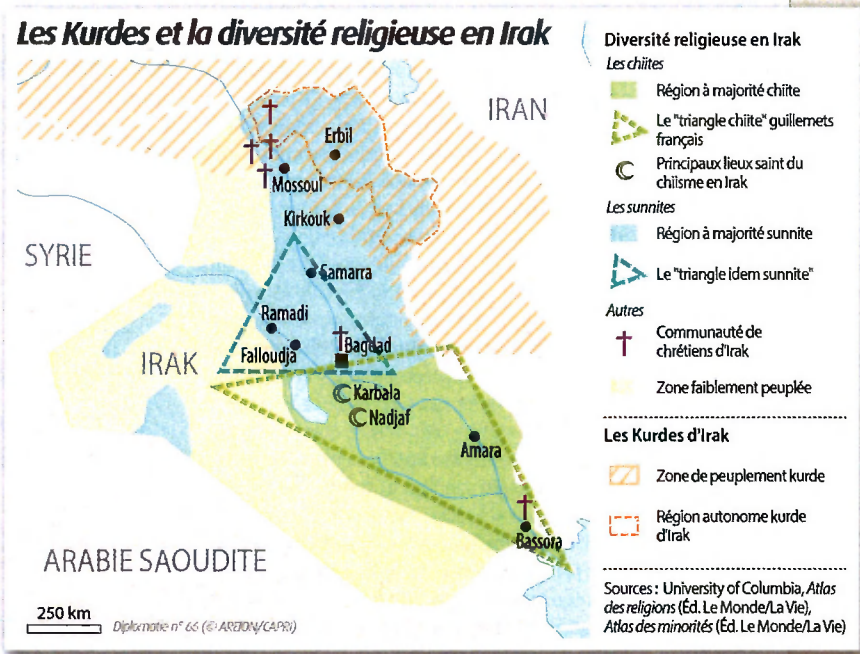
Le premier acteur et emblème de cette résurgence autoritaire en Irak n'est autre que le Premier ministre Al-Maliki lui-même. Depuis son investiture en 2006, ce dernier s'est en effet lancé dans une course effrénée au pouvoir. Tout d'abord jugée opportune en réponse aux opérations insurgées, la concentration de la décision politique par le chef de l'exécutif est aujourd'hui virulemment décriée par ses opposants. Depuis 2012, Al-Maliki est ainsi publiquement accusé d'une dérive sécuritaire qui se traduit, dans les faits, par la mise au pas de l'armée et des forces de sécurité et le rappel aux commandes d'anciens hauts gradés baasistes. Les institutions régaliennes se sont vues en large part subverties, qu'il s'agisse de certains ministères placés sous la coupe directe du Premier ministre et de ses adjoints, d'agences supposément indépendantes comme la Commission pour l'intégrité, chargée de la lutte anticorruption, ou de la branche judiciaire et du Parlement. De surcroît, Al-Maliki n'a pas hésité à réactiver le processus de « débaasification » décrété en mai 2003 par la coalition américaine pour purger l'Irak de ses anciennes élites et structures, et aujourd'hui devenu un instrument pour se débarrasser de ses concurrents. Au-delà des retombées immédiates de cette mesure, le recours systématique au passé comme stratégie de politique politicienne et non



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comme outil de justice transitionnelle en dit long quant au rapport encore épineux des Irakiens à leur histoire, récente et plus lointaine (6).

De plus, pareille résilience de la pratique autoritaire ne se cantonne pas à Bagdad mais touche en réalité tous les échelons de l'appareil d'État, y compris locaux, prenant la forme de ce que d'aucuns qualifieraient d'autoritarisme « compétitif », en l'espèce à plusieurs niveaux et plusieurs têtes. Depuis 2011 et la vague de révoltes ayant parcouru l'Irak dans la foulée des deux révolutions tunisienne et égyptienne, les conseils de province sont par conséquent sujets à une remise en cause analogue de leurs prérogatives. Dans la ligne de mire de la population, l'absence de réformes et la dégradation continue des conditions de vie questionnant la légitimité des élites locales. Pourtant formellement opposées à l'usage de la force par Bagdad, ces dernières n'ont pas essayé de temporiser avec les manifestations antigouvernementales et ont fait appel à leur tour à l'armée et à la police pour mater la contestation. Au printemps 2011, à la suite de violents affrontements ayant provoqué la mort de dizaines de protestataires, plusieurs gouverneurs, à Bassora par exemple, ont dû quitter leurs fonctions sous le poids de la pression populaire. Ce divorce criant entre des civils en lutte perpétuelle pour leur survie et une classe politique préoccupée par la sauvegarde de ses intérêts particuliers ne se limite pas aux seules provinces arabes du pays mais caractérise également le Kurdistan où, malgré un important développement économique et une relative stabilité sur le plan sécuritaire, les partis



au pouvoir (UPK et PDK) ont vu leur assise historique désavouée par de nouveaux arrivants (à l'instar du parti Gorran, « changement » dans le dialecte kurde).

La violence pour tout horizon
La brutalité des replis communautaires est indissociable du regain de violence observé en Irak depuis plusieurs mois, et dont l'explosion de colère dans les provinces sunnites constitue l'ultime métastase. Si la contestation a débuté de manière relativement pacifique, elle s'est radicalisée au fil de la répression lancée par Bagdad, tandis que l'insurrection n'a cessé de capitaliser sur le mécontentement des populations

pour multiplier les recrues dans ses rangs. Les insurgés bénéficient aussi, dans une large mesure, du contexte régional fragile pour étendre leur combat, l'Irak restant l'un des principaux creusets des rivalités interconfessionnelles entre communautés et États au Moyen-Orient. Affaiblie entre 2007 et 2008 sous les coups de l'« escalade » américaine (*Surge*) qui voit 20 000 soldats supplémentaires déployés en Irak par l'administration de George W. Bush, Al-Qaïda est de retour dans le paysage armé depuis plusieurs années. Plus que jamais, ses membres sont déterminés à torpiller le legs laissé derrière eux par les Américains et à réaffirmer le sunnisme en Irak et au-delà de ses frontières. Pour ce faire, l'organisation salafiste-jihadiste table à la fois sur le puissant sentiment antichiiite qui règne parmi les sunnites irakiens, les victoires militaires de la rébellion syrienne voisine, mais aussi sur le soutien des pétromonarchies du Golfe, en tête desquelles l'Arabie saoudite, résolue à contrecarrer par tous les moyens le rôle de l'Iran. Idéologiquement, l'objectif poursuivi par Al-Qaïda reste double : à son combat confessionnel livré depuis 2004 pour purger toute trace du chiisme « apostat » en Irak s'ajoute un dessein plus politique, celui de rendre tout leur poids aux sunnites et, dans un second temps, de restaurer le califat historique avec pour épice Bagdad. Tout en continuant de signer des attentats sanglants contre les civils chiites, Al-Qaïda s'est rebaptisée



Photo ci-contre :
Le 21 septembre 2013 à Erbil, capitale de la région kurde autonome, des habitants font la queue devant un bureau de vote à l'occasion des élections législatives où se présentaient 1129 candidats pour 111 sièges disponibles à l'Assemblée législative régionale. Après le dépouillement des votes, le Parti Démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) du président du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzanî, est arrivé en tête des résultats. (© Xinhua/Zhang Shuhui)

Photo ci-dessous :

Le 26 août 2013 à 50 km d'Erbil, capitale de la région kurde autonome, des enfants syriens jouent dans le camp de réfugiés de Kawergost. Le 15 août 2013, la région autonome kurde d'Irak a ordonné l'ouverture de sa frontière avec la Syrie pour aider les milliers de Syriens à fuir les violences dans leur pays. Selon le Haut Commissariat aux Réfugiés, près de 45 000 réfugiés syriens ont franchi la frontière de la province, portant le total de réfugiés syriens en Irak à environ 200 000 personnes. (© Xinhua/Liang Youchang)

« État islamique d'Irak » en octobre 2006, puis « État islamique d'Irak et du Levant » en avril 2013 lors de l'anniversaire des dix ans de la guerre et suite à la décision de ses membres de faire front commun avec la mouvance salafiste-jihadiste en Syrie (7). En réaction à la remilitarisation de l'insurrection armée sunnite et aux liens étroits établis entre combattants irakiens et syriens, les milices chiïtes se sont à leur tour remobilisées avec le soutien financier et logistique de Téhéran. Bénéficiant de nombreux relais religieux, politiques et stratégiques en Irak, surtout depuis le renversement de Saddam Hussein, l'Iran redoute en effet de voir son allié chiïte à Bagdad menacé sur un plan interne si le régime de Bachar al-Assad venait à tomber. Ce scénario est d'autant plus inquiétant qu'Al-Qaïda se trouve revigorée et que l'islam politique sunnite a effectué une percée sans précédent dans la région depuis 2011, avec l'appui d'importants sponsors tels que le Qatar et la Turquie. Par son choix de réarmer des milices chiïtes, Téhéran poursuit une logique à deux versants : imposer un équilibre de la terreur en Irak face aux insurgés sunnites et sanctuariser le gouvernement chiïte conduit par Al-Maliki ; s'assurer, sur le plan extérieur, de la préservation du « croissant chiïte » qui s'étend du Golfe au Liban en prenant part à la défense du régime alaouite installé à Damas depuis des décennies. Plusieurs milices irakiennes sont, de ce point de vue, activement engagées dans le jihad pro-chiïte au Levant : les traditionnelles Brigades Badr, bras armé du Conseil suprême islamique irakien (CSII) du clan Al-Hakim, et l'Armée du Mahdi du leader Moqtada al-Sadr, mais aussi d'autres groupes de formation plus récente comme la Ligue des vertueux et le Hezbollah irakien (8).

Quel avenir ?

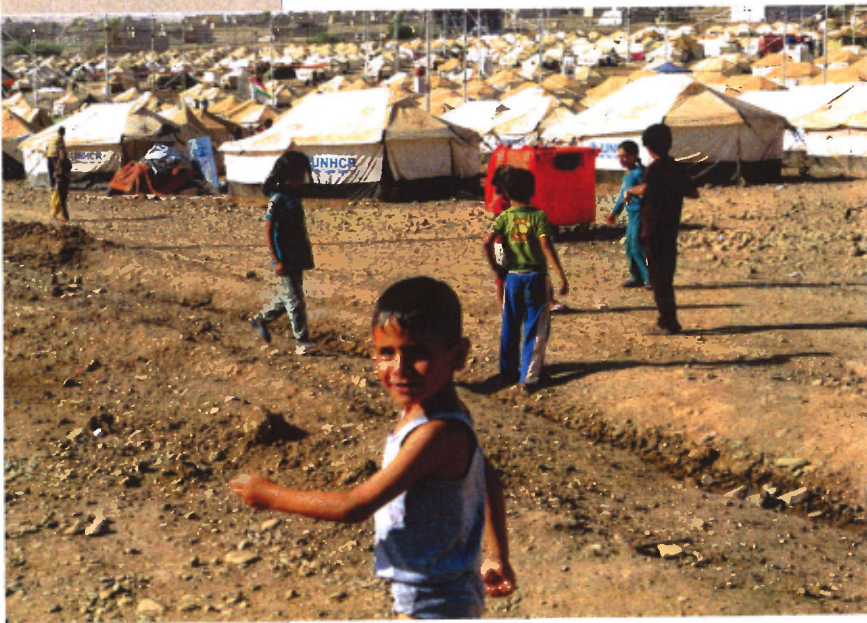
Depuis le retrait des dernières troupes américaines du pays en décembre 2011 et l'avènement des soulèvements arabes, l'Irak s'est trouvé relativement en marge des débats portant sur l'avenir du Moyen-Orient. Il n'est pourtant pas excessif d'affirmer que le pays demeure un point névralgique dans la région, tant par sa géographie que par son histoire. Son évolution politique dans les mois et années à venir sera, à n'en point douter, lourde de conséquences.

Une dégradation plus grande de la situation sécuritaire en Irak pourrait en effet se répercuter au-delà de son seul territoire, aggravant le chaos dans lequel s'est engouffrée la Syrie et exacerbant des tensions régionales qui pourraient alors atteindre un irréversible paroxysme. L'Irak ne parvient pas à s'extraire de cette inépuisable violence, d'une impasse politique chronique et de la précarité socio-économique (absence d'eau et d'électricité, infrastructures délabrées) dans laquelle il se trouve. Malgré les formidables revenus générés par le pétrole, susceptibles de faire du pays l'une des économies les plus puissantes de la région, l'Irak s'enfonce toujours un peu plus dans la confusion.

“ D’ardents défenseurs d’un État national fort, les sunnites ont pour leur part fini par amorcer un virage fédéraliste courant 2011. ”

À la lumière de ses déboires, l'expérience irakienne des dix dernières années est finalement l'illustration probante de la complexité du changement politique à l'œuvre dans le monde arabe et de la difficulté de toute dynamique électorale à accoucher d'un système durablement démocratique lorsqu'elle ne va pas de pair avec un développement socio-économique concomitant. Comme l'ont démontré les élections provinciales de 2013, l'Irak est loin d'avoir achevé sa transition, et le scrutin national prévu pour 2014 sera un « test » démocratique déterminant : amoindrie, l'opposition irakienne parviendra-t-elle à unir ses rangs pour barrer la route à Al-Maliki, ou ce dernier réussira-t-il à se maintenir à son poste en accentuant *de facto* le tournant autoritaire pris par le pays ? Qu'advient-il du processus de réconciliation nationale, autre condition décisive à l'éclosion de la démocratie ?

Myriam Benraad

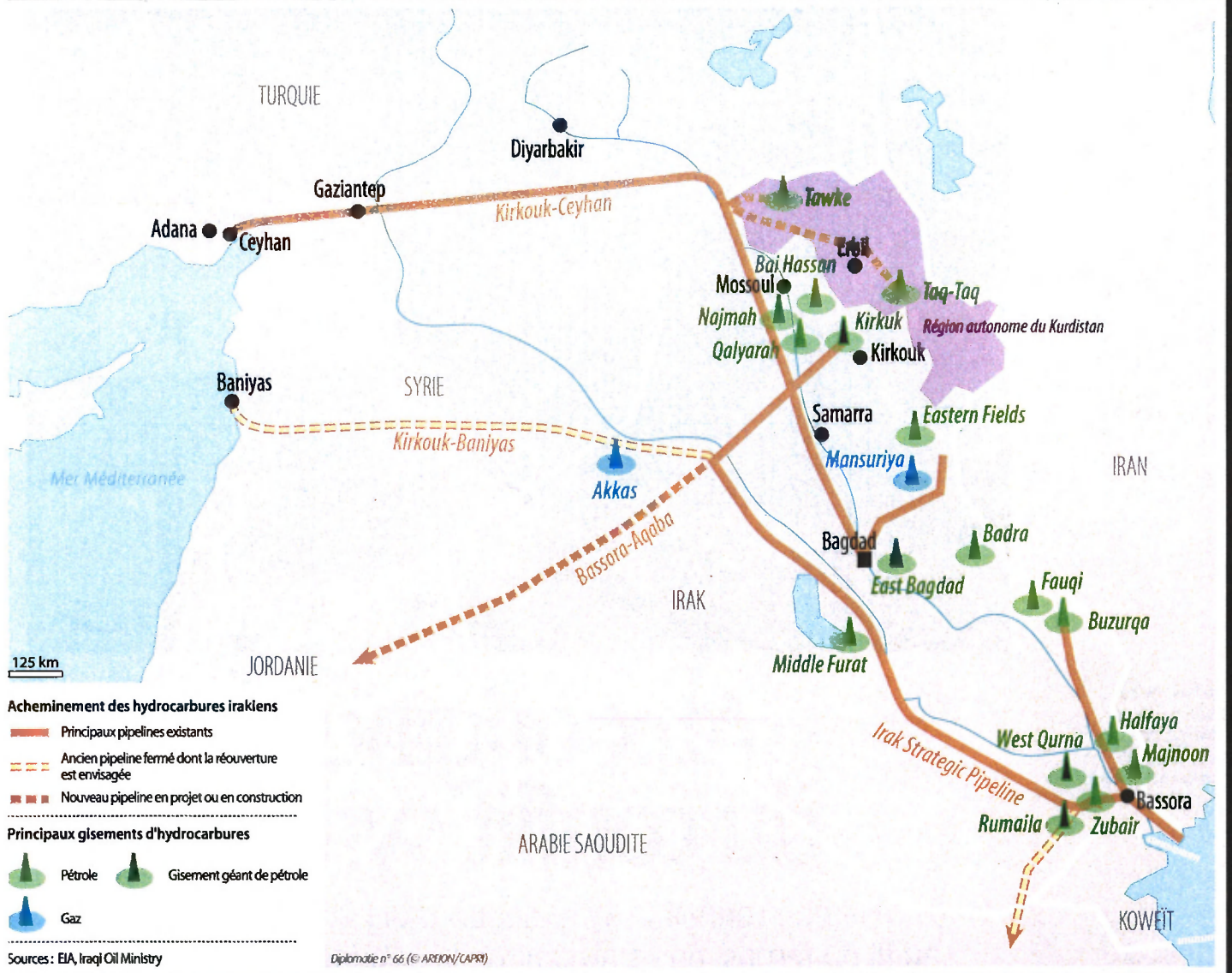


Notes

- (1) M. Benraad, « Fin de l'occupation et crise en Irak : la clef de voûte sunnite », in *Politique étrangère*, n° 1, printemps 2012 ; « Du phénomène arabe sunnite irakien : recompositions sociales, paradoxes identitaires et bouleversements géopolitiques sous occupation (2003-2008) », in *Hérodote*, n° 131, septembre 2008.
- (2) S. Wicken, « Iraq's Sunnis in Crisis », Middle East Security Report II, Institute for the Study of War (ISW), mai 2013.
- (3) M. Benraad, « Les méandres d'une transition : un an après la fin de l'occupation, faut-il craindre un retour de l'Irak à la dictature ? », *Actuelle de l'Irfi, Moyen-Orient*, janvier 2013.
- (4) M. Benraad, « Le pétrole : bénédiction ou malédiction des Irakiens ? », in *Moyen-Orient*, n° 18, avril-juin 2013.
- (5) M. Benraad, « Irak : les oripeaux de la dictature », in *Revue internationale et stratégique* (IRIS), n° 88, hiver 2012.
- (6) M. Benraad, « L'impossible réconciliation nationale irakienne ? » in *Revue internationale et stratégique* (IRIS), n° 81, avril 2011.
- (7) A. Lund, « The Non-State Militant Landscape in Syria », in *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 6, n° 8, août 2013.
- (8) P. Smyth, « From Karbala to Sayyida Zaynab: Iraqi Fighters in Syria's Shi'a Militias », in *CTC Sentinel*, vol. 6, n° 8, août 2013.



Points chauds



Le Kurdistan irakien revendique le droit d'exporter son pétrole via la Turquie

La construction d'un oleoduc devant relier le Kurdistan irakien à la Turquie est sur le point d'être achevée, selon la société pétrolière norvégienne DNO, l'une des premières entreprises étrangères à être présentes au Kurdistan irakien. Sa mise en service devrait permettre à la région autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak d'accroître ses exportations pétrolières vers les marchés

internationaux, malgré l'opposition du gouvernement fédéral irakien, qui qualifie ces exportations d'illégales et revendique un droit exclusif sur la gestion du pétrole irakien. Les Kurdes, pour leur part, réclament la pleine souveraineté sur l'exploitation de ces ressources. Jusqu'à présent, le brut du Kurdistan était exporté via un pipeline contrôlé par Bagdad.



Points chauds



Aux origines du conflit syrien

La crise que connaît la Syrie depuis mars 2011 s'est révélée, au fil du temps, un catalyseur de la géopolitique régionale, en même temps qu'une sorte d'illustration en négatif des espoirs nés dans la foulée des « printemps arabes ».

Par **Frédéric Pichon**, professeur en classes préparatoires, chercheur associé à l'Université François Rabelais (Tours).

Photo ci-dessus :

Jusqu'ici contrôlée par l'Armée syrienne libre, la ville de Hadjira, située dix kilomètres au sud de Damas, a été reprise par les forces de Bachar el-Assad le 13 novembre 2013. Symbole de cette reconquête, le drapeau national syrien, dont les couleurs diffèrent de celles brandies par la Coalition nationale syrienne (deux étoiles vertes au lieu de trois rouges, une bande rouge à la place de la bande supérieure verte) a été peint à l'entrée de la ville. (© Xinhua/Bassem Tellawi)

A lors que le conflit va entrer dans sa troisième année, un bref regard historique et géographique permet d'en éclairer les enjeux et d'expliquer pourquoi, en Syrie, la situation reste bloquée.

L'*assabiya* alaouite

C'est en reprenant le célèbre concept d'*assabiya* de l'historien maghrébin Ibn Khaldoun (1332-1406) que l'on peut comprendre la force du lien communautaire qui unit la communauté alaouite de Syrie autour du pouvoir syrien. Selon l'anthropologie, une *assabiya* est un « groupe de solidarité » à effet politique ou économique. Cette solidarité peut reposer sur l'ethnie, le territoire, la religion, ou simplement le but à atteindre. Cette donnée fondamentale, alliant cohésion et conscience du groupe, semble

avoir échappé aux analystes comptant sur une chute rapide du régime dès les débuts de la contestation. Elle fut pourtant le carburant de la conquête, puis du maintien au pouvoir de la famille Assad et de ses « clients », en grande partie alaouites (1). En effet, le régime actuel est l'héritier de la prise de pouvoir opérée en novembre 1970 par le général Hafez el-Assad, après vingt-cinq ans d'une vie politique chaotique post-indépendance, dans une Syrie héritée du découpage colonial. Avec le petit Liban voisin, la Syrie est l'un des pays arabes les moins homogènes du point de vue communautaire. Coexistent, avec une majorité d'Arabes sunnites, des communautés aussi diverses que les alaouites, les chrétiens et des ethnies comme les Kurdes et les Arméniens.

Né en terre alaouite près de Lattaquié en 1930, Hafez el-Assad

adhère très jeune au parti Baas. Élève à l'école militaire de Homs, il en sort en 1955 avec le grade de lieutenant et un brevet de pilote de chasse. À partir de la prise du pouvoir par le parti Baas en 1963, il entame une habile et patiente carrière politique. Nommé général et commandant des forces aériennes en 1965, il devient ministre de la Défense l'année suivante. Dès lors, Hafez utilise la « tactique de l'artichaut » : utiliser les deux postes-clés que sont le commandement de l'Aviation et le ministère de la Défense pour organiser la conquête méthodique de l'armée, avant celle de l'État. Au même moment, le propre frère d'Hafez, Rifaat el-Assad, se voit confier le soin de mettre sur pied des « brigades spéciales », dont les membres, recrutés dans son village natal d'Al-Kardaha en pays alaouite, vont constituer une véritable armée privée qui jouera un rôle essentiel dans le coup d'État de novembre 1970, mené sans effusion de sang et pudiquement baptisé : « mouvement de rectification ».

À partir de cette date, le recrutement des cadres et des responsables du régime se fait massivement au sein de cette communauté. L'enjeu est clientéliste, mais devient aussi une question de survie : le soulèvement des Frères musulmans de Hama en 1982 et sa répression sans état d'âme ont montré aux Alaouites en général et aux « minoritaires » en particulier combien leur sort était lié à la survie du régime (2). Pourtant, le régime a su s'attirer les faveurs d'une partie de la bourgeoisie commerçante sunnite en l'incluant dans une politique économique menée à coup de virages « bourgeois », c'est-à-dire moins socialisants que ne l'aurait voulu l'aile gauche du Baas. Le mariage de l'actuel président Bachar avec Asma Akhras, issue d'une grande

l'armée depuis les débuts du soulèvement furent assez limitées, d'une part parce que le corps des officiers est majoritairement alaouite, mais aussi parce que les unités moins « homogènes » (rappelons qu'une grande majorité des soldats et conscrits syriens sont sunnites) furent stationnées dans leurs casernes quand elles n'étaient pas reconnues comme « sûres ».

La mondialisation et ses impacts spatiaux sur la Syrie | Le deuxième facteur explicatif concerne la timide insertion dans la mondialisation, pour partie voulue, mais aussi subie par la Syrie. Contrairement à une présentation simpliste et « euro-péanocentrée » du conflit, la révolte démarrée en mars 2011 n'a rien de spontané, ni d'uniquement « politique ». En tout cas, toute vision téléologique sur l'inéluctabilité de la révolution syrienne comme produit historique de l'évolution des sociétés arabes bute sur plusieurs écueils. Certes, on ne peut pas nier que les bouleversements intervenus en Tunisie puis en Égypte ont eu une influence sur le processus. Mais les aspirations révolutionnaires syriennes ne furent pas comparables à celles des classes moyennes urbaines occidentalisées de Tunis ou du Caire, ni le fait d'une « révolution 2.0 » (4) qui fit fantasmer tant d'analystes et fit véritablement débiter la contestation. Ce qui est remarquable en Syrie, c'est que le mouvement n'a pas touché les grandes villes de Damas ou Alep, mais est né en périphérie, dans les espaces ruraux ou dans les quartiers urbains « ruralisés » des banlieues. Pauvreté et islamisation de la société syrienne ont été les détonateurs de la crise. Pour preuve, dès février 2011, le régime devance les événements en prenant des mesures économiques en direction de

“ La révolte démarrée en mars 2011 n'a rien de spontané, ni d'uniquement « politique ». (...) Pauvreté et islamisation de la société syrienne ont été les détonateurs de la crise. ”

famille sunnite, montre le besoin qu'a eu le régime d'élargir la base de son soutien, même si les services de sécurité, l'État-major et les meilleures unités de l'armée, comme la 4^e division, dirigée par le frère de Bachar, Maher, sont presque essentiellement composés d'alaouites. Enfin, le régime a su se poser en défenseur des autres minorités, chrétiennes notamment, à l'exception des Kurdes syriens, longtemps ignorés et très étroitement surveillés dans leurs revendications d'autonomie. Le développement d'un discours nationaliste arabe, évacuant quasiment le passé islamique de la Syrie et privilégiant la longue durée dans l'histoire syrienne, devint un classique de la propagande officielle en même temps que le développement d'une « laïcité » assez poussée (3). En 1973, le premier projet de Constitution omettait même de préciser la confession du président : à la suite de violentes émeutes, il fut amendé et désormais l'obligation fut faite au chef suprême d'être musulman. Dès lors, contrairement aux attentes, les défections dans



Photo ci-contre :
Le 2 février 2012 à Amman (Jordanie), des réfugiés syriens célèbrent le trentième anniversaire du massacre de Hama. En février 1982, les forces armées syriennes ont violemment réprimé une insurrection des Frères musulmans contre le parti Baas dans la ville de Hama, 40 kilomètres au nord de Homs. En quatre semaines, le siège et le bombardement de la ville auraient fait entre 10 000 et 40 000 morts selon différentes sources. (© AFP/Khalil Mazraawi)



Points chauds

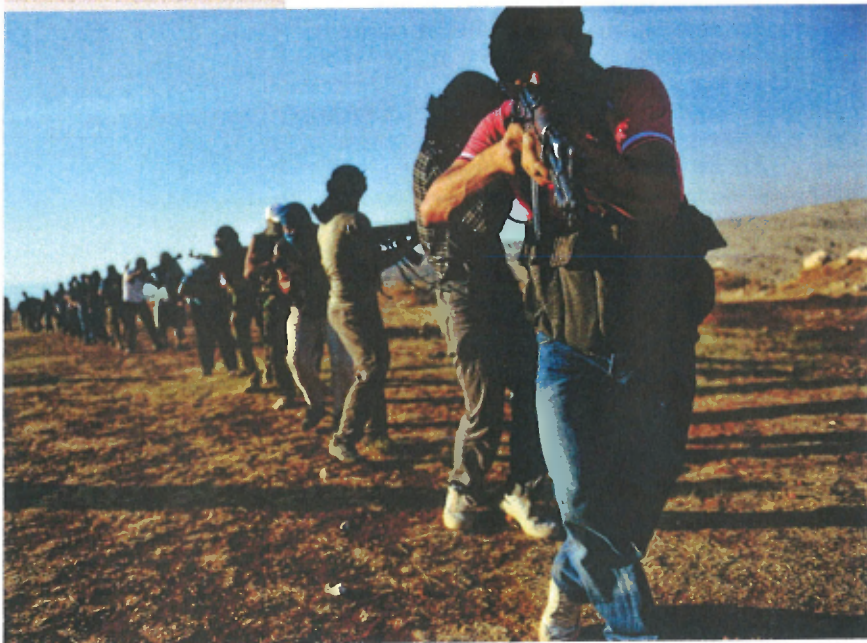
Photo ci-dessous :

Le 19 juillet 2012, de nouvelles recrues du groupe djihadiste Hamza Abd Al-Muttalib s'exercent à l'arme automatique près d'Alep. Le nombre de combattants étrangers ayant rejoint des formations djihadistes actives en Syrie aurait fortement augmenté ces derniers mois, une évolution qui ne serait pas sans lien avec l'attaque au gaz sarin menée par les forces gouvernementales le 21 août 2013 dans la banlieue sud de Damas. La plupart de ces nouveaux moudjahiddines viendraient du Caucase, d'Europe de l'Ouest et d'Australie. (© AFP/Bulent Kille)

ces catégories : un fonds de 250 millions de dollars est affecté à des prestations financières pour près de 400 000 personnes et l'État diminue (parfois drastiquement) les taxes sur les produits alimentaires essentiels. Car ce sont avant tout les laissés-pour-compte de l'ouverture économique qui fournissent les gros bataillons de la rébellion, touchés de plein fouet par les effets classiques de la mondialisation, au premier rang desquels le creusement des inégalités et le retrait de l'État (ici partiel) de la sphère économique. En effet, l'ouverture timide, à partir des années quatre-vingt-dix, à l'économie de marché sous Hafez, puis la politique d'insertion partielle dans la mondialisation sous Bachar, ont permis aux classes urbaines de profiter des avantages d'une mondialisation qui fit exploser les échanges, affluer les touristes (les ambitions du régime dans ce domaine étaient grandes), mais qui eut son lot de corruption, de destruction d'emplois au profit des productions manufacturières venues d'Asie et de désengagement de l'État, notamment auprès des populations rurales encadrées par un système de coopératives subventionnées. Comme le rappelle Fabrice Balanche, « ce nouveau contexte économique remet en cause l'organisa-

tion socio-spatiale héritée de la période baasiste, qui se voulait plus égalitaire en favorisant les périphéries, dont le nouveau personnel politique était issu » (5). La géographie de la révolte syrienne est à cet égard sans appel : au-delà des considérations politiques et même confessionnelles, ce sont majoritairement les espaces périurbains et les bourgs ruraux qui se sont soulevés et qui fournissent encore les gros bataillons des rebelles. Encore fallait-il un catalyseur à ces frustrations observées déjà depuis quelques années et dont le régime n'a semble-t-il pas eu conscience. Et c'est une fois de plus la mondialisation, et notamment celle de l'information, qui a joué ce rôle. Depuis près d'une décennie, le régime a commis l'erreur de sous-traiter en quelque sorte la question sociale, par le biais d'organisations proches de certains pays du Golfe, à condition que celles-ci ne se mêlent pas de politique. Comme les investissements affluaient massivement depuis ces mêmes pays (Arabie saoudite,

Qatar), le régime fermait les yeux, puisqu'ils lui fournissaient les IDE (investissements directs étrangers) nécessaires à ses projets de développement. Le développement des médias satellitaires arabes, et notamment d'Al-Jazeera, est venu se greffer sur la profonde désaffection qu'éprouvaient les Syriens pour les médias nationaux, où la propagande le disputait aux programmations ternes, à tonalité le plus souvent historique. Le Qatar, depuis l'accession au pouvoir de l'émir Al-Thani en 1995, s'est en effet distingué par un choix géopolitique radical, ambigu, mais assumé : accueillir et servir de base arrière à tous les mouvements d'opposition aux régimes arabes, pour peu qu'ils soient liés aux Frères musulmans. La chaîne Al-Jazeera leur a donné une formidable tribune et prolongé en quelque sorte le *soft power* qatari. Avec ces chaînes satellitaires, une sorte de contre-société a pu se former, notamment en Syrie, par le biais des sociabilités traditionnelles. Échappant à la vigilance du pouvoir, qui avait pourtant fait du contrôle de l'information le cœur de son système de répression, la question confessionnelle, en l'occurrence ici à dominante islamiste, fonctionnant comme une sorte d'échappatoire aux difficultés de l'heure, a joué à



“ C'est à de véritables « Brigades internationales » qu'il faut comparer les milliers de djihadistes venus du monde sunnite et même d'Europe ou d'Australie. ”

plein lors du déclenchement de la révolte. Les prêches enflammés de personnalités religieuses saoudiennes ou qataries dans l'accompagnement des révoltes du monde arabe (6), les *fatwas* appelant à destituer tel ou tel dirigeant ont eu, par-delà les frontières, un impact fondamental sur la crise syrienne. Pour la première fois furent réunies les conditions d'une véritable mondialisation de l'information arabe, par le biais du rôle clef qu'a notamment joué la chaîne satellitaire qatarie Al-Jazeera : le lendemain de la chute du régime de Moubarak, c'est l'une des stars de la chaîne, le prédicateur égyptien en exil au Qatar Youssouf Al-Qaradawi, qui dirigea la prière depuis la place Tahrir le 18 février 2011. Preuve que la dimension confessionnelle fait aussi partie de l'équation, en avril 2011, moins d'un mois après le déclenchement de la révolte, le gouvernement décidait de revenir sur sa décision de juillet 2010 d'exclure de l'enseignement public toutes les institutrices portant le *niqab*. Mais il était trop tard.

La mondialisation trouve enfin un troisième champ d'application dans le conflit syrien. Très rapidement, l'Internet et la porosité des frontières, notamment au Nord avec la Turquie, ont propagé l'idéologie djihadiste de façon exponentielle par rapport aux précédents afghan et irakien. Ce *djihad*, d'abord virtuel, vécu à travers les vidéos postées sur les réseaux sociaux tels que YouTube, est devenu une partie même de la bataille que se livrent loyalistes et rebelles sur le Net. La mobilisation des diasporas, l'appel à une « internationale sunnite » grâce à une présentation très clairement confessionnelle (chiites vs sunnites) du conflit, ont pu rencontrer un écho favorable, y

compris jusqu'au Caucase russe. Si certains ont pu faire le rapprochement entre le conflit syrien et la guerre d'Espagne, où l'impuissance de la France et de la Grande-Bretagne pouvait rappeler le non-engagement des mêmes en 1936, ils n'imaginaient sans doute pas que la comparaison ne s'arrêtait pas là. En effet, de façon très nette, c'est à de véritables « Brigades internationales » qu'il faut comparer les milliers de djihadistes venus du monde sunnite et même d'Europe ou d'Australie. Et les règlements de compte sanglants entre différentes factions islamistes dont les parrains sont rivaux rappellent l'extermination des anarchistes du POUM (le Parti ouvrier d'unification marxiste) par les stalinien en 1937.

Un printemps qui n'en finit plus

La crise syrienne, que certains espéraient brève et conforme à ce qui s'était déroulé plus tôt en Afrique du Nord, s'est installée dans la durée du fait de logiques exogènes au conflit, et en particulier du fait de la neutralisation de la diplomatie occidentale par la diplomatie russe. Le conflit syrien a été l'occasion pour la Russie de revenir de façon spectaculaire dans le jeu diplomatique mondial. L'accord obtenu en septembre 2013 sur l'arsenal chimique syrien en constitue l'exemple magistral. Les Occidentaux ont fini par accepter le plan de sortie de crise proposé par Poutine le 9 septembre, plan qui consiste, sous supervision de l'ONU, à sécuriser l'arsenal chimique de Damas. Pour Moscou, il était en effet capital de faire revenir les Américains et les Occidentaux sur le terrain du droit international, la diplomatie russe montrant ainsi un attachement viscéral à la légalité dans les relations entre grandes nations qui n'est pas sans rappeler la diplomatie tatillonne dont faisaient montre les Soviétiques sur la question des traités et des frontières durant la guerre froide. Pour les Russes, plus l'Occident s'indigne et invoque la morale, plus il a tendance à s'affranchir du droit international. Pourquoi ce retour en force? Les années quatre-vingt-dix ont été vécues par la diplomatie russe comme une « décennie noire », correspondant à un incontestable déclassé des positions du pays face à une Amérique « hyperpuissante ». L'intervention de l'OTAN en 1999 en Serbie et l'imposition d'un Kosovo souverain et indépendant ont été perçues comme une humiliation sans précédent à Moscou.

Certes, le maintien de la base navale de Tartous (ville sur la côte ouest de la Syrie), seule fenêtre maritime méditerranéenne de la marine russe, constitue un enjeu important, sans être toutefois essentiel. Depuis 1970, l'URSS puis la Russie loue cette base située sur le littoral syrien, ce qui lui assure une présence en Méditerranée. Mais la question des routes des hydrocarbures constitue aussi sans doute l'une des raisons particulières de l'attention portée par la Russie au dossier syrien : le territoire syrien est le carrefour essentiel par lequel pourraient transiter de nouvelles routes venues du golfe Persique en direction de l'Europe. Derrière ces projets se profile une marginalisation programmée du gaz russe au profit du gaz qatari, à destination d'un des premiers foyers de consommation mondiale, l'Union européenne.

Mais à vrai dire, les Russes se battent en Syrie pour des questions de principe. Et à cet égard, la rigidité de la position russe est directement le résultat du précédent libyen de 2011. Les Russes (suivis par les Chinois) avaient négocié et finalement décidé de s'abstenir « pour des raisons de principe » sur la résolution 1973 du 17 mars 2011 instaurant une zone d'exclusion

aérienne en Libye, pour autant qu'elle ne préjugeait pas d'un changement de régime par la force. Or, la responsabilité directe de l'intervention de l'OTAN dans la capture puis l'exécution de Mouammar Kadhafi a été perçue comme une violation de ladite résolution. C'est dans ces dispositions que la Russie abordera durant l'année 2011 les discussions au Conseil de Sécurité touchant le dossier syrien : trois veto et des refus répétés d'accepter toute résolution sous chapitre VII concernant la Syrie. L'objectif principal de la diplomatie russe est donc de s'en tenir au respect de la souveraineté de la Syrie et au maintien du principe de non-ingérence dans les affaires intérieures des États. La question du « *regime change* » est donc le cheval de bataille de Moscou dans le conflit syrien. À cet égard, les Russes ont su habilement faire venir les États-Unis sur le terrain du droit international, en proposant Genève 1 et Genève 2, et tout récemment par l'accord sur l'arsenal chimique, le tout sous supervision de l'ONU.

Dans la droite ligne de ce que l'on a baptisé le « consensus de Pékin », la position russe dans les relations internationales se veut « réaliste », une sorte d'actualisation wébérienne (7) de l'éthique de responsabilité que Moscou oppose à une éthique de conviction que constitueraient les invocations humanitaires, les indignations (jugées sélectives) et la « morale » des Occidentaux (8). Pour Moscou, une intervention extérieure et un renversement brutal du régime viendraient encore ajouter au chaos ambiant. La Russie ne cesse de souligner qui sont les « parrains » arabes des révolutionnaires syriens, bien peu enclins à faire respecter chez eux les valeurs que prône l'Occident (9). La présentation du conflit par certains médias occidentaux et arabes est perçue comme dominante, et les Russes soulignent combien ces derniers se sont fait les auxiliaires de l'option d'une intervention armée en Syrie auprès des opinions publiques, y compris en manipulant l'information, en maniant l'émotion et en privilégiant systématiquement les sources de l'opposition.



Pour aller plus loin

Frédéric Pichon, *La tragédie syrienne : pourquoi l'Occident s'est trompé*, Monaco, éditions du Rocher (à paraître).

Photo ci-contre :

Malik Hazhar Ellahi, conseiller politique auprès du directeur général de l'Organisation pour l'interdiction des armes chimiques (OIAC), lors d'une conférence de presse à La Haye le 9 octobre 2013. Encadrée par l'accord russo-américain du 26 septembre 2013, la destruction de l'arsenal chimique syrien devrait débuter en janvier prochain. Près de 1300 tonnes d'agents et armes chimiques auraient jusqu'ici été placées sous scellés. (© Xinhua/Pan Zhi)



Photo ci-dessus : Discussion entre Wendy Sherman, sous-secrétaire d'État des États-Unis aux Affaires politiques (à droite), et Gennady Gatilov et Mikhaïl Bogdanov, ministres adjoints des Affaires étrangères russes (deuxième et troisième en partant de la gauche), le 5 juin 2013 à Genève. Trois semaines plus tard, le Groupe d'action sur la Syrie, réunissant les membres permanents du Conseil de Sécurité, la Turquie, le Koweït et le Qatar, s'est accordé sur les principes d'une transition politique devant être menée par les Syriens. « L'organe de gouvernement transitoire exercera les pouvoirs exécutifs ; il pourra inclure des membres du gouvernement actuel et de l'opposition et d'autres groupes et devra être formé sur la base d'un consentement mutuel », a souligné l'émissaire international Kofi Annan après la conclusion de l'accord. (© UN/Violaine Martin)

C'est à l'aune de ces principes que doit se comprendre la réaction russe à la reconnaissance unilatérale par la France de la Coalition nationale formée à Doha le 11 novembre 2012, qualifiée par Dmitri Medvedev, d'« inacceptable ». L'objectif de cet embryon de « gouvernement provisoire » incluait un départ d'Assad et écartait la possibilité d'une négociation avec le régime (10). Pire pour les Russes, la charte prévoit le démantèlement des structures politico-militaires, ce qui ne manquera pas de rééditer le scénario irakien après l'invasion américaine de 2003.

Plus fondamentalement, les Russes, qui tiennent à un règlement politique de la crise en Syrie, voient dans la militarisation du conflit et l'ascendant que prennent les groupes armés d'inspiration djihadiste dans l'offensive contre les forces gouvernementales, un danger sur le long terme, y compris pour l'Occident lui-même... La Tchétchénie constitue par ailleurs une des grilles d'analyse de Moscou sur le conflit syrien. La séquence des guerres de Tchétchénie continue d'être lue comme un conflit importé de l'extérieur par l'envoi de combattants djihadistes, à quoi Moscou a opposé, certes, la force, mais aussi un règlement politique, en prenant appui sur les confréries soufies domestiques (11). Moscou ne manque jamais l'occasion de rappeler à ses partenaires que la fourniture d'armes sophistiquées comme des missiles sol-air ne ferait qu'ajouter au chaos. La Russie ne peut se permettre de couvrir une stratégie dont elle voit très bien comment elle pourrait en devenir, par contagion, la victime sur son propre espace, elle qui compte près de 22 millions de musulmans dont elle craint la radicalisation, en particulier dans le Caucase.

À l'inverse, le repli (tactique ?) des États-Unis a été manifeste. Faut-il pour autant parler d'un « déclin » de la superpuissance mondiale ? La stratégie prônée est davantage celle d'une puissance « intelligente » attentive au partenariat et à la réévaluation de certains enjeux clés comme la coopération, le dialogue et le développement. Le concept de « *smart power* », énoncé par Suzanne Nossel en 2004 (12) et repris par Hillary Clinton

en 2009, marque l'infléchissement manifeste de la diplomatie de Washington, en particulier depuis 2012 et le second mandat de Barack Obama. Cette nouvelle définition de la puissance américaine est avant tout une façon de faire de nécessité vertu : la puissance ne peut s'imposer que par son adéquation au contexte (13). Or, quel est le contexte ? Un effacement de l'« Occident » dans un concert mondial de plus en plus multipolaire. C'est aussi l'affaiblissement de la puissance militaire par le développement des stratégies de *déni d'accès*, dont le poids a été sous-estimé dans le cas syrien : la projection de forces se heurte à des systèmes d'armes antiaériens notamment capables d'infliger suffisamment de pertes pour que le conflit ne soit pas « vendable » aux opinions publiques. C'est enfin l'idée de modalités d'intervention plus légères (« *light footprint* »), où l'Amérique cesserait d'être exposée comme elle le fut durant la décennie 2000 en Irak et en Afghanistan.

Ainsi, le conflit syrien met en lumière une profonde modification de l'architecture mondiale, entamée depuis quelques années. À cet égard, il constituera sans aucun doute un cas d'école et une illustration du grand retour de la Russie dans le jeu mondial.

Frédéric Pichon

Notes

* Équipe Monde Arabe Méditerranée, UMR 6173 CITERES. Dernière publication (en collaboration) : *Géopolitique du Moyen-Orient et de l'Afrique du Nord*, PUF, 2012.

(1) Voir à ce sujet Fabrice Balanche, « Les Alaouites : une secte au pouvoir », *Outre-Terre*, n° 14, mars 2006 et plus généralement du même, *La région alaouite et le pouvoir syrien*, Paris, Karthala, 2006.

(2) Rappelons que le siège de Hama en 1982 fut engagé suite à une série d'attentats et de tueries visant des Alaouites depuis 1975 et en particulier en juin 1979, quand 83 cadres alaouites furent exécutés à l'Académie militaire d'Alep. À Alep, entre 1979 et 1981, 300 fonctionnaires, militaires, universitaires ou religieux alaouites seront abattus par des groupes armés, perpétrant les tout premiers attentats à la voiture piégée de la région.

(3) Voir Stéphane Valter, *La construction nationale syrienne : légitimation de la nature communautaire du pouvoir par le discours historique*, Paris, CNRS éditions, 2002.

(4) En référence aux réseaux sociaux (Facebook, Twitter...).

(5) Fabrice Balanche, *op. cit.*

(6) Le prédicateur Youssouf Al-Qaradawi émet ainsi le 21 février 2011 une *fatwa* appelant à tuer Mouammar Kadhafi.

(7) Max Weber, *Le Savant et le Politique*, Paris, Plon, 1959 pour l'édition française.

(8) Rappelons qu'en février 2012, Alain Juppé avait parlé de « tâche morale » pour qualifier la position russe sur le dossier syrien.

(9) Le rapport du Club international de discussion Valdai pointe ainsi p. 53 (en anglais), l'empressement avec lequel les Saoudiens et les Émiratis ont étouffé dans l'œuf le soulèvement des chiites Bahreïn et leur diligence à soutenir l'opposition sunnite à Bachar el-Assad.

(10) La charte de la coalition comporte dix points parmi lesquels : « 2° Les parties signataires ont pour objectif commun de renverser le régime, ses bases et ses symboles, démanteler les appareils sécuritaires et déferer en justice ceux qui ont été impliqués dans les crimes commis contre les Syriens. 3° La Coalition s'engage à n'engager ni dialogue, ni négociation avec le régime. »

(11) Voir, sur le sujet des infiltrations djihadistes en Tchétchénie et la pratique des attentats-suicides, l'article de Pénélope Larzillière, « Tchétchénie : le *jihad* reterritorialisé », *Critique internationale*, 2003/3 n° 20, pp. 158 et suiv.

(12) « *Smart power* », *Foreign Affairs*, mars-avril 2004.

(13) Voir Bertrand Badie, Dominique Vidal (dir.), *Puissances d'hier et de demain : l'état du monde 2014*, Paris, La Découverte, septembre 2013.

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GÉOPOLITIQUE



La Syrie d'Al-Assad : *de la résistance du régime*

Depuis le printemps 2011, la Syrie est ravagée par un conflit civil dont la fin ne semble pas proche, malgré l'accord sur la destruction des armes chimiques du régime obtenu en septembre 2013. L'opposition demeure fragmentée politiquement et militairement, et le pouvoir mène une guerre défensive. Si la fourniture d'armes aux belligérants par leurs alliés respectifs (1) contribue à la poursuite des combats, elle ne constitue pas un facteur tendant à modifier le rapport de force qui les oppose. Et le régime de Bachar al-Assad continue de fonctionner.

Régime et opposition en Syrie se livrent une guerre d'usure qui apparaît comme moins défavorable au pouvoir en place, car il bénéficie de l'infrastructure étatique pour la mener dans la durée. Bien que l'appareil politique, militaire et administratif de l'État baasiste ait particulièrement été affaibli, notamment au niveau des provinces (2), il tient le choc. Cette résilience du régime ne laisse pas d'étonner tant elle défie les prévisions des chancelleries occidentales et des analystes politiques du monde

arabe. Comment expliquer que le président Al-Assad et l'élite politico-militaire baasiste se maintiennent au pouvoir ? Quelle perspective en tirer concernant la guerre civile ?

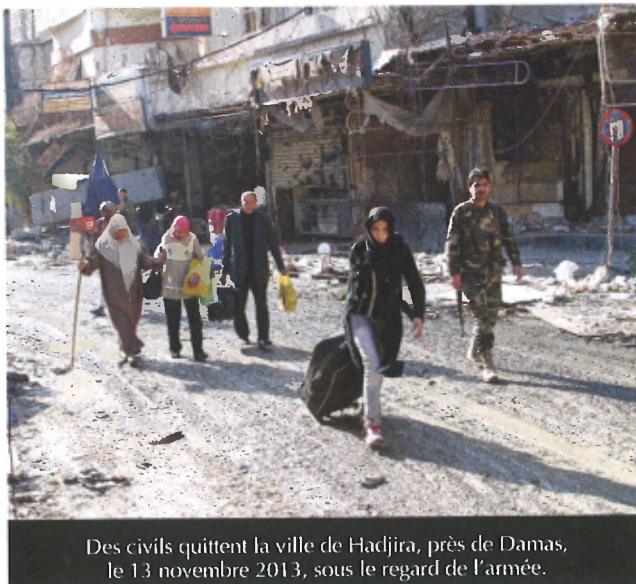
Le régime est officiellement institué en mars 1973, lorsque la Constitution donne au Baas la fonction de parti hégémonique, moins de trois ans après le coup d'État de novembre 1970 de Hafez al-Assad, père de Bachar (au pouvoir depuis 2000 (3)). Dès lors, une forme de gouvernement autoritaire s'impose et limite l'accès aux ressources politiques et économiques par

l'intermédiaire d'institutions telles que le Baas, les services de renseignement et l'armée. Ce gouvernement s'est progressivement établi en s'appuyant sur une élite militaro-politique, ainsi que sur des figures des milieux cléricale et marchand qui, en échange de leur soutien, ont le privilège d'occuper, pratiquement à vie, des postes à responsabilité. Les dirigeants politiques ou économiques que le régime ne parvient pas à coopter sont placés sous l'étroite surveillance des services de renseignement, voire réprimés s'ils remettent publiquement en cause le dogme de l'hégémonie du Baas.

C'est ainsi que la Syrie n'a pas connu d'alternance politique depuis plus de quarante ans et qu'aucun véritable parti d'opposition n'a pu se former et s'affirmer face au Baas. Cela peut expliquer que les différents groupes d'opposition à Bachar al-Assad et au régime peinent à se structurer et donc à représenter une force susceptible de renverser le gouvernement, mais ce n'est pas l'unique raison. La cohésion des membres les plus influents depuis le début des années 2000 de l'élite sécuritaire et politique permet au cœur du pouvoir de continuer de fonctionner.



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Des civils quittent la ville de Hadjira, près de Damas, le 13 novembre 2013, sous le regard de l'armée.

Un pilier militaire et sécuritaire qui résiste

D'après les informations qui émanent directement de l'état-major syrien et qui ont été recoupées, l'armée aurait subi environ 120 000 défections depuis le début de la guerre civile, en mars 2011, soit près de la moitié des troupes et du personnel. Ce chiffre est considérable, mais il doit être pondéré, car les unités d'élite de l'armée ainsi que les effectifs des membres actifs du renseignement n'ont été que peu touchés par ces défections. De plus, on ne compte qu'une seule figure importante de l'armée qui a rompu, en juillet 2012, avec le régime, le général Manaf Tlass, fils de l'ancien ministre de la Défense entre 1972 et 2004, Mustafa Tlass. En effet, les chefs militaires et sécuritaires les plus expérimentés et influents, tels que Mohammed Nassif Kheirbek (vice-président chargé des questions sécuritaires), Ali Mamlouk (chef du Conseil de la sûreté nationale), Mohammed Dib Zeitoun (chef de la Sûreté générale) ou Abd Fatah Qudsia (ancien chef des Renseignements militaires et chef adjoint du Conseil de la sûreté nationale), continuent de diriger les opérations contre l'opposition.

Par ailleurs, l'idée que le régime ne reposerait plus que sur sa composante sécuritaire alaouite est démentie par les faits. Par exemple, les sunnites Ali Mamlouk, Mohammed Dib Zeitoun et Rustom Ghazaleh, ancien responsable des Renseignements militaires dans le secteur de la périphérie de Damas et désormais chef de la Sécurité politique, occupent les avant-postes du dispositif de contre-insurrection mis en place par le pouvoir. De même, à un niveau de responsabilité intermédiaire (adjoints), l'équilibre entre officiers alaouites et sunnites n'est pas fondamentalement changé. Certes, la grande majorité des soldats et des gradés qui ont rejoint les rangs de l'opposition sont sunnites. Néanmoins, de nombreux officiers de cette confession musulmane continuent d'être fidèles au régime, même si c'est par défaut, soit parce que leur défection tardive peut être synonyme de représailles tant de la part des autorités que des groupes rebelles, soit parce que leurs proches ont été victimes d'actes de vengeance de ces mêmes mouvements armés (assassinats, mutilations, enlèvements).

De manière générale, la cohésion de l'élite sécuritaire syrienne est favorisée par le fonctionnement du pouvoir, lequel permet un partage communautaire (alaouites/sunnites) des postes de responsabilité et assure la prééminence des organes sécuritaires au sein de l'État : services de renseignement, forces prétorienne et état-major de l'armée. Le processus d'intégration des officiers à cette élite est long et graduel afin d'éprouver leur loyauté, mais une fois accompli, ils bénéficient d'un accès direct aux privilèges politiques et aux rentes.

Le partage communautaire des postes de responsabilité est principalement assuré par le jeu des nominations qui ont lieu à deux époques de l'année, en janvier et en juillet. Par décret présidentiel, Bachar al-Assad, mute et/ou promeut les membres des forces armées en fonction de plusieurs critères, parmi lesquels la loyauté, l'influence, la compétence, le soutien d'un ou de plusieurs hauts gradés, la région d'origine, la confession,



Entouré d'importants dignitaires politiques et religieux, Bachar al-Assad (au centre) prie dans la mosquée Hasibeh, à Damas, le 15 octobre 2013.

les liens familiaux (4). Ces nominations vont dans le sens d'un maintien d'un équilibre communautaire compliqué entre alaouites et sunnites, avec pour effet que les uns ne sont pas en mesure de supplanter les autres. Au sein des officines de renseignement, par exemple, les officiers sunnites, qui sont majoritaires et haut placés dans la hiérarchie, sont généralement flanqués de collègues alaouites qui revendiquent une certaine liberté d'action. Cette liberté peut être concédée en raison d'un lien de proximité avec Bachar al-Assad sans qu'il soit nécessairement familial. C'était le cas pour Mohammed Suleiman, l'un des plus proches conseillers sécuritaires du président, chargé du programme de construction d'un réacteur nucléaire syrien et du transfert d'armes au Hezbollah. Selon les enquêtes les plus récentes, il aurait été assassiné par les services secrets israéliens en août 2008 à Tartus (5).

Les quatre remaniements importants intervenus au cours de la décennie 2000 dans les équipes dirigeantes du Renseignement – 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010 – témoignent de cette recherche d'équilibre communautaire, synonyme de stabilité et de protection du cœur du régime. Depuis le déclenchement de la guerre civile, le président syrien n'a pas dérogé aux usages en la matière, y compris pour le remaniement de juillet 2012, où trois sunnites (Ali Mamlouk, Mohammed Dib Zeitoun et Rustom Ghazaleh) figurent parmi les quatre hauts responsables promus. Pourtant, ce remaniement a été décrété dans des circonstances particulières. En effet, le pouvoir avait été affaibli et déstabilisé par la mort

de quatre dirigeants lors d'un attentat survenu dans les locaux de la Sécurité nationale à Damas et revendiqué par l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) et le groupe armé Liwa al-Islam.

Les moukhabarat syriens, un État dans l'État

Le principe du partage communautaire de gouvernance, qui incite l'élite sécuritaire syrienne à la cohésion, est renforcé par un second principe donnant aux services spéciaux une autonomie et un pouvoir étendus de surveillance et de contrôle des activités politiques. Cette autonomie et ce pouvoir font de l'administration du Renseignement l'organisation la plus ramifiée et la plus socialement enracinée du régime syrien. Les services secrets sont en effet présents à tous les niveaux de l'État et dans toutes les institutions pour recueillir des informations : ministères, Parlement, gouvernement local, universités, grandes entreprises publiques, etc. La délimitation volontairement indistincte de la compétence des différents services les incline à opérer dans d'autres secteurs, tels que l'économie ou la justice ou encore au sein d'organisations de la société civile. Ils ne reçoivent pas de directives d'« orientation » du gouvernement et le Baas, s'il doit veiller à ce que les services se conforment bien à la politique de sécurité nationale, ne peut leur intimer d'ordres.

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Seul le président peut exercer un pouvoir d'injonction sur eux et s'affirmer ainsi comme la clé de voûte du système. De plus, leurs moyens et leur capacité d'action sont grands, particulièrement ceux de la Garde républicaine commandée par le frère du chef de l'État, Maher al-Assad. Enfin, l'état d'exception, en vigueur jusqu'en 2011, leur accordait le droit d'user d'un pouvoir étendu de coercition aussi bien que celui de bénéficier d'une certaine immunité dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions. Dans la situation de conflit civil, cette immunité est toujours de mise.

C'est grâce à cette autonomie et à ce pouvoir de surveillance et de contrôle que les responsables du Renseignement détiennent une prééminence au sein de l'État et influencent la vie politique. L'irruption de la crise en mars 2011 a confirmé et mis davantage en relief cette domination de l'élite sécuritaire au sein du régime. Ce processus s'est opéré au détriment des dirigeants civils du Baas qui, dans un laps de temps court, ont été marginalisés, puis supplantés par les chefs de l'armée et du Renseignement à l'intérieur des organes de décision : Commandement régional du parti, Comité central, présidence de la République. C'est ainsi que la répression à l'encontre de la population s'est imposée comme la solution au problème de la contestation du pouvoir.

La mise à l'écart des dirigeants civils de la gestion directe du conflit et de la direction du pays depuis trois ans s'explique également par le fait qu'ils se sont montrés incapables de soutenir le régime en mobilisant les masses populaires à travers l'appareil du Baas. Sachant que les structures de ce dernier se sont considérablement affaiblies, surtout au niveau local, un regain d'influence des « civils » au sein du régime paraît peu probable. Pour autant, leur défection n'est pas à prévoir parce que l'opposition les considère comme des suppôts du pouvoir en place et parce qu'eux-mêmes tablent sur la survie du régime grâce à l'appui politique et militaire que lui apportent la Russie, l'Iran et le Hezbollah.

La Russie, l'Iran, le Hezbollah, des alliés indéfectibles ?

Fin 2013, dans les cercles du pouvoir en Syrie, il se dit que le véritable ministre des Affaires étrangères syrien est le Russe Sergueï Lavrov et non plus Walid Mouallem, en poste depuis 2006. Le soutien diplomatique, militaire et financier – il n'existe pas de données chiffrées fiables – qu'apporte Moscou au régime lui permet d'exercer sur ce dernier une certaine influence. Pour preuve, la Russie a été l'instigatrice du plan de destruction de l'arsenal chimique syrien qui a fait l'objet d'une résolution onusienne (2118). Son action dépasse le noyau des responsables sécuritaires syriens. Les hauts fonctionnaires gouvernementaux et les caciques du Baas sont très attentifs aux signaux politiques envoyés par les Russes. La confiance que ces cadres administratifs et politiques conservent au régime tient pour une bonne part au soutien sans faille que lui apporte Moscou.

L'Iran n'est pas en reste et s'implique en faveur du régime syrien depuis le début du conflit en fournissant une aide financière et militaire ; il n'existe pas de données chiffrées fiables. Des experts militaires de la République islamique donnent, par exemple, des conseils à leurs homologues syriens en matière de tactique à adopter face à l'opposition armée, et leur font profiter des capacités iraniennes en matière de guerre électronique. Les Iraniens ont donc mis leur maîtrise technologique au service de leur allié. De plus, ils fournissent au régime syrien des troupes paramilitaires composées de soldats chiites, chargés de protéger les lieux saints chiites en Syrie – telle la mosquée Sayyida Zeinab, près de Damas – et les localités où une communauté chiite est présente, comme Lattaquié et Idlib.

Quant au Hezbollah (6), il s'accorde avec le régime au moyen de procédures rodées depuis plus d'une décennie et participe aux combats contre les groupes armés de l'opposition dans plusieurs localités. Il coordonne en outre ses actions politiques avec les dirigeants iraniens et russes. Trois semaines après son entretien avec le vice-ministre russe des Affaires étrangères, Mikhaïl Bogdanov, Hassan Nasrallah, leader du mouvement, a annoncé publiquement, le 25 mai 2013, l'implication du Hezbollah dans la « bataille d'Al-Qusayr », au sud-ouest de Homs, entre avril et juin. Le fait que cette rencontre ait eu lieu laisse penser que l'intervention du Parti de Dieu en Syrie s'est effectuée avec l'accord de Moscou. Le soutien des dirigeants



La délégation de l'Organisation pour l'interdiction des armes chimiques à son arrivée en Syrie en octobre 2013.

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russes, iraniens et du Hezbollah au régime Al-Assad ainsi que la concertation permanente entre eux pour rendre cet appui efficace assurent matériellement le pouvoir en place et renforcent la confiance de l'élite politico-sécuritaire et administrative syrienne envers lui. Par conséquent, il participe doublement à sa survie, qui constitue pour ses alliés un gage du respect des accords bilatéraux (Russie, Iran) et apporte une garantie à la sauvegarde de leurs intérêts stratégiques dans la région. Le maintien de Bachar al-Assad au pouvoir est également un moyen pour les Russes, les Iraniens et les dirigeants du Hezbollah d'accéder à une position plus favorable dans les luttes d'influence qui les opposent aux chancelleries occidentales, notamment les États-Unis, au Moyen-Orient.



Les ministres syrien (à gauche) et russe des Affaires étrangères à Moscou, le 9 septembre 2013.

Le conflit en Syrie, symbole d'une nouvelle guerre froide

La guerre civile perdure parce que le régime baasiste résiste aux coups portés par l'opposition politique et armée et à la pression diplomatique internationale. Cette capacité de résistance dépasse largement les prévisions faites par les chancelleries occidentales et les analystes, et laisse penser que la fin des hostilités n'est pas proche.

La résilience du régime syrien peut s'expliquer par les effets conjugués de la cohésion de l'élite sécuritaire et du soutien actif et coordonné de la Russie, de l'Iran et du Hezbollah libanais. La cohésion de cette élite est favorisée par le partage communautaire du pouvoir et par la prééminence politique octroyée à ses membres (accès aux privilèges et aux rentes). Elle rend le « complexe sécuritaire syrien » (services de renseignement, forces prétoriennes, état-major de l'armée) d'une certaine manière homogène et cohérent, et tend ainsi à maintenir l'administration centrale et le gouvernement fonctionnels. Cela tient au fait que les membres dudit complexe sécuritaire sont présents au sein de toutes les institutions de l'État et recueillent des informations au moyen d'un réseau social étendu. Ils forment donc l'organisation la plus structurante du pouvoir syrien et pour ainsi dire son socle.

Si le régime est particulièrement affaibli, mais pas désorganisé, c'est également dû au fait qu'il reçoit une aide financière, militaire et diplomatique extérieure. Ces ressources permettent

non seulement aux dirigeants de faire fonctionner l'État, mais incitent aussi l'élite administrative et politique à ne pas se désolidariser du régime.

Compte tenu de ces éléments, l'hypothèse d'une transition négociée entre Damas et l'opposition paraît moins soutenable que celle d'un pourrissement du conflit. Si cela advenait, les conséquences seraient funestes pour la Syrie et les pays voisins, avec davantage encore de victimes, de destructions et de déstabilisation (7). Sachant que la guerre civile syrienne constitue un enjeu dans la rivalité qui oppose la Russie et les États-Unis et que la sécurité d'Israël est en question, il est probable que sa résolution dépendra, comme au temps de la guerre froide, de la conclusion d'un accord entre ces deux puissances. ■

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(1) L'opposition syrienne est principalement soutenue par l'Arabie saoudite, le Qatar, la Turquie, les États-Unis, la France et le Royaume-Uni ; le régime syrien par la Russie, l'Iran et le Hezbollah libanais.

(2) Souhaïl Belhadj, *The Decline of Syria's Baath Party*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 5 décembre 2012.

(3) Fabrice Balanche, « Bachar al-Assad : le lionceau de Damas », in *Moyen-Orient* n° 12, octobre-décembre 2011, p. 31-33.

(4) On évoque souvent le cas des frères, oncles et cousins du président Al-Assad, comme ceux du clan Makhlouf, mais on

peut également mentionner la famille Tlass (sunnite).

(5) David Makovsky, « The Silent Strike: How Israel bombed a Syrian nuclear installation and kept it secret », in *The New Yorker*, 17 septembre 2012.

(6) Didier Leroy, « Hezbollah, de la résistance au Liban au djihad en Syrie », in *Moyen-Orient* n° 20, octobre-décembre 2013, p. 40-45.

(7) Selon les données disponibles en novembre 2013, la guerre en Syrie a causé la mort de plus de 120000 personnes et le départ du pays de 2,24 millions de réfugiés depuis 2011.