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PARIS : CONFÉRENCE SUR « LA QUESTION KURDE AU XXI EME SIECLE ».

à L'OCCASION du 25^{ème} anniversaire de l'Institut kurde de Paris, une conférence a, le 25 février, été organisée au Palais Bourbon sur le thème de la « question kurde au XXI^{ème} siècle ».

Le quart du siècle écoulé depuis fut riche aussi bien en tragédies qu'en espoirs : les Kurdes irakiens menacés d'une disparition pais-

sant inéluctable au lendemain des opérations Anfal en 1988-1989, purent, à la faveur de la Guerre du Golfe (1991) s'engager dans une expérience d'autonomie politique ; la décapitation du leadership kurde iranien (1989-1992) n'entrava guère le renouveau culturel kurde dans ce pays ; depuis une décennie, les Kurdes syriens connaissent un renouveau qui passe par l'engagement pacifique

dans la lutte aussi bien pour la démocratie que par les droits culturels, et malgré sa politique de terre brûlée, mise en place en réponse à la guérilla du PKK, la Turquie ne parvint guère à «éradiquer» la kurdicité. Au-delà d'un moment de réflexion sur son propre passé, l'Institut kurde souhaitait, à travers ce colloque, faire le bilan de ces 25 dernières années de l'histoire kurde.

La conférence a été inaugurée par les mots de bienvenue de M. François Loncle, ancien ministre et député de l'Eure, qui a salué le

travail de l'Institut kurde et a promis de lancer un groupe d'études sur le Kurdistan au sein de l'Assemblée nationale française. Le président du Parlement national du Kurdistan, Adnan Mufti, a, également rendu hommage au travail de l'Institut kurde, fondé dans une période particulièrement sombre de l'histoire kurde, et résumé l'agenda politique du Kurdistan irakien.

Dans son introduction aux débats, le président de l'Institut kurde de Paris, Kendal Nezan, a, pour sa part, dressé un regard rétrospectif sur les événements marquant l'histoire kurde de ces 25 dernières années et l'action culturelle, politique et sociale de l'Institut kurde de Paris.

La première table ronde sur « les études de cas » dirigée par le journaliste et écrivain, Jonathan Randal, a réuni Gilles Dorronsoro, professeur de sciences politiques à l'Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, qui est intervenu sur le thème de « l'identité, territoire et mobilisations politiques dans le Kurdistan de Turquie ». Dr. Dorronsoro a décrit la situation actuelle au Kurdistan de Turquie et le sentiment identitaire des Kurdes en soulignant que la langue kurde ne semble pas être l'élément substantiel de kurdicité en Turquie.

Les deux directeurs du Centre des Etudes kurdes à l'Université d'Exeter étaient également présents à la conférence. Hashem Ahmadzade, est intervenu pour décrire « les relations entre Kurdes et Iraniens » et Gareth Stansfield, « de la situation de facto à celle de jure : la consolidation de la région du Kurdistan d'Irak ». Pour clore ces études de cas, Jordi Tejel, cher-

cheur à l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS) a analysé le thème des « Kurdes en Syrie : continuités et changements d'une question méconnue »

La session du matin déclinant les mots de bienvenue et la première table-ronde a été honorée par les mots de soutien de Mme Danielle Mitterrand venue encourager les Kurdes dans leur combat pour la démocratie.

La seconde table ronde qui a débuté la session de l'après-midi, intitulée « Regards transversaux », a été dirigée par André Poupard, professeur honoraire de l'Université de Montréal, qui a fait une comparaison pertinente du partage des pouvoirs au Kurdistan avec le système fédéral canadien en général et québécois en particulier. Hamit Bozarslan, professeur de sciences politiques à l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS), a évalué la « question kurde de 1983 à 2008 », puis Ann-Catrin Emanuelsson, de

l'Université de Goteborg, en Suède, a développé la question de la « diaspora comme espace culturel et politique ».

La dernière table ronde a réuni les intervenants autour de la question des « perspectives de la question kurde au XXI^{ème} siècle ». Sous la présidence de l'Ambassadeur de France, Bernard Dorin, Peter Galbraith, ancien ambassadeur des Etats-Unis en Croatie, Fuad Hussein, directeur de cabinet du président du Kurdistan, Gérard Chaliand, spécialiste de géopolitique, Najmaldin O. Karim, président de l'Institut kurde de Washington et Kendal Nezan ont dressé le tableau de la situation politique, culturelle, sociale et économique du Kurdistan et tracé les perspectives pour les Kurdes.

La conférence, traduite en kurde, en anglais et français, a été ponctuée par des questions du public, près de 300 personnes, venus partager les analyses des intervenants.

OFFENSIVE TURQUE AU KURDISTAN D'IRAK

AU soir du 21 février, l'armée turque a lancé une opération contre les bases du PKK de Qandil, au Kurdistan d'Irak, en franchissant la frontière. L'opération a duré une semaine, avant le retrait des troupes turques. Mais le chef de l'état-major a déclaré qu'il se réservait le droit de reprendre ce type d'opération, si nécessaire, tandis que le PKK présentait ce retrait comme une lourde défaite de l'armée turque.

Les bombardements de l'armée

turque sur la frontière irakienne, s'étaient poursuivis régulièrement, depuis décembre 2007. Le 4 février, des avions ont franchi la frontière pour bombarder 3 villages – vides - près de Qandil, sans faire de victimes, selon le PKK. De son côté l'armée turque a qualifié ce bombardement de « pilonnage massif » sur les bases des combattants kurdes.

Mais la plupart des observateurs ne s'attendaient pas à une offensive en février, en raison du climat encore hivernal, qui rend les opé-

rations en montagne très difficiles. Le 18 février, dans le journal turc Zaman, proche de l'AKP, le journaliste Ercan Yavuz déclare que « l'armée turque est maintenant prête pour effectuer une opération terrestre en Irak ». La date la plus probable qui est donnée est la mi-mars.

Cependant, plusieurs responsables américains se sont rendus à Ankara avant la date de l'offensive. Le 13, c'est le général James Cartwright qui est arrivé à Ankara pour rencontrer le général turc Ergin Saygun et David Petraeus, le commandant des forces américaines en Irak. La rencontre devait porter sur la « lutte commune » des Etats-Unis et de la Turquie contre le PKK. Le 15 février, le ministre américain de la Justice, Michael Mukasey, s'est à son tour entretenu à Ankara avec des responsables turcs sur le même sujet. Le ministre américain a alors déclaré que cette coopération avait été « active et couronnée de succès » et qu'elle continuait.

Le même jour, dans toute la Turquie, la police était en état « d'alerte maximale » en raison des manifestations kurdes commémorant le 9^{ème} anniversaire de la capture d'Abdullah Öcalan. Des heurts s'étaient produits entre la police et des manifestants kurdes, au cours desquels un garçon de 15 ans a été tué à Cizre. Lors de ses funérailles, la police anti-émeute est une fois de plus intervenue contre des jeunes manifestants qui ont détruits plusieurs boutiques, érigé des barricades dans les rues et lancé des pierres sur les forces de l'ordre turques. Des troubles agitaient aussi la ville kurde de Hakkari.

Le 21, des troupes turques, comprenant plusieurs milliers de soldats et 3000 commandos ont franchi pour la première fois la frontière, amorçant une opération terrestre contre le PKK. L'armée a pénétré de 20 km à l'intérieur du Kurdistan d'Irak, l'avancée de l'infanterie étant soutenue par les tirs d'artillerie, l'aviation et les « renseignements en temps réel » promis par les USA depuis le début de janvier sur les positions et mouvements du PKK.

L'armée turque affirme avoir détruit, totalement ou partiellement 312 positions. Quant aux pertes humaines, elles s'élèveraient au total à plus de 300 morts, dont 270 rebelles du PKK et 30 soldats selon le communiqué de l'état major turc alors que le site proche du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan a annoncé la mort de 130 soldats turcs et 5 PKK et annonce avoir abattu un hélicoptère, dont la perte a été confirmée par l'armée turque, qui évoque seulement un « incident technique ». Les sources kurdes indépendantes évaluent le bilan à une douzaine de morts, dont 5 civils côté kurde ; les pertes turques autour d'une trentaine de morts.

Le Gouvernement du Kurdistan d'Irak, qui a protesté contre cette violation de frontière, et accusé rapidement la Turquie de viser toute la Région kurde et non seulement le PKK, a mis ses Peshmergas en état d'alerte maximale, autour des grandes villes et sur les points stratégiques. Le 21 février, des blindés turcs basés à Bamarné, près d'Amadiyya, installés là depuis les accords de « cessez-le-feu » entre la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et le PDK en 1997, ont tenté de quitter leur caserne pour

participer à une manoeuvre d'encercllement de la région frontalière de Hak. Ils ont été immédiatement encerclés par les peshmergas et violemment pris à partie par la population kurde, très hostile à l'opération turque et ils ont dû rebrousser chemin.

Le 24, de violents combats se déroulaient autour du camp de Zap, que les Turcs cherchaient à prendre d'assaut, couverts par l'artillerie et des frappes aériennes. Ce camp, à 6 km de la frontière turque et encastré dans une vallée profonde, est un des principaux points de passage pour les attaques du PKK en Turquie, ainsi que sur le camp de Harkuk, où des soldats étaient parachutés par hélicoptères. L'état-major parlait toujours de « lourdes pertes » dans le camp kurde, mais le mardi 25, de fortes chutes de neige ont contraint les troupes turques à stopper leur avancée. Le PKK a parlé alors de 200 soldats que leurs propres combattants auraient encerclé dans une des vallées montagneuses et a fait état aussi de « nombreux » soldats gelés sur place, les températures ayant chuté en dessous de - 15 degrés.

Le porte-parole du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan a dénoncé la position américaine au sujet du raid turc sur les montagnes de Qandil : « Nous tenons pour responsable le gouvernement américain de ces opérations militaires, car sans son consentement la Turquie ne se serait jamais permis de violer la souveraineté territoriale et aérienne de l'Irak » a accusé Falah Mustafa, le ministre kurde des Relations extérieures. « Le Gouvernement régional condamne ces opérations militaires et le bombardement des infrastructures » et

« demande à la Turquie de se retirer immédiatement de la Région kurde d'Irak. Le problème ne sera pas résolu militairement, mais par des moyens pacifiques. » Falah Mustafa a également insisté sur les mesures déjà prise par le gouvernement kurde pour stopper les activités du PKK dans la Région du Kurdistan, avant d'appeler à un dialogue direct entre Ankara, Washington et Erbil pour trouver une solution.

Le 25 février, le Premier ministre de la Région du Kurdistan, Nêçirvan Barzani, a tenu une conférence de presse, durant laquelle il s'est dit « très préoccupé » par l'opération turque et a appelé à la cessation immédiate de l'incursion. Le Premier ministre a insisté sur le fait que seule une solution politique pouvait résoudre la question : « Le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan comprend que le PKK soit un problème pour la Turquie. Dans les années 1990, la Turquie, parfois avec notre aide, a essayé de résoudre militairement le problème avec le PKK et aujourd'hui, elle essaie à nouveau. Mais l'expérience nous a montré clairement que les méthodes militaires ne peuvent réussir. Je suis prêt à me rendre à Ankara. Une discussion quadripartite entre Washington, Istanbul, Bagdad, et Erbil aiderait à trouver une solution durable et pacifique à cette question. »

Le Premier ministre a également condamné la destruction d'infrastructures loin des zones frontalières par l'aviation turque, et sans rapport avec le PKK : « Nous pensons que cela prouve qu'en dépit de leur but affiché, la Turquie vise la Région du Kurdistan. Je suis surpris par la faible réponse

de Bagdad devant cette violation flagrante de la souveraineté irakienne. »

Le 26 février, le parlement kurde a d'ailleurs demandé la fermeture de ces bases turques et le départ de leurs 3200 soldats de la Région du Kurdistan. « Nous exigeons que le gouvernement turc quitte les bases qui avaient été établies dans la région du Kurdistan en raison des circonstances exceptionnelles que la région traversait avant la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein ».

La « faible réaction irakienne », dénoncée par Nêçirvan Barzani, a en fait beaucoup varié entre les premiers jours de l'offensive et le moment où les combats se sont intensifiés et enlisés. Le 23, le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki a appelé la Turquie à « respecter la souveraineté de l'Irak », tandis que le ministre des Affaires étrangères irakiens, le kurde Hoshyar Zebari, s'adressant à la BBC, qualifiait l'opération d' « incursion militaire limitée dans une région lointaine, isolée et inhabitée » en ajoutant que « si elle continuait, ça pourrait déstabiliser la région, parce qu'une erreur pourrait déboucher sur une escalade ». M. Zebari a indiqué que le gouvernement irakien n'avait été informé des intentions turques qu'à « la dernière minute », qu'il n'avait pas donné son consentement à l'opération et que « malgré la promesse d'Ankara d'"éviter de cibler les infrastructures, plusieurs ponts ont déjà été détruits ».

Cependant, le 24, le porte-parole du gouvernement irakien, M. Ali Dabbagh, déclarait : « Nous ne pensons pas que ces opérations représentent une atteinte la sou-

veraineté de l'Irak. Nous savons qu'il existe une menace contre la Turquie de la part des terroristes du PKK, mais nous avons fait savoir à la Turquie que cette opération ne devait pas déstabiliser l'Irak et la région ».

Mais l'impopularité de l'incursion turque et le scepticisme grandissant concernant son efficacité a peut-être amené Bagdad à durcir son propos car le même jour un nouveau communiqué appelait la Turquie « à retirer au plus vite ses troupes du nord de l'Irak » en affirmant, cette fois-ci, qu'il s'agissait d'une « menace pour sa souveraineté ». Le cabinet du Premier ministre invitait aussi Ankara à « ouvrir un dialogue bilatéral avec le gouvernement irakien » et que le conflit avec le PKK ne devait pas être traité par des voies militaires », tout en assurant « comprendre les préoccupations légitimes de la Turquie en matière de sécurité ».

Les dignitaires chiites ont désapprouvé, pour leur part, l'opération turque. Un religieux chiite, Qasim al-Tayi, a ainsi déclaré le 24 février : « Nous rejetons catégoriquement l'incursion turque dans le nord de l'Irak et nous la considérons comme une agression et une violation de la souveraineté de l'Irak ; nous appelons toutes les forces politiques, les décisionnaires et l'opinion publique à s'opposer fermement à cette invasion. L'avancée des troupes turques à l'intérieur du territoire irakien sous prétexte de pourchasser le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan peut amener la destruction de la plupart des infrastructures du pays et la mort d'Irakiens innocents. » Qasim al-tayi a ajouté que cette incursion était un

acte illégitime, « qui ne peut avoir d'explication rationnelle ».

Du côté américain, dès le 22 février, le président George Bush avait approuvé l'offensive, mais devant les difficultés rencontrées par les troupes turques, la dureté inattendue des combats, aggravée par de lourdes chutes de neige, et le danger d'affrontements directs entre les Turcs et les Peshmergas, Washington a très vite craint une contagion du conflit au Kurdistan d'Irak et appelé la Turquie à se retirer « le plus vite possible ».

Mais le ministre de la Défense turc, Vecdi Gönül, a semblé sourd aux demandes rapides de retrait, qu'elles émanent des Etats-Unis, de l'Irak ou de l'Union européenne et a déclaré : « *la Turquie restera dans le nord de l'Irak le temps qu'il faut* », tout en assurant les Américains que son pays n'avait pas l'intention d'occuper le « nord de l'Irak ».

Le 27 février, une délégation turque est partie à Bagdad pour s'entretenir de l'opération dans le nord du pays. A l'issue de cette rencontre, Ahmet Davutoglu, le conseiller pour la politique étrangère du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a déclaré dans une conférence de presse donnée avec le ministre des Affaires étrangères irakien, le Kurde Hoshyar Zebari : « Il n'y aura pas de calendrier de retrait des troupes turques du nord de l'Irak tant que la présence de l'organisation n'est pas éliminée ».

Mais dans la nuit du 27, de façon inattendue, l'armée turque a commencé de se retirer du Kurdistan d'Irak, alors qu'une heure auparavant le chef de l'armée turque, le

général Yasar Büyükanit, refusait également de donner une date de retrait : « *Un délai rapide est une notion relative, il peut s'agir parfois d'un jour et parfois d'un an* ».

La plupart des médias turcs, ainsi que la classe politique et même l'homme de la rue sont persuadés que cette volte-face a pour cause les pressions américaines, et la menace de fermer l'espace aérien à l'aviation turque, en plus de suspendre les informations en temps réel sur les mouvements des Kurdes, malgré les démentis de l'armée. La presse turque a même parlé de « bombe » pour qualifier l'annonce officielle de la fin des opérations. Face à ces affirmations, Yasar Büyükanit, interrogé par le journal Milliyet, a réitéré que « la décision du retrait comme l'ordre du départ des opérations militaires, ne dépend que de lui, et ni l'administration politique ou un pays allié (US), ne peuvent prendre une telle décision », laissant donc entendre que ce retrait a surpris même le Premier ministre turc. : « Monsieur Erdogan était au courant de l'ensemble de l'opération y compris la décision du retrait, par contre, il ne savait pas, quand et où exactement se déroulerait le retrait ». Le général insiste sur le fait que ce n'est pas l'ultime visite du Secrétaire d'Etat Robert Gates qui est à l'origine de sa décision. Il explique ainsi que les troupes avaient commencé à se retirer deux jours avant l'annonce officielle, survenue le 29, pour « éviter que les Kurdes n'attaquent nos soldats lors de leur retrait ». Mais cette explication ne semble guère convaincante, car ce sont précisément les Kurdes, les Peshmergas d'abord et puis les combattants du PKK qui, dès le 27, ont donné l'alerte aux médias.

Dans la classe politique turque, le retrait a causé quelques remous, notamment au Parlement. Les deux partis de l'opposition, le Parti du mouvement nationaliste (MHP) et le Parti républicain du peuple (CHP) ont vivement critiqué le chef de l'état-major et Robert Gates. Le président de l'assemblée turque, Köksal Top-tan, a condamné également sur la chaîne turque TRT les pressions américaines, y voyant une manoeuvre régionale : « J'imagine qu'ils voulaient envoyer un message au gouvernement irakien central d'une part, et à l'administration régionale du Kurdistan du nord de l'Irak d'autre part, en disant que, si vous êtes en colère contre nous car nous aidons les Turcs, ces derniers se retireront dès que nous le leur demanderons. »

Sitôt après l'annonce officielle du retrait Recep Tayyip Erdogan a fait deux déclarations contradictoires. D'une part, en s'adressant au gouvernement de Bagdad, il a déclaré que « la Turquie et l'Irak ne devraient pas permettre aux rebelles kurdes du PKK d'empoisonner leurs relations bilatérales » et il a appelé à nouveau une coopération entre les deux pays pour chasser le PKK du nord de l'Irak. Mais d'un autre côté, il a également invité le PKK à déposer les armes, en déclarant que la démocratie turque était « assez mûre » pour résoudre politiquement la question kurde : « Notre démocratie est assez mûre pour prendre en compte toutes les sortes de divergences, toutes les sortes d'opinions politiques tant qu'elles restent sur le terrain de la loi ».

Le PKK a, en réponse à l'attaque turque, appelé les Kurdes de Tur-

quie à des mouvements d'émeutes urbaines. Bahoz Erdal, un des leaders de ce parti, a ainsi déclaré : « La jeunesse kurde doit répliquer à cette opération » et « la réponse doit être forte. S'ils veulent nous balayer, notre jeunesse doit rendre la vie dans les villes insupportables et brûler des centaines de voitures chaque nuit. » Le PKK accuse également les USA d'avoir participé activement à l'opération. « Des avions de reconnaissance américains ont survolé la région. Ils donnaient des informations à la Turquie sur nos positions en temps réel et les avions turcs venaient ensuite nous bombarder. » Bahoz Erdal a également accusé des groupes de Kurdes irakiens d'avoir pris part au combat, en dénonçant ouvertement le président irakien, Jalal Talabani : « Selon nous, l'attitude de Jalal Talabani est très dangereuse. Nous avons des informations selon lesquelles il aurait même invité l'armée turque à Qandil. » Le Porte-Parole du PKK a invité également les Kurdes d'Irak à s'opposer à l'invasion.

En fait, dès le 23 février, des manifestations contre l'opération militaire avaient été organisées par le DTP, d'abord à Istanbul, puis dans quelques villes kurdes. A Diyarbakir, ce sont quelques milliers de personnes qui ont défilé le 25 pour réclamer la fin de l'invasion, avec des slogans très hostiles au Premier ministre turc et au président d'Irak, Jalal Talabani, alors en visite en Turquie. Les manifestations n'ont pas cependant dégénéré en violences, la police ayant visiblement reçu des instructions pour éviter tout embrasement.

De son côté, le gouvernement irakien, par la voix de son porte-parole Mohammad Ali Hosseini, a annoncé avoir « renforcé » sa fron-

tière avec le Kurdistan d'Irak après l'offensive turque, afin d'empêcher les combattants du PKK de se réfugier en Iran.

LA PRESIDENCE IRAKIENNE APPROUVE LA SENTENCE DE MORT CONTRE ALI LE CHIMIQUE

La condamnation à mort d'Ali Al-Madjid, dit "Ali le Chimique", haut responsable de l'ancien régime et cousin de Saddam Hussein, qui avait joué un rôle de premier plan dans l'Anfal, le génocide des Kurdes, a été approuvée par le président de l'Irak Jalal Talabani et par ses deux vice-présidents pour être exécutée.

Al-Majid est l'un des trois anciens responsables baathistes condamnés à la pendaison en juin dernier, après avoir été déclaré coupable de génocide, de crimes de guerre et de crimes contre l'humanité. La cour d'appel a maintenu ce verdict en septembre. Les deux autres sont Hussein Rashid Mohammed, l'ancien représentant de la direction des opérations pour les forces armées irakiennes et l'ancien ministre de la Défense, Sultan Hashim al-Taïy.

Au Kurdistan d'Irak, la ministre des Martyrs et de l'Anfal, Chinar Sa'd Abdullah a appelé vendredi à ce qu'Ali Hassan al-Majid soit rapidement exécuté en se réjouissant de la décision de la présidence irakienne : « Nous invitons le gouvernement central à accélérer l'exécution de Majdid.

L'approbation de la sentence est un pas positif pour restaurer la légitimité de la cour qui a rendu ce jugement. »

En décembre 2007, Chinar Abdullah avait déclaré que son ministère était prêt à recourir à l'ONU si la peine de mort requise contre les acteurs de l'Anfal n'était pas appliquée. Une controverse politique et juridique avait en effet agité les milieux irakiens au sujet de ces trois condamnations. Jalal Talabani et son vice-président, Tareq al-Hashimi, considéraient en effet que les officiers de l'ancienne armée irakienne ne devaient pas être exécutés, car ils avaient été forcés d'obéir aux ordres sous peine de mort. Jalal Talabani a défendu à maintes reprises Sultan Hashim Ahmed, qu'il qualifie de militaire « respectable » qui ne devrait pas être exécuté.

Saber Abdul-Aziz al-Dori, qui dirigeait les anciens services secrets et Farhan Motlak al-Juburi, le chef des services dans la « Zone du Nord » ont été condamnés à perpétuité, et l'ancien gouverneur de Mossoul, Taher Tawfiq al-A'ani a été acquitté.

LA « LOI DU CHAPEAU » PROSCRIT L'USAGE PUBLIC DU KURDE EN TURQUIE

OSMAN Baydemir, le maire de Diyarbakir, a été finalement acquitté à la reprise du procès qui s'était ouvert contre lui, en novembre dernier, et qui portait sur l'impression et la distribution de cartons d'invitation pour le 6ème Festival d'art et de culture de sa ville, qui avaient été rédigés, en plus du turc, en kurde, en arménien et anglais. Trois ans de prison avaient été requis contre lui.

Les procès invoquant l'article 222 de la loi dite « loi du chapeau » se multiplient en Turquie. En plus d'Osman Baydemir, le tribunal juge aussi Abdullah Demirbas, l'ancien maire de Sur, une municipalité de Diyarbakir et 19 autres membres du Conseil municipal. Abdullah Demirbas avait en effet voulu fournir dans sa mairie des services en quatre langues, soit le turc, l'arménien, le syriaque et bien sûr le kurde, alléguant que c'était là quatre langues parlées par ses électeurs, lesquels ne maîtrisent pas tous correctement le turc.

Les 21 accusés le sont d'une part en vertu de l'article 257, qui condamne « les nuisances au public » et l'abus d'une « position », mais c'est surtout l'article 222 qui sert à proscrire l'usage public de la langue kurde dans les administrations. En 1925, Kemal Atatürk fit en effet promulguer une loi interdisant le port du fez aux hommes, d'où son nom, et en 1928 s'y ajouta l'usage de lettres « anti-turques », qui visaient à l'époque à interdire l'alphabet ottoman. Aujourd'hui, il sert à condamner les trois lettres de

l'alphabet kurde qui ne sont pas utilisées dans le turc (W, Q et X).

L'argument de la défense du maire de Sur était que Diyarbakir et les municipalités adjacentes ne sont pas les seules à distribuer des brochures en langue étrangère, puisque bien des villes turques, surtout à l'ouest du pays, offrent aux touristes, notamment sur leur site Web, des informations en anglais, allemand, néerlandais et même en polonais...

Mais si Osman Baydemir a été acquitté, l'éditeur Mehdi Tanrikulu a été condamné, lui, à 5 mois de prison pour s'être plaint d'un procureur en kurde et d'avoir « persévéré » en s'exprimant en kurde au tribunal. La 1ère Chambre criminelle de la Paix d'Istanbul a jugé que Mehdi Tanrikulu, qui dirige la maison d'édition Tevni, avait enfreint cette même « Loi du chapeau », verbalement et par écrit.

Mehdi Tanrikulu avait été auparavant condamné à douze ans et demi de prison pour appartenance

au PKK par la Haute Cour de Sûreté de Diyarbakir. Il a été aussi accusé (mais acquitté) de « propagande pour une organisation illégale », après avoir publié un livre de Zülfikar Tak racontant les pratiques de torture dans la prison de Diyarbakir. Au cours d'un de ces procès, le procureur Muammer Özcan, a, dans son acte d'accusation, mentionné le « soi-disant peuple kurde ». A la suite de quoi Mehdi Tanrikulu a porté plainte contre lui, en kurde, pour « injure » à son identité. Si le procureur ne fait l'objet d'aucune enquête, en revanche, par contre, l'accusateur retombe sous le coup de la « loi du Chapeau ». Et au cours de son jugement, il est venu accompagné d'un interprète pour le turc, persistant à ne s'exprimer que dans sa langue maternelle : « J'ai le droit de m'exprimer dans ma langue maternelle et son alphabet doit être accepté par les institutions. », a-t-il déclaré au tribunal, en invoquant l'article 39/5 du Traité de Lausanne qui « garantit à tous les citoyens turcs le droit d'utiliser leur langue maternelle devant les tribunaux. »

La cour y a vu une « insistance à commettre un crime » et a condamné Mehdi Tanrikulu à 5 mois de prison.

INTIMIDATIONS, ARRESTATIONS ET CONDAMNATIONS EN SYRIE

Un célèbre « dengbêj » (barde traditionnel) kurde, Ali Tidjo, a été arrêté par les services syriens et nul ne connaît son sort, malgré l'insistance de sa famille et de ses amis pour avoir de ses nouvelles, en se disant inquiet pour sa santé. Âgé de 71 ans, le

chanteur souffre en effet de problèmes cardiaques.

Selon des sources proches du chanteur, Ali Tidjo a reçu à son domicile d'Alep une délégation de chanteurs kurdes venus du Kurdistan d'Irak. Quelque temps après, la police syrienne a fait un

raid chez lui, a mis à sac son domicile et l'a emmené pour être interrogé au Centre de la Sécurité d'Alep, avant de le déférer au Quartier général de la police secrète de Damas.

Ali Tidjo est un chanteur bien connu des Kurdes d'Afrin. Ce « dengbêj » compte à son répertoire une centaine de balades et d'épopées, dont une célébrant Sheikh Saïd et le soulèvement de 1925 contre la Turquie, très appréciée et connue des Kurdes.

À l'approche du Newroz en Syrie, les arrestations et les actes d'intimidation contre les Kurdes se multiplient. Six détenus viennent d'être condamnés pour « séparatisme » à des peines allant de 2 à 10 ans de prison, par la Haute Cour de Sûreté. Quatre d'entre eux (condamnés de 7 à 10 ans) sont accusés d'avoir « attaqué » des forces de sécurité lors d'une manifestation à Alep au Newroz 2007. Les deux autres (condamnés à 2 ans) étaient accusés d'appartenance « à un groupe extrémiste ». Ayant purgé leurs deux ans en préventive, ils ont été relâchés.

Dans la ville kurde de Hassaké, un militant des droits de l'Homme a été arrêté par les services de sécurité de la ville. Selon la Ligue syrienne de défense des droits de l'homme, Osama Edward Qario est détenu pour ses activités et ses écrits sur la vie quotidienne en Syrie. Âgé de 31 ans, ce professeur d'anglais a été convoqué par les services syriens pour avoir écrit un article intitulé « Ni gaz, ni essence, ni électricité » dans lequel il critiquait l'économie syrienne.

Quant à l'ancien député kurde du parlement syrien, Uthman Muhammad Dadalî, il est mort ce

mois-ci à l'hôpital al-Kanadi d'Alep. Quelques mois auparavant il avait été arrêté et torturé par les services baathistes. Relâché, sa santé était restée gravement compromise, selon son entourage. Son état s'était aggravé au début du mois et il a fini par mourir des suites des sévices physiques subis.

Osoyê Dadalî avait été député dans les années 90 au Parlement syrien, pour représenter Koban, sa ville natale.

Dans le même temps, le Haut-Commissariat pour les réfugiés aux Nations Unies, après une visi-

te d'Antonio Guterres au Kurdistan irakien, a donné son accord pour que les Kurdes de Syrie qui ont fui leur pays pour la Région du Kurdistan, reçoivent officiellement le statut de réfugiés, comme l'a annoncé Dindar Zebarî, le coordinateur du Gouvernement Régional kurde.

Ces Kurdes de Syrie sont venus principalement après les émeutes et les représailles du Newroz 2004 à Qamishlo et sont installés dans un camp de la région de Duhok. Leur nombre est estimé à 500 par le Gouvernement du Kurdistan.

IRAN : UN ENSEIGNANT CONDAMNÉ A MORT

FARZAD Kamangar, né en 1975 et enseignant durant 12 années à Kamiaran, au Kurdistan d'Iran a été condamné à mort.

Marié et père de famille, il est membre du syndicat des enseignants et d'autres associations militantes. Il écrivait pour des revues et des publications associatives en faveur des droits de l'homme. Arrêté le 19 août 2006, à Sanandaj (Kurdistan d'Iran) par les services secrets, dans les quatre mois qui suivirent, sa famille n'eut aucune nouvelle et les autorités niaient être pour quoi que ce soit dans sa disparition.

Il avait été en fait transféré dans la Prison n° 9 d'Evin de Téhéran, un centre de détention secret du VEVAK, les services secrets iraniens. Des militants pour les droits de l'homme en Iran, faisant état d'une lettre que l'enseignant a fait sortir clandestinement de sa cellule, racontent qu'il a été torturé

gravement, soumis à des pressions psychologiques, et n'a pu voir aucun avocat, ni contacté sa famille. Il tenta même de se suicider et son état de santé s'étant gravement détérioré, il dut être hospitalisé. Son avocat confirme ses déclarations en faisant état de la mauvaise condition physique de son client lors de leur première entrevue. En plus de graves brûlures aux mains dues à l'eau bouillante, il souffre aussi d'une infection rénale et de sang dans les urines.

Entre 2006 et 2007, Farzad Kamangar fut plusieurs fois transféré, soit à Kermansha soit à Sanandaj pour être torturé et interrogé. Quand sept mois après son arrestation, sa mère et son frère furent autorisés à le voir, en présence d'agents de renseignement, Farzad Kamangar n'avait toujours pas eu connaissance des chefs d'accusation que l'on portait contre lui et n'avait pu rencontrer son avocat, qui n'avait aucune

information sur son dossier. Ce n'est que plus tard qu'il sut qu'il était accusé de « miner la sécurité nationale ».

Farzad a fait plusieurs grèves de la faim, avec d'autres détenus, pour protester contre ses conditions de détention et a dû être hospitalisé à plusieurs reprises.

Le 25 février la Branche 130 de la Cour révolutionnaire d'Iran a condamné Farzad Kamangar à

mort pour atteinte à la sécurité nationale, en l'accusant d'être membre du PJAK. L'accusé plaidait non coupable. Son avocat a souligné l'irrégularité du procès, qui n'était pas public et sans la présence de jurés. Human Rights Watch dénonce ce procès, la sentence et les tortures infligées au prisonnier. L'organisation appelle la justice iranienne à annuler la condamnation et à rejurer l'accusé de façon équitable et régulière.

« Nous ne voulions pas statuer sur la réalité des événements mais susciter des questions sur cette réalité, car c'est actuellement la question majeure en Turquie. La politique de l'Etat a toujours été d'ignorer notre identité, de nous appeler « Turcs des montagnes ». Il est plus important de susciter des interrogations sur de telles déclarations que de leur opposer notre propre didactisme.

Il y a plusieurs cercles de narration dans le film. Le premier cercle, le plus extérieur, est celui d'une simple histoire d'amour, que tout le monde peut comprendre. Il y a aussi un deuxième cercle, que ceux qui ont quelques connaissances de la Turquie et du Kurdistan peuvent saisir. Et puis vient le cercle le plus interne, pour ceux qui connaissent très bien la région. Les premières images, par exemple, montrent des scènes de rue dans Istanbul, mais la musique de la bande son est kurde. Filmer l'ancienne capitale des Turcs avec une musique kurde est quelque chose qui n'a jamais été fait auparavant.

Plus tard, quand Ayca roule vers la frontière irakienne, elle discute avec le chauffeur de taxi, un Kurde, de la question de l'identité. Ils s'arrêtent dans un village en ruines, afin qu'il puisse nettoyer une vieille tombe. Cela ne veut rien dire pour des étrangers mais tous les Turcs savent que ce village est un de ceux qui furent détruits par l'armée turque, il y a 17 ans, en raison de sa situation hautement stratégique. Il n'est même pas besoin de le nommer. »

Dans le film, deux vieilles dames arméniennes, qui habitent le même immeuble qu'Ayca, guettent sans cesse ses allées et venues,

CULTURE : UN CINEASTE KURDE EST REMARQUE AU FESTIVAL DE ROTTERDAM



RÉSENTÉ au festival international de Rotterdam, le film « Gitmek » ou « My Marlon and my Brando » est le dernier film de Hüseyin Karabey. Depuis *Boran*, un documentaire fiction sur les « Mères du Samedi » et les disparus en Turquie, en passant par un reportage sur les Kurdes « déplacés » de Mardin et un documentaire contre l'isolement et les prisons de type F (*La Mort silencieuse*), le cinéaste kurde n'a cessé de produire un cinéma engagé sur la question kurde et les problèmes politiques en Turquie.

Déjà salué en Turquie, notamment par le journal Zaman, son nouveau film a suscité un accueil enthousiaste aux Pays-Bas.

Ayca et Hama Ali, deux acteurs, l'une de nationalité turque et l'autre irakienne se rencontrent sur un tournage à Suleïmanieh et tombent amoureux l'un de l'autre. Puis chacun retourne chez soi et la relation se poursuit par lettre, vidéo, téléphone, alors que l'inter-

vention américaine en Irak est proche... Quand la guerre commence, Ayca décide de rejoindre Hama Ali à Suleïmanieh, et l'histoire devient un road-movie entre frontière turque, iranienne, irakienne...

« Dans le passé, raconte Hüseyin Karabey au journal Daily Star, nous, les Kurdes avons l'habitude d'enregistrer nos « lettres » sur des magnétophones, parce que nous n'aimons pas écrire. Maintenant les Kurdes tournent des vidéos »

« Je savais que le film mènerait Ayca sur la frontière turco-irakienne parce que ... nous voulons rappeler aux gens ce qui s'est passé au Kurdistan et ce qui s'y passe maintenant... »

Je crois que ce « documentaire » est plus « fictionnel » qu'un pur film de fiction. Des gens pensent que si vous tournez 24 images par secondes, cela semblera plus réel. Avec les vidéos-lettres de ce film, nous avons essayé de montrer une nouvelle forme de réalité.

attendant son retour pour lui recommander toujours de bien fermer la porte. « Elles nous amusent, explique Hüseyin Karabey, mais leur peur envoie aussi un signal sur la situation des Arméniens de Turquie dans le pays.

D'un côté, je ne me soucie pas des frontières. Je ne dis pas qu'il faut forcément un Etat kurde unifié. Mais les frontières sont une réalité. J'ai vu des villages coupés en deux par la frontière turco-irannienne. Beaucoup de gens essaient d'attiser la haine entre les peuples.

Il vaut mieux traiter ces questions avec humour, compassion et humanité.

Je ne veux pas ignorer mon identité ni l'utiliser pour faire un film à succès. J'essaie de ne pas oublier d'où je viens, juste pour combattre cette politique de négation sur ce que nous sommes. Mon père parle quatre langues : le kurde, le turc, le persan et l'arabe. Aujourd'hui, les gens tournent le dos à ce cosmopolitisme. Mais c'était une bonne chose, non ? »

Sanandadj, onze militants pour le droit du travail ont été condamnés à être fouettés pour « troubles à l'ordre public et participation à une manifestation non autorisée ». Les condamnés, en plus d'une peine de 91 jours de prisons, doivent recevoir dix coups de fouet chacun, pour avoir manifesté le 1^{er} mai 2007. Deux d'entre eux avaient même été condamné d'abord à deux ans et demi de prison, avant que cette peine soit commuée en dix coups de fouet et une amende de 200 000 tomans (200\$).

AINSI QUE...

VISITE DE L'AMBASSADRICE DU CANADA AU KURDISTAN D'IRAK. Mme Margaret Huber, l'ambassadrice canadienne en Irak, s'est rendue pour la première fois dans la région du Kurdistan, pour une visite de trois jours, où elle accompagnait une délégation du ministère des Affaires étrangères et des responsables des sections du commerce international de l'ambassade. La délégation doit écrire un rapport sur les secteurs favorables aux investissements et au commerce à l'adresse des milieux d'affaires canadiens.

Lors de la réception organisée par le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, Mme Margaret Huber s'est dit « très encouragée » par le haut niveau de coopération de la part du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan ». L'ambassadrice a ajouté : « Trop souvent, les étrangers n'ont pas une compréhension exacte de ce qui se passe en Irak et dans la Région du Kurdistan. Je veux changer cela. »

Le porte-parole du gouvernement kurde, Falah Mustafa Bakir, a, pour sa part émis le voeu que le monde sache combien « la région du Kurdistan est stable, pacifique et engagée sur la voie de la prospérité. C'est pourquoi nous espérons que les sociétés étrangères viendront dans la Région du Kurdistan et en feront une plate-forme de départ pour s'étendre au reste de l'Irak ».

Le Premier ministre Nêçirvan Barzani a, lui, souligné que jusqu'ici, c'étaient les ressources naturelles du Kurdistan et son commerce, mais que d'autres secteurs économiques offraient un vaste éventail d'activités, comme l'agriculture, le tourisme, l'industrie, les infrastructures et le secteur financier. Il a assuré l'ambassadrice de son aide afin que le Kurdistan et le Canada puissent lier une amitié plus étroite et devenir des partenaires commerciaux.

IRAN : ONZE MILITANTS SYNDICALISTES CONDAMNES A LA FLAGELLATION. Au Kurdistan d'Iran, à

Khaled Savari, le chef de l'Union nationale des travailleurs licenciés ou au chômage a lui aussi été condamné à dix coups de fouet, comme il l'a expliqué sur Radio Farda : « Quel crime avons-nous commis ? Est-ce que nous avons cassé des portes et des fenêtres ? Brûlé des voitures ? Tout ce que nous avons fait est de nous plaindre de nos salaires et d'autres problèmes liés au travail devant le bureau de l'Emploi ».

Les militants dénoncent la condamnation, dans un contexte économique et social de plus en plus difficile pour les travailleurs. Depuis deux ans, les mouvements de protestations ont été réprimés avec une sévérité croissante par l'Etat iranien. Beaucoup de protestataires ont déjà été détenus, emprisonnés ou intimidés. Mais c'est la première fois que la sentence du fouet est appliquée. Shirine Ebadi, directrice du Centre de défense des droits de l'homme à Téhéran, et prix Nobel de la Paix, a jugé alarmantes ces condamnations et rappelé, toujours sur Radio Farda, que les châtiments physiques, tels que la lapidation, le fouet, l'amputation des mains, sont strictement interdits

par la Convention internationale contre la torture.

FERMETURE DE LA PRISON D'AKRE. Après un rapport défavorable de Human Rights Watch en juillet 2007, sur les conditions de détention des prisonniers au Kurdistan d'Irak, le Premier ministre avait fait part de son soutien « énergique » à l'organisation des droits de l'Homme et annoncé de « prochaines mesures. »

Sept mois après la divulgation du rapport, le ministre des Droits de l'Homme au Kurdistan, Shwan Muhammad Aziz, vient de décider la fermeture de la prison d'Akre et la construction de deux prisons plus conformes aux critères requis par l'Observatoire international des prisons. Le ministre annonce aussi que les prisons de la Région du Kurdistan dépendront désormais du ministère du Travail et des Affaires sociales. Shwan Muhammad Aziz a présenté cette

série de mesures comme « une avancée vitale pour comprendre et identifier les tâches à entreprendre pour cette réforme ».

LA TURQUIE A NOUVEAU CONDAMNEE PAR LA COUR EUROPEENNE DE STRASBOURG. La Cour européenne des droits de l'Homme de Strasbourg a condamné la Turquie pour la mort de Mazlum Mansuroglu, 24 ans, survenue en 1996, lors d'un raid des forces de sécurité, qui recherchaient des militants du PKK. Il avait été arrêté chez lui, à Tunceli, alors sous état d'urgence. Par la suite, son corps fut présenté, avec ceux de deux des militants recherchés, par les autorités turques, qui affirmèrent que Mazlum Mansuroglu avait été tué lors d'un affrontement avec les forces turques.

Mais sa famille a toujours contesté cette version, affirmant qu'il avait été exécuté.

La Cour européenne a estimé que « la responsabilité de l'Etat se trouve assurément engagée faute pour lui d'avoir pu établir que la force meurtrière utilisée contre Mazlum Mansuroglu n'était pas allée au-delà du nécessaire », et que « le non-encadrement par des règles et l'abandon à l'arbitraire de l'action des agents de l'Etat sont incompatibles avec un respect effectif des droits de l'Homme ».

Les juges ont aussi reconnu les mauvais traitements subis par la mère de la victime, Emine Mansuroglu, lorsqu'elle avait tenté d'empêcher l'arrestation de son fils.

La Turquie a été condamnée à verser près de 27.000 euros aux proches de la victime au titre des dommages moraux et matériels.

Kurds in Iraq feel their leverage decline

By Alissa J. Rubin

BAGHDAD: As a minority group in Iraq, the Kurds have enjoyed disproportionate influence in the country's politics since the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003. But now their leverage appears to be declining, as tensions rise with Iraqi Arabs, raising the specter of another fissure alongside the sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shiites.

The Kurds, who are mostly Sunni but not Arab, have steadfastly backed the government, most recently helping to keep it afloat when Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki lacked support from much of the Parliament.

With their political acumen, close ties to the Americans and considerable technical competence at running government agencies, the Kurds cemented a position of enormous strength. This allowed them to all but dictate terms in the Constitution, which gave them considerable regional autonomy and some significant rights in oil development.

But now the Kurds are pursuing policies — trying to seize control of the oil city of Kirkuk and to gain a more advantageous division of national revenues — that are antagonizing the other factions, uniting most Sunnis and many Shiites within Maliki's government in opposition to the Kurdish demands.

One major Shiite group, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, has not publicly taken sides, but powerful individuals within the party have been openly critical of the Kurds. Among them are leading members of Parliament and Hussein al-Shahristani, the oil minister, who has declared Kurdish oil contracts with foreign firms illegal.

"They are no longer the egg in the balance," said Humam Hamoodi, the head of the international committee in the Parliament and a leading Shiite lawmaker from the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. The phrase is an old Arabic proverb that refers to the item that tips the scale. "The Kurds are not so powerful," he said.

Independent analysts largely back that claim. "There's a strong feeling that the Kurds have overreached," said Joost Hiltermann, a senior analyst for the Middle East at the International Crisis Group who is based in Istanbul but tracks events in Iraq closely.

"The Kurds had their eye on independence in the long term and they wanted to use the current window to increase the territory they hold and the powers they exercise within the territory," he added. "They've done well on the powers, but not so well on the territory. They now face real restrictions."

The jousting threatens to undermine much of what the Kurds have achieved in political influence and supercede, temporarily, at least, the far deeper and



A tea room in Sulaimaniya, Iraqi Kurdistan. Demands for greater autonomy have united most Sunnis and many Shiites within the government in opposition to the Kurds.

'There's a strong feeling that the Kurds have overreached.'

bloodier divide between Sunnis and Shiites.

And by helping unite Sunnis and Shiites, the Kurds' overreaching has strengthened the hand of Maliki, despite widespread doubts about his ability to govern effectively. The tensions could even persuade the central government to postpone further a much-delayed referendum on Kirkuk, something Kurdish leaders have worked hard on to assure themselves a victory (to the point of urging Kurds to move there so they would win any vote).

"The government got a lot of support when they stood against the exaggerated demands of the Kurds," said Jaber Habeeb, an independent Shiite member of Parliament who is also a political science professor at Baghdad University. But to capitalize on this support, which is almost certain to be temporary, since Shiites and Sunnis remain at odds, the government must move quickly to improve electricity, water and other basic services, he said.

For the United States, the diminution in Kurdish power is part of the larger problem that Iraq's political groups have yet to forge any common vision. Increasingly, several parties will come together to cope with a particular problem but form no lasting allegiances that

can actually govern.

The Kurds, with their pro-American outlook, were a natural ally. But with the new tensions in their relations with Iraqi Arabs, the Americans are in the uncomfortable position of choosing between the two: the Kurds, whom they have long supported and protected, and the Iraqi Arabs, whose government the Americans helped create.

The Kurds have been locked in a decades-long power struggle with Sunni Arabs, most recently with Saddam Hussein. That led to the Saddam government's Anfal campaign, in which about 180,000 Kurds died and 2,000 Kurdish villages were destroyed, according to Kurdish counts.

Since the United States and its allies created a no-flight zone over Kurdistan, after the first Gulf War, the area has become increasingly affluent. While much of Iraq has been engulfed in violence since 2003, Kurdistan has been notably peaceful, with streams of foreign investment and a building boom in Erbil, the largest city. Against that backdrop, the Kurdish aspiration to include more territory, including Kirkuk, in its semi-autonomous region looks greedy to the Arabs.

In a signal of its displeasure, Parliament has refused to approve a new budget because it awards the Kurds 17 percent of the total revenues, which many representatives say is more than their share, based on population. Since Iraq has not had a census in decades, it is impossible to know the true size of the Kurdish population. Some Kurdish leaders say it could be as high as 23 percent; some Arabs say it is just 13 percent.

The Kurds are also believed to collect

millions of dollars in customs duties on goods coming into the country, but they neither send any of the money to Baghdad nor share accounts of that income, according to the International Monetary Fund.

Parliament members are also angered that the Kurds want Baghdad to pay salaries for their militia force, the peshmerga, from the budget of the Ministry of Defense. The peshmerga, a force of about 100,000, operates primarily in Kurdistan rather than serving the country as a whole.

However, the Kurds contend that in the event of an invasion they would be on the front lines. Such a scenario seems all too real to the Kurds, since

Turkey threatened to invade to rout the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party, which has been using the Qandil mountains to attack in Turkish territory.

Perhaps most grating for Iraqi Arabs, the Kurds have refused to back down on oil exploration contracts that they have signed with a number of foreign companies, which the Arabs claim is a violation of Iraqi law. Arabs view the central government as the only entity empowered to approve contracts, albeit in consultation with the regions where the oil is located.

In fact, any revenue from the contracts the Kurds sign with foreign companies would go into the country's general coffers, but the fight is over

power and money associated with the oil exploration deals.

The Kurds argue that the central government has been dragging its feet on an oil law and that they cannot afford to further defer oil exploration and development, said Ros Shawees, a former vice president of Iraq and point man in Baghdad for Massoud Barzani, the president of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government.

Saddam refused to allow any oil development on Kurdish soil to ensure that the Kurds would never gain the financial means to make a play for independence.

At least 65 killed in 2 attacks in Baghdad

Death toll in city is worst in 6 months

By Stephen Farrell and Mudhafer al-Husaini

BAGHDAD: Two women suicide bombers killed 65 people and wounded 149 at Baghdad pet markets on Friday, inflicting the bloodiest day on the Iraqi capital in six months.

The coordinated attacks at the hugely popular Ghazil animal market and smaller New Baghdad bird market, 6 kilometers, or 4 miles, away came within minutes of each other on the Muslim day of prayer. Both areas of eastern Baghdad, which have mixed populations of Sunnis and Shiites, have been attacked numerous times before despite a heavy Iraqi security presence.

The bombings came after a relative lull in violence in Baghdad, with attacks having fallen 60 percent across the country since June.

The Ghazil bomb, which police say killed 38 people, exploded at exactly the same point inside the walled-off market as a Nov. 23 bomb hidden in a box of birds, which killed 13 people.

The New Baghdad bomb killed 27 people beside a string of shops where angry stall-holders have long demanded protective walls that have been installed in many vulnerable markets.

The attacks created the worst carnage in Baghdad since Aug. 1, when a car bomb and a truck bomb killed 70 people in Hurriya and Mansour, Iraqi police officials said.

The American military, which gave a lower combined death toll of 27, said it suspected the bombings were the work of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the homegrown Sunni insurgent group that the military says is led by foreigners. It attributed the November attack in Ghazil to Iranian-backed militias.

The Ghazil market has been a regular target. It was struck in January 2007, when 15 people died, but after months of increased U.S. troop presence it regained some of its vitality until the attack in November came as a reminder that security gains in this city are fragile.

"The terrorists' main target is to kill as many people as they can and this place is perfect for them. All sects come to this market, Christians, Shiites, Sunnis, everyone," said Rabaa Hussein, 47.

"With these explosions their aim is to make the government look bad and show that the occupation forces did not achieve their main goal of democracy in Iraq," he added, referring to U.S. troops.

"If the Americans withdraw it will definitely affect things," he said. "It would be a disaster for Iraq."

Hussein Ali, 31, a bird seller who lives near the Ghazil market but who moved his stall to Sadr City a year ago because of previous attacks, echoed his pessimism. "It will get worse," he said, next to shattered windows and piles of victims' shoes.

Iraq's chief military spokesman in Baghdad, Brigadier General Qassim al-Moussawi, told The Associated Press that the bombers appeared to be mentally impaired and that the explosives were detonated by remote control.

Major General Abdul Kareem al-Ezzi, a senior officer in the Ministry of Interior police commandos, said officials at the Ghazil market had concluded that the bomber was a Down syndrome sufferer after studying the intact head. Iraqi officials have made similar claims in the past, and other witnesses said the Ghazil bomber's head could have been distorted by the blast.

One witness, Mohammed Qasem, 35, a roadside vendor at Ghazil, said he saw the woman minutes before the explosion, apparently behaving normally.

"She was guiding a small kid with her and she wasn't uncomfortable at all be-

cause she was walking and looking behind her," he said. "The child who was with her stopped near me when I saw her for the last time, and a few seconds later the explosion happened and I was thrown a couple of meters away from my booth.

"I recognized her later when I saw the head but the child had vanished, and I want to know what happened to him because I can't forget the innocent look in his eyes."

As adults collected scraps of flesh from a nearby roof, children helped pick up the human remains.

"Death has become so normal for us," said Uday, 13, one of the children. "It doesn't scare me any more because I've seen a lot up to now."

As the police finally covered the head with a cardboard box, Abbas Aziz, a member of the Iraqi tribal Awakening movement, which helps secure the area, said the bomber appeared to have slipped through because, unlike men, women are not searched at the checkpoint.

"We search every single person coming to the market, especially those who are carrying bags or boxes, but the suicide bomber was a female, whom we don't search at all," he said. "We have already learned the lesson."

In recent months American commanders have noted insurgents switching from car bombings to suicide vests — and using women suicide bombers — in areas where checkpoints and roadblocks make it less easy for them to smuggle in vehicles capable of causing greater carnage.

"It's a more precise delivery tool," said Major General Mark Hertling, the U.S. commander in northern Iraq, last month. "With cars sometimes you can and sometimes you can't get them through checkpoints, but you can precisely kill people with suicide vests."

LE FIGARO

samedi 2 - dimanche 3 février 2008

la Croix

MARDI 5 FÉVRIER 2008

La France s'installe chez les Kurdes d'Irak

MOYEN-ORIENT

Un « bureau d'ambassade » à Erbil sera confié à un proche de Bernard Kouchner.

L'ANCIEN « french doctor » Frédéric Tissot ouvrira en début de semaine prochaine un « bureau d'ambassade » à Erbil, dans les provinces kurdes de l'Irak. Après les États-Unis, la Grande-Bretagne ou l'Allemagne, Paris disposera à son tour d'une « antenne » officielle dans ces régions, épargnées par les violences depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003. « Il ne s'agit pas d'un simple consulat », précise-t-on au Quai d'Orsay, mais d'une présence politique.

L'ouverture de ce bureau d'ambassade avait été annoncée en novembre 2006 lors de la visite à Paris du président de la République d'Irak, le Kurde Jalal Talabani. Redoutant un attentat en période électorale en France, Jacques Chirac s'était ensuite opposé à l'envoi du diplomate choisi pour ce poste sensible.

Nid d'espions

Quelques mois après la visite à Bagdad de Bernard Kouchner, cet ancrage est un nouveau signe de « la fin de l'indifférence » française à l'égard de l'Irak post-Saddam. Elle ne peut que réjouir les Kurdes. Tissot est un défenseur de leur cause. Il parle la langue et connaît bien les montagnes du Kurdistan, pour avoir organisé en 1989 l'évacuation en France des réfugiés kurdes fuyant l'Irak de Saddam Hussein. « Je me suis toujours senti citoyen du monde sensible aux malheurs des autres », confie-t-il.

Dans ce nid d'espions, le représentant de la France marchera sur des œufs. Même si le calme y règne, celui-ci est régulièrement rompu par des attentats commis par al-Qaïda. D'autre part, même si les

frères ennemis, Jalal Talabani et Massoud Barzani, ont enterré la hache de guerre, les divisions ancestrales entre factions kurdes ne sont pas complètement éteintes, comme le prouve l'attentat manqué dont aurait été la cible Massoud Barzani, en fin d'année dernière. Tissot arrive à un moment où les aspirations kurdes à l'indépendance – que Paris ne soutient pas –, sont combattues par leurs alliés chiites au sein du gouvernement central à Bagdad. Fin décembre, les Kurdes ont dû accepter un report à juin prochain du référendum sur Kirkouk, cette cité pétrolière arabisée sous Saddam que les Kurdes revendiquent. Victimes du veto français à la guerre en Irak, les relations entre Paris et les Kurdes se sont améliorées ensuite. Signe d'un retour de confiance, la sécurité de Frédéric Tissot à Erbil sera largement assurée par les pechmergas, les combattants kurdes.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

Deux attentats font 73 morts à Bagdad

■ Au moins 73 personnes ont été tuées hier dans deux attentats suicides commis par des femmes kamikazes sur des marchés de Bagdad et attribués par l'armée américaine à la branche irakienne d'al-Qaïda.

Les deux attaques, menées sur des marchés bondés, ont également fait plus de 100 blessés, selon des services de sécurité et des hôpitaux.

Il s'agit de la journée la plus meurtrière à Bagdad depuis le 1^{er} août 2007, date à laquelle un triple attentat à la voiture piégée avait fait 80 morts.

AFP



PORTRAIT

Un « French doctor » au Kurdistan d'Irak

Frédéric Tissot

Chef du bureau décentralisé à Erbil de l'ambassade de France en Irak

Frédéric Tissot a rejoint hier Erbil, capitale politique du Kurdistan irakien. Le « French doctor » a pris hier la direction du « bureau d'ambassade » français.

C'est un homme de terrain et un compagnon de route que le ministre des affaires étrangères, Bernard Kouchner, a choisi pour représenter la France. Né en 1951, Frédéric Tissot quitte à 11 ans l'Algérie avec sa famille. En France, il fait des études de

Ce médecin baroudeur est passionné par le Kurdistan, son peuple, sa culture et sa langue.

carrière à la direction de la cellule d'aide humanitaire d'urgence au ministère des affaires étrangères où il fait acheminer des vivres à Sarajevo et en Somalie. Sa trajectoire semble alors connaître la même éclipse que celle de Bernard Kouchner jusqu'en septembre 2001, où, à la chute des talibans, il est envoyé à l'ambassade de France à Kaboul pour mettre en place une coopération en matière de santé entre la France et l'Afghanistan. En 2006, il est en

Haïti, conseiller du ministre de la santé local, lorsqu'un grave accident le cloue dans un fauteuil roulant. Il ne s'arrêtera pas pour autant.

Depuis son premier voyage au Kurdistan pour le compte d'AMI, ce médecin baroudeur est passionné par le Kurdistan, son peuple, sa culture et sa langue que lui enseigne son professeur, le médecin et leader politique kurde Ghassemelou. Il passe au moins trois années dans les montagnes kurdes qu'il a rejointes hier en tant que diplomate. Le Kurdistan d'Irak a gagné une indépendance de fait depuis qu'en 1992 la communauté internationale lui a octroyé une protection aérienne. Le projet d'y ouvrir un « bureau d'ambassade » date de la présidence de Jacques Chirac. Reporté à plusieurs reprises, il voit enfin le jour pour la plus grande satisfaction des Kurdes.

AGNÈS ROTIVEL

AP Associated Press

Le bilan des attentats de Bagdad s'alourdit à près de 100 morts

02 février 2008

Le bilan des deux attentats suicide perpétrés vendredi à Bagdad par des femmes handicapées mentales s'est encore alourdi, passant à au moins 99 morts et 144 blessés, selon les chiffres communiqués ce samedi matin par le ministère irakien de l'Intérieur.

Ces deux attentats ont fait de vendredi la journée la plus meurtrière à Bagdad depuis l'envoi de renforts militaires américains dans la capitale irakienne.

Les deux femmes kamikazes se sont fait exploser dans le cadre d'une attaque coordonnée sur des marchés d'animaux de compagnie. Les deux explosions se sont produites à 20 minutes d'intervalle.

Le premier attentat, qui a eu lieu dans le marché central d'Al-Ghazl, a coûté la vie à 62 personnes et blessé 88 autres. Le second a fait 37 morts et 56 blessés dans le marché aux oiseaux du Nouveau Bagdad, quartier à majorité chiite situé dans le sud-est de la capitale irakienne.

Selon la police, les femmes kamikazes étaient atteintes de trisomie 21 et les explosifs étaient télécommandés, indiquant un possible recours de la guérilla à une nouvelle méthode pour échapper au renforcement des mesures de sécurité.

Dans un communiqué diffusé samedi, le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki a estimé que ces attaques sanglantes révélaient la barbarie des terroristes et leur «haine de l'humanité et de tous les Irakiens».

«Les terroristes veulent empêcher tout retour à la vie normale à



Bagdad et revenir à la période qui a précédé l'envoi de renforts», a-t-il ajouté.

Le président irakien Jalal Talabani avait auparavant observé que ces attentats visaient à montrer que les terroristes «sont encore capables d'arrêter la marche de l'histoire» et du peuple irakien «vers la réconciliation».

AP Associated Press

La présidence valide le retour des anciens fonctionnaires baasistes

4 février 2008

Le conseil de la présidence irakienne a ratifié ce dimanche la loi controversée permettant aux anciens baasistes, membres du parti au pouvoir sous Saddam Hussein, d'accéder à nouveau aux emplois gouvernementaux.

Cette loi devrait permettre à environ 38 000 anciens fonctionnaires baasistes de demander à récupérer leur poste ou d'obtenir une pension s'ils ont atteint l'âge de la retraite.

Après la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003, le limogeage de milliers de membres du Baas, notamment au sein de l'armée, et l'interdiction qui leur avait été faite d'accéder aux fonctions officielles, avait aggravé les tensions dans le pays.

La loi ratifiée dimanche fait partie des 18 mesures réclamées par les Etats-Unis pour promouvoir la réconciliation entre les communautés sunnite, chiite et kurde du pays.

Le texte, adopté par le Parlement le 12 janvier, n'a pas été for-

mellement signée par le président irakien Jalal Talabani et ses deux vice-présidents Adel Abdoul-Mahdi et Tariq al-Achemi en raison de l'opposition de ce dernier à certains aspects de la loi. Mais la Constitution prévoit que le conseil de la présidence doit ratifier un texte dans un délai de dix jours après qu'il ait été transmis par le Parlement.

Les Etats-Unis réclament aussi des mesures sur un partage des ressources pétrolières, une réforme de la Constitution et la définition de règles pour des élections provinciales, autant de dossiers qui peinent à avancer.

En vertu de la nouvelle loi, les membres du parti Baas non impliqués dans des crimes contre la population irakienne pourront retrouver leur poste. Ceux ayant exercé des responsabilités importantes au sein du parti seront mis à la retraite d'office et ceux impliqués dans des crimes seront traduits en justice, même si leurs familles bénéficieront de leur pension de retraite.

AFP

Lourdes peines de prison pour quatre Kurdes syriens

DAMAS, 4 fév 2008 (AFP) -

La Haute cour de sûreté de l'Etat a condamné quatre Kurdes syriens à de lourdes peines de prison pour "tentative d'amputation d'une partie du territoire syrien pour l'annexer à un Etat étranger", a annoncé lundi l'Organisation nationale des droits de l'homme de Syrie (ONDHS).

Hamid Souleimane Mohammad et Adnane Mouaïmech ont été condamnés dimanche à dix ans de prison tandis qu'Ibrahim Haj Youssef et Ahmad Hassan Habache se sont vus infliger sept ans d'emprisonnement pour avoir "tenté par des actes, des plans ou des écrits d'amputer une partie du territoire syrien pour l'annexer à un pays étranger", a indiqué l'organisation dans un communiqué.

En Syrie, les détenus kurdes sont systématiquement accusés de vouloir rattacher une partie du territoire syrien à un futur Etat indépendant du Kurdistan.

Les quatre Kurdes avaient été arrêtés en mars 2006 après avoir participé à

une manifestation organisée à Ifrine, dans le gouvernorat d'Alep (nord) à la veille de la fête kurde du Newroz, et accusés alors d'avoir attaqué une patrouille de sécurité.

Par ailleurs, deux détenus syriens, Hassan al-Jabiri et Abdel-Razzaq Tra-boulsi, appartenant à un courant islamiste extrémiste (salafiste) ont été condamnés à deux ans de prison pour avoir "incité à des dissensions communautaires et raciales" par le même tribunal.

Ils ont été libérés car ils avaient déjà purgé leur peine, selon l'ONDHS.

L'ONDHS et la Ligue syrienne de défense des droits de l'Homme (LSDDH) ont demandé "la suppression" de ce tribunal d'exception dont les jugements sont sans appel.

La LSDDH a demandé au gouvernement syrien de "prendre des mesures urgentes pour garantir les droits civiques et politiques des accusés" et de "fermer le dossier des détenus politiques en les libérant tous", dans un communiqué.

AFP

L'aviation turque a frappé mardi 70 cibles du PKK en Irak

ANKARA, 4 fév 2008 (AFP)

L'armée turque a annoncé que son aviation avait "massivement" pilonné tôt lundi des bases de rebelles séparatistes kurdes situées dans le nord de l'Irak.

"Les avions turcs ont massivement bombardé à partir de 03H00 (01H00 GMT) quelque 70 cibles (...) avant de regagner à 15H15 (13H15 GMT) leur bases", a indiqué un communiqué publié sur le site internet de l'armée.

L'armée a précisé que ces cibles se répartissaient dans les zones d'Avasin-Basyan et de Qhakurk.

Depuis la mi-décembre 2007, l'armée turque a mené une série de raids aériens contre des positions du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak, ainsi que des opérations terrestres limitées en territoire irakien.

La Turquie assure que son seul objectif dans ces attaques est d'éliminer les rebelles du PKK, dont le nombre est estimé à quelque 4.000 dans les zones montagneuses du nord de l'Irak.

Ces rebelles s'infiltrèrent en Turquie pour y mener des attaques.

Le dernier pilonnage des avions turcs sur le Kurdistan irakien remonte au 18 janvier.

Auparavant le général Jabar Yawar, porte-parole des peshmergas, les forces de sécurité de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, avait affirmé que "les avions turcs ont bombardé trois villages dans le nord du Kurdistan dans la nuit". "Nous n'avons pas d'indication de victime", avait-il ajouté.

Un responsable du PKK avait indiqué pour sa part qu'un raid de l'aviation turque avait visé trois villages inhabités, Khorakouk, Khnira et Loulan, près de la frontière avec la Turquie.

la-Croix

05 février 2008

Le nouveau drapeau irakien flotte sur Bagdad, 8 morts dans un attentat suicide

Au moins huit personnes ont été tuées mardi matin au nord de Bagdad dans un attentat suicide visant les membres d'une milice sunnite opposée à Al-Qaïda, alors que dans la "zone verte" de la capitale était hissé le nouveau drapeau irakien.

BAGDAD (AFP) -Un kamikaze a déclenché sa veste d'explosifs à un barrage de miliciens dans le village d'Awad, au nord de la ville de Taji (30 km au nord de Bagdad), a indiqué une source policière locale qui s'exprimait sous couvert d'anonymat.

Au moins huit de ces miliciens ont été tués dans l'attentat, qui a fait également de nombreux blessés, selon cette source.

L'attaque a eu lieu près du quartier général du cheikh Shathr al-Obeïdi, chef local d'une des milices des "forces du Réveil", des groupes composés en majorité d'anciens insurgés et mobilisés par l'armée américaine dans les provinces sunnites pour lutter contre Al-Qaïda.

Le kamikaze visait le cheikh Shathr al-Obeïdi, toujours selon la même source.

Le Premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, des membres de son gouvernement et des hauts responsables irakiens ont eux assisté à la cérémonie, avec musique militaire et prise d'armes, durant laquelle a été hissé le nouveau drapeau du pays sur le

bâtiment de la présidence du Conseil dans la "zone verte" de Bagdad, selon un communiqué officiel.

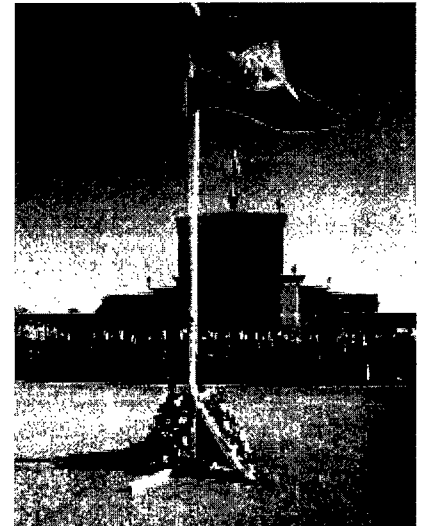
La célébration devait marquer le début d'une initiative visant à "hisser le (nouveau) drapeau irakien sur tous les bâtiments officiels", précise le communiqué. Adoptée le 22 janvier par les députés, la loi modifiant l'emblème national irakien avait été ratifiée une semaine plus tard.

Elle remplace l'inscription "Allah Akbar" (Dieu est le plus grand), écrite en vert par Saddam Hussein sur la partie centrale, blanche, du drapeau, par un texte identique mais inscrit dans le style coufique, une forme d'écriture arabe ancienne.

Les trois étoiles symbolisant le parti Baas au pouvoir sous l'ancien régime et qui figuraient sur la partie centrale du drapeau rouge-blanc-noir ont également été ôtées.

Ce nouveau drapeau suscite de nombreuses oppositions, en particulier dans le camp sunnite, et pourrait renforcer les divisions du pays. Nulle part dans Bagdad, où l'emblème national est partout, il n'a remplacé les traditionnelles couleurs.

Il a été en revanche accueilli positivement au Kurdistan irakien (nord), où le gouvernement autonome kurde a toujours refusé de faire flotter le drapeau irakien sur ses



bâtiments officiels, préférant les couleurs kurdes.

La nouvelle loi, telle qu'adoptée par le Parlement, est révisable pendant un an.

Le régime de Saddam Hussein a été renversé lors de l'invasion de l'Irak en 2003. L'ancien président a été exécuté le 30 décembre 2006 pour crimes contre l'humanité.

Ap Associated Press

08 février 2008

Cinq soldats américains ont été tués dans deux explosions en Irak, a annoncé samedi l'armée américaine.

Sur ces cinq décès, quatre sont survenus à Bagdad et un dans la province de Tamim, au nord-est du pays, a fait savoir l'armée dans deux communiqués différents. Les cinq soldats ont été tués vendredi au cours d'opérations. L'explosion dans la province de Tamim a par ailleurs blessé trois autres soldats.

L'armée n'a pas donné davantage de détails. L'identité des victimes est gardée secrète le temps d'informer les familles.

Au moins 3958 membres de l'armée américaine sont morts depuis le début de la guerre en Irak en mars 2003, selon un décompte de l'Associated Press.

Par ailleurs, les troupes américaines ont tué huit insurgés présumés et en ont capturé 26 vendredi -dont le chef présumé d'une milice chiite- a annoncé l'armée.

Tous les huit ont été tués lors d'attaques séparées visant Al-Qaïda en Irak dans les régions du nord et du centre du pays, selon l'armée.

IRAK: Cinq soldats américains tués

A Téhéran, nos envoyés spéciaux avaient rendez-vous avec le président iranien. Récit d'un entretien atypique et d'une brève incursion dans le théâtre du pouvoir de la République islamique.

Une heure avec Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

TÉHÉRAN
ENVOYÉS SPÉCIAUX

Rideaux tirés et enfilade de salons déserts entre deux colonnes de marbre : ce vendredi 1^{er} février, la magnifique villa qui abrite les bureaux de la présidence de la République islamique d'Iran, au centre de Téhéran, a tout de l'ambiance feutrée de coulisses de théâtre avant la représentation. Un entretien avec Mahmoud Ahmadinejad n'est jamais facile à programmer : le président iranien ne cesse de voyager.

Deux jours plus tôt, il était dans le sud du pays, à Bouchehr, dont la centrale nucléaire, approvisionnée par la Russie, lui a rappelé le contentieux persistant entre son pays et les Occidentaux qui, au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, préparent une série de sanctions (la troisième) pour obliger Téhéran à suspendre son programme d'enrichissement d'uranium. M. Ahmadinejad a profité de son voyage à Bouchehr pour lancer un appel aux investissements européens en Iran, tout en prononçant une nouvelle diatribe contre Israël, « la sale entité sioniste, qui tombera tôt ou tard ».

Ce vendredi après-midi, jour férié en Iran, il faut attendre encore quelques heures pour que débute l'entretien avec M. Ahmadinejad demandé par *Le Monde*. « M. le président a encore beaucoup de travail », confient ses assistants. On peut le comprendre : malgré les prix élevés du pétrole, l'Iran traverse de fortes difficultés économiques qu'une inflation galopante et un taux de chômage élevé chez les jeunes (plus de 30 %) ne font qu'accroître. Sa gestion a même été critiquée au Parlement. Certaines universités s'agitent, et le nombre record d'exécutions publiques enregistré ces derniers mois alourdit un peu plus le climat à l'approche des élections législatives de mars.

En fin d'après-midi, soudain, la plus grande agitation s'empare des salons : le moment est venu. Une armée de techniciens installe d'énormes fauteuils sous la lumière violente de projecteurs.

« Bulle » médiatique

Cette fois, le décor est planté. Mais pourquoi seulement deux fauteuils, alors que l'entretien est prévu avec les deux envoyés spéciaux du *Monde* ? Pourquoi ces caméras ? Pourquoi ces interprètes dans la pièce d'à côté, prêts à traduire les propos présidentiels dans l'oreillette des participants, sans même assister au débat, coupant ainsi toute spontanéité ?

La réponse ne vient que quelques minutes avant le début de l'entretien, – faut-il dire du « show » ? : tout a été prévu, en fait, pour la télévision iranienne. Et c'est

aux Iraniens, en regardant la caméra, que le président s'adresse, plus qu'il ne répond aux questions de son faire-valoir du jour. Une « bulle » médiatique sur mesure.

Très chaleureux, pondéré, M. Ahmadinejad ne refuse aucune question, mais répond à sa manière, souvent par d'autres questions. Et, peu à peu, au-delà des figures imposées – le nucléaire (l'Iran n'a pas peur de nouvelles sanctions et poursuivra son programme d'enrichissement de l'uranium) ou encore le rôle de l'Europe (elle doit afficher son indépendance), celui de la France (elle devrait entretenir des relations plus étroites avec l'Iran) –, le président iranien dévoile sa « vision » d'un monde idéal, selon lui en quête de « pureté ». Un monde de certitudes simples dans lequel la faute originelle au Proche-Orient revient à Israël et à « ce peuple déplacé qui finira par partir ». Un monde

où les résolutions de l'ONU (celle créant l'Etat d'Israël comme les autres) n'ont pas de valeur particulière.

Croyant et nationaliste, M. Ahmadinejad parle d'un Iran qui, certes, voudrait « plus de démocratie », mais, « est-ce là l'important ? », s'interroge-t-il, balayant la question des droits de l'homme comme il évacue la crise économique chez lui : « L'économie américaine n'est-elle pas en voie de régression ? »

Puis, à la fin, comprenant, devant les protestations réitérées, qu'un journal européen a d'autres critères pour un entretien de ce genre, surtout lorsque l'accord initial n'a pas été respecté, il offre, non sans une certaine élégance, de « réparer » en accordant sous peu un nouvel entretien. « Le président tient toujours ses promesses ! », insiste l'un de ses plus proches conseillers. ■

A. FR. ET M.-C. D.

« Le peuple iranien demande plus que la démocratie. Il veut la dignité humaine »

TÉHÉRAN
ENVOYÉS SPÉCIAUX

Le président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, a dit à plusieurs reprises son inquiétude quant à la finalité du programme nucléaire iranien...

Qu'en pensez-vous, vous, en tant que Français ? Ne faut-il pas que les armes nucléaires, qui ne sont d'aucune utilité dans le monde d'aujourd'hui, soient éliminées ? Nos deux peuples entretiennent de bonnes relations (...), ils ont des points de vue communs sur beaucoup de questions internationales. Nous croyons que ces propos [de M. Sarkozy sur le nucléaire iranien] n'ont pas leur place aujourd'hui. Nous ne les prenons pas trop au sérieux ; nous avons pensé que c'est le début de ce nouveau gouvernement français. Nous attendons les vraies positions de la France, celles qui auront un effet pratique. Nous n'avons pas d'inquiétudes à ce sujet.

Invitez-vous M. Sarkozy à Téhéran à l'occasion de la présidence française de l'Union européenne, au printemps ?

Nous croyons que cette présidence française est une bonne occasion, pour la France et pour l'Europe, car nous pensons qu'il est temps que l'Europe repense la question de sa présence internationale. Aujourd'hui, sur la scène internationale, l'Europe n'existe pas : je veux dire une Europe qui soit une entité indépendante. (...) La présence de la France à la tête de



l'Union peut être une occasion pour l'Europe de développer une politique indépendante, surtout dans la région du Moyen-Orient, autour de la Méditerranée. Quant à M. Sarkozy, il peut venir en Iran à tout

moment ; nous l'accueillerons quand il le désirera.

Le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU prépare une nouvelle résolution sommant l'Iran d'arrêter son programme d'enrichissement d'uranium, sauf à subir un durcissement des sanctions économiques déjà prises contre votre pays...

La question nucléaire est très importante pour notre peuple. Nous voulons que tous les pays – à commencer par les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité – permettent à l'organisation légalement chargée de cette question, l'AIEA [*Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique, qui dépend de l'ONU et est chargée de faire respecter le Traité de non-prolifération (TNP)*], d'agir conformément à sa mission. Les problèmes ont commencé quand certains pays membres – les cinq permanents – ont voulu s'arroger des droits qui dépassent ceux des autres pays membres de l'AIEA. (...) Cette nouvelle résolution, ce n'est pas notre problème : c'est le leur [*celui des cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité*]. Quand, sur la base d'informations erronées, un groupe de pays agit avec entêtement de façon erronée, alors c'est lui, c'est ce groupe, qui a un problème... Mais nous n'avons pas d'inquiétude. Notre peuple est un grand peuple : quand il s'agit de défendre nos droits, nous sommes sérieux.

Où en est votre proposition de permettre la création en Iran d'un consortium international pour enrichir l'uranium dont vous avez besoin ?

Cette proposition, je l'ai faite il y a deux ans à l'ONU. Malheureusement, les Européens et les Américains ne l'ont pas accueillie favorablement. Ils ont considéré que nous ne la formulions que parce

que nous aurions été en position de faiblesse. Aujourd'hui, cette proposition n'est plus sur la table. Mais si d'autres en venaient à la reformuler à nouveau, nous l'étudierions. A une condition : que le droit du peuple iranien à l'enrichissement de l'uranium soit préservé.

Approuvez-vous M. Sarkozy quand, du Maghreb au Golfe, il propose d'aider de nombreux pays à accéder au nucléaire civil ?

Nous ne considérons pas que c'est une mauvaise chose. En cette matière, nous n'entendons pas fixer des limites aux autres. Nous croyons que tous les pays devraient pouvoir jouir de l'énergie nucléaire. Nous croyons que c'est opprimer une partie de l'humanité que d'assimiler l'énergie nucléaire à la bombe nucléaire. C'est une énergie pure, dont tous les peuples doivent pouvoir profiter.

Vous n'aidez pas à la création d'un Etat palestinien indépendant en Cisjordanie et à Gaza ; vous ne soutenez qu'un parti palestinien, le Hamas...

Que voulez-vous dire ? Actuellement, n'y a-t-il pas un gouvernement du Hamas [*à Gaza*] ? Un gouvernement qui a été établi par le peuple [*le Hamas a remporté les élections législatives dans les territoires palestiniens en janvier 2006 puis s'est emparé par la force de l'administration de la bande de Gaza le 15 juin 2007*] ? Qui s'oppose à ce gouvernement ? Ce sont les Européens, les Etats-Unis, qui sont contre ce gouvernement du Hamas. Nous sommes actuellement le seul pays qui soutient le gouvernement légal de la Palestine. Alors, qui réprime ce peuple ? Qui lui impose des sanctions économiques ? Je suis désolé de dire que ce sont les gouvernements des pays européens qui collaborent avec les sionistes dans cette affaire.

Mais la question de la Palestine va au-delà de votre question. Il faut en revenir à un événement intervenu il y a soixante ans [*la création de l'Etat d'Israël par une résolution des Nations unies, en 1948*], un événement qui a déplacé des millions de personnes, en a tué des centaines de milliers d'autres [*selon l'ONU, quelque 700 000 Palestiniens ont été déplacés pendant ou à l'issue de la guerre israélo-arabe qui a suivi la création d'Israël, qui a fait quelques dizaines de milliers de morts*]. Ce ne sont pas les initiatives européennes ou américaines qui vont régler le problème. Il faut aller à la source, à l'origine du conflit, à sa racine, si nous voulons régler cette question, sinon la crise se poursuivra. A la longue, ceux qui perdront sont ceux qui sont responsables de l'occupation.

Il y a deux jours, vous avez encore annoncé que « l'entité sioniste tombera tôt ou tard »...

Pourquoi le peuple palestinien doit-il accepter d'être amputé d'une partie de son territoire ? Ce n'est pas parce que l'ONU a reconnu [*Israël*] que cela confère une légitimité à cette reconnaissance. Un peuple falsifié, inventé [*le peuple israélien*] ne va pas durer ; il doit sortir de ce territoire. Ce n'est pas parce que tout le monde dit quelque chose de faux que cela devient juste.

L'an prochain, il y aura un nouveau président américain. Est-ce important pour vous qu'il soit démocrate ou républicain ?

S'il y avait des élections libres aux Etats-Unis, si le peuple américain avait différents choix, s'il n'avait pas seulement deux options, nous croyons que le peuple américain se prononcerait pour une autre politique que celle que mènent les Etats-Unis. Il essaierait d'orienter différemment la politique étrangère des Etats-Unis. Le peuple américain aimerait avoir des relations d'amitié et de collaboration avec les autres peuples. Il n'aime pas qu'il y ait dans le monde des massacres perpé-

trés en son nom et des territoires occupés. Nous espérons que ceux qui sont candidats reçoivent le message du peuple américain, qui souhaite le changement.

Il y a deux ans, vous avez annoncé que vous seriez le président qui s'attaquerait prioritairement aux difficultés économiques de l'Iran...

Où n'y a-t-il pas de problèmes économiques ? Il n'y a pas de problèmes économiques en France ? Les progrès économiques de l'Iran sont bien connus : l'Iran progresse dans différents domaines. Evidemment, nous rencontrons des difficultés : c'est naturel. Aux Etats-Unis, il n'y a pas de problèmes ? Les difficultés des Etats-Unis sont plus nombreuses que celles de l'Iran. L'économie des Etats-Unis est en voie de régression.

Qu'est-ce qui vous motive ? La fierté nationale iranienne ? Vos convictions religieuses ?

A votre avis, que demande le peuple iranien ?

Plus de démocratie...

Vous ne vous trompez pas. Mais ce que demande le peuple iranien, c'est plus que cela. C'est quelque chose de plus haut que cela : c'est la dignité humaine. C'est une certaine place de l'homme dans l'univers. C'est la justice. C'est la pureté. C'est le refus de la domination. Et tout cela n'est possible qu'avec la croyance en Dieu. Et tout cela est plus haut que la démocratie. La démocratie n'est qu'une petite partie des acquis du peuple iranien. Le peuple iranien a ses racines dans l'Histoire. L'Iran a été le foyer de grandes civilisations mondiales. Ce n'est pas un peuple qui craint les tempêtes, il vent. Vous avez vu que huit ans de guerre [*la guerre irano-irakienne de 1980 à 1988*] ont rendu notre peuple encore plus avisé. Et le genre de boycottages, de sanctions, le genre de menaces dont nous faisons l'objet nous donnent encore plus de maturité. Sans aucun doute, l'Iran est actuellement une puissance mondiale. Il ne tire pas sa force de ses armes, mais de la vigueur de son influence culturelle. ■

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR ALAIN FRACHON
(AVEC MARIE-CLAUDE DECAMPS)

Feb 3, 2008



Mosul next major test for U.S. in Iraq

Military says devastated city plagued by terrorists, religious tensions

By **STEVE LANNEN MCCLATCHY NEWS SERVICE**

MOSUL, Iraq -- Iraq's third-largest city looks like Baghdad did a year ago.

U.S. soldiers drive armored Humvees and tanks through a decimated and dusty landscape. Burned-out cars sit on the street corners, and trash and chunks of concrete litter the medians and the gutters.

Poor people from the countryside have flooded the city, but the streets and sidewalks are mostly deserted.

U.S. officials say that al-Qaida in Iraq and other terrorist groups have a significant presence in the city and that Mosul is a gathering point for foreign fighters coming across the border from nearby Syria.

On Monday, gunmen killed five U.S. soldiers during a firefight after an improvised explosive device attack on their Humvee, and in the past week, 20,000 to 30,000 pounds of explosives in an insurgent weapons cache exploded, killing 60 people and ripping a huge crater in the city. The next day, a suicide bomber killed the police chief at the blast site.

Terrorists aren't Mosul's only problem. The city's Sunni and Shiite Muslim Arabs detest each other, and the Arabs distrust the city's Kurdish, Christian and Turkmen minorities.



Although 60 percent of Mosul's population of 1.8 million is Sunni, three-quarters of the provincial government is Kurdish, and the Arabs suspect the Kurds of wanting to take over the city.

Islamic extremists have found it easy to blend into this backdrop, said Rear Adm. Gregory Smith, a U.S. military spokesman.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has vowed a "decisive" battle against al-Qaida in Iraq in Mosul and said he was sending more troops, but in fact they were already on their way.

How Iraqi and American forces fare in Mosul will test whether the U.S. counter-insurgency strategy and additional American troops can defeat the insurgents or

whether they will keep pushing them around Iraq.

The two main American units in Mosul have been on the job only a short time. The 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment from Fort Hood, Texas, arrived in late November, and the attached 1st Battalion, 8th Regiment, from Fort Carson, Colo., arrived in late December.

U.S. and Iraqi forces are using the formula developed in Baghdad -- building outposts where there's been no security presence and setting up police stations around the city.

At night, the soldiers move out in their armored Humvees to look for insurgents or weapons caches.

During the day, they "meet and greet" Iraqis in Mosul's neighborhoods. Convoys halt and block the roads.

An interpreter and one or two soldiers question shopkeepers about everything from insurgent activity to the water pressure in the local primary school.

The units move quickly, knowing that trouble might arrive soon.

Some curious children get close and smile, but most others fix the Americans with hard stares.

Guardian

February 3, 2008

New Law Allows Baathists to Reclaim Jobs

By **QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA** Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD (AP) - Iraq's presidency council on Sunday issued a controversial law that allows lower-ranking former Baath party members to reclaim government jobs, the final step for the first U.S.-backed benchmark approved by parliament.

The measure was thought to affect about 38,000 former members of Saddam Hussein's ruling political apparatus, giving them a chance to go back to government jobs. It would also allow those who have reached retirement age to claim government pensions.

It became law without the signature of the Sunni representative on the three-member presidency council because the constitution requires the body to act within 10 days after the panel received the law, according to Iraq's constitution.

Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi objected to provisions in the law that would have pensioned off 7,000 members of Saddam's former secret police and intelligence agents who still worked in Iraq's security apparatus.

The law is the first of 18 pieces of bench-

mark legislation demanded by the Bush administration to promote reconciliation among Iraq's Sunni and Shiite Arab communities and the large Kurdish minority.

Other draft legislation, including measures to divvy up the country's vast oil wealth, amend the constitution and define rules for new provincial elections.

The so-called de-Baathification law was passed by the 275-member parliament on Jan. 12. The presidency council announced it had issued the legislation in a statement on Sunday.

In addition to al-Hashemi, the presidency council consists of President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and Adel Abdul-Mahdi, a Shiite, who both approved the law as sent to the panel by the parliament.

Al-Hashemi, however, objected to the automatic dismissal of the 7,000 agents, former Baathists still employed in the country's security services. Top al-Hashemi aides also said he wanted decisions on exceptions to the law to be han-



dled by the presidency council rather than parliament as the law currently requires.

In an apparent face-saving gesture to al-Hashemi, Talabani and Abdul-Mahdi promised they would agree to send amendments back to parliament. But passage of the changes was seen as highly unlikely.

The measure also sets up a seven-judge appeals panel for those who have been dismissed in the de-Baathification process and strikes an old clause that forced them to surrender pensions automatically if they appeal previous dismissal.

The move was seen as a key step in the reconciliation process and the parliament's decision was hailed by President Bush. The decision to outlaw the Baath party was the first official act of L. Paul Bremer's Coalition Provisional Authority, and along with his order to disband the Iraqi army has been widely blamed for setting in

motion the Sunni insurgency in the fall of 2003.

The strict implementation of so-called de-Baathification rules meant that many senior bureaucrats who knew how to run ministries, university departments and state companies were fired after 35 years of Baath party rule.

Iraq's military already had worked through the Baath Party problem, declaring that anyone who had served above the rank of major in Saddam's time would be automatically retired and put on pension. Those who held the rank of major or below were allowed to return to the military if qualified.



Feb 3, 2008

Iraq Cancels Oil Deal With Austria OMV

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD (AP) -- Iraq has halted oil exports to Austria's OMV, the leading oil and gas group in central Europe, to protest a deal with the self-ruled Kurdish region, a government official said Saturday.

The company joins South Korea's SK Energy in being cut off because of deals with the Kurds that are not sanctioned by the government in Baghdad.

In November, OMV signed two production-sharing contracts with the Kurdish administration in northern Iraq for two exploration blocks, Mala Omar and Shorish, in Irbil.

Irbil, located about 217 miles north of Baghdad, is the capital of the Kurdish region, which is made up of three northern Iraqi provinces.

An official from Iraq's Oil Ministry said the decision to end the contract was enforced Jan. 1.

"The ministry has made it clear since last December that it would stop cooperation with these companies and then blacklist them if they keep insist on maintaining these contracts which we consider illegal," the official said on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release the information.

The official said OMV will no longer receive 10,000 barrels per day of Iraq's Basra Light crude.

In Vienna, OMV spokesman Thomas Huemer declined to comment on the

ministry's decision but stressed that its oil deal with the Kurds was in line with the Iraqi Constitution. Huemer also declined to comment on how much Iraqi oil the company was buying.

Four companies are thought to have agreements with both the Oil Ministry and with Kurdistan: the United Arab Emirates' Crescent, Canada's Western Oil Sands and Heritage Oil, India's Reliance Industries and Austria's OMV.

"Letters were already sent to these companies to inform them about the decision in case they eye any future cooperation with the Oil Ministry," the official said.

Since April, the Kurds and Arab leaders have been wrestling in parliament over who has the final say in managing oil and gas fields. The dispute has delayed passage of the national oil and gas law designed to regulate foreign investment in Iraq vast reserves.

Frustrated with this delay, the Kurds have signed 15 production-sharing contracts with 20 international oil companies. The Oil Ministry considers those contracts illegal.

As of Dec. 31, South Korea's SK Energy refused to abandon its exploration project in Kurdistan as part of a consortium led by the state-run Korea National Oil Corp. That prompted the Oil Ministry to cancel a contract to supply the company with about 90,000 barrels per day of Basra light crude.



Kurdistan Regional Government

05 Feb. 05 .2008

INTERNATIONAL LAW EXPERT CONFIRMS KRG'S AUTHORITY TO MANAGE OIL & GAS RESOURCES

Ministry for Natural Resources , Erbil, Kurdistan Region

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has received an expert independent legal opinion that confirms the KRG's constitutional authority to manage the Kurdistan Region's oil and gas resources.

The KRG asked for a formal independent legal opinion from Professor James R. Crawford, a professor of international law, through Clifford Chance, a multinational legal firm.

Professor Crawford concluded, "The Kurdistan Region Oil and Gas Law is consistent with the Constitution of Iraq".

He also concluded, "Existing contracts entered into by the KRG for oil and gas exploration and exploitation since 1992 are valid unless they conflict with the Constitution. Pending agreement between the KRG and the federal government on strategic policies, the authority of the KRG to authorize the conclusion and implementation of new contracts is unqualified."

Dr Ashti Hawrami, the Kurdistan Regional Government Minister for Natural Resources, said, "We have never had any doubt about our constitutional right to manage the Kurdistan Region's oil and gas resources, and we are pleased that this independent legal opinion confirms that our actions are in full compliance with Constitution."



February 4, 2008

Reward loyalty of Kurds in Iraq

USATODAY - By Harry Schute - Erbil, Kurdistan; Iraq

I have no problem with the U.S. military rewarding tribal sheikhs with contracts in thanks for their turning against the insurgency ("Military: 75% of Baghdad areas now secure," News, Jan. 18).

My problem is with a policy that has largely ignored the one group of Iraqis who have been our friends all along. From the beginning of this war, we have been staunchly supported by the leaders and people of Kurdistan. They fought with our soldiers — I was there — and have

offered their blood to keep our soldiers safe. But they have been taken for granted time and again and received only a fraction of the reconstruction support that should be their share.

Often much of what was intended for expenditure in Iraqi Kurdistan was diverted elsewhere to provide security for projects that would only be later sabotaged. Yet, the benefits of the meager allocations to Iraqi Kurdistan are still being enjoyed today.

Where is the sanity in that? Wouldn't it be better

to clearly identify at the beginning how we reward the good and supportive behavior of our friends? The reward could be held up as an example of what is possible instead of rewarding those who chose to blow up our soldiers one month and be on good behavior the next. Also, the treasury that we invest could be more wisely spent on those who appreciate it. Reward those who truly deserve it.



COMMENTARY

The Kurdish Front

By David L. Phillips

Continued democratization and economic development is the best way for Turkey to drain the swamp of domestic support for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). A comprehensive solution also requires cooperation between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government, from whose territory the PKK operates. Instead, Turkey has gone for the military option, risking a regional conflagration that would destabilize Iraq.

After U.S. President George W. Bush agreed on Nov. 5 to provide actionable intelligence on the PKK to Ankara, Turkey launched a series of air strikes against targets in Iraqi Kurdistan. Though nearly 30 PKK members were killed in the first attack in December, subsequent sorties only struck some empty caves and abandoned settlements, inflicting little damage to the terrorists' infrastructure or capabilities.

The Iraqi Kurdish leadership -- Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Massoud Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government -- has reacted calmly. They are prepared to put up with an air strike or two if it helps mollify Turkish hard-liners and prevent a large-scale ground invasion. But their patience is not without limit. Fear is spreading among Iraqi Kurds, who demand a tougher response from their leaders. Turkish air strikes also endanger civilians nearby, and the regional Kurdish government may have to deal with refugees if the strikes continue.

There is also a growing outcry against the United States among Iraqi Kurds, who are among Washington's strongest allies in the country. They feel betrayed by America's complicity in Turkey's attacks. The U.S. sold out the Iraqi Kurds twice in recent history -- once in 1975 when the CIA ceased support for them, and then again during the U.S.-Iraq war in 1991, when Washington encouraged the Kurds to rebel against Saddam Hussein only to abandon them later when the Baath regime struck back. Iraqi Kurds fear history might be repeating itself.

Knowing that it is in their interest to reduce cross-border violence, Messrs. Talabani and Barzani recently convinced the PKK to announce a cease-fire and intervened to secure the release of eight Turkish soldiers held captive by the PKK.

They have also targeted the PKK's financing and information infrastructure. The Kurdistan Regional Government stepped

up efforts to interdict PKK cash couriers by bolstering security at local airports.

Checkpoints have been established around PKK bases in Iraq's Qandil Mountains, monitoring the flow of goods and barring all foreign and local press to stop the PKK from using the media for propaganda. The government closed all official PKK offices and shuttered other Iraqi Kurdish groups, like the Democratic Solution Party, that espouse violence against Turkey.

While the regional government is ready to put pressure on the PKK, it is not ready to confront them militarily. Mr. Barzani, whose forces joined Turkish troops in operations against the PKK twice in the 1990s told me that thousands of his men were "martyred" attacking camps that even Saddam believed were too well fortified to destroy.

While taking practical steps to contain the PKK, the regional government has also tried to foster better relations with Ankara. Iraqi Kurds promised Turkey lucrative business opportunities in the region's oil and gas sector once Iraqi legislation on production sharing agreements with foreign partners has been passed. But Turkey has responded with a cold shoulder, rejecting the offer until the PKK problem has been solved.

Worse, it is threatening economic sanctions against the Kurdistan Regional Government for harboring the PKK. While slowing trade at the Harbur Gate on the Turkey-Iraq border, Ankara is also dragging its feet on an agreement to open a second border crossing to facilitate travel and trade with Iraq. Ankara believes its economic leverage will pressure Iraqi Kurds to confront the PKK. But economic sanctions will also hurt Turkish businesses, which have received the lion's share of reconstruction contracts in Northern Iraq.

Ankara also refuses to have any meaningful diplomatic contact with Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government officials. Nor has it responded to the Iraqi Kurdish proposal for a summit on regional security cooperation among the U.S., Iraq, Turkey and the regional government.

With winter immobilizing the PKK in its Qandil stronghold, there is a window of opportunity for the United States to use its influence over Turkey and the Iraqi Kurdish leaders to foster trilateral cooperation. Not only is the Kurdistan Regional Gov-

ernment key to solving the PKK problem. Trilateral cooperation is critical for the surge in Iraq, where Iraqi Kurdish units fight side by side with the U.S. military, whose supplies are transported via Turkey.

Instead, the PKK has been able to push the U.S. into the unenviable position of taking sides between Turkey and Iraq's Kurds. No doubt the PKK welcomes Turkey's military action because it fuels Kurdish nationalism and undermines moderates seeking a peaceful solution. And the PKK will surely respond to Turkey's attacks by striking back.

The escalation of this deadly conflict also plays into the hands of Turkey's "deep state" -- a web of military and security officials, the bureaucracy, and corrupt politicians with ties to Mafia types waiting in the wings to reassert their power and privileges. Seeing themselves as the defenders of secularism, these forces are deeply distrustful of the Justice and Development Party's Muslim leadership (AKP), which just moved to lift a ban on wearing head scarves in public universities and arrested ultranationalists suspected of political killings. The "deep state" would surely like to use the resurgent PKK as an excuse to crack down on the AKP, thereby shrinking the space for democratic participation and radicalizing Turkey's Islamists. This would also reduce Turkey's chances of joining the European Union.

Instead of giving a green light to further Turkish military actions, the Bush administration should intensify its diplomacy to achieve a nonmilitary solution to the PKK problem. The U.S. should encourage the Kurdistan Regional Government to ratchet up pressure on the PKK by arresting its leaders on Interpol's "Most Wanted" list. And Washington should urge Turkey to deepen and accelerate democratic reforms. This needs to be done quickly before a new round of PKK terror attacks sabotage prospects for conciliation and cooperation among the U.S., Turkey and Kurdish leaders in Iraq.

Mr. Phillips is project director of the National Committee on American Foreign Policy and a visiting scholar at Columbia's Center for the Study of Human Rights.

Iraqi President in Kirkuk

Talabani visits Kirkuk to help maintain peace during ongoing Article 140 issue.

By **Qassim Khidir**
The Kurdish Globe

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani would like to see administrative posts distributed equally among all parties in Kirkuk.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani paid a three-day visit to the oil-rich city of Kirkuk last week in attempts to solve disputes among Kurds and Turkmen, and to ensure that the city won't face any regional or internal conflict as the planned referendum inches closer. On Saturday, February 2, the last day of his visit, President Talabani held a press conference in Kirkuk, announcing the formation of a joint committee between Kurds and the Turkmen Front to solve the disputes between the two factions and encourage the Turkmen Front to end its boycott in the Kirkuk provincial council. Talabani added that Kirkuk would not witness regional conflicts, because it's an Iraqi city subject to the country's Constitution, noting that Article 140 concerning the situation in Kirkuk was legal and would be implemented. He explained that the only solution between all Kirkuk components was for administrative posts to be distributed equally between Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen. For instance, Kurds would get 32% of the posts, Arabs 32%, and Turkmen 32%, and the rest, or 4%, would go to the Christian community. Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution provides for the normalization and census as a prelude for a self-determination referendum.

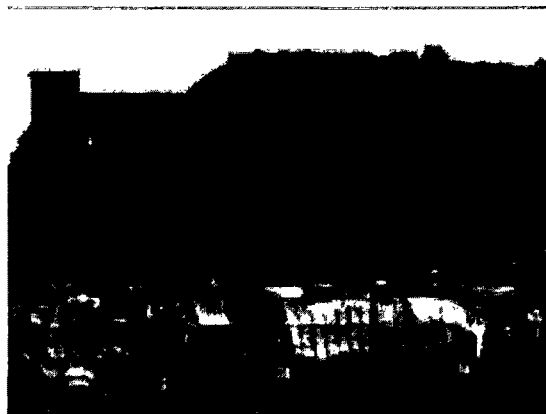
The referendum was supposed to take place late last year, but the High Committee for implementing the article called for extending the deadline to end the stages of its work. Also, the UN appealed to Kurdish leaders to delay the implementation of the article for six months.

What are the claims of the Turkmen Front? The Turkmen Front, which is strongly against Article 140 or any attempts to merge Kirkuk city to Kurdistan Region, has several demands



regarding Kirkuk. First, it proclaims that Article 140 ended legally and constitutionally with the expiration of its deadline set in the Constitution, and therefore Kirkuk province should become an independent region in Iraq and the administrative posts should be equally distributed among Turkmen, Arabs, and Kurds.

groups in the city in a way to be agreed on later. Mahmud Osman, a prominent Kurdish lawmaker in Iraqi Parliament, devalued the workshop organized by the Turkmen Front in Baghdad. He said the only aim of the Turkmen Front in the workshop was to get a lobby in order to make Kirkuk an independent region in Iraq.



Some Turkmen parties met on February 2 in a workshop in Baghdad on the fate of Kirkuk, and agreed that Article 140 was finished. The meeting was attended by a number of Iraqi MPs and ministers, but Kurds did not attend the workshop.

"The Turkmen parties agreed to unify political and media discourse and that Article 140 has ended legally and constitutionally with the expiration of its deadline set in the Constitution," said Saad al-Din Arkij.

Arkij said an agreement was reached during the meeting to have Kirkuk as an independent province to be run by the

"When a delegation of Turkmen in Kirkuk provincial council recently visited Turkey and met Turkey's president, there they were told to attempt to make Kirkuk an independent region, and now they are trying to get Arab lobby to pursue the idea," said Osman.

Recently, a delegation of Turkmen in the Kirkuk provincial council visited Turkey, where they met Turkish president Abdullah Gul, the Turkish foreign minister, and other high-ranking Turkish officials. The visit was criticized by head of the Kirkuk council, Rizgar Ali.

The UN role in implementing Article 140 The Kurdistan Region Parliament at the end of 2007 approved a UN plan to delay a public vote on the future of Kirkuk by six months.

Of the 111 lawmakers in the Kurdistan regional Parliament, 94 voted in favor of postponing the Kirkuk referendum. The decision came at the advice of Staffan de Mistura, the UN's special representative in Iraq.

The UN is supposed to provide technical help for implementing the article. A UN delegation headed by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's special envoy, Andrea Gilmore, visited Kirkuk on February 3 and held a meeting with Kirkuk's Governor Abdul Rahman Mustafa, the head of the Kirkuk Provincial Council, Rizgar Ali, and representatives of both Kurdish and Arab lists in the city's provincial council, but the Turkmen representative did not attend the meeting. "We met with the representatives and leaders of Kirkuk's factions and listened to their views, which we will raise to the UN," Gilmore said, indicating that the visit is in the framework of the desire of the UN to resolve issues of the disputed areas according to the 1770 UN Security Council's Resolution."

"We will try to work with the representatives and leaders of Kirkuk's factions on ways of the UN's support to deal with these issues peacefully, to which all factions of the city agree."

Kirkuk residents are political victims The American consul in Kirkuk, Howard Keegan, told a local Kurdish newspaper, Aso, that residents of Kirkuk city are "victims of the politicians' behavior, not victims of their wealth." Regarding the U.S. position on Article 140, Keegan said they would work toward implementation. The UN could play a positive role in solving the Kirkuk issue as well, he added.

The New York Times February 5, 2008

Turkish Planes Strike Iraqi Kurdistan

By ALISSA J. RUBIN and SABRINA TAVERNISE

BAGHDAD — Turkish warplanes bombed villages in Iraqi Kurdistan on Monday as the Kurds came under pressure on several fronts. Representatives in Parliament discussed the Kurdish share of the budget, and the Turkmen, a minority group primarily in northern Iraq, declared that they would no longer support efforts to hold a referendum on whether the city of Kirkuk should join the Kurdistan region.

In a statement on its Web site, the Turkish military said it had struck 70 targets in the Avashin and Hakurk districts in a 12-hour bombing run that began at 3 a.m. The military did not give details on damage or deaths. It said the targets were in 11 places.

Turkey's military has been fighting a militant fringe of its ethnic Kurdish minority for decades. The militants, known as the Kurdistan Workers Party, hide in Turkey and Iraq. They are trying to force Turkey to give greater rights and recognition to its minority Kurds.

Though the extent of the damage from the bombing on Monday was not clear, it was not the largest airstrike that Turkey has conducted since beginning military action on Dec. 1. It claimed to have bombed 200 targets on Dec. 16.

Kurdish military sources said they did not believe that anyone had been killed in the bombing. Jabar Yawar, a deputy minister in the Peshmerga Ministry in Kurdistan, said the Turks believed that the area was used by the Kurdistan Workers Party, but "there was no damage because this area had been deserted because of the tensions."

Haval Rosh, a spokesman for the militants, said the group had abandoned the area and no longer had bases there.

In Parliament, representatives delayed a vote on the budget because of continued disagreement over how much the Kurdistan region should receive. There was also frustration among some members who said the government had not fully explained the budget's expenditures.

On the issue of Kirkuk, there is a growing dispute about the validity of the constitutional requirement that the city must hold a referendum to determine whether it will join the Kurds' semiautonomous region. The referendum was supposed to be held by the end of 2007, but was delayed, and now the Turkmen, one of several minority groups in Kirkuk, are arguing that the window is closed and the city should not hold the referendum.

The referendum, provided for in Article 140 in the Iraqi Constitution, has long been a contentious issue. Non-Kurdish groups have feared that the Kurds would win by bringing in Kurds from outside the Kirkuk area to vote. The right to include Kirkuk in the Kurdistan region has been an article of faith for the Kurds, who see it as a way to right the wrongs of Saddam Hussein, who forcibly replaced many of the Kurds there with Arabs during the 1980s.

In a meeting on Monday in Baghdad, representatives of several Turkman groups agreed that regardless of sect — there are Sunni and Shiite Turkmen — they would stand together in opposition to holding the referendum. "Our meeting in Baghdad is a letter to the world that the Turkmen are united and they agree that they reject Article 140," said Narmeen Mufti, a spokeswoman for the Turkman Front, the main Turkman party in the Kirkuk area.

The Kurds do not accept that view, and the Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, has spent the past several days in Kirkuk trying to work out a compromise.

Qais Mizher contributed reporting from Baghdad, and an Iraqi employee of The New York Times from Kirkuk.

KURDISHGL BE
The first and only English paper in Iraq

06 February 2008

Conference on improving banking system in Kurdistan

Ministry of Planning in a conference about the mechanism of improving the banking system.

By **Aiyob Mawloodi** - **The Globe**

investigations, they made KRG High Economic Committee recommendations for the tee, the recommendations

"Some of the recommendations are about implementing credit-card system for public employees as well as for government institutions' purchases," Toma told The Kurdish Globe. "Others were about encouraging businesses and organizations to do all their transactions through banks.

As part of the long-term strategic planning for the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) Ministry of Planning organized a conference about the mechanism of improving the banking system in the region in a way that all the public and private sector could do their daily transactions through their bank accounts instead of using cash.

The conference was attended by experts in the field of financial markets and banking system, government officials and representatives from the Region's Central Bank and some other private commercial and investment banks in the region.

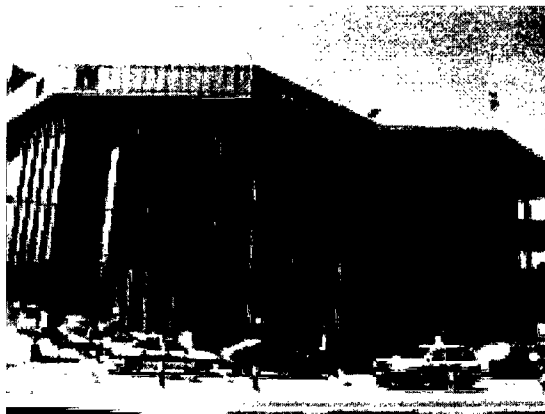
The conference elected a committee to follow the issue up and consult experts and prepare a report for the ministry for action. After some

reestablishment of a modern banking system in the region with international standards.

According to Dr Sabah Toma, advisor to the KRG Ministry of Planning and member in the

were approved and forwarded to the Region's High Economic Development Committee.

According to Toma, the committee is currently working on the recommendations.



An outside view of the Federal Bank in Erbil.
GLOGE PHOTO/Qassim Khidir

Besides, recently the Minister of Trade signed an agreement with the American Enterra Solutions Company to establish a Business Center in the Region's capital city of Erbil. According to the agreement, Enterra is to implement several projects in number of sectors around Kurdistan among which was banking system and insurance sector. The company is planning to bring some specialists to do researches in Kurdistan on which the company is to set up its projects.

On the other hand, there are also plans to establish an E-government in the region with the help of several reputable

international organizations specialized in Information Technology.

Lack of a dependable financial and banking system along with lack of an effective and well functioning e-government have been major drawbacks in the region and factors in delaying the economic development in the region.

The old and conventional way of governance and operation of institutions in the region have been the major reasons behind the excessive bureaucracy

currently existing in Kurdistan.

"Lack of computerized system of governance and the bureaucracy has facilitated corruption in almost every institution in Kurdistan, private and public," said KRG official on the condition of anonymity. "There are people who benefit from this chaos and hate computerized systems, and they are powerful enough to be serious hinders on the way of computerizing the government." Toma believes that

this will be helpful in fighting bureaucracy and corruption. "Any new procedures using IT help improve the situations," he said.

Many private banks have been established in Kurdistan in the past few years. However, they haven't yet been quite successful in attracting people's trust, thus still people prefer holding cash rather than depositing their money in the banks. On the other hands, still most of the supermarkets and stores in the market only ac-

cept cash for payments. Therefore having a credit card is considered unpractical in Kurdistan currently.

"Encouraging the businesses, organizations and institutions to use bank accounts for transactions and payments is one of the recommendations made by the committee," says Toma.



Turkey pursues Kurdish rebels who escaped clashes that killed 10

February 4, 2008

By Suzan Fraser ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANKARA, Turkey – Turkish troops searched Monday for separatist Kurdish rebels who escaped fighting that killed 10 insurgents in a snow-covered mountainous area in the country's southeast over the weekend, a private news agency reported.

The military said Sunday it had killed 10 rebels from the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, in clashes in the predominantly Kurdish province of Bingol. It was the highest rebel death toll for clashes inside Turkey in recent weeks. Previously, 11 rebels were killed in a two-day operation that ended on Dec 26.

The military gave no details about the fighting, but the state-run Anatolia news agency said the rebels were killed at the end of operations that lasted three days.

The private Dogan news agency said soldiers had located a group of about 20 rebels sheltering on a mountainous area of Bingol with the help of intercepted radio conversations. The military airlifted special commando troops to the area and 10 of the rebels were killed on Sunday. Their shelters were destroyed with short-range artillery fire, it said.

On Monday, troops were trying to locate the rebels who may have escaped, the agency said.

The PKK has been fighting for autonomy in southeastern Turkey for more

than two decades in a campaign that has resulted in tens of thousands of deaths.

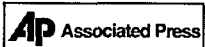
Turkey's military has been battling the rebels in the country's southeast as well as striking suspected separatist targets across the border in northern Iraq, where thousands of rebels have their main base.

The pro-Kurdish Firat news agency also reported clashes between troops and guerrillas in Bingol but said there were no details about casualties. The statement said military operations were continuing and the Turkish troops were backed by helicopters.

Turkish jets have conducted at least four cross-border aerial attacks on rebel positions in northern Iraq since Dec. 16. The military has claimed to have inflicted heavy losses on the group in those raids, killing as many as 175 rebels and destroying command and logistic centers, shelters, and ammunition depots.

In October, the Turkish parliament authorized the military to strike at the rebels across the border, following a string of deadly attacks by the PKK.

The U.S. – which with Turkey and the European Union considers the PKK a terrorist organization – has cautioned Ankara against a large incursion, fearing it could disrupt one of Iraq's more stable regions.



Pro-Kurdish party protests Turkish raids in Iraq; 2 police injured in blast

February 5, 2008

ISTANBUL, Turkey: Members of a pro-Kurdish political party set up camp near the Iraq border to protest Turkish military raids on Kurdish rebels based on the other side. Separately, a roadside bomb injured two police officers in a border area where guerrillas are active, local media reported Wednesday.

Activists from the Democratic Society Party drove in dozens of vehicles Tuesday to Mt. Cudi in Sirnak province to demand a peaceful solution to the long conflict between the Turkish state and rebels who seek autonomy. The gathering was likely to infuriate Turkish nationalists, who accuse the Kurdish party of being a political front for the guerrillas.

On Monday, the Turkish military said its warplanes hit dozens of targets of the PKK rebel group in Iraq, a periodic occurrence since the United States said late last year that it would provide intelligence to Turkey to help it hunt Kurdish militants. Washington, in turn, has pressed Turkey to refrain from a major ground offensive across the border that could destabilize the relatively tranquil Kurdish regions of northern Iraq.

The PKK traditionally scales down attacks during the winter, and despite Turkish claims of success, there is no independent confirmation that aerial raids have diminished its fighting capacity. The rebels have not staged any large-scale ambushes since October, but two police were injured in a blast late Tuesday in the town of Yuksekova, in Hakkari province, where



the borders of Turkey, Iraq and Iran meet.

Police said the bomb was detonated by remote control as the police vehicle passed by, the Anatolia news agency reported. One officer was seriously hurt in the explosion, which shattered windows in nearby homes and offices. Police set up roadblocks at the entrance of the city to try to catch

the assailants.

In the overnight gathering near Mt. Cudi, Kurdish lawmakers and supporters slept in tents and danced around a camp fire at dawn. They urged the Turkish parliament to rescind the authorization that it gave to the government to carry out cross-border raids against the PKK, saying the guerrillas in turn should refrain from hostilities.

"We don't need another 30 years or another 30,000 deaths to understand that the policy of violence doesn't solve the Kurdish problem," lawmaker Emine Ayla said in a speech from the top of a bus.

Ayla also called for an improvement in the "living and health conditions" of Abdullah Ocalan, the founder of the PKK who is serving a life sentence on an island prison. In defiance of Turkish law, some people in the crowd held posters that showed Ocalan's image.

Ocalan's welfare is a chief concern for lawmakers from the Democratic Society Party, reflecting the sway that the imprisoned leader holds over

many Kurds. Ocalan built the PKK into a Stalinist organization in which dissent was sometimes met with execution, and the group's brutal tactics earned it a "terrorist" label from the West.

The Democratic Society Party won 20 seats in the 550-seat legislature in general elections last year, leading to hopes that the many disaffected Kurds in Turkey were poised to play a meaningful political role in a state that had effectively denied them a voice for years.

But the mood has soured since then, with prosecutors seeking to close down the party because of allegedly subversive activity. On Wednesday, the leader of the party, Nurettin Demirtas, went on trial on charges that he used forged health documents to avoid military service.

Demirtas, who was jailed for 10 years for PKK membership and denies the current charges, faces up to five years in prison. Most Turkish men must serve in the army for up to 15 months, and many do their service in zones where Kurdish rebels are active.

REUTERS

In Iraq : Problems seen for Iraq budget despite compromise

February 6, 2008

By Wisam Mohammed and Ahmed Rasheed **REUTERS**

BAGHDAD – A compromise on the main sticking point holding up Iraq's 2008 budget appears possible but it and several other key reconciliation laws face potentially long delays, lawmakers and ministers said on Wednesday.

Iraqi lawmakers are set to vote on Thursday on the budget as well as laws governing the distribution of power between Baghdad and Iraq's 18 provinces and another that would free thousands of mainly Sunni Arab detainees from Iraqi jails.

Lawmakers have so far refused to ratify the \$48 billion budget because of arguments over allocations between the provinces, particularly the largely autonomous northern region of Kurdistan.

The current draft of the law has allocated 17 percent of budget funds to Kurdistan, based on population estimates.

Shi'ite and Sunni Arab lawmakers say Kurdistan should receive about 13 percent because that is a more accurate reflection of the Kurdish population in the absence of any recent census.

Planning Minister Ali Baban, a Kurdish independent, said he would deliver on Thursday a report from his department with a compromise figure that showed Kurds made up about 14.5 percent of Iraq's estimated population of 27.5 million.

He said the figure was based on statistics available to his department, including the most recent national census in 1987.

Despite that estimate, Baban said he expected the budget to pass with an allocation for Kurdistan of 17 percent.

'I expect the budget for the region will be 17 percent because normally we give more than the percentage of the population to secure provinces to encourage these provinces to implement projects,' Baban told Reuters.

JUMPSTART ECONOMY

Iraqi officials have said that failure to pass the budget would hold up vital spending at a time when Washington is urging the government to jumpstart the economy.

U.S. officials have praised the 2008 budget as well as this month's passage of a law allowing former members of Saddam Hussein's Baath party to rejoin the government. Washington introduced 'de-Baathification' under U.S. administrators in Iraq after the 2003 invasion but acknowledged it went too far.

A U.S. embassy official said that matters of 'political will' were holding up the budget. He said the fact that lawmakers would not be able to take their winter recess before the budget was passed might hasten the process.

'The parliamentarians are desperate to go on holidays ... that's adding to the dynamic and increasing their willingness to compromise,' the embassy official told Reuters.

Lawmakers on both sides appeared unwilling to give ground.

'We consider the demands to lower our share of the budget below 17 percent are a political conspiracy against the Kurds and our rights,' Kurdish lawmaker Mahama Khalil told Reuters.

Usama al-Nujaifi of the secular Shi'ite Iraqi National List said 14.5 percent was the most likely point for compromise.

'If the Kurds insist on 17 percent then many blocs will reject the budget in its current form,' he said.

'It will be very difficult to pass the budget on Thursday.'

Freeing prisoners has been one of the preconditions for the Accordance Front, the main Sunni Arab bloc, to return to cabinet after it quit last August over a number of differences with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's Shi'ite-led government.

The amnesty law to be voted on would exclude those sentenced to death or convicted of killings, terrorism, kidnapping, drugs offences or corruption and would cover more than 23,000 prisoners held by Iraq but not detainees in U.S. custody.

OIL&GAS JOURNAL

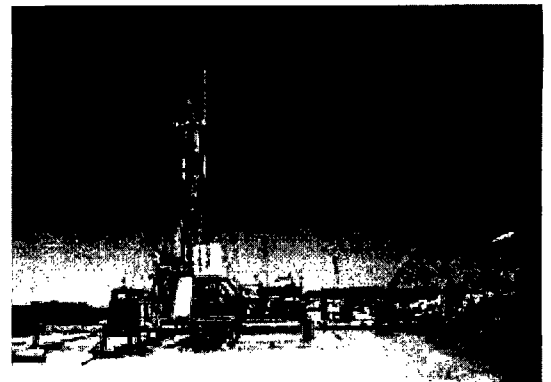
February 04, 2008

Iraq, Kurdistan continue row over oil contracts

Eric Watkins Senior Correspondent

LOS ANGELES, -- Disagreement over the development of Iraq's oil and gas persists between the country's central government in Baghdad and the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG), as both sides continue to insist on their respective rights. Kurdistan Region Prime

Minister Nechirvan Barzani said he will lead a delegation to Baghdad in the next 2 days for talks with the central government over the country's draft oil law, among other topics. Mahmud Uthman of the Kurdistan Alliance said the delegation will hold talks with Iraqi



Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on the status of the Oil and Gas Law, as well as recent and pending contracts KRG signed with international oil companies.

KRG Oil Minister Ashti Hawrami told an oil conference in London that the Kurds have not made any decision to stop signing new contracts with foreign firms, despite threats from the central government to block oil exports as a result of disputes over the legality of KRG contracts. "Talks with other firms are still

under way," said Hawrami. Meanwhile, reaffirming that the KRG oil contracts are illegal, Iraqi Oil Minister Husayn al-Shahrastani has threatened to blacklist international oil firms if they sign them.

In a published interview, Al-Shahrastani dismissed Kurdish aspirations by saying Iraq has lost decades of opportunities and wasted a year discussing the draft Oil and Gas law. He noted that the government has decided to expedite the rehabilitation of oil wells, adding that the

exact specifications required for developing oil wells in the long run have not yet been approved. Al-Shahrastani also said a good contract that would give the Iraqi government full ownership and control over the country's oil will be designed to encourage international oil companies to introduce technology and provide financial resources to his country.



Azzaman February 6, 2008

Kurds say to leave government if demands not met

By Kareem Zair

The Kurds will withdraw from the government of Prime Minister Noori al-Maliki if their share of the country's oil revenues is reduced.

Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish member of parliament, and a veteran Kurdish politician accused "certain political factions" in the government of attempts to "slash the gains Kurds have made" since a U.S.-led invasion toppled the regime of former leader Saddam Hussein.

Othman accused some Arab parliamentary blocs, both Shi-

ite and Sunni, of attempts to "ignite Arab-Kurdish strife."

Tension between Arab Sunnis and Shiites has subsided recently with tribal leaders, clergymen and politicians of both sides working together to reduce levels of violence.

Othman said both Arab Sunnis and Shiites were trying to undermine the Kurds.

Kurdish delegations some headed by Othman himself are in talks with Maliki on the percentage of oil money that will go to their regional budget.

The Kurds demand 17 percent but the government and its Arab allies say the figure is not

representative of the population of their semi-independent enclave currently including the three province of Dahouk, Arbil and Sulaimaniya.

This year's budget has yet to be approved by the parliament but differences over Kurdish share have blocked the approval.

MPs from both Shiite and Sunni blocs are said to have vowed turn down any budget proposal that meets Kurdish demands on oil royalties.

But Othman said if the parliament rejects the proposal, the Kurds will leave the government.

A Kurdish departure will deny Maliki the parliamentary majority but analysts say Arab factions, both Shiite and Sunni, which have so far shunned the government, may join in.

"Some elements in the parliament carry Chauvinistic minds," said Othman in the harshest criticism of the current Shiite and Sunni liaison in parliament.

In response, some MPs alleged that the Kurds were fomenting the sectarian strife and were not happy to see it subsiding.

Othman denied the allegations.

United Press International

Feb. 7, 2008

Talabani seeks resolution to Kurdish issue

KIRKUK, Iraq, Feb. 7 (UPI) -- Iraqi President Jalal Talabani visited the city of Kirkuk in an effort to resolve issues regarding disputes between Kurds and Turkomen.

Talabani visited the region in early February to resolve issues stemming from Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution dealing with the normalization of relations with ethnic communities in Kirkuk.

Article 140 attempts to reconcile grievances imposed by Saddam Hussein, who redrew boundaries in the oil-rich Kurdish region. The article calls for a new census to determine eligible electoral participation and referenda determining future provincial boundaries.

Kirkuk's Kurdish ethnic communities are pushing for integration into the Kurdistan Regional Government, though the Turkomen and Arab communities oppose that measure.

Talabani announced the establishment of a joint committee between Kurdish representatives and members of the Turkomen Front party during the visit, The Kurdish Globe reported. He urged officials with the Turkomen Front to end their opposition to the Kirkuk Provincial Council and encouraged more amicable ties between the Turkomen and Kurds.



Talabani suggested to officials a final resolution to Article 140 may include the equal distribution of administrative posts among Kurds, Arabs and Turkomen, with a minor delegation awarded to the Christian community.

Implementation of Article 140 was slated for completion by the end of 2007, but Kurdish officials approved a plan developed by the United Nations to delay the measure an additional six months.



Kurdistan Regional Government

February 7, 2008

Dr Hawrami: Just and fair oil management ensures Iraq's unity

London, UK (KRG.org) – Dr Ashti Hawrami, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Minister for Natural Resources, on Tuesday said that the oil and gas sector must be managed fairly to ensure the unity of Iraq.

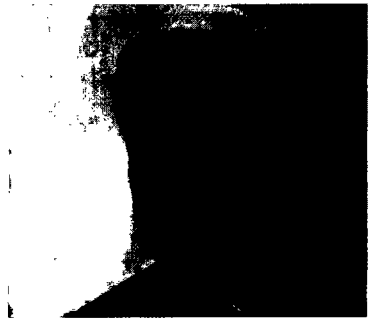
The Natural Resources Minister made the remarks in his presentation to a Middle East Energy Conference at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, also known as Chatham House, the UK's leading think tank on international affairs. The London conference brought together government officials, energy companies, analysts and journalists.

Dr Hawrami said, "The KRG is leading the way in Iraq's recovery by exercising our constitutional rights in the oil and gas sector. Our approach and policies will become a model for all of Iraq."

Dr Hawrami concluded that practising democratic federalism is the best way to keep Iraq together, and fair Iraqi revenue-sharing and oil laws can help to cement this new relationship.

He added, "We are in no doubt that we are acting constitutionally and legally, and this has been confirmed by an authoritative legal opinion." The KRG will continue to exercise its constitutional rights and continue with its achievements in oil and gas sector investment, he said.

To view Dr Hawrami's presentation please click on the link below. Please note that this file is 13 megabytes and may take some time to download.



The New York Times February 8, 2008

OP-ED CONTRIBUTOR

Veiled Democracy?

By **NOAH FELDMAN**, Cambridge, Mass.

THE West doesn't know quite what to think of Turkey's Islamic-oriented ruling party: does it envision a liberal, European future for Turkey or an Islamist one? A vote this week on the seemingly minor issue of whether head scarves should be allowed at universities will help us begin to answer that question.

The ban on women covering their heads on campus has long been a thorn in the side of the Justice and Development Party. The rule has the perverse effect of keeping devoutly religious women out of higher education. A few years ago, while on a trip to lecture about Islam, I met a daughter of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan — not in Istanbul, but at Indiana University, which she was attending at least in part so she could cover her head while getting an education.

The ban — a relic of the aggressive secularism enforced by modern Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk — can be repealed only by a constitutional amendment. Such an amendment was just one of dozens of changes that the Justice and Development Party was expected to propose a few weeks ago as part of a comprehensive overhaul of Turkey's state-centered, ethnically narrow Constitution.

The description of the package of draft amendments that was leaked to the press would put Turkey on a decidedly liberal constitutional course. Reports said that it would vest sovereignty in the people, not the state, and acknowledge that the category "Turkish" in reality encompasses people of all ethnicities — implicitly including Kurds, whose separate identity has

long been suppressed. The new Constitution would give parents increased control over their children's education, allowing them to opt out of state-mandated religious instruction. In this context, lifting the head-scarf ban could be seen as just another step toward the religious liberty that liberal, Western states claim to prize.

But before the amendment package could be formally introduced, a minority secularist party, the Nationalist Movement Party, introduced an amendment limited to ending the head-scarf ban. Support from that party essentially guarantees passage for any initiative the government favors — and, indeed, it passed a preliminary vote on Thursday and is likely to get final approval tomorrow. Apparently, Prime Minister Erdogan felt he could not turn down the opportunity to get the head scarf ban revoked.

Unfortunately, the passage of the head-scarf amendment casts doubt on whether the rest of the constitutional package will be introduced at all. Some hard-liners within the ruling party seem to be questioning whether it is worth the fight over liberal constitutional ideals if the gains to religion like lifting the head scarf ban can be achieved other ways. They have a point: the party must always be careful about provoking the military, which sees itself not only as the protector of secularism but of traditional Turkish nationalism, and is wary of any major liberalizing changes.

The issue raises a big question about Mr. Erdogan: is he dedicated to his party's plans for comprehensive constitutional reform, or is he simply serving the inter-

ests of religion? The latter would be a grave error — if Turkey is to continue its integration into European and Western civilization, it needs to show that liberal values and Islam are not only compatible but complementary. The audience for this message includes Europe, which for historical reasons is skeptical — perhaps too skeptical — about bringing a non-Christian nation into the orbit of the European Union.

Yet there is a more important audience: the Muslim world at large. The rising global Islamist movement is embroiled in its own epochal debate about whether an authentically Islamic government can and must respect individual freedoms and the equality of all citizens. The best possible refutation of the claim that Islam and democracy are incompatible would be to point to an existing government where liberal and Islamic values work together.

In Turkey, starting with the head-scarf amendment — a case study of religious freedom against coercive secularism — is perfectly fine. Liberalism, after all, has its roots in the desire to protect Christian religious liberty. But the historical staying power of liberal democracy has come from expanding citizenship and extending constitutional protections to minority groups and others vulnerable to government coercion. Turkey has the chance to blaze that trail in the Muslim world — it's up to Mr. Erdogan to keep moving ahead.

Noah Feldman, a contributing writer for The Times Magazine, is a professor at Harvard Law School and a fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Ruling partners pressure Iraq premier

Key parties threaten to oust Nouri Maliki unless he acts quickly to improve the government's performance and build an effective coalition.

By Ned Parker Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

BAGHDAD — Key partners in Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's government may seek the ouster of the Shiite Muslim leader if he fails to move quickly on stalled benchmark reforms and on sharing in decision making.

Threats of a possible parliamentary vote of no confidence have come in recent weeks from the Kurdish Alliance and the Shiite party Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, Maliki's last major defenders, which, along with the largest Sunni political party, have suggested Vice President Adel Abdul Mehdi, a Shiite, as a possible alternative. The parties have told Maliki that he must build an effective ruling coalition.

"If he does not, he will hurt himself and he will hurt Iraq. Then the parties should seek other options," said Rosh Shaws, a senior Kurdish Alliance leader.

Iraqi leaders, worried that Baghdad could slip back into sectarian war, are demanding quick improvement in the government's performance in areas such as providing services and creating jobs for former Sunni insurgents.

"Whether it will come to a vote of no confidence or not, it remains to be seen, but the agreed policy, the agreed road map, is that sweeping fundamental reforms are urgently needed. Otherwise the consequences will be dire," said Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Barham Salih, with the Kurdish Alliance.

The warnings to Maliki have come in public statements, private communications and closed-door meetings since late December, when the Kurdish Alliance accused him in a letter of running a dysfunctional one-party state.

The Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, the main ally of Maliki's Shiite-run Islamic Dawa Party, promptly followed with a public rebuke during a Friday sermon. The Iraqi Islamic Party, the largest Sunni grouping in parliament, announced a political alliance with the Kurds.

Faced with a mini-revolt, Maliki held a meeting Jan. 14 with Iraq's three-man presidency council, with which he had feuded since late summer.

The council -- President Jalal Talabani of the Kurdish Alliance; and the two vice presidents, Tariq Hashimi, a Sunni with the Iraqi Islamic Party, and Abdul Mehdi, of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council -- presented Maliki a paper sketching their vision of how the government should be run. Maliki had spurned an earlier draft in August and had stopped meeting with the council.

The document calls on Maliki to set all national policies in consultation with the presidency council and to form an efficient technocrat government, slimmed down from its current size of nearly 40 ministries.

'Not about personality'

As a guarantee, the skeptical Talabani, Hashimi and Abdul Mehdi inserted a clause in the paper that said the presidency reserved the right to call for a parliamentary vote of no confidence against the prime minister if he failed to move seriously on reforms or to consult them.

"We are giving Al Maliki another opportunity to prove he is very much interested to change the course," Hashimi said.

"We have said no problem if you are prepared to make the required reforms," he said. "We don't have any reservations about you staying in power. It's not about personality; it's about how the country is going to be run. If he fails, definitely the country will be in need of a replacement."

Maliki supporters, for their part, appear deeply suspicious of the presidency council and reluctant to cede ground.

"They want to take some authority from the prime minister," said Sami Askari, a parliament member and part of Maliki's inner circle. "If Hashimi takes anything from Maliki, that means Adel Abdul Mehdi will take something as well."

Advisors to Maliki have confirmed the existence of the document and the prime minister's acceptance, but it has yet to be signed.

"There is such a thing," said Haidar Abadi, a parliament member with Maliki's party. "I don't know if it will come to that. If things go to the worse, they can ask for a vote of no confidence. It's a constitutional right. That's how we see it, and we don't reject it."

Humam Hamoodi, a senior leader from the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, the largest party in Maliki's 85-seat Shiite bloc, said the document was meant to hold Maliki accountable.

"It is also to make these meetings more serious and more productive," he said. "We think through pressure and advice and support we can make it better."

Oil is an issue

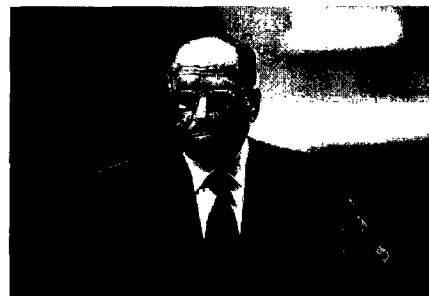
The deepest disputes remain between Maliki and the Kurdish Alliance. The Kurds believe that Maliki has reneged on promises to bring to a parliamentary vote the draft of a national oil law approved by the Cabinet a year ago. The legislation invited regional governments to sign their own oil contracts with Baghdad's approval and to welcome joint ventures. Instead, they say, Maliki has thrown his weight behind a radically reworked draft law that the Kurds say peels back the regions' rights. The legislation remains in limbo.

The Kurds also believe that the Islamic Dawa Party has permitted the Kurds to be stymied in parliament on issues such as the funding of its regional paramilitary force and the Kurdistan region's 17% share of the national budget. The latter dispute has delayed passage of the 2008 budget. Since the latest effort at compromise between Maliki and the presidency council, one piece of major legislation has passed parliament -- a law to reinstate former civil servants from Saddam Hussein's government -- but the presidency council has criticized the legislation.

Dawa members believe that neither the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council nor the Kurds will remove powerful party figures from ministries in the name of forming a technocrat government. But the Kurds, the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council and the Islamic Party have started to coa-

lesce around Abdul Mehdi as a possible alternative to Maliki.

"If you ask me who could replace Maliki, there are millions of Iraqis who would be qualified to be prime minister, but on top of the list is definitely Dr. Adel [Abdul Mehdi]," Hashimi said. "I



can say that he could be the man in case our intended reforms reach an impasse."

Hamoodi of the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council acknowledged that Abdul Mehdi still had much support within the broader Shiite alliance. "Half of the [alliance] wants Adel Abdul Mehdi to be the prime minister, but anyway we have a prime minister now and he has had success especially in the security file," Hamoodi said.

The senior parliament member pointed out that Maliki remained weak.

"The Sunnis have problems with him; the Kurds have problems with him; even the Shiites have problems," Hamoodi said.

Maliki confidant Askari accused Abdul Mehdi of traveling to Tehran last month to engineer Maliki's ouster but said he was rebuffed by the Iranian government

Abdul Mehdi, who twice narrowly lost in his bids for the premiership after Iraq's two national elections in 2005, is a favorite in Washington, where he is seen as a relative moderate, capable of working with all of Iraq's religious and ethnic groups. He has denied any wish to unseat Maliki.

Minding the U.S.

A government official with the Shiite bloc cautioned that the Americans were still opposed to replacing Maliki -- particularly in a U.S. presidential election year and with no ironclad assurance that a new Cabinet could be named in less than four or five months.

A U.S. State Department official, who was not authorized to speak to reporters, said the Americans doubted such a coalition to oust him existed.

The Iraqi official, who also did not have permission to talk to journalists, said the factions were looking for the votes necessary for a no-confidence resolution to pass in the parliament.

"I think they will do it if they can agree on a person who can take over the Cabinet after a vote of no confidence, but we don't have the formula yet," he said. "A lot of people are hoping they will come up with something soon."

TIME

Feb. 08, 2008

No Local Allies in Wings for Mosul Fight

By AP/BRADLEY BROOKS

(MOSUL, Iraq) — Iraqi and American commanders are preparing for a prolonged — and possibly pivotal — fight against al-Qaida in Iraq in this vital northern hub. But they are missing an essential tool used to uproot insurgents elsewhere: groups of local Sunni fighters.

The so-called Awakening Councils remain conspicuously absent in Mosul and efforts to stir a similar movement appear unlikely amid the region's pecking order of groups. Some military leaders even worry that seeking to enlist local allies could boomerang and bring more unrest.

It could create "the perception that you're arming one side, which automatically creates tension among the groups and has the potential to escalate violence," said Lt. Col. Michael Simmering, of the 3rd Armored Cavalry at Forward Operating Base Marez near Mosul.

This could change the complexion and strategy of the anticipated offensive in the Mosul area, which is believed to be al-Qaida's last major urban stronghold.

In other key showdowns over the past year — including the western Anbar province and Sunni corridors around Baghdad — U.S.-led forces have counted on important help from the Awakening Councils, which provide extra firepower and critical local knowledge.

But areas such as Anbar are almost entirely Sunni and are dominated by a single tribe. Mosul's province, Nineveh, is a patchwork of ethnicities and religious sects that includes Sunni Arabs, Shiites, Kurds and others.

In Anbar, it is "easier to have a model like the Awakening Councils because essentially it is being run by the predominant tribe," said Juan Cole, a Middle East political analyst at the University of Michigan.

"But Nineveh just doesn't look like that, therefore the model is much more difficult to implement," he said.

While about 60 percent of Nineveh is Sunni Arab, there are also large groups of ethnic Turkmen along with Shiite Arabs, Kurds and enclaves for Christians and Yazidis, who follow an ancient faith.

There are approximately eight Awakening Councils around Qarraya, a predominantly Sunni Arab city about 45 miles south of Mosul. But the rest of the province is so mixed that — if the U.S. military were to support one group — it could upset a perceived balance of power and lead to fighting, Simmering said.

The main friction could be caused by the Kurds and their peshmerga fighting force, believed to have more than 60,000 members, and whose semi-autonomous region borders Nineveh.

"The Kurds are expansionists and they would very much like to annex Mosul and parts of Nineveh to the Kurdistan regional authority," Cole said. "There is severe tension between the peshmerga and the Sunni Arabs — and Mosul is something like 80 percent Sunni Arab."

So the risks are clear if U.S. commanders attempt to form Sunni-led Awakening Councils in Iraq's third-largest city, said Cole.

"You're setting up for a civil war," he added.

Mosul has become a prime objective for Iraqi and U.S. forces as insurgents sought new havens after fleeing offensives in and around Baghdad.

Last month, Iraq ordered thousands more police and soldiers to the region after an insurgent bomb cache blew apart a poor Sunni neighborhood, killing about 60 people. Less than a week later, an insurgent ambush killed five U.S. soldiers on patrol.

An al-Qaida front group on Monday threatened

more bloodshed, calling on volunteers to carry out suicide attacks on U.S. troops, Iraqi Shiites and Kurdish forces in a statement posted on a Web site commonly used by insurgents.

The scenario does not become simpler outside Mosul.

Within the Sinjar mountain region in the west, for example, there is a strong Kurdish enclave that includes Yazidis — a Kurdish-speaking group whose religion precedes Christianity and Islam. Surrounding all that is a large Sunni Arab population.

"Automatically, creating an Awakening Council there creates the perception that a balance of power has shifted for one side or the other and escalates tensions," Simmering said.

The lack of an Awakening Councils network — working as local informants and paramilitary muscle — forces the Iraqi army to boost its presence throughout Nineveh.

Army Maj. Gen. Mark P. Hertling, the top American commander in northern Iraq, said "Mosul will be more reliant on the Iraqi army and the Iraqi police force for security in their area."

"A lot of U.S. policy in the north is hamstrung. The U.S. can't just do whatever it wants up there because it depends so heavily on the Kurds and peshmerga for general security duties," Cole said.

So creating ties with Sunni militia allies is a dangerous option.

"It's just politically very delicate and the U.S. military would be in danger of breaking with its Kurdish allies if it went in that direction," Cole said.

REUTERS

Feb 10, 2008

Kurdistan raises Iraq's new post-Saddam flag

By Shamal Aqrabi

ARBIL, Iraq, (Reuters) - Iraq's new flag was raised for the first time in the autonomous region of Kurdistan on Sunday in place of a banner Kurds have long said was a painful reminder of Saddam Hussein's rule.

A military band played the Iraqi national anthem as the new flag, which looks similar to the design it replaced, was raised above parliament beside the flag of Kurdistan.

"Today is the start of a new day for relations between the Kurdish region and the rest of Iraq," Adnan al-Mufti, the speaker of Kurdistan's parliament, told Kurdish lawmakers before the ceremony.

"Raising this flag unites us with the other Iraqi peoples in the struggle to build a new Iraq. It is a rebuff to those who say we don't want to be part of the state," he said.

Kurdish officials had refused to fly the old flag, saying it reminded them of Saddam's military campaign against the Kurds in the 1980s that killed tens of thousands.

The new flag, approved for a year after which a permanent replacement will be chosen, looks much like the old one which was first flown after the coup by Saddam's Baath party in 1963.

It is still red, white and black, but three green stars in the centre representing unity, freedom and socialism -- the motto of the now outlawed Baath party -- have been removed.

The phrase Allahu Akbar (God is Greatest), added in green Arabic script on



Saddam's orders during the 1991 Gulf War, remains but is no longer in his handwriting.

The new flag was raised over the national parliament in Baghdad for the first time on Tuesday.

But some Iraqis, including Sunni Arabs favoured during Saddam's era, reject the new banner.

Many say the old flag had little to do with Saddam and would prefer the government focused on creating new jobs and fixing intermittent water and electricity supplies.

Kurds say they are only happy with the flag as a stop-gap, until a more inclusive design is drawn up.

"This flag does not symbolise the Kurdish people. It talks only of Arab history ... I hope the permanent flag will mention the Kurds," lawmaker Shukriya Rasoul told

Turkey 'stuck' over head scarves

Worn-out issue stifling women's progress, lawyer argues

By Sabrina Tavernise

ISTANBUL: For Fatma Benli, a Turkish lawyer and women's rights advocate, the current controversy over Islamic head scarves has the irritating sound of a broken record.

Benli, who is 34, wears one herself. (On Wednesday, it was light brown with floral print, tucked into neck of a white turtleneck.) But she would rather talk about other things.

"I could tell you about domestic violence, about honor killings, about the parts of the criminal code that discriminate against women," she said, ticking off her areas of expertise in rapid-fire sentences. "But we can't move on to those issues."

"The head scarf is where we are stuck," she said.

The story of how Turkey got there is also, in large part, the story of Benli, who has been a central, if reluctant, participant in the fight in Turkey over whether covered women should be allowed to go to college.

The governing party of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has taken its case to Parliament, trying to lift the ban, a move that has enraged the secular establishment. A final vote on lifting the ban is scheduled for Saturday.

Benli's family came from rural Turkey to Istanbul before she was born, part of a wave of migration to cities that began in the second part of the last century as uneducated, observant Turks sought work in newly developing industries.

Turkey changed into an urban society from an agrarian one — now more than 60 percent of the population lives in cities — and by the 1990s their children began to go to college.

Still, the state remained divided by class, and the secular elite who controlled the state through institutions like the military and the judiciary watched warily as growing numbers of covered women, whose mothers had not been educated, entered campuses.

Benli was the first person in her family to get a college education. She finished her law degree before the state began to enforce the ban, an interpretation of an earlier court ruling, but her two years of additional graduate work

fell victim to it: a 300-page master's thesis at Istanbul University Law School had to be orally defended on campus.

Her mother, also covered, pressured her to remove her scarf, to no avail.

"I just couldn't do it," she said in an interview in her law office this week. "I left the room crying. They marked me absent."

The reasons are deeply personal and hard to put into words, but are a combi-

nation of her relationship to God and her aversion to accepting what she sees as misplaced authority. "This is related to my private life," she said. "It's my personality. My wholeness."

In one particularly traumatic example, as told to Benli by several of her clients, a university rector forced several women to uncover their heads in front of him, in order to obtain his signature to allow them to transfer out of

**'This is related
to my private life.
It's my personality.
My wholeness.'**

the college he was taking over and no longer allowing them to attend.

The state, she said, was saying: "No matter what you think, I can make you do what I want," an attitude that, if followed, made one feel "degraded."

Benli argues passionately that the ban moves Turkish society backward by keeping women like herself out of skilled professions. Among her generation of women in her family, there is a doctor, a dentist and a teacher, but their daughters have fewer opportunities.

"There's a sense of defeat," she said. "Now the objective is to have a family, to make a nice marriage. They do not have the ideals we once had."

For the past decade she has been defending cases of covered women who argue that the state violated their legal rights. Because of her scarf, she cannot defend the cases in court, and has to send uncovered partners to do it for her. Last month, one of her law partners

took up the veil; now they are both looking for new partners.

"They say you are not a person," she said last Saturday at a women's center in Istanbul. "We can limit you because you don't deserve it. They don't cite laws. They say you are a threat."

Turkish society is currently consumed with discussions over the head scarf. Talk shows blare loud debates. Newspapers declare victories and failures in headlines. That has led to a lot of talk, some of it deeply uninformed, about whether Islam requires the veil.

Benli said she does not want people untrained in religion to decide for her. "This is like a foot doctor making a diagnosis on the teeth," she said, smiling.

The ban has caused bursts of ingenuity on the part of the women and the state they are trying to circumvent. To obtain identification cards with photographs of uncovered heads, young wom-



en used computer graphics programs to draw hair over their scarves. The Higher Education Council, responsible for enforcing the ban, countered by sending its own photographers to campuses and requiring women to be photographed by them.

Some women began going to Turkish-controlled northern Cyprus to get around the ban, but the Turkish authorities followed, according to Benli, setting up rules that forbid Turkish citizens to wear their scarves in colleges there.

Other Muslims, from Europe and Africa, were free. Turkey has even asked Bulgaria to require Turks to uncover in college, Benli said.

"They called religious people uncontemporary," she said. "Now they are applying very uncontemporary methods."

Meanwhile, the fight over the scarf goes on. A mainstream secular newspaper ran an article about Benli and a group of activists demonstrating in a public area, saying they were subversives and religious radicals.

The photograph told a different tale. She was in the center, she said, flanked by other women, some covered, some not.

"I was in pink," she said, smiling playfully, "and I was very beautiful."

Why the Surge Worked

A year after Bush sent 30,000 additional troops to Iraq, violence is down and al-Qaeda is in retreat. But the gains are still too fragile

BY MICHAEL DUFFY WITH MARK KUKIS/BAGHDAD

LIKE MANY RETAIL DISTRICTS IN downtown Baghdad, al-Kindy Street has lately had little to offer shoppers but a fine assortment of fear, blood and death. Shootings and regular bombings have shuttered many of al-Kindy's stores, where some of Baghdad's wealthiest residents once bought everything from eggplants

to area rugs. At this time last year, al-Kindy was deteriorating into just another bombed-out corner of a city spiraling out of control.

Then came the surge—President George W. Bush's controversial deployment, beginning last January, of an additional 30,000 U.S. troops, that seemed as tactically bold as it was politically unpopular. With his approval ratings ebbing and a bipartisan group of wise elders urging him to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq, Bush went in the other direction. Overcoming the opposition of the Joint Chiefs, Bush sent five additional combat brigades to secure the capital, hunt down al-Qaeda in Iraq in the countryside and, at least in theory, stop the violence long enough for the country's Sunnis and Shi'ites to find common ground on power-sharing.

The surge's successes and limits are both plainly visible on al-Kindy today. A well-stocked pharmacy has reopened. A new cell-phone store selling the latest in

high-tech gadgets opened in December. A trickle of shoppers moved along the sidewalks on a recent chilly morning as a grocer, who asked that his name not be used, surveyed the local business climate. "Things are improving slightly," he said. "But not as much as we hoped." Indeed, if al-Kindy is coming back, it is doing so slowly, unevenly—and only with a lot of well-armed help. Sandbagged checkpoints stand at either end of al-Kindy, manned by Iraqi soldiers with machine guns. Iraqi police in body armor prowl back alleys and side streets to intercept would-be car bombers. U.S. military officials often point visitors to al-Kindy Street as a metaphor for what is working—and what remains undone. "We still have some work to do," says Lieut. General Ray Odierno, the No. 2 U.S. commander in Iraq. "I tell everybody we've opened a window. There's a level of security now that would allow [Iraqi politicians] to take advantage of this window in time, pass the key legislation to bring Iraq together so they can move forward. Are they going to do that? In my mind, we don't know."

One year and 937 U.S. fatalities later, the surge is a fragile and limited success, an operation that has helped stabilize the capital and its surroundings but has yet to spark the political gains that could set the stage for a larger American withdrawal. As a result of improving security in Iraq, the war no longer is the most pressing issue in the presidential campaign, having been supplanted by the faltering U.S. economy. Voters still oppose the war by nearly 2 to 1, but Democrats sense the issue could be less galvanizing as troops begin to return home. Republicans who supported the surge, like Arizona Senator John McCain, have been trying out tiny victory laps lately, but because the hard-won stability could reverse itself, both parties are proceeding carefully. Interviews with top officials in Baghdad and Washington and on-the-ground assessments by TIME reporters in Iraq reveal why the surge has produced real gains—but also why the war still has the capacity to cause collateral damage half a world away.

Bush's Plan—and Saddam's

IT IS AN ENDURING MYSTERY OF THE BUSH White House that no one seems to know exactly when, how or why Bush decided to invade Iraq in 2003. But no such confusion clouds how the surge of 2007 was hatched. In December 2006, even as the Iraq Study Group was urging the President to begin a staged withdrawal from Iraq, another group of experts was putting together a very different plan. Fred Kagan of the American Enterprise Institute and retired Army General Jack Keane began



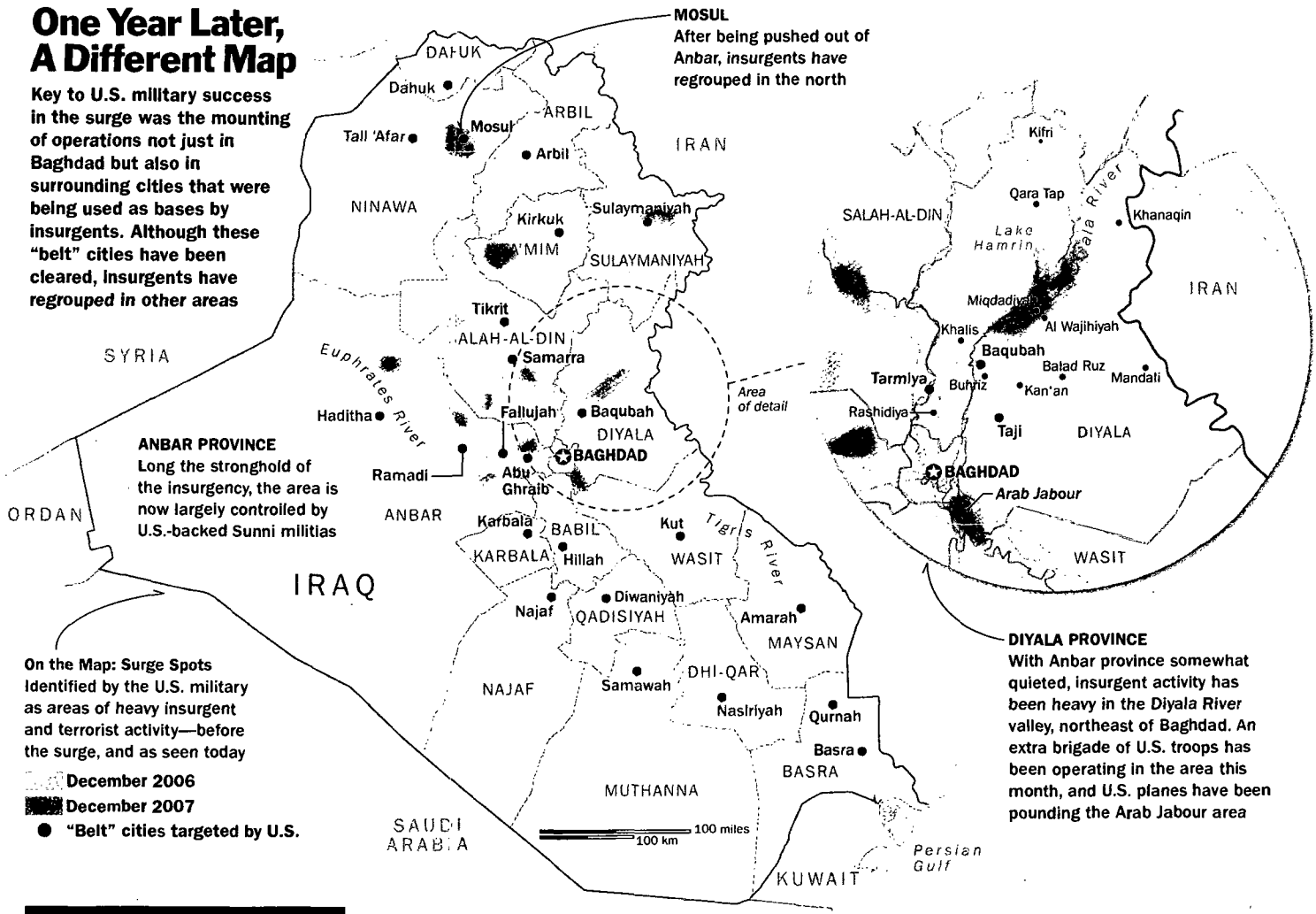
Keeping the faith A U.S. armored vehicle patrols a street in al-Dora as a woman walks to church. A year ago, Christians in this mixed neighborhood rarely left home for fear of attacks by jihadis



On our side now Two soldiers receive head scarves from a commander of the Concerned Local Citizens group in the Mekanik district. Many CLC members are ex-insurgents who now help the U.S. military

One Year Later, A Different Map

Key to U.S. military success in the surge was the mounting of operations not just in Baghdad but also in surrounding cities that were being used as bases by insurgents. Although these "belt" cities have been cleared, insurgents have regrouped in other areas



THE SURGE BY THE NUMBERS

TROOPS

130,000

U.S. troops in Iraq before the surge

30,000

Additional troops sent in 2007

U.S. CASUALTIES

68

Monthly average of U.S. troops killed in '06, before the surge

84

Killed in August '07

23

Killed in December '07

IRAQI CIVILIAN CASUALTIES

2,871

Monthly average of Iraqi civilians killed in '06

1,600

Killed in August '07

550

Killed in December '07

IRAQI MILITARY AND POLICE CASUALTIES

174

Monthly average of security forces killed in '06

76

Killed in August '07

72

Killed in December '07

INSURGENTS

2,400

Insurgents killed during the surge

8,800

Insurgents captured during the surge

SUNNIS

1,500

Sunnis who signed up for pro-U.S. "awakening councils" before the surge

25,000

Iraqis currently in awakening councils. 60,000 others, mostly Sunnis, have enrolled in Concerned Local Citizens groups

SOURCES: ICASUALTIES.ORG; IRAQ BODY COUNT; THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION'S IRAQ INDEX; U.S. MILITARY

calling not for a pullout but for an escalation of troops—a one-time infusion of combat soldiers to push the insurgents out of Baghdad. The Kagan-Keane plan found an eager audience at the National Security Council and with Vice President Dick Cheney. Within days, the plan had been sold to Bush, who pulled out a lot of stops to persuade the Pentagon—as well as colleagues in Congress. One Republican lawmaker, having watched his party lose control of both houses because of the war just a few months before, told Bush in a White House meeting that he would support the surge but that the strategy was a little like throwing a Hail Mary on fourth

down. At about the same time, Bush told General David Petraeus, the top U.S. general in Iraq, that he would be getting additional troops.

Petraeus and his commanders had gotten a lucky break when U.S. forces raided an al-Qaeda command-and-control center in Taji, north of Baghdad. Captured in the raid, Odierno tells TIME, was a map of Baghdad that outlined al-Qaeda's plan to capture and control the "belt" cities around the capital and then use those as logistical hubs and staging areas from which to mount attacks on U.S. forces inside the city. The telltale map suggested that to stabilize Baghdad, U.S. forces would also have

to root out the troublemakers lurking outside the city. "A lot of people thought what we needed to do was put everybody into Baghdad to secure the population," says Odierno. "But what we really thought was causing the sectarian violence were the car bombs, the indirect fire [from mortars and rockets] and the suicide bombers. And we really thought their supply networks were in these belts."

At about the same time Odierno was targeting the Baghdad beltway, he tasked his staff to find out how Saddam Hussein had defended Baghdad against the many secret cells and gangs that wanted to up-

end his regime. The answer came back: Saddam had always maintained a complex perimeter around Baghdad that on paper looked like a series of concentric circles. Saddam had posted his Republican Guard

in various towns that ringed the capital, and inside the city, he had stationed his Special Republican Guard. If it had worked for Saddam, thought Petraeus and Odierno, it might work for them against the insurgents.

But they had to wait. Though Bush announced the surge in January 2007, several months would pass before all 30,000 additional troops reached Iraq and took up their positions. As the troops deployed, Petraeus and Odierno mounted a string of offensive operations against al-Qaeda and insurgent strongholds all over Iraq: in Baghdad, in the belt towns and in cities deeper to the north and south. The idea was to shake the bad guys loose and then chase them down. Even with the extra troops, Odierno and Petraeus didn't have the forces to do this everywhere, but they dispersed their forces so widely that it seemed that way for a while.

Some of the initial results worried Odierno: U.S. casualties in May and June—227 killed—were so high that even he thought he might have miscalculated. But over the summer, the landscape began to change. In Baghdad, GIs moved out of their relatively safe megabases on the outskirts and into smaller bases in the city's violent neighborhoods—to live, form networks and walk patrols. Following Saddam's model, Odierno split his troops between Baghdad and the belt towns on

a 3-to-2 basis: 3 soldiers inside the capital for every 2 outside the city. By the end of June, the generals began to notice that sectarian attacks were decreasing.

Antagonists Become Allies

PETRAEUS AND ODIERNO ALSO REALIZED early on that the insurgents could never be defeated the old-fashioned way. "You cannot kill your way out of an insurgency," Petraeus tells *TIME*. "You're not going to defeat everybody out there. You have to turn them." And many of America's enemies were ripe for turning. Before the surge, elements of al-Qaeda in Anbar province were carrying out grisly atrocities against local Sunnis, including women and children, who refused to join the jihad against Americans. The Sunnis approached the Americans for help, and Petraeus was happy to oblige. The local uprising against al-Qaeda is known as the Anbar Awakening, and it gave the U.S. a model for turning local tribes, clans and whole neighborhoods against the insurgents.

Sometimes the incentive has been simply the will to survive; at other times, the U.S. has rushed cash, logistical help and weapons to local militias in exchange for

registration of their names and retinal IDs with U.S. officials. Over the past year, the U.S. has sanctioned more than 125 local proxy armies, an ad hoc force of at least 60,000 that one could call "the other surge." Known as Concerned Local Citizens groups (CLCs), these militias serve as watch groups, police forces and eyes and ears for U.S. forces all over Iraq. But while American commanders are delighted to have help, not all Iraqis are comfortable with the CLCs. Many in the Shi'ite-led Iraqi government worry that the citizens groups—which are mostly Sunni and in some cases are little better than street gangs—will eventually morph into antigovernment militias. Lately al-Qaeda has stepped up attacks on Sunnis who take up arms with the Americans.

As former Sunni insurgents have made common cause with the U.S., one of Iraq's largest Shi'ite factions has been eerily quiet. In late August, for reasons that are still a little mysterious, Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his Mahdi Army to desist from attacking U.S. forces. U.S. officials believe al-Sadr's move was less about helping the U.S. than about purging unruly elements from his 60,000-man militia. Another interpretation is that al-Sadr is simply waiting out the surge and that his fighters will return to the fray when U.S. troops have withdrawn. Whatever the reason, Odierno reckons that al-Sadr's cease-fire is responsible for a 15%-to-20% reduction in attacks on U.S. forces over the past year. U.S. military officers are now in touch with their counterparts at all levels of al-Sadr's operation, trying to persuade them to join the peaceful coalition, as some Sunni tribes have done. But whether that invitation will be accepted—or how long the cease-fire will hold—is anyone's guess.

The surge's proponents say the main reason Iraq is quieter now than it was a year ago is that Odierno and Petraeus simply kept after the bad guys. "They went after about every safe haven at the same time," notes Kagan. "They followed up, they didn't give the enemy time to regroup and set up command-and-control centers." The strategy has been costly: 901 American troops died in Iraq in 2007, the deadliest year for U.S. forces since 2004. But Iraqi-on-Iraqi violence has dropped dramatically since the surge began, and U.S. fatalities decreased from 126 in May to 23 in December.

How Long Can It Last?

ONE OF THE MOST STRIKING CHANGES OF 2007 is the relative candor with which U.S. military officers now talk about Iraq. Unlike most of their starry-eyed predecessors, when asked, Petraeus and Odierno are quick to list what isn't working well. Iraqi security forces remain unable to mount operations without the logistical help of U.S. forces. Al-Qaeda in Iraq is on the run, but it has not been routed, and it still enjoys free

rein in some parts of the country. Murder, death threats and kidnappings are still commonplace; more than 100,000 sections of concrete car-bomb barriers now snake around Baghdad's neighborhoods. And in something of an understatement, even Petraeus calls the progress toward political reconciliation "tenuous." The largest Sunni bloc in parliament, known as the Accordance Front, walked out in August. In January, the parliament passed a measure that would extend to former Baathists and supporters of Saddam a measure of eligibility for service in the new government, which is largely controlled by Shi'ites. The move was long overdue, and no one knows whether the measure will ever be implemented; Sunnis are skeptical, and so, at times, is Washington. "We nudge. We push. We prod. We pull. We cajole," says U.S. ambassador Ryan Crocker. But he adds that the Iraqis "have to make the decision."

And that's the trouble. "The big problem remains that you've got a central government that is dysfunctional and disorganized, and that's being kind," says Representative Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican and a member of the House Armed Services Committee, who has been to Iraq seven times. Cole believes that the only thing that will compel Iraq's various factions to work together is the threat of U.S. withdrawal—something the Iraq Study Group proposed more than a year ago.

In fact, that's already happening. Several thousand troops involved in the surge have quietly begun to pull out. For now, Petraeus and Odierno are sticking by their plan to draw down U.S. forces by roughly 4,000 troops a month through July. Left unchanged, that would return U.S. forces close to their pre-surge level. But both men caution that it could be halted if violence flares up. Petraeus says further withdrawals depend on a matrix of unknowns: military and economic conditions, and whether the Iraqis are showing signs of governing themselves.

Uncertainties of that size make it impossible to know where the U.S. will be in Iraq in six months, and that's something the presidential candidates would be better off not trying to predict. Iraq is an undoubtedly safer, better place than it was 12 months ago. Yet the ultimate outcome in Iraq is out of the hands of Petraeus and the U.S. military. After a yearlong surge, the U.S. is about to move from the relatively safe ground of betting on its troops to betting on Iraqis. And that's a very different kind of wager. —WITH REPORTING BY DANIEL PEPPER AND MAZIN EZZAT/BAGHDAD AND MARK THOMPSON AND BRIAN BENNETT/WASHINGTON ■

IRAK

Les Kurdes victimes de leur boulimie

Les revendications excessives des Kurdes irakiens ont eu pour effet de pousser les Arabes chiites et sunnites à se rapprocher. A terme, ils seront obligés de revoir leur copie.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

New York

Depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003, la minorité kurde jouit d'une influence disproportionnée. Mais le vent est en train de tourner, car cette emprise est loin d'être du goût des Irakiens arabes, et la fragile unité du pays, déjà mise à mal par l'antagonisme entre Arabes sunnites et chiïtes, risque de se fissurer encore davantage. Les Kurdes, qui sont en majorité sunnites mais ne sont pas arabes, avaient soutenu le gouvernement lorsque le Premier ministre Al-Maliki eut perdu le soutien du Parlement. Grâce à leur sens politique, à leur proximité avec les Américains et à leurs compétences techniques, les Kurdes se sont retrouvés en position de force. Cette place de choix leur a permis de dicter les termes de la Constitution, qui leur a accordé une autonomie régionale et des droits importants en matière d'exploitation pétrolière.

Mais, aujourd'hui, leur politique provoque l'hostilité des autres communautés. Leur volonté de prendre le contrôle de la ville pétrolière de

Kirkouk [également revendiquée par les Turkmènes et les Arabes] et d'obtenir un partage plus avantageux des revenus nationaux a eu pour résultat que la plupart des sunnites et une bonne partie des chiïtes se sont rangés derrière le gouvernement pour mettre le holà aux revendications des Kurdes. Et Washington se retrouve coincé entre les Kurdes, qu'il soutient et protège depuis longtemps, et les Irakiens arabes, qu'il cherche à conquérir. Une position des plus inconfortable.

Le Conseil suprême islamique d'Irak, un groupe chiïte influent, n'a pas pris parti publiquement [contre la mainmise kurde], mais certains de ses dirigeants se sont ouvertement montrés hostiles aux Kurdes. Le ministre du Pétrole, un chiïte important, a qualifié d'illégaux les contrats pétroliers passés avec des entreprises étrangères. Et la majorité des commentateurs indépendants se rangent à cette opinion. "Les Kurdes en ont trop fait, c'est le sentiment général", souligne Joost Hiltermann, analyste pour le Moyen-Orient de l'International Crisis Group, qui a son siège à Istanbul.

"En vue d'une éventuelle indépendance, les Kurdes ont voulu profiter de leur

■ Virus nationaliste

L'intellectuel kurde Nizar Aghri analyse, dans *Al-Hayat*, la poussée nationaliste des Kurdes : "Une nation unie et éternelle dans l'Histoire, qui a été séparée par des frontières tracées par le colonialisme. Un berceau de la civilisation..." Pour Aghri, l'influence du nationalisme arabe est évidente mais néfaste pour l'entité kurde émergente. En effet, elle focalise le nationalisme sur la race, la langue et l'Histoire, au lieu de se concentrer sur l'individu, les institutions et la citoyenneté.

état de grâce pour agrandir leur territoire et leurs pouvoirs, ajoutez-t-il. Ils y sont parvenus en ce qui concerne les pouvoirs, mais, pour le territoire, c'est un échec et ils vont devoir revoir leurs ambitions à la baisse."

Cet antagonisme risque de prendre le dessus sur les divisions entre sunnites et chiïtes, et de remettre en cause tout ce que les Kurdes avaient réussi à obtenir en termes d'influence politique.

En favorisant l'unité des sunnites et des chiïtes, les ambitions des Kurdes ont raffermi le pouvoir d'Al-Maliki. Les tensions pourraient même persuader le gouvernement central d'ajourner à nouveau le référendum prévu sur le rattachement de Kirkouk à la région semi-autonome du Kurdistan. "Le gouvernement irakien de Bagdad a reçu un soutien massif quand il s'est insurgé contre les demandes exorbitantes des Kurdes", explique Jaber Habib, député chiïte indépendant du Parlement irakien et professeur de sciences politiques à l'université de Bagdad. "Mais, pour mettre à profit ce soutien temporaire, le gouvernement doit améliorer l'approvisionnement en électricité, en eau et autres services de base."

Pour manifester son mécontentement, le gouvernement a refusé de ratifier un nouveau budget qui accordait aux Kurdes 17 % du revenu total du pays. Les Kurdes sont également soupçonnés de détourner des millions de dollars en taxes sur les marchandises qui arrivent en Irak, selon le FMI. Autre pomme de discorde : les Kurdes veulent que Bagdad paye les salaires de leur milice, les peshmergas, sur le budget de la Défense. Or les peshmergas opèrent surtout au Kurdistan.

De plus, les Kurdes ont refusé de revenir sur les contrats de prospection pétrolière signés avec des compagnies étrangères. Pour les Arabes, seul le gouvernement central est habilité à approuver ces contrats, en consultation avec les régions. Selon les Kurdes, le gouvernement tarde à proposer une loi sur le pétrole et ils ne peuvent se permettre de reporter la prospection et l'exploitation pétrolière, avance le Kurde Ros Shawees, ancien vice-président de l'Irak et représentant à Bagdad de Massoud Barzani, le président du gouvernement régional semi-autonome du Kurdistan. Les Kurdes ont beau avouer leurs inquiétudes devant cette levée de boucliers, ils refusent d'admettre qu'ils ont peut-être surestimé leurs forces. **Alissa J. Rubin**

Le Monde

8 février 2008

TURQUIE RÉFORME CONSTITUTIONNELLE

Le Parlement turc autorise le port du voile islamique à l'université

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

Les débats se sont prolongés jusqu'à quatre heures du matin, jeudi 7 février, et ont opposé, parfois vigoureusement, les députés de la majorité (AKP) et ceux de l'opposition kémaliste (CHP). Mais la proposition de réforme de la Constitution destinée à lever l'interdiction du port du voile islamique dans les universités a été votée à une large majorité, par 401 voix contre 99. Le parti au pouvoir et le parti d'extrême droite MHP l'ont soutenue.

Le nouveau texte établit notamment que « personne ne peut être privé de son droit à l'enseignement supérieur ». La jurisprudence en vigueur depuis la fin des années 1980 interdisait aux jeunes femmes d'entrer sur les campus coiffées de leur foulard,

au nom d'une application stricte du principe de laïcité. Pour l'opposition, cette mesure vise à « neutraliser la laïcité ».

La réforme doit encore être confirmée par un vote, samedi, et devra sans doute franchir l'obstacle de la Cour constitutionnelle pour entrer en vigueur. Le dirigeant du CHP, Deniz Baykal, a annoncé son intention de déposer un recours devant les juges. La composition de la Cour est aujourd'hui plutôt favorable à l'AKP. Mais, selon un proche observateur, « le vote [des juges] dépendra de la pression que vont mettre les militaires ». Pour peser sur la décision, les lobbies kémalistes doivent de nouveau se rassembler, samedi, à Ankara, autour du mausolée de Mustafa Kemal, symbole du régime laïque. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

🇮🇶 L'armée américaine présente des documents pessimistes émanant d'« émirs » djihadistes

Al-Qaida en échec dans les provinces irakiennes

REPORTAGE

BAGDAD

ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

Je m'appelle Abou Tariq, émir du secteur d'Al-Layin et Al-Mashadah... » C'est un document rare et fascinant que le haut commandement américain, déterminé à contrer la propagande djihadiste sur tous les fronts, a rendu public dimanche 10 février à Bagdad.

Présenté aux journalistes par le contre-amiral Greg Smith, le journal personnel du dénommé « Abou Tariq » – un nom de guerre, probablement – a été saisi le 3 novembre dans une cache d'Al-Qaida en Irak, près de Balad, à 80 km au nord de Bagdad.

Très soigneusement manuscrites en arabe, les seize pages de ce « journal de guerre » signées par un « émir » local, un chef régional de l'organisation, qui n'a pas été capturé mais dont les Irakiens ont retrouvé le paraphe sur plus d'une vingtaine de sentences de *mbrt* émises contre des « traîtres », donnent l'impression d'une véritable déroute. Une impression que les Américains modèrent : « *Al-Qaida est toujours là, et dangereux.* »

« Il y avait près de 600 combattants dans notre secteur avant que les tribus [de la zone] changent de camp », écrit Abou Tariq. « Beaucoup ont abandonné le combat et certains ont rejoint les déserteurs (...). Il nous reste une vingtaine de combattants, peut-être moins », poursuit-il. Rédigeant en octobre, l'auteur se lamente – « Nous avons été maltraités et trahis par certains de nos frères » – et menace : « Nous ne devons faire preuve d'aucune pitié pour ces traîtres jusqu'à ce qu'ils reviennent dans le droit chemin ou soient complètement éliminés. »

Passant en revue les cinq « bataillons » dont il avait la charge, l'« émir » qui aurait fui à Mossoul, où les forces américaines et irakiennes ont lancé une offensive qui a déjà fait des dizaines de morts, fait l'inventaire des pertes subies. « Le bataillon des martyrs de Laylat Al-Qadr avait 200 hommes bien équipés. (...) La majorité nous a trahis. (...) Il en reste 10. (...) Celui d'Abou Hayder Al-Ansari avait 300 hommes, de bonnes armes et 17 véhicules. (...) Il nous a trahis et la plupart de ses hommes ont rejoint les infidèles. (...) Muhammad Ben Muslimah a été tué par les traîtres de l'Armée islamique en Irak [groupe armé sunnite « nationaliste »] avec l'aide des hélicoptères des envahisseurs. (...) Beaucoup ont fui avec leurs armes, spécialement ceux de la tribu... (nom biffé par

les Américains) qui ont rejoint les traîtres de Sahwa. »

Les groupes du « Sahwa » – « Réveil » en arabe – portent des noms



Des soldats américains patrouillent dans le marché d'Al-Shuruiyah, à l'ouest de Bagdad, samedi 9 février. ALI YUSSEF/AFP

différents selon les régions et les tribus. Ce sont des sortes de comités populaires d'autodéfense créés par différentes tribus, sunnites à 82 %, qui étaient le plus souvent alliées aux djihadistes, mais qui ont fini par se révolter contre leurs méthodes sanglantes ou qui ont été « retournées » à coups de dollars et de « services » divers par les Américains.

Le contre-amiral Smith a évalué, dimanche, leur nombre à plus de 77 500 hommes – dont 15 000 à Bagdad – répartis dans plus de 300 milices à travers le pays. Parmi eux, « beaucoup » appartenaient soit à Al-Qaida, soit à l'une ou l'autre des organisations de « résistance nationaliste » – dont l'Armée islamique en Irak et les Brigades de la révolution de 1920 – qui, en principe, existent toujours, mais affirment ne pas recourir aux attentats aveugles qui ont tué des milliers de civils chiites depuis cinq ans.

Rapport d'activité

Un second document de 39 pages dactylographiées et non signé a été partiellement dévoilé dimanche. Celui-ci a été saisi le 18 novembre près de Samarra, à 110 km au nord de la capitale, lors d'une opération au cours de laquelle Abou Maysara, l'un des hauts dirigeants djihadistes, a été tué. Parmi d'autres prises de guerre – ordinateurs, disques compacts et DVD –, le document, « probablement rédigé pendant l'été 2007 » selon l'officier américain, ressemble à un rapport d'activité et fait part de « la crise profonde subie par l'Etat islamique en Irak [établi, tout virtuellement, par Al-Qaida en 2005], spécialement dans la province d'Al-Anbar ».

L'auteur anonyme explique combien les « combattants étrangers » du groupe ont « du mal à circuler librement en raison

de leur accent » dans cette province sunnite qui fut la place forte de l'organisation avant de devenir le lieu de naissance des « Sahwa ». Il fait part des « désillusions » de ces combattants – Saoudiens, Maghrébins et Yéménites pour l'essentiel –, de leur « manque de ferveur » et recommande de « ne plus les utiliser que pour des missions-suicides ». Il se plaint également de « difficultés grandissantes pour recruter » des combattants locaux, met l'accent sur « le manque d'expérience militaire des émirs » et fustige les « tribus renégates » qui se sont alliées « aux infidèles pour nous détruire ». « Nous avons perdu les villes, conclut-il, puis les villages. Nous nous sommes éloignés des gens et n'avons trouvé refuge que dans un dangereux désert. » ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

M. Gates évoque « la déroute » des combattants islamistes

En visite à Bagdad, le secrétaire américain à la défense, Robert Gates, a félicité, lundi 11 février, les soldats américains pour avoir mis en difficulté les combattants islamistes d'Al-Qaida. « Al-Qaida est en déroute (...) et la violence a été réduite de façon spectaculaire », a-t-il déclaré lors d'une brève allocution dans la capitale irakienne. « La situation reste fragile, mais le peuple irakien a aujourd'hui l'occasion de se bâtir un avenir meilleur, plus sûr et plus prospère », a-t-il ajouté. D'ici juillet, l'armée américaine prévoit de retirer cinq brigades, ramenant le nombre de soldats à 130 000, soit le niveau d'avant l'hiver 2006-2007. – (AFP.)



Le Premier ministre turc promet de combattre les séparatistes kurdes en Irak "jusqu'à ce que nous gagnions"

9 février 2008

MUNICH - Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a assuré, samedi lors de la conférence internationale sur la sécurité de Munich, que son pays continuerait à combattre les rebelles séparatistes kurdes basés dans le nord de l'Irak "jusqu'à ce que nous gagnions".

Lors de la cérémonie d'ouverture du plan grand rassemblement mondial de responsables chargés de la sécurité, M. Erdogan a placé l'action d'Ankara dans le cadre de la lutte mondiale contre le terrorisme.

"Laissez-moi dire les choses très clairement", a-t-il dit, "nous allons continuer jusqu'à ce que nous gagnions".

Il a toutefois voulu rassurer sur les intentions turques, expliquant qu'il



n'avait pas l'intention d'occuper le nord de l'Irak, où seraient réfugiés les combattants du Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK). "La Turquie n'est pas intéressée par un seul centimètre du territoire qui appartient à l'Irak, a-t-il assuré.

La Turquie affronte les séparatistes kurdes depuis environ vingt ans. Depuis la fin 2007, Ankara a mené une série de raids aériens contre des positions du PKK dans le Kurdistan irakien.



Jordanie: appel du CICR en faveur de réfugiés kurdes bloqués à la frontière

AMMAN, 10 fév 2008 (AFP)

Le Comité international de la Croix-Rouge (CICR) a lancé dimanche un appel en faveur de 190 réfugiés Kurdes iraniens, bloqués à la frontière jordanienne après avoir fui l'Irak et ses violences, et qui se trouvent dans des conditions précaires, selon le CICR.

Ce groupe de Kurdes originaires d'Iran, qui avaient quitté ce pays après la Révolution islamique de 1979, vivaient jusqu'en 2005 dans un camp de réfugiés du centre de l'Irak.

A cette date, ils ont fui l'Irak, livré aux violences, et se trouvent désormais dans un "no man's land" à la frontière jordanienne, une zone militaire impossible d'accès pour le Haut commissariat aux réfugiés (HCR).

La Jordanie rejette leur installation dans le pays, et eux-mêmes ont refusé un retour en Irak, dans la province d'Erbil, à la faveur d'un accord entre le

HCR et le gouvernement régional kurde irakien.

Le CICR estime que "cette situation a assez duré" et appelle "ceux qui ont le pouvoir de trouver une solution durable et viable pour ces personnes à faire leur possible pour empêcher un nouveau drame dans la région".

"Les conditions de vie et l'absence de programme pour (...) ces gens dans un pays où ils se sentiraient en sécurité est regrettable", ajoute le CICR.

"Ils subsistent autant que faire se peut dans un environnement extrêmement précaire", a encore relevé le chef du CICR à Amman, Paul Castella.

Le HCR estime que 4,2 millions d'Irakiens ont quitté leurs foyers depuis l'intervention américaine en mars 2003, dont deux millions sont déplacés dans leur propre pays. La Syrie accueille 1,4 million de réfugiés et la Jordanie 750.000 autres.



Un général américain à Ankara pour des discussions sur les rebelles kurdes

ANKARA, 13 fév 2008 (AFP)

Un général américain de haut rang est arrivé mercredi à Ankara pour des discussions avec les militaires turcs sur la lutte contre les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) basés dans le nord de l'Irak, a affirmé une source diplomatique américaine.

Le général James Cartwright, numéro deux de l'état-major américain, va discuter avec ses hôtes turcs de la "lutte en cours" contre le PKK, a déclaré une porte-parole de l'ambassade des Etats-Unis à Ankara.

Le général Cartwright, son homologue turc le général Ergin Saygun et le général David Petraeus, commandant les forces américaines en Irak, sont chargés de la coordination dans la lutte commune contre le PKK.

Cette visite intervient alors que l'armée turque a mené depuis décembre cinq raids aériens dans le nord de l'Irak contre les camps du PKK, avec l'aide des services de renseignement américains, ainsi qu'une opération terrestre d'ampleur limitée.

Ankara avait obtenu en octobre l'autorisation du Parlement turc pour intervenir militairement dans le nord de l'Irak, utilisé par les rebelles comme une base arrière pour leurs opérations dans le sud-est anatolien dont la population est en majorité kurde.

Le PKK est considéré comme un groupe terroriste par les Etats-Unis, l'Union européenne et la Turquie.



Heurts en Turquie lors de commémoration de la capture d'Öcalan: un mort

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 15 fév 2008 (AFP) -

Des manifestations organisées dans le sud-est de la Turquie vendredi à l'occasion du neuvième anniversaire de l'arrestation du chef rebelle kurde Abdullah Öcalan ont dégénéré en heurts violents se soldant par la mort d'un manifestant, selon des sources locales.

Un jeune homme de 15 ans, blessé à la tête dans des circonstances encore non élucidées lors d'une manifestation en faveur d'Öcalan, arrêté le 15 février 1999 au Kenya, a succombé à ses blessures à Cizre, une ville de la province de Mardin proche de la Syrie, ont rapporté ces sources.

A Hakkari, près de la frontière irakienne, la police a tenté de s'opposer au passage de quelque 200 manifestants, qui ont jeté des pierres sur les forces de sécurité. Celles-ci ont répliqué par des jets de grenades lacrymogènes et en tirant en l'air. De nombreux magasins ont eu leurs devantures brisées.

A Batman, une autre ville du sud-est anatolien à la population en majorité kurde, de nombreux commerçants ont exprimé leur soutien à Öcalan et à son Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en fermant leurs magasins.

A Diyarbakir, la principale ville de la région, la police anti-émeutes est intervenue contre plusieurs manifestations, tandis que le Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), la principale formation pro-kurde du pays, commémorait l'événement en accrochant un drapeau noir devant ses locaux.

Des agents turcs, aidés par les services de renseignement américains, ont capturé Öcalan à Nairobi, où le chef rebelle avait trouvé refuge plusieurs jours durant auprès de l'ambassade grecque.

Il a été transféré en Turquie et condamné à mort pour trahison en juin 1999, une peine commuée en prison à vie après l'abolition de la peine capitale.

IRAK VOTE DE TROIS TEXTES LÉGISLATIFS APRÈS DES MOIS DE BLOCAGE

Le Parlement irakien adopte le budget 2008 et des lois d'amnistie et de régionalisation

BAGDAD

ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL

L'Assemblée irakienne a enfin adopté, mercredi 13 février, trois textes législatifs attendus depuis des mois et par le pays et par les Américains. En l'absence d'une centaine d'élus sur 275, les députés ont voté à l'unanimité un budget de 48 milliards de dollars pour l'année 2008, une loi d'amnistie pour certains des 50 000 prisonniers détenus sans procès et un texte prévoyant des élections provinciales pour le 1^{er} octobre.

Ryan Crocker, l'ambassadeur américain à Bagdad, s'est immédiatement félicité de ce développement politique évoquant, au cours d'une conférence de presse spécialement convoquée, « une victoire pour le peuple irakien ». Le diplomate a tenu à souligner combien les problèmes abordés par les élus avaient « nécessité d'efforts et de compromis » entre les partis extrêmement divisés de l'Assemblée.

De fait, pour parvenir à ce résultat et tenir compte de la défiance et la suspicion mutuelle qui règnent en maîtres entre les groupes, les trois textes ont été votés en un seul « paquet », chacune des parties craignant que l'accord négocié avec les autres soit dénoncé ou « oublié » sitôt après l'adoption du texte voulu par telle ou telle faction. Ainsi le « bloc » kurde (58 élus) a-t-il accepté de voter l'amnistie et la régionalisation après que les chiites et les sunnites ont donné leur accord pour un budget qui lui réservera 17 % des dépenses et prendra en charge le financement de son « armée » autonome – les peshmergas.

Les deux autres « blocs » voulaient réduire la part kurde à 14,5 % des dépenses, financement des peshmergas inclus.

Pour sauver la face des opposants chiites et kurdes, le « paquet » adopté mercredi prévoit qu'une commission parlementaire « révisera » la part budgétaire kurde pour 2009, après un recensement national qui aura lieu « avant la fin 2008 ».

Réclamée avec insistance par les partis sunnites parce que beaucoup de prisonniers appartiennent à cette confession, la loi d'amnistie devrait permettre d'élargir plusieurs milliers d'hommes parmi les 25 000 emprisonnés par les Irakiens et parmi les autres 25 000 retenus dans deux camps américains en tant que « combattants hors-la-loi », non bénéficiaires des conventions de Genève. Selon un général américain, « environ 950 prisonniers » – et un nombre inconnu détenu par les Irakiens – « sont des adolescents de 15 à 17 ans, souvent illettrés », arrêtés pour avoir posé ou aidé à poser les engins piégés qui sont la cause numéro un de la mort de soldats. Relativement limitative, l'amnistie exclut les détenus convaincus, inculpés ou lourdement soupçonnés de terrorisme, d'enlèvement, de cambriolage, de corruption, vol d'antiquités, viol, sodomie, inceste, trafic de drogue, faux et usage de faux.

Enfin, la loi dite de « régionalisation » organise la répartition des pouvoirs

entre l'Etat central et les « gouvernorats » des provinces, donnant à ceux-ci plus de prérogatives qu'avant, notamment pour le financement de leur développement par des taxes spécifiques. Le texte ne s'appliquera qu'à 15 des 18 provinces irakiennes, les trois du Nord étant inclus dans la région du Kurdistan qui dispose d'un Parlement autonome.

Exigé par plusieurs partis chiites, notamment celui de Moqtada Al-Sadr (32 députés), apparemment certain de faire mieux aux élections régionales du 1^{er} octobre qu'à la dernière consultation en janvier 2005, ce texte était également soutenu par les groupes sunnites émergents qui avaient largement boycotté les élections il y a trois ans et qui s'estiment non représentés par les deux grands partis dits « sunnites » de l'Assemblée.

Débatues depuis près de deux ans, deux autres législations, réclamées par les Américains comme preuves qu'une « réconciliation nationale » est en marche – un texte sur le partage et la redistribution des revenus du pétrole entre les provinces et l'Etat central ainsi qu'une loi sur le devenir de la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk, dont l'intégration à leur région est réclamée par les Kurdes et refusée par les autres –, devront encore attendre. L'Assemblée s'est mise en congé mercredi soir pour deux semaines. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

Ankara multiplie les griefs à l'encontre des Européens

Le Monde
14 février 2008

ISTANBUL

CORRESPONDANCE

La polémique lancée par Ankara avec Berlin sur l'intégration de la communauté turque d'Allemagne illustre un changement de cap du premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui a pris ces dernières semaines ses distances par rapport à son objectif d'intégration européenne. Sur le plan intérieur, l'AKP (conservateurs), qu'il dirige, a scellé une alliance avec les ultranationalistes du parti d'extrême droite (MHP) pour faire passer sa réforme autorisant le port du voile à l'université. En revanche, les mesures réclamées par Bruxelles et la révision en profondeur de la Constitution attendent toujours.

En quelques jours, le premier ministre turc s'est livré à un inventaire des reproches à destination des pays européens. Sur les sujets sensibles du terrorisme kurde, de l'adhésion à l'UE et des politiques d'intégration européennes, le dirigeant

de l'AKP a adopté un ton jusqu'alors plutôt emprunté par les ultranationalistes.

A la tribune de la conférence annuelle sur la sécurité, à Munich, le 9 février, M. Erdogan a accusé les pays européens de laisser les « terroristes » du PKK (séparatistes kurdes) opérer impunément sur leur territoire. « Quand des criminels membres d'organisations terroristes sont arrêtés en Europe, ils sont parfois relâchés, a-t-il dit. C'est difficile à comprendre. » Allusion à la France et à l'Autriche, qui ont laissé filer Riza Altun, le trésorier présumé du PKK, en juillet 2007. Ankara a aussi vivement réagi à l'acquiescement partiel, le 8 février, par la cour d'appel d'Anvers, de sept membres du DHKP-C, un groupe d'extrême gauche considéré lui aussi comme « terroriste » par l'Union européenne. Le porte-parole du gouvernement, Cemil Çiçek, a qualifié le jugement « d'encouragement au terrorisme ».

Après l'incendie de Ludwigshafen, en

Allemagne, où neuf personnes d'origine turque ont trouvé la mort, les allégations de « crime raciste », abondamment relayées par la presse populaire d'Istanbul, ont provoqué une réaction de défense collective. Le quotidien nationaliste *Hürriyet* parlait encore mardi d'un nouveau témoin-clé qui aurait vu un homme sortir de l'immeuble en courant. « Il reste des soupçons », a commenté Deniz Baykal, leader de l'opposition kémaliste. Ces derniers mois, les autorités turques s'étaient déjà élevées contre la limitation, en Allemagne, du regroupement familial pour les immigrés.

La croyance répandue dans les foyers turcs de la turcophobie à l'œuvre dans ce « club chrétien » qu'est l'UE rejoint aujourd'hui la déception de ceux qui ne comprennent pas l'opposition de la France ou de l'Allemagne à l'entrée de la Turquie dans l'UE, vécue comme un affront. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Angela Merkel et Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'affrontent sur l'intégration des Turcs d'Allemagne

L'incendie d'un immeuble à Ludwigshafen a été l'élément déclencheur d'un débat sur l'« assimilation », nourri par les propos provocateurs du premier ministre turc

BERLIN
CORRESPONDANTE

Je le répète : l'assimilation est un crime contre l'humanité. » Loin de désarmer, le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a réitéré, mardi 12 février devant le Parlement turc, les propos provocateurs qu'il avait tenus dimanche en Allemagne, devant 20 000 personnes réunies à Cologne. Ces déclarations, qui ont suscité des sympathies dans la communauté turque, ont provoqué un tollé dans la droite allemande et relancé outre-Rhin le débat sur la politique d'intégration des immigrés.

Dès lundi 11 février, la chancelière Angela Merkel avait contre-attaqué : « En ce qui concerne la compréhension de l'intégration du premier ministre turc, nous ne sommes pas encore au bout de la discussion. (...) L'intégration suppose qu'il y ait une disposition à s'adapter au mode de vie d'un pays. » Plusieurs représentants des unions chrétiennes CDU-CSU ont mis en garde le premier ministre turc contre une ingérence dans les affaires intérieures allemandes. Certains, à l'instar du président de la CSU, Erwin Huber, ont profité de la polémique pour redire leur réticence à l'égard de l'entrée de la Turquie dans l'Union européenne, que soutient le parti social-démocrate SPD.

Citoyens de seconde classe

« Il a touché une corde sensible, les Turcs ont peur de se faire assimiler », explique Kenan Kolat, président de la communauté turque d'Allemagne, qui compte 2,7 millions de personnes, dont un million possèdent la nationalité allemande. Secrétaire général du Conseil central des musulmans, Aiman Mazyek renchérit : « Beau-

coup de migrants turcs ont l'impression qu'on attend d'eux qu'ils renoncent à leur identité culturelle. » Selon Kenan Kolat, les débats récurrents sur la maîtrise de la langue allemande, la réduction des cours de langue turque et le durcissement récent



Devant l'immeuble incendié de Ludwigshafen, où neuf personnes d'origine turque ont péri, le 3 février. RONALD WITTEK/EPA

des conditions du regroupement familial ont contribué à créer ce climat. Les discussions, au sein de la CDU, sur le concept de culture dominante en 2003 et l'emploi du terme d'« assimilation » par l'ancien ministre de l'intérieur Otto Schily (SPD) en 2002 ont aussi marqué les esprits.

Les Turcs d'Allemagne se sentent encore considérés comme des citoyens de seconde classe. Même si rien ne prouve, à ce stade de l'enquête, qu'il s'agisse d'un acte criminel, l'émotion suscitée par l'incendie d'un immeuble à Ludwigshafen, où neuf personnes d'origine turque ont trouvé la mort le 3 février, a fait resurgir le malaise. « Il faut que M^{me} Merkel s'occupe plus de nous, qu'elle vienne nous voir comme M. Erdogan l'a fait », réclame M. Kelat.

L'Allemagne a mis longtemps à accepter l'idée que ses immigrés étaient là pour rester. Il a fallu attendre l'arrivée au pouvoir en 1998 de la coalition « rouge-verte » dirigée par l'ex-chancelier Gerhard Schröder pour changer les choses. La politique d'intégration a connu un tournant avec la réforme du code de la nationalité en 2000, introduisant le droit du sol sous certaines conditions, suivie de l'adoption d'une nouvelle législation sur l'immigration en 2005.

Les résultats ne sont pas encore à la hauteur du problème. En 2005, 17,5 % des jeunes étrangers ont quitté l'école sans

aucun diplôme contre 7,2 % pour les jeunes Allemands. Les conditions d'accès au marché du travail se sont aggravées. La part des jeunes issus de l'immigration qui obtiennent une place en apprentissage a baissé de 34 % à 23 % entre 1994 et 2003. « Même ceux qui sont qualifiés sont victimes de discriminations », affirme M. Kolat.

La droite chrétienne a fini par se convaincre de la nécessité d'un changement. Aujourd'hui, la CDU parle elle aussi de l'Allemagne comme d'un « pays d'intégration ». Sous l'égide de M^{me} Merkel, un plan national d'intégration a été adopté en juillet 2007 et certaines régions gouvernées par la droite multiplient les initiatives. Néanmoins les vieux clichés persistent, comme le montre la campagne électorale aux relents xénophobes menée en janvier par le ministre-président de Hesse, Roland Koch (CDU). ■

CÉCILE CALLA

Iraqi MPs pass 3 laws with wide agreement

By Alissa J. Rubin

BAGHDAD: Using old-fashioned behind-the-scenes politicking, Iraqi parliamentary leaders on Wednesday pushed through three divisive laws that had been delayed for months by bitter maneuvering between factions and, recently, threats to dissolve the legislative body.

More than any legislation approved so far, the three measures have the potential to spur reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites and set the country on the road to a more representative government.

The three laws are the 2008 budget, a law outlining the scope of provincial powers — a crucial aspect of Iraq's self-definition as a federal state — and an amnesty that will cover thousands of the detainees held in Iraqi jails, including thousands of Sunnis, many of whom have been held without charges for months and, in a few cases, more than a year. It will be the largest release at one time since 2003.

The freeing of detainees who have not been charged has been a headline issue for Sunni legislators in Parliament and for the Sunni vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi, who say that the Shiite-dominated security forces have charged many innocent Sunnis with being members of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, an extremist Sunni group that American intelligence says is led by non-Iraqis.

The three measures were put to a vote as a single package and passed Wednesday afternoon. There were 206 legislators of the 275-member body at the session, according to the Parliament's press office. Provisions of each law were subject to approval, during which process some lawmakers walked out. But when it came to a full vote on the final package, there were few no votes, and legislative leaders called the vote "unanimous."

"Today we have a wedding party for the Iraqi Parliament," said Mahmoud Mashadani, the speaker, who is a Sunni. "We have proved that Iraqis are one bloc and Parliament is able to find solutions that represent all Iraqis."

A Shiite beamed as he told reporters right after the vote that the laws had passed "unanimously."

"It is a big achievement," said Khalid al-Attiya, the deputy speaker. He promised that approval of the budget and

spending associated with it would translate into as many as 700,000 new jobs for Iraqis. Even factions that did not agree with some of the measures said they did not want to vote against the measures but allowed those members who disagreed with the measure to leave the chamber for the vote.

Passage of the measures represent a significant achievement for the Iraqi Parliament, which on many days could not muster a quorum. The approach of voting on the three laws together broke the logjam because it allowed every group to boast that they had a win. Leaders of the blocs — Shiite, Sunni and Kurd — realized that while no one of the laws could pass on its own, together they offered something for each political constituency. So factions would swallow the measures they liked less in order to get the one they wanted.

The Kurds wanted the budget in its current form, which guarantees the regional government 17 percent of the country's revenues after subtracting the costs of federal ministries that serve the entire country, like Foreign Affairs and Defense.

The Sunnis wanted the amnesty because about 80 percent of the more than 26,000 detainees in Iraqi jails are Sunnis. About half of all detainees have not been sentenced.

Most Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds wanted the provincial powers measure because they are eager to ensure that substantial power rests in the provinces rather than the central government. For all three groups, former President Saddam Hussein's strong centralized bureaucracy, which strictly controlled all decisions, was anathema. They see a more decentralized power structure as a better guarantee of freedoms and rights.

The only controversy was over the inclusion of a date for holding provincial elections. Two political parties, one Shiite and one Sunni, stand to lose control of one or more provincial councils. Those groups would prefer to defer the vote indefinitely. But the majority, supported setting a date certain and Mashadani, the speaker, forced the inclusion of a date at the last minute. The provincial elections must be held by Oct. 1.

The U.S. administration has pushed

hard for passage of the provincial powers law, and President George W. Bush has said he would like to see new provincial elections held before the end of his term.

After the laws are approved by the Presidency Council — in this case a pro forma step since all of the political blocs agreed to their passage — they will be published. The particulars of the laws remained unclear in part because changes were made in the last minutes of the legislative process.

Embedded in each of the measures, however, are the same problems that created the controversy in the first place. For instance, on the budget, the size of the Kurdish share has merely been deferred for a year. The 17 percent agreement is only for this year; next year it will be re-negotiated and there is a strong push to reduce their share.

On the provincial powers law, which includes a requirement that elections be held next fall, there are serious problems with the election commission both at the national and provincial level, raising questions about whether a vote will be viewed as fair or merely deepen divisions among and within sects. Worries about that could end up delaying the elections.

And, still left out of the political bargain are the Awakening Councils, which are predominantly Sunni and in many cases represent powerful tribes. They have taken the lead in fighting extremist Sunni groups, and now their leaders are clambering for a place at the table. They are outraged that the Iraqi Islamic Party, which is Sunni but has limited grass-roots support, dominates the provincial council in Anbar.

Abeer Mohammed contributed reporting.

■ Interpreter is released

An Iraqi interpreter kidnapped in the southern city of Basra was freed Wednesday, but the CBS journalist seized with him this week was still being held, Ian Fisher reported from Baghdad.

Amid reports of a deal to free both men, however, the American military and Iraqi officials both said they hoped the journalist would be released shortly.

US BUSINESS LAGS IN KURDISTAN, 'THE OTHER IRAQ'

REUTERS

Feb 11, 2008

WASHINGTON, Feb 11 (Reuters) - Opportunities are rich in oil, agriculture and other sectors in Iraq's Kurdish north, U.S. and Kurdish officials said on Monday, but U.S. investment is still paltry in what promoters bill as "the other Iraq."

U.S. business and government officials, seeking to encourage investment and ease fears about doing business in war-torn Iraq, called the autonomous Kurdistan region a "shining example" of what the entire country might one day become.

Boosters point to rich natural resources, a favorable investment climate and greater security.

The region, with its own government and parliament, has boasted a lower level of violence than the rest of Iraq, which is now cautiously embracing security improvements in Baghdad and elsewhere almost five years after the U.S.-led invasion.

The Iraqi government is hoping to rebuild an economy, and public infrastructure, battered by years of sanctions and war, which plunged many Iraqis into poverty and joblessness.

But the employment outlook is far brighter in Kurdistan, and median incomes are up to 25 percent higher than in the rest of Iraq, the regional government says.

Even so, Qubad Jalal Talabany, the Kurdistan Regional Government's representative to the United States and son of the Iraqi president, said U.S. business accounts only for 1 percent of total investment in Kurdistan. "The United States lags behind most other countries," he said.

Turkey is a major investor in Kurdistan's bridges, banks and oil sector, Talabany said, despite longstanding tension with Ankara over the Kurdish rebels who have launched attacks from their mountain enclaves.

While opportunities may abound, evidence is hard to find that investors are willing to put aside concerns about general security in Iraq, along with doubts about the country's political stability, and come to Kurdistan in droves.



Neither Kurdish nor U.S. officials were immediately able to provide figures for U.S. investment in the region.

Oil is certainly a lure. The Kurdish government has clashed with Baghdad over petroleum deals it has signed with foreign oil firms, which the central government deems illegal.

Talabany, speaking at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in Washington, insisted the Kurdish government's oil contracts would benefit the entire country.

Kurdish officials are also hoping that agribusiness will become another driver for foreign investment in Kurdistan, a traditional wheat producer.

The region's acreage of field crops, mostly wheat and barley, was about 2.3 million acres (950,000 hectares) in 2007, according to the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Processing and export facilities are needed to invigorate those sectors, along with tobacco, fruits and nuts, maybe even wine, Talabany said.

"The right investments will turn Kurdistan into the breadbasket of the region," he added.

United Press International

February 12, 2008

Iraqi Kurds court investors, not just oil

Ben Lando, UPI Energy Editor

Washington DC (UPI) - "The future" isn't just oil, the head of the US branch of Iraq's Kurdish government said while courting investors in Washington Monday.

The US Chamber of Commerce is hosting a luncheon with the Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq's semiautonomous three northern provinces, featuring top US and business officials.

"While the development of our oil and gas sector will be critical for our sustained development, and we place great emphasis on it, the Kurdistan region's economy is not solely dependent on oil and gas," said Qubad Talabani, the KRG's representative to the United States and son of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani. "In fact, we are spoilt for choice. For example, we have enormous agricultural potential as well as a robust workforce that is entrepreneurial and industrious.

"As the publication shows, the economic opportunities are varied and enticing."

He spoke to United Press International prior to the release Monday of the new publication "The Kurdistan Region: Invest in the Future."

The KRG area has been semiautonomous since the early 1990s, under international protection from Saddam Hussein. Though Kurdish leaders fought sometimes bloody power struggles, the top political parties have aligned and dominate both the region and have key roles in the national Iraqi government.

This decade head start of the rest of Iraq, where violence and

political inaction has stalled much economic development, has allowed Iraqi Kurdistan's economy to advance.

Talabani said the publication and event "is targeted at many in the international business community who may have never thought about investing in our region."

The KRG encourages businesses with an eye on Iraq as a whole to start with its relatively safer area. Among the speakers Monday are US Assistant Secretary of Commerce David Bohigian and Jay Garner, the retired general and former director of reconstruction of Iraq prior to Paul Bremer.

"Our region should be thought of as the gateway for doing business in Iraq," he said. "We are the other Iraq and we are open for business."

"Attracting foreign private sector investment will help us develop our own private sector; this can be a stimulus to eliminate poverty and ensure sustainable economic growth."

But the KRG's prerogative hasn't always been aligned with Baghdad's - and vice versa - which is seen in current arguments over Iraq's oil sector. A draft oil law is stalled because the two sides don't agree on how much central control is called for in the new constitution and what roles the international oil companies should play.

The KRG has passed its own regional oil law and has signed dozens of production-sharing contracts with big players in the oil business, though not the world's largest oil firms. Baghdad has called the KRG deals illegal.

Kurdistan: A state in the making?

In the coming days, a delegation of senior Kurdish leaders from the north of Iraq is expected to travel to Baghdad to try to resolve some of the outstanding issues that divide the country's politicians.

By Crispin Thorold

BBC News, Irbil, Iraq

The meetings could be tense. There is growing resentment amongst Arab politicians about the gains the Kurds have made since the fall of Saddam Hussein.

Since then, a combination of canny politics, tough negotiating and their closeness to the US has ensured that the Kurds now punch well above their weight in the politics of Iraq.

The Iraqi president is a Kurd, Kurdish parties are part of the governing coalition and the Kurdistan region in the north of Iraq has a high degree of autonomy.

However, many issues that are critical for the Kurds - and Iraq - remain unresolved, including:

- the future of Iraq's oil industry
- the status of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk
- the national budget
- who should pay the salaries of the peshmerga, the Kurdish fighters

Twin fears

In Irbil, it is easy to forget that you are in Iraq. The city,

enjoy the strong and sweet chai.

Khalil's is more than a teashop. It is an unofficial museum.

The walls are covered in photographs of key moments and figures in Kurdish history. Even Saddam Hussein - hated by Kurds - is here.

"Kurds and Arabs lived in this country like brothers, but when Saddam came he made a lot of problems between the Arab and Kurds," said the owner Khalil.

"He killed a lot of Kurdish people. He damaged the relationship between the Kurdish and Arab people."

Senior Kurdish politicians argue that it is this history that is shaping Iraq's current politics.

"The Shia are afraid of their past," said Dr Mohammad Ihsan, a cabinet minister in the regional government. "They have nothing to be scared of in the future because they are a majority.

"Sunnis are afraid of the future, but they had a great past ruling the country. We Kurds are the ones who are afraid of both the past and the future."

Infuriation

Kurdish fears drove their hard bargaining after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Their gains were considerable. But could the Kurds have been too successful?

Take Iraq's stalled oil law - when there was no agreement, the Kurds decided to go it alone.

The KRG has negotiated exploration contracts with international oil firms. That infuriated Iraq's central government.

"To be frank, the contracts that have been signed by the KRG have complicated the issue," said Iraqi Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani in a recent BBC interview.

"They have not been public. They have not been competitive. They have not been transparent. No region can enter into contracts for the development of oil laws without the approval of the central authority."

Arab politicians are increasingly frustrated. Some Kurds believe that the resistance they are now facing in Baghdad is reminiscent of another era.

"There is an alarming rise in Arab chauvinism," said one senior Kurdish politician.

In the past few weeks there was a glimmer of hope when Iraqi politicians finally agreed on a new national flag.

The removal of the three stars on the previous Iraqi flag, which the Kurds said were linked to the Baath Party, have made the new design acceptable to them.

Now Muhammad Ibrahim, a tailor in Irbil, is making a batch of the new flags, which will fly in the city at a meeting of Arab parliamentarians next month.

Asked if he believes it will ever replace the flag of the Kurds, he replies with one word: "No".

Back at the teashop there are lots of pictures of the President of the Kurdistan Region, Massoud Barzani, but there are none of any of the recent Iraqi prime ministers. So does the owner Khalil respect the government in Baghdad?

"No," said Khalil. "We have a relationship with our prime minister here. Barzani's our leader now, we don't have anything to do with Baghdad."



Kurds and Arabs lived like brothers before Saddam, says Khalil

which is the seat of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), has all the hallmarks of a capital city in the making. The Kurdish flag - red, white and green with a blazing yellow sun - flies from all the government buildings. The Iraqi national flag is nowhere to be seen.

At the airport, passports are stamped, Republic of Iraq - Kurdistan Region. The labyrinthine visa rules that apply in the rest of the country are not in force here.

A good place to judge local opinion is Khalil's teashop in the bazaar. Since the 1930s, Kurds have been coming here to



February 12, 2008 KRG.org

KRG Launches New Publication

"The Kurdistan Region: Invest in the Future"

WASHINGTON (KRG.org) "The Kurdistan Region is open and ready for business" was the theme outlined by speakers before hundreds of potential investors at the launch of *The Kurdistan Region: Invest in the Future* publication at the headquarters of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The 194-page publication provides a detailed, sweeping guide to the politics, culture and investment opportunities available in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, and includes a directory that contains a useful series of economic data, travel tips as well as contact information for organizations interested in operating in the region.

"Today in Kurdistan, there are a multitude of paths to investment and prosperity. Opportunity lies in many different sectors of our new economy and I urge you all to take a good look at what our publication outlines," Qubad Talabani, the Washington based representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government, told the attendees. "Kurdistan is the safest place in Iraq and is undergoing an economic boom because of its stability."

Officials from the Chamber joined with those from the U.S. Department of Commerce and experts and scholars on Iraq and Kurdistan to hail the new publication and tout the investment opportunities now available in what they called the new economic engine of the region.

"This region of Iraq is a shining example of how commerce breeds peace, prosperity, and opportunity" said LTG (Ret) Daniel W. Christman, senior vice president for international affairs at the Chamber of Commerce. "This new publication shows everyone—from investors to tourists to friends around the world—how they can participate in strengthening the Kurdistan Region's democracy."

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is a strong supporter of, and driving force behind, the U.S.-Iraq Business Dialogue sponsored by the Department of Commerce. It has worked on developing a roadmap on how to strengthen the economic and commercial relationship between the United States and Iraq. The Chamber has pledged to continue to champion efforts to improve the visa process so that Iraqi business people can come to the U.S. to meet with their counterparts, highlight credible business opportunities in Iraq, and continue to support the efforts of the U.S.-Iraq Business Dialogue.

Talabani was joined by Dr. Brendan O'Leary, International Constitutional expert and director of the Solomon Asch Center at the University of Pennsylvania; Gen. Jay Garner (Ret.), former director, Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance for Iraq, and Gabriel Pellathy, Chief of Staff, U.S. & Foreign Commercial Service, Commerce Department.

Copies of the publication are available by through the KRG Washington office and online at: www.krg.org/s/?s=13

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Feb. 14, 2008

Kurdish Chief Says Energy Deal Lawful

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SEOUL, South Korea — The leader of Iraq's Kurdistan regional government said that an energy agreement signed Thursday with South Korean companies does not violate Iraq's basic law.

"It was within the constitutional rights," Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani told reporters in Seoul.

Iraq's parliament has been locked in a dispute over who has the final say in managing the Middle Eastern country's oil and gas fields. The disagreement has delayed passage of a national oil and gas law designed to regulate foreign investment.

Frustrated with the delay, the Kurds have signed more than a

dozen contracts with international oil companies. The Iraq Oil Ministry considers the agreements illegal.

The Iraqi federal government suspended crude exports to SK Energy Co. in January on grounds that South Korean companies had not abandoned a deal signed with the Kurdistan administration to develop a disputed oil field.

Earlier Thursday, a group of South Korean companies, led by Korea National Oil Corp., signed an initial agreement with the Kurdistan authority to develop energy projects.

Under the deal, a consortium led by KNOC will have the right to explore and develop four oil fields in the Kurdistan region, said a KNOC official who spoke to Dow Jones Newswires on condition of anonymity. The

fields are expected to have reserves of 1 billion to 2 billion barrels.

The agreement also calls for a separate consortium to participate in projects to develop infrastructure in the Kurdish region, the state-run oil developer said in a statement.

Barzani wants Iraq's central government to reconsider its decision to halt oil supplies to South Korea and said he will visit Baghdad after he leaves Seoul.

"We will work with Baghdad to solve this problem," Barzani said.

In early November, KNOC said that it and other South Korean companies signed a production-sharing contract with the Kurdistan government to explore the onshore Bazian oil

field over the next three years. The field has estimated reserves of 500 million barrels.

Iraq's oil ministry earlier this month said the country had halted oil exports to Austria's OMV AG, the leading oil and gas group in central Europe, to protest an oil deal with the Kurdish regional administration.

During a meeting early Thursday, South Korean President-elect Lee Myung-bak asked Barzani for more cooperation in expansion of oil development by South Korean companies in the Kurdish region.

Barzani said he would try to give priority to South Korean companies because the regional government needs their expertise and experience.

Don't let the headscarf cover our eyes from Kirkuk

The more we postpone to invite Talabani to Turkey and therefore delay talks about a 'grand bargain,' the more the critical foreign policy issue of Kirkuk will turn into a mess

Cengiz CANDAR

The headscarf ban was lifted through a few constitutional changes. We have yet to witness the last round in the Constitutional Court, where the Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Deniz Baykal will challenge the government. The court has two options for its final decision: legal or political.

If its decision is legal the headscarf ban will be history and the relevant debates will change course. If the ruling is political we will face a new smashup. If covering the head is a religious requirement, therefore freedom of belief, or if it is part of individual freedoms does not rule out the necessity of the ban's removal.

But if you discuss the issue on the basis of the Islam-laicism axis, you start the discussions over the regime and fundamental principles of the Republic automatically. And that makes the issue a part of political polarization and transforms it into a variant of power struggle. Followers of the latter option, in other words fundamentalist secularists, including the institutions and personas they lean on, constitute the defeated in this struggle.

The united front of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), the opposition Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) to devise constitutional amendments, indicates the change in the country's political composition. Meanwhile political stir over wearing headscarves has retained minds from thinking on strategic issues regarding Turkey and kept eyes away from the horizon.

Kirkuk gesture from Talabani

We can neither follow nor can we pay attention to the latest developments about our very own future poking at our nose nor are we being informed about these developments thoroughly. With a few exceptions though. For instance the Taraf daily a week ago published an article titled A Kirkuk gesture from Talabani. The consensus between Turkmens of Kirkuk and the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani was covered in depth. As the seven conditions for Turkmens that Talabani complied with were spelled out in the daily.

However we haven't heard anything on the subject in the big-shot newspapers of the media neither have read any relevant op-ed.

If the Kirkuk issue and Turkmens were of no importance then how come northern Iraq is the number one strategic and security issue that even affects bilateral relations with the United States and who will explain this?

First let's see what these seven conditions for Turkmens that are dubbed Kirkuk gesture approved by Talabani:

1. The Kirkuk Municipality under Kurdish management should be left to Turkmens.
2. The Office of Deputy Governor under Arab management should be appointed to Turkmens.
3. The Health Directorate should be assigned to Turkmens.
4. The Trade Directorate should be left to Turkmens.
5. Turkish should be one of the official languages in addition to Arabic and Kurdish.
6. The District Governorship should be left to Turkmens.
7. Kirkuk Province General Assembly should be managed by a 32 percent rule: Kurds, Turkmens, Arabs should have 32 percents of the seats each, and Christians the remaining 4 percent.

Kurdish-Turkmen consensus?

Item 5 restates the right foreseen in the Iraqi constitution already. And others, number one and seven in particular, signal a very serious Kurdish-Turkmen consensus. In case of the fulfillment of all, there would not be much to talk about a Turkmen issue. And the issue of the status of Kirkuk will remain. That is to say, will Kirkuk either have a special status" or a federal unit, as stated in the Transitional Law of Administration (TAL) approved in 2004, or will it be bound to the semi-autonomous regional administration in northern Iraq via the referendum, as it is foreseen in the Iraqi constitution?

Another formula is to give an autonomous status to Kirkuk first and then bind it with the semi-autonomous regional administration in northern Iraq.

In case of the fulfillment of these seven conditions, to determine the institutional identity of Turkmens by the formula above is a very hard row to hoe. Besides what will be the attitude of Turkey, although the issue on paper is about the internal affairs of Iraq

and the constitutional process? How busy are we with these matters?

The more we postpone an invitation of Talabani to Turkey and therefore delay talks about a grand bargain on a wider strategic horizon, which the subject also includes the Kurdish issue and the fight against terror, the more this critical foreign policy issue will inevitably turn into a mess, just like the headscarf ban as part of the internal affairs, will it not?

A neo-con assessment:

One of the prominent writers for the Weekly Standard, an influential opinion magazine of the neo-conservatives, Reuel Marc Gerecht, in his article titled "A New Middle East, After All," talks about the developments in Kirkuk and warns that the developments could drag northern Iraq into chaos in the following paragraph:

The still unscheduled referendum in which the people of Kirkuk and its environs are to vote on the status of that multi-ethnic city could possibly throw the north of the country into chaos. The Kurds will be tenacious about their "Jerusalem." Although they are somewhat disingenuous in their intentions, the Kurds want unchallenged control over Kirkuk's oil and would strongly prefer to have fewer Arabs living among them, especially Arabs who moved into Kurdish homes emptied by Saddam Hussein. Underestimating the passion of ethnically-based nationalism has a bloody history, and Iraq's Kurds are a passionate, much-abused people.

They will not allow Tamim province, which has Kirkuk's oil, to slip from their control to the central government. The Kurds know they could lose a referendum on Kirkuk at this time; Kurdish efforts to drive out and silence the potential no' vote have not yet been sufficiently successful. Nonetheless, the Bush administration would be wise to have a rapid-reaction force ready to preempt Kurdish, Arab, and Turkmen animosities in the north.

Reading these lines together with the Seven Turkmen Conditions approved by Talabani and making assessments afterwards is beneficial.

There is nothing wrong to wear headscarf and attend university, but to close eyes and retain minds to other issues through the headscarf discussions have serious drawbacks.

Compromise, Baghdad-style

THE IRAQI Parliament passed three contentious laws simultaneously Wednesday - on the national budget, amnesty for many of the 26,000 prisoners in Iraqi jails, and regional autonomy - and there are good reasons to reserve enthusiasm. The very belatedness of the laws' approval testifies to the mistrust Kurds, Sunni Arabs, and Shi'ites still have for one another and to the persistence of identity politics among these factions.

Nevertheless, Iraq's politicians have taken a promising step forward. Their forging of back-room deals suggests they are learning the lessons of compromise and horse-trading that define democratic politics.

The most obvious compromise was their agreement to bundle the three laws in a single package. This had to be done because each of the three major interest groups needed to have one of the three bills passed and each, distrusting lawmakers from the other two groups, did not

want its bill to be voted on last.

In this way, Shi'ite parties seeking to consolidate their political power and control over oil in southern Iraq won guarantees of regional autonomy. The Kurds were able to secure a budget that granted their region 17 percent of the federal funds distributed to Iraq's provinces. Since the Sunni Arab and the Shi'ite parties still argue that less than 17 percent of Iraq's population lives in the three provinces administered by the Kurdish Regional Government, the disputants agreed

to put off until the 2009 budget a definitive judgment on that region's proper share.

For the Sunni Arab parties, meanwhile, the amnesty law was the linchpin to the package. Most of the beneficiaries of this law will be from their constituency. Once the law is approved by a three-member presidential council - a foregone conclusion - detainees now in American custody can be transferred to Iraqi jails and become eligible for amnesty. The release of thousands of Sunni Arabs is expected to demon-

strate that Sunni Arab politicians are able to deliver what their constituents want.

These imperfect compromises are necessary but insufficient steps toward the creation of a stable, pluralist political system in Iraq.

The next steps must include bringing into government the large Sunni tribes that have formed so-called Awakening Councils to fight Al Qaeda. This will entail new elections soon in predominantly Sunni provinces such as Anbar. And there

must also be rapid and widespread job creation to absorb young men in sectarian militias. They will put down their guns only if they can have secure jobs at decent wages. Iraq's politicians are beginning to play by democratic rules, to practice

the art of the possible. They have a long way to go to create a stable political order, but even the longest journey must begin with a single step.

BBC NEWS

15 February 2008

Civilians losers in Turkey-PKK conflict

Deep in the mountains, the Khanaqa Valley is one of the most idyllic places in northern Iraq. The jagged snow-covered peaks glisten in the sunlight.

By Crispin Thorold

BBC News, Khanaqa Valley, northern Iraq

Small villages hug the mountainsides and a gently flowing river runs through the valley floor. In normal times the peace is only broken by the crow of a cockerel or the gentle twittering of sparrows.

But 16 December 2007 was not a normal day for the valley's inhabitants.

Early in the morning, Turkish warplanes bombed several sites



in the area, which is situated 100km (60 miles) from the Turkish border.

At the time, Turkish officials insisted the raids had only targeted the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan hailed them as a "success".

'Ground shook'

But according to someone living in the valley, Turkish jets also bombed the village of Zargali.

Awat Qadir said she and her family had been asleep in their house there when the sky suddenly erupted at around 0200.

"It was a very bad night", says Mrs Qadir.

"All the glass of the windows fell out and our door was broken. All the families were frightened because of the noise of the aeroplanes and the bombs."

Locals said that the village was lit up by the bombardment and that the ground shook. The Qadirs ran to the mountainside and hid among the rocks.

Now nearly two months later the Qadirs are living in a relative's house in a village further down the valley, where they share a small room with two other families.

The children play outside, but never for long - their mother says that since the bombing they have been too scared.

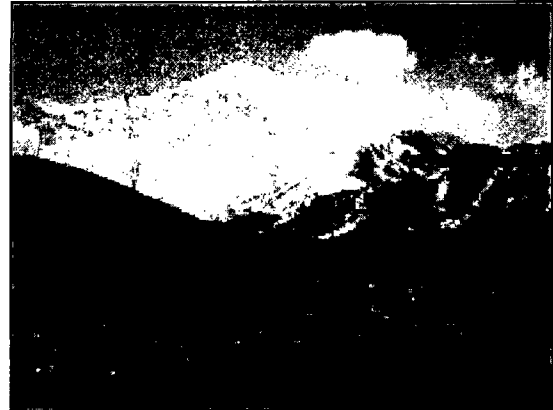
"When they play outside and they hear the sound of the aeroplane, they come running in," she says. "One even ducks when he sees a bird swooping down."

Painful history

Listening in a corner of the room is the head, or mukhtar, of Zargali village.

Ismael Abdullah nervously fiddles with his prayer beads as he

recalls the region's painful history.



During the Anfal (Spoils) campaign against the Kurds in 1988, in which at least 100,000 people were killed, government forces directed by the late Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, destroyed the houses there.

Now another enemy threatens their safety.

"We thought that when Saddam went, our suffering was finished," says Mr Abdullah.

"All Iraqis - especially the Kurds - were happy and relaxed. Now we see everyone is looking for an excuse to make problems for us, even though we are living on our own land and in our own country."

Official reluctance

Although Turkey says it targeted only the PKK, everyone we spoke to in the Khanaqa Valley denies that the Kurdish rebel group operates in this area. That claim was impossible for us to

When they play outside and they hear the sound of the aeroplane, they come running in - one even ducks when he sees a bird swooping down

Awat Qadir

verify independently.

All our requests - at a regional, provincial and local level - to visit the scene of the bombings were rejected. The Kurdish administration and intelligence services cited our safety as the reason for refusing us access to Zargali.

We thought that when Saddam went, our suffering was finished

Ismael Abdullah

Head of Zargali village

Sure enough, when we visited the last checkpoint on the road to Zargali we were turned away, unlike the many local cars that were let through.

The official reluctance to allow journalists into the area reflects

the sensitivity of the Turkish bombing of northern Iraq.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has a difficult history with the PKK - both of the main parties in the administration have fought them in the past, at times in league with the Turks.

But the PKK is also a group that says that it is fighting for the rights of the Kurds in Turkey.

'Shared responsibility'

After enduring decades of persecution, there is sympathy among Iraqi Kurds for a group that advocates greater freedoms for the Kurdish people in Turkey.

"You know, we don't believe that military operations will bring any results", says Falah Mustafa Bakir, the head of the foreign relations department at the KRG.

"We realise that this is a problem and we have a shared responsibility in order to address this issue. The KRG is ready to be involved in talks to address this issue."

The problem with that is that the Turkish government refuses to talk directly to the Kurds. Instead, it accuses them of providing a base for the PKK to launch raids into Turkey. The Turks, the EU and the US all classify the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

The Iraqi border police do undertake regular patrols in PKK strongholds, but it is not clear what they are doing to tackle the group.

Over recent months they have monitored Turkish incursions into Iraqi territory and violations of Iraqi airspace, but they have not intervened.

Enduring conflict

During a tour of the border police's facilities, a commander took us to a village that had been the scene of Turkish artillery shelling and heavy machine-gun fire.

There he repeated a familiar message: "The PKK are not here, but still the Turkish attack."

He also let it slip to our translator that he had been told to look

The PKK are not here, but still the Turkish attack Border police commander

after us but also to ensure that we didn't go anywhere too "interesting".

Whatever is going on in the PKK strongholds the KRG appears determined that it is not publicised. In the meantime the attacks by the Turkish military continue. The most recent air-strikes were a week ago.

The Turkish prime minister has vowed that his country will continue its fight against the PKK "until we win", but in the mountains of northern Iraq victory for either side seems a distant prospect.

In this battle it is the civilians who are emerging as the main losers.

The Columbus Dispatch February 17, 2008

Kurdistan puts out welcome mat for Westerners

BY STEVE STEPHENS

Iraqi Kurdistan isn't a place that's drawing a lot of visitors these days.

But someday, maybe sooner than many people might expect, the semi-autonomous region of northern Iraq could be a promising tourist destination.

"If you have an interest in the Middle East, it's a great place to visit," said Ken Dillman of Columbus, who recently returned from a working visit to Kurdistan.

"For the adventurer, they have a great history there. It's a very culturally rich area with some very, very scenic places as well."

The group of visitors was awed by the citadel of Irbil, which was founded about 2,300 B.C. and is one of the oldest continuously occupied cities in the world, Dillman said.

And gazing up at the beautiful, rugged mountains above the town of Dahok, visitors can easily forget about the scars the region carries, he said.

But those who do get the chance to visit shouldn't go in summer, when temperatures often reach 120 degrees, he said.

Dillman, the pastor at Ekklesia, a nondenominational church on Buttles Avenue, toured the region in November (when temperatures were in the 70s and the weather was good) with a small group of Columbus and California pastors to learn more about the region and to help a small, indigenous Christian ministry there.

Although the Kurds, who are mostly Muslim, frown on proselytizing, Christians seem to be welcome, Dillman said.

And compared with the rest of Iraq, Kurdistan is calm, Dillman said.

"In fact there is a huge economic boom in Kurdistan now," he said. "There's probably more new housing, businesses and malls being built there now than in the Columbus area. That's a side of Iraq that we don't usually get to see. All we hear about is what is going on in Baghdad."

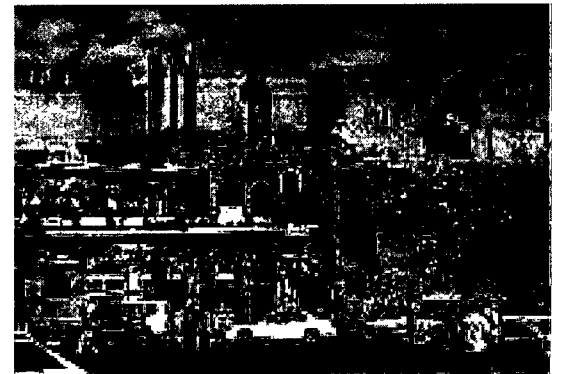
The Kurds that Dillman met -- both officials and ordinary people -- seemed to be pro-Western and eager to attract visitors and investors from Europe and the United States, he said.

"The Kurdish people are very open, very friendly. Kurdistan is heavily Islam, but it's more of a secular Islam. The women even dress in a very Western style. You don't see any burqas in Kurdistan.

"The Kurds are very peaceful people," he said. "They don't seem to have the tribal angst that you find in other regions of the Middle East."

Iraq's Kurdish population was brutally repressed under Saddam Hussein, Dillman noted. So most Kurds, understandably, don't even want to be identified with Iraq, he said.

That could spell sectarian trouble down the road, of course. Troubling, too, are the problems that Kurds potentially have with Turkey, which is fighting Kurdish rebels of its own. Turkey has claimed that some of the rebels are



The oldest part of Irbil in Iraqi Kurdistan is more than 4,000 years old.

based in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"A month or so after we left was when Turkey started shelling across the border in the region we were actually in," Dillman said.

But Dillman, who might return to Kurdistan this year, holds out hope that the region will be spared another wave of great suffering.

"We heard some amazing stories meeting with people who were able to survive the atrocities" under Saddam, he said. "But one of the beautiful things about the Kurds is that they didn't seek out revenge. They're saying, 'Let us live in peace and govern ourselves.' It was very encouraging."

Steve Stephens is the Dispatch travel writer.

Fragile situation in Iraq makes a troop reduction unlikely

By Michael R. Gordon

WASHINGTON: There is an overarching reason American commanders in Iraq want a pause in American troop reductions this summer: The United States has learned through painful experience that security can rapidly deteriorate if it overestimates the capability of Iraq's forces to keep the peace.

The case for temporarily halting the drawdown was endorsed Monday by Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who had previously voiced hope for greater reductions to ease the enormous strain on the military. But the die was cast last month when President George W. Bush said on a visit to Kuwait that he was prepared to give his Iraq commander whatever forces he needed.

With General David Petraeus, the senior American commander in Iraq, advocating that the United States "let things settle a bit" after the current round of troop reductions, and General George Casey Jr., the U.S. Army chief of

staff, warning, by contrast, that the army is "stretched and stressed" by its constant deployments, some sort of trade-off had to be made. For now, at least, securing Iraq has won.

Gates has not said how long the pause should last before troop withdrawals resume, adding that Bush must decide this matter. But one senior American officer estimated that a pause of three to four months would be needed after the American force shrinks to 15 combat brigades in July from 20 brigades at the height of the "surge" last year.

"We have momentum, and we must maintain this momentum," said the officer, who asked not to be identified because final decisions on troop levels in 2008 have yet to be made at the White House. "Without a pause to assess trends, we could make a serious mistake."

In recommending a pause, American commanders in Iraq are partly guided by the past. When Casey commanded American forces in Iraq — he was Petraeus's predecessor and served there from mid-2004 until early 2007 — the

United States put a premium on transferring security responsibilities to the Iraqis. But insurgents stepped up their attacks. Some Iraqi forces engaged in wantonly sectarian operations.

Violence steadily increased.

With the addition of about 30,000 American troops and guidance from a new counterinsurgency strategy, the American military has reduced violence to 2005 levels. The military gains have yet to be followed by the sort of major progress toward Iraq political reconciliation that Bush administration officials had hoped for.

But the gains have had the unintended effect of encouraging an increase in the Sunni volunteers who have aligned themselves with the Americans.

In the United States, politicians tend to speak as if the war is lost or all but won. In Iraq, U.S. commanders suggest that the war still hangs in the balance and worry about preserving tangible, but fragile, security gains.

Military officials and experts outside government who favor a pause make

several arguments. First, the military is cutting the number of U.S. combat brigades by a quarter. By July, the reduction will have brought the number of U.S. troops down to 130,000 or so from the current level of about 160,000, restoring troop levels to those in place at the beginning of 2007, or slightly higher.

Many U.S. forces will remain involved in logistics, training Iraqi forces and other support missions. But the drawdown is a substantial reduction in combat power, one that will make it more difficult to mobilize forces for major operations.

Secondly, Iraq's political course is still uncertain, and some political steps could add to the demands on U.S. forces. If provincial elections are held this year, U.S. and Iraqi forces would need to safeguard the voting, as in the past.

Another variable is that the United States wants to reduce the number of Iraqis in detention centers, partly to encourage efforts at political reconciliation. Along with the potential return of additional refugees to Iraq, that may introduce another complication.

There are also about 70,000 mostly Sunni volunteers who have aligned themselves with the U.S. military. The Shiite-dominated Iraqi government remains suspicious of the volunteers, who American commanders say need to be enlisted in Iraq's security forces and given jobs to discourage many of them from returning to their insurgent ways.

The duration of the cease-fire declared by Moktada al-Sadr, the anti-American Shiite cleric, and the extent of Iraq's support for Shiite militants is another wild card. Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, a predominantly Iraqi group that U.S. intelligence says has foreign leadership, has been pushed north toward Mosul but is still active.

Lastly, the Iraqi Army and the police are expanding. But U.S. officers want to carefully monitor their progress and try to improve their capability. This involves not only training the forces and supporting them with aircraft and logistics but also working with them on operations.

U.S. officials favor a gradual process of putting Iraqi forces in the lead and backing them up when necessary, not a wholesale transfer of responsibilities. When the United States ceded authority to the Iraqis prematurely in Diyala Province in 2006, the Iraqis engaged in sectarian attacks, Qaeda militants presented themselves as the defenders of the Sunnis, and, a year later, American forces had to mount a major operation to reclaim Baquba, the provincial capital.

A delay in making reductions would increase the strain on U.S. troops. The army is facing a serious shortfall in captains. And the number of new recruits who have not graduated from high school is growing. That means, one U.S. officer said, that enlistment standards are being lowered when the military faces counterinsurgency and nation-building tasks that are more and more complex.

For all this, there is no guarantee that the strategy of bringing political stability to Iraq will succeed. But there is also little prospect that there will ever be enough political support in the United States for another surge.

Iranian revolutionary looks back

By Michael Slackman

TEHRAN: Revolutionaries know exactly what they want to tear down but often lack the ability to predict what will come next. That was true of Ibrahim Yazdi and many of his allies in the Iranian revolution, who now, three decades later, still savor the memory of the day the shah fled Iran, while struggling with the bitter reality that they have been spit out, marginalized and rejected by what it is they helped to create.

Iran celebrated the 29th anniversary of its revolution this month, but there are many fathers of that revolution, like Yazdi, who have not been part of any official celebration.

"Of course this is not a monarchy, it's a republican state," Yazdi said in an interview in his living room, where he reflected on the nation he helped to found. "However, the political system, basically, is a despotic one. Many basic rights and liberties are continuously being denied. Therefore one inspiration behind the revolution, restoration of people's sovereignty, democracy and so on, hasn't been achieved — yet."

Yazdi was an adviser to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the force behind the shah's ouster, the larger-than-life cleric who forged a nation that sought to merge religious governance and republican ideals. Yazdi was the first deputy prime minister and the first foreign minister.

Today he is 76, the leader of an illegal, though tolerated, party that has virtually no influence in the nation's affairs. He tried to run for president in 2005 but was disqualified and barred from the ballot.

Yazdi has white hair now, a white beard and a face softened by time, barely resembling the tight, stern young man who strode beside Khomeini in the early days of the revolution. He has a nice house in a nice section of Tehran, with crystal chandeliers in the living room, a large collection of parakeets that sing all day long, a study lined with books and old photographs — and time, a lot of time.

Yazdi opposed the student takeover of the U.S. Embassy in 1979 but that is not to say he was pro-American. He was a critic of Washington's policies toward Iran and an enemy of Zionism. But he wanted a normal state, one recognized by the international community, not a pariah, isolated and radicalized. He said he knew that taking diplomats hostage would lead to the kind of Iranian state that exists today, one that continues to reward the most radical ideas.

Yazdi now finds himself aligned with some of those student hostage-takers who also want to change the system and have been marginalized for their views. Men like Abbas Abdi.

"We thought we knew a lot of things

Democracy will win, Khomeini ally says

back then," Abdi said. "Everything was simplified. We thought if only the shah goes, everything will be solved and finished. But the revolution was right, there was no alternative, no solution."

Yazdi said he is a fundamentalist, but what he meant is that he is a Muslim intellectual, traditional in his adherence to ritual and teachings. But he is a staunch democrat who defines democracy not by the mechanics of governance, not by elections and institutions, but by ideas. "We recognize tolerance as a basic component of democracy," he said.

"God has not created all of us alike — we are different — human society is a pluralistic society. In the Koran, God is telling us that man is created to be free. So we are free to think, and think different. So the aim of democracy is to recognize the pluralistic nature of human society. The second item is tolerance, I have to tolerate my opponent. With tolerance comes compromise, without compromise democracy doesn't exist."

But Yazdi said that those who took over, those whose voices are loudest these days, not just in Iran but around the region (and, he said, in Washington, too), are those who condemn diversity and demand allegiance to one view — their view. In Iran, he said, those he sees as having hijacked his revolution are the traditionalists, the people like President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who he said want to rule as religious leaders did centuries ago, who see diversity and tolerance as anathema to Islam and to Iran.

"The simplistic perception of the state was that there is a leader, chosen by God, a divine person, so they were expecting that the system would work as it was working centuries ago," Yazdi said. "They have succeeded. They have a leader and he can do everything. And yet the problems are still here."

Yazdi turned to radical politics after the United States and Britain helped stage a coup in 1953, deposing the democratically elected government of Mohammed Mossadegh, a nationalist who opposed foreign control of Iranian affairs, and installed Shah Reza Pahlavi.

Yazdi joined an underground organization opposed to the shah but in 1960 traveled to the United States to study. He remained there until 1978, when he joined Khomeini who was briefly in exile in France. Yazdi, who had earned a doctorate in pharmacology from Tehran University, did postdoctoral work in molecular genetics at Baylor University in Houston before joining its medical school faculty.

It is hard to reconcile the American

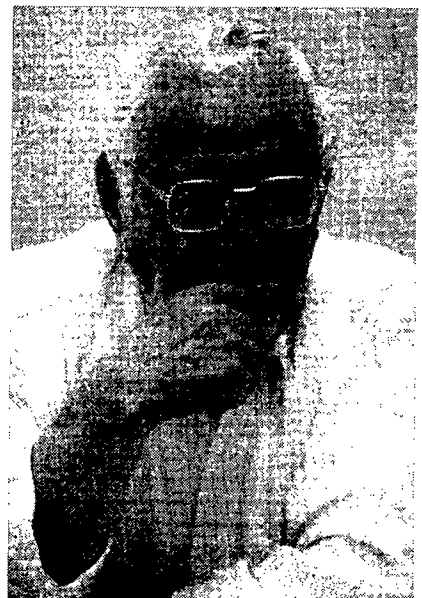
trained scientist, fluent in English, comfortable in Houston, with the images available on YouTube, old washed-out pictures of a young revolutionary. In one, Yazdi, Khomeini and Yasser Arafat are shown taking over the Israeli Embassy in Tehran. Yazdi held Arafat's hand, cupped tightly in his own, as they faced a sea of men and women cheering.

"The story of the Iranian revolution is similar to the story of other revolutions," he said. "It was a restoration of people's rights and liberties — people rose against the tyrannical regime of the shah. There was a very brutal secret police and a lack of minimum freedom of expression." That was what they tore down, he said.

"The day after the revolution," Yazdi continued, "Khomeini was facing the question: What is an Islamic Republic? I was in favor of a constitution and elections. They were against it. Khomeini was oscillating, but gradually he turned to the conservative side."

Nevertheless, Yazdi remains an optimist. He said he sees more traditional thinkers taking an increasingly pragmatic view. He says that Iranian society is maturing, moving through a difficult stage on its way to constitutional democracy. Economic hardships now, he said, are the wake-up call many traditionalists need to accept changes to the system.

"Iran is learning democracy," he said, "because democracy is a learning process. Nobody will learn in a classroom. Democracy is not a commodity to be imported. America doesn't carry democracy in its soldiers' rucksacks. Democracy should come from within, through our own challenges and experiences."



Newsha Tavakolian/Polaris, for The NYT

Ibrahim Yazdi: The true goals of Iran's revolution have yet to be achieved.

MINORITY RULES

By MELINE TOUMANI

Walking through the Sur district of Diyarbakir with Abdullah Demirbas was like taking an old-fashioned mayoral stroll. As the day got under way in one of the largest cities in south-eastern Turkey, Demirbas passed through the narrow stone alleys, and one by one, shopkeepers stepped outside and waved. In return, Demirbas patted his chest and called out loud greetings. He stopped to compliment a cafe owner's new door frames, asked a trio of women if they were satisfied with the trash collection and teased some kids about getting to school on time. Demirbas addressed most of the locals in Kurdish, his native language, but every now and then he switched to Turkish. When I asked him why, he said he has known all his constituents long enough to remember which language each speaks.

Neither my question nor his answer was idle. Demirbas was in a legal ordeal when we spoke last summer because he had been using Kurdish in his capacity as the mayor of Sur, Diyarbakir's central district, an ancient neighborhood ringed by several miles of high basalt walls. For printing a children's book and tourist brochures in Kurdish, according to a report by the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party, Demirbas was accused of misusing municipal resources. For giving a blessing in Kurdish while officiating at a wedding ceremony, he was accused of misusing his position. And for proposing that his district should employ Kurdish-speaking phone operators and print public-health pamphlets in Kurdish, he was accused (and later acquitted) of aiding a terrorist organization — the Kurdistan Workers Party, or P.K.K.

The fact that a reference to terrorism should find its way into the reported accusations against Demirbas, a 41-year-old schoolteacher-turned-politician, might seem bizarrely beside the point, given the scale of the conflict between Turks and Kurds. The fighting between P.K.K. guerrillas and Turkish soldiers has raged in various forms for nearly 30 years and since 2004 has alternated between short-lived cease-fires and sporadic attacks. After 12 Turkish soldiers were killed in a devastating assault in October last year, the military began a series of airstrikes against P.K.K. camps in northern Iraq. These came after months of diplomatic wrangling in which Turkey criticized American and Iraqi leaders for not supporting its fight against the P.K.K., and the Bush administration begged Turkey not to destabilize the one part of Iraq that was fairly functional. This would seem to be far more serious than a dispute over the language of a children's book.

But the battle that Demirbas entered, waged entirely on paper and in courtrooms, is closely related to the violence. For the past two years, politicians all over southeastern Turkey, along with human rights advocates, journalists and other public figures, have been sued for instances of Kurdish-language usage so minor that they are often a matter of a few words: sending a greeting card with the words "happy new year" in Kurdish, for example, or saying "my dear sisters" in a speech at a political rally. Such lawsuits have become so common that in some cases the accused is simply fined for using the letters W, X or Q — present in the Kurdish but not the Turkish alphabet — in an official capacity. In cases involving elected politicians, like Demirbas, the language usage is sometimes

considered disloyalty and can carry a prison sentence.

This miniaturist culture war and the fighting in the mountains are related because they both reflect the inability of Turkish society to integrate Kurds — about 20 percent of the country's total population and the majority in the southeast — in a way that doesn't insist on assimilation down to the last W, X or Q. For decades, Turkish law has not allowed acknowledgment of Kurds as a distinct ethnic group; from 1983 to 1991 it was even illegal to speak Kurdish in public. Until 2002, broadcasting in Kurdish was essentially banned, and only in 2003 could parents give their children Kurdish names (except, again, for names using W, X or Q). But even these small advances suggest that while the military fight has been a stalemate, the deeper cultural conflict can, with relative ease, be resolved. Such at least is the vision of Abdullah Demirbas. His may not be the effort that makes headlines, but it is probably the one that matters most.

In his huge, wood-paneled office, filled with leather couches and elegant tables, Demirbas held up a picture frame that he keeps on his desk. "I look at these photos every day," he told me. His office was buzzing with aides, television news and ringing phones, but he seemed calm and focused. The frame holds two photographs: a black-and-white picture of Musa Anter, a Kurdish writer and activist who was killed in 1992, and a school portrait, in color, of a 12-year-old boy, Ugur Kaymaz, who was killed alongside his father by the Turkish police in 2004 on the grounds that they were terrorists.

In Turkish media coverage of P.K.K. attacks, there is little discussion of Kurdish civilians being killed by Turkish soldiers — still less about why a child growing up in the southeast might be driven to sympathize with the P.K.K. The young victim in Demirbas's picture frame, Kaymaz, played a role in another of the lawsuits against the mayor. Directly across the street from the entrance to the Sur district office building, Demirbas erected a sculpture: an abstract and striking figure made of stone, with its arms curved up into the air. The statue has 13 small, identical round holes carved into it; these represent the 13 bullets with which Ugur Kaymaz was killed. The words on the statue are paragraphs from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in Turkish. For erecting such a memorial Demirbas was accused of "misuse of municipal office and resources" once again.

Children have a special place in Demirbas's work. He served as the head of the Diyarbakir teachers' union for 18 years — he was fired for criticizing the nationalist school curriculum — and as mayor championed children's festivals, libraries, music groups and the free distribution of children's activity books in Kurdish, Turkish and Assyrian. He was likely to take the opportunity to explain why the Turkish primary-school experience is a particularly sensitive issue for Kurds. Most Kurdish children in poor, rural areas start school without knowing how to speak Turkish. Demirbas told me that on his first day of school, at age 6, his teacher lifted him up by the earlobes because he did not know how to say "my teacher" in Turkish. "I am 41 years old," Demirbas says. "But I can never forget that teacher and that school."

Demirbas's colleague Osman Baydemir is six years younger but has similar stories. A lawyer



by profession, Baydemir is mayor of the greater Diyarbakir municipality, which encompasses Sur and 31 other districts. Baydemir faces more than 50 investigations and also risks prison for a long list of cultural offenses. Baydemir, too, started school without a word of Turkish. He recounted to me the informal "web of espionage" that characterized his childhood years: in his Kurdish village near Diyarbakir, a few children kept track of which kids spoke Kurdish in the village and reported the names to their teachers, who levied punishments accordingly. Baydemir, who has published health brochures and a book of baby names in Kurdish, among other materials, said that in meetings with the public in this part of the country, if politicians don't speak Kurdish most people do not understand them: "If we carry out a public-service campaign in Turkish only, there are limited results."

But the use of Kurdish is not simply a matter of linguistic comprehension. Sometimes it is a form of diplomacy. One of the most aggressive legal investigations against Baydemir concerned a series of public statements he made in Kurdish in March 2006. In a battle that month between P.K.K. militants and Turkish soldiers, 14 Kurds had been killed. Diyarbakir exploded in mass demonstrations that ultimately became violent. Baydemir begged the crowd — in Turkish — to settle down, to refuse further violence, to go home and rest. The crowd chanted P.K.K. slogans, like "Teeth to teeth, blood to blood, we are with you Ocalan," referring to Abdullah Ocalan, the head of the P.K.K. whom Baydemir, as a lawyer, had defended after his capture in 1999. Desperate to subdue the crowd, Baydemir switched to Kurdish. "You claimed your identity," he told them. "With burnt hearts, you claimed your people and your pain. We are also with you. Be sure of this. But for the sake of peace, for the sake of your success, we have to listen to each other under the leadership of the party" — the Democratic Society Party, or D.T.P., Turkey's only legal "pro-Kurdish" party. "We fear," he went on, "that this mobilization from now on will harm our nation and our people. From now on, we all will go back to our homes quietly." Sixteen people were killed in the rioting that subsequently spread across the southeast and into Istanbul. The mandate — the ordeal — of a mayor in a Kurdish town was clear: a kind of internal mediation of the highest order, the challenge of connecting to the hearts of the Kurdish population while governing according to the laws of the state.

Nearly all of the prominent Kurdish politicians accused of language violations are members of the D.T.P. But the latest front in the party's legal battles is not crimes against the alphabet but the status of the D.T.P. itself. On Nov. 16, Abdur-

rahman Yalcinkaya, chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals, applied to the Constitutional Court to ban the D.T.P., arguing that it is merely a suit-and-tie-clad front for the P.K.K. "The party in question has become a base for activities which aim at the independence of the state and its indivisible unity," the prosecutor wrote in his statement.

This move to ban the pro-Kurdish party, likely to last several months in court, is in some ways less surprising than the fact that the D.T.P. made it to Parliament at all. In the past several years, at least four Kurdish parties have been banned or forced to dissolve in Turkey, always under the accusation of supporting the P.K.K. and threatening Turkey's unity. But the D.T.P. has been different. In last July's elections, it became the first Kurdish party to have a strong presence in Parliament in more than a decade. It did so by running its candidates as independents in order to get around a 10-percent minimum (of the total vote) that a party would need to achieve in order to actually win seats. Supporters saw its victory as a chance to address Kurdish issues in Turkey through democratic means. D.T.P. members took great pains to assert their desire to work within the law, to give voice to the economic, social and cultural concerns of their constituents and to bridge the deep chasms between their group and Turkey's old guard, which is represented by the Republican People's Party and the Nationalist Action Party.

But from the new Parliament's opening session in August, the D.T.P.'s presence set in motion a circus of hostile and even juvenile behavior. At the helm of Parliament, the neo-Islamist Justice and Development Party has been the most neutral. But throughout the late summer and fall, Turkish society was captivated by play-by-play scrutiny of who would shake whose hand and who would be invited to whose parties. Some representatives of nationalist and secularist camps took to calling their D.T.P. colleagues "separatists."

Since D.T.P. members first entered Parliament, they have been urged by everybody from the prime minister to the European Union to the United States to condemn the P.K.K. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and the leaders of other parties have stated repeatedly that until the D.T.P. does so, it will not be trusted. D.T.P. leaders have attempted to distance themselves from the P.K.K. without directly condemning the group: in public statements, they constantly reiterate that they are against separatism, do not want to divide the Turkish state and oppose all violence. In the autumn, D.T.P. leaders began calling fallen Turkish soldiers "martyrs," as the military and the rest of Turkey's establishment have always done. But that wasn't nearly enough after an early-October attack killed 13 — the worst strike by the P.K.K. in years. Turkish television channels broadcast continuous gut-wrenching footage of soldiers' mothers collapsing over coffins and uniformed officers comforting them. An intense climate of national mourning set in, along with a focus on national security that Kurdish activists feared would obliterate any hope for cultural reforms.

Aysel Tugluk, a young female leader of the D.T.P. and a one-time member of Ocalan's defense team, sounded exhausted when she spoke at a conference in Istanbul later that month. She started her talk with a long string of condolences for all those who died, then went on to say: "If you force the D.T.P. to condemn the P.K.K., you deny us the possibility to take initiative in a way that could turn out to be effective." But she added that if Kurdish cultural

demands were met, the D.T.P. would be able to condemn "any force that deploys violence" and that the most important step right now would be for Kurds to be allowed to express themselves in their native language. "After 30 years, we still have violence," Tugluk said, "so I think we should stop and ask, What was our mistake? The P.K.K. has to be taken into account from a sociological point of view; it is the result of the nonsolution to the Kurdish issue: we have to focus on the origins of that issue." Ayhan Aktar, a sociologist at Istanbul's Bilgi University, described the situation to me more bluntly: "If the D.T.P. condemns the P.K.K., they won't ever be able to go to Diyarbakir again; they will get beaten up on the street by some hotheads when they set foot in town."

Dilek Kurban, an analyst at Tesev, the research institute that was a sponsor of the event at which Tugluk spoke in October, told me that the personal element should not be discounted: "Every family in the southeast has someone in prison or in the mountains." ("In the mountains" is a euphemism for fighting on behalf of the P.K.K.) "For them," she continued, "the condemnation seems like a betrayal of their own sons and daughters, who, in their opinion, have paid too high a price for their national liberation. If those people are integrated into social life and civic life, I wonder how much of this problem will remain. But when there is still a conflict, both sides cling to their symbols: the Turkish flag or the photos of Ocalan."

After the October crisis, harassment of Kurdish politicians only worsened. In December, a military court arrested the 35-year-old D.T.P. chairman, Nurettin Demirtas, on charges of forging medical documents to avoid military service. (Among politically minded, university-educated Kurds and Turks alike, it is common to evade military service.) Demirtas is now in a military jail awaiting word on a possible five-year prison sentence. Meanwhile, a photo began to circulate of a woman, dressed in a P.K.K. uniform, standing outside a camp in northern Iraq. The largest Turkish daily, *Hurriyet*, along with many other media organizations, reported that it was the D.T.P. legislator Fatma Kurtulan, leading to an official investigation. (When reporters asked Kurtulan to explain herself, she said, "You know perfectly well I'm not the person in that photo.") In December, the Turkish chief of staff, Gen. Yasar Buyukanit, made a statement that showed what some in the military thought of the D.T.P.'s July election gains. "The P.K.K. is in the Parliament," the general said, a charge repeated throughout the Turkish media.

But the most dubious moment in this legal battle came last month, when the chief prosecutor for Turkey's capital city, Ankara, filed a case against Ahmet Turk, a D.T.P. deputy (and former party president), for "insulting the military." The reason for the accusation was emblematic: last August, when the military held a reception celebrating Turkish Victory Day, it refused to invite D.T.P. legislators. The D.T.P.'s Turk (who is Kurdish, despite his last name) made a statement admonishing the military for excluding his party, saying, "Now it is clear who is engaging in separatism." As a result, he stands to face a two-year sentence for insulting the military by accusing it of being separatist.

When I asked Demirbas how he feels about the P.K.K. and the prospect of a separate state, his voice grew softer both in tone and in volume. "I am against separation," he says, "but it's difficult to convince people of this. I am not working for the Kurds; I am working for all people. Democracy means that when you want something for yourself, you also want it for others."

It was Demirbas's interest in others that led me to seek him out. I had heard from a friend in Istanbul that the mayor of the central neighborhood of Diyarbakir had published a map of the city in Armenian. One hundred fifty years ago, Armenians and other Christians made up about half of Diyarbakir's population, but as an ethnic Armenian myself, I was astonished that a mayor in a Turkish town had done something to acknowledge this history. Most old Armenian sites in Turkey are either abandoned altogether or labeled with signs and explanations that offer roundabout explanations without ever mentioning that a particular site was Armenian. (Even the much-lauded official renovation of an Armenian church in Van relied on the geographical term "Anatolian.") In Turkey, the "Armenian question" — whether the massacre of the Ottoman Armenian population during World War I was a state campaign — is at least as taboo as the Kurdish issue.

When Demirbas learned of my ethnic background, he took out a stack of about a hundred tourist brochures describing Diyarbakir, printed in Armenian, and handed them to me. "Please give these to Armenians in the United States," he said. He also showed me the same brochure in Assyrian, Arabic, Russian and Turkish. "Why is it," he asked by way of example, "that tourists who visit Topkapi Palace in Istanbul can get an audio listening guide in English, French, Spanish, German or Italian, but when I publish a small tourist brochure in Armenian, as a welcoming gesture to Armenian tourists who want to visit their ancestral home, I am accused of committing a crime?" (The brochures are among the many projects for which Demirbas has been accused of misusing municipal resources.) We spent the rest of the afternoon touring an area that Demirbas calls "the Streets of Culture Project." Tucked among a cluster of alleyways in his district, several ancient structures remind visitors of the Armenians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Jews and other groups who once populated a neighborhood that is still known locally as the infidel quarter. Demirbas calls it the "Armenian quarter," at least while talking to me, and has drafted a proposal to undertake a major renovation of the area and its monuments.

"So many civilizations lived in the Sur district over millennia," he says. "Kurds, Arabs, Armenians, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Nestorians, Jews, Turks, Hanafi, Shafi'i, Alevi, Yezidi, traces of Sabihi" — occasionally he lengthens his list by repeating groups he has already named — "all these different beliefs coexisted in the Sur district of Diyarbakir. The more we lose this multicultural side of ourselves, the more we become one another's enemies."

Listening to him, I felt sure that he meant it, but also sure that he knew he was undermining the nationalist foundations of the Turkish Republic. At first, I wondered if he was using Diyarbakir's other ethnicities to somehow soften the blow of his support of Kurdish cultural rights. But supporting the Armenian issue would hardly win him friends in Turkey, at least not friends with power. I was told that his emphasis on multiculturalism was not so much strategic as it was part of a natural long-term shift in the dynamics of Kurdish identity in Turkey. According to Hisyar Ozsoy, a scholar of Kurdish origin at the University of Texas who was as an adviser to Baydemir, Kurdish politics has been moving "from war and struggle to themes of multiculturalism," and "when you talk to Abdullah Demirbas, you hear him saying that 'this is just a kind of richness; we are very much innocent here.' This is not the kind of political actor who was operating effectively in Diyarbakir during the 1990s." Multiculturalism, according to Ozsoy,

also helps Kurds gain legitimacy in the eyes of outsiders, especially Europeans: "There is always this foreign gaze on Kurds. They're looking at us like" — he mimics a baby voice — "Oh, these poor guys, they just want to speak in Kurdish and sing songs and dance, and then we can come and enjoy the richness of these cultures." In democratic societies, such an attitude might properly be criticized as condescending, Ozsoy says, but in the Turkish system, it becomes a critical force in legitimizing ethnic identity.

The European Union has been consistently supportive of Kurdish cultural rights, and Demirbas's case has held the attention of E.U. observers since 2006, when he traveled to Strasbourg to talk about using multiple languages in municipal affairs. For presenting a paper, "Municipal Services and Local Governments in Light of Multilingualism," Demirbas was sued by the Turkish minister of the interior on the grounds of "making propaganda to promote the aims of the terrorist organization P.K.K."

An European delegation made regular visits to Diyarbakir to monitor Demirbas's case, among others, and in a September report on local democracy in Turkey, it harshly criticized the legal actions against the mayor and his colleagues and called on Turkey to sign the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

But the huge distance between such conventions and Turkish official policy was obvious when the delegation members described how officials at the Ministry of the Interior in Ankara justified the language lawsuits. The Turkish officials argued that the distinction between Kurdish and other languages was that Kurdish was only an "ethnic" language. The Europeans were not impressed with this reasoning. They wrote that the laws under which Demirbas, his district council and countless other politicians throughout the southeast had been accused were "so flawed as to be unsustainable."

Unfortunately, European support of minority rights in Turkey has its own hazards: for many Turks, it brings to mind the period when European nations sought to undermine the Ottoman empire's strength by pitting different ethnic groups against one another and against the Ottomans. The eventual collapse of the empire and the trauma of dismemberment were in many ways the foundation for Turkish nationalism, as Mustafa Kemal Ataturk sought to empower his new nation with a strong Turkish identity.

These days, each instance of criticism from European observers gets an angry response from mainstream Turks. According to the latest polls, only half of the population says it wants to join Europe, down from 70 percent a few years ago. Turks with the highest education levels were disproportionately more likely to oppose closer E.U. ties.

Even some of the most sympathetic analysts of the Kurdish problem believe that Demirbas and Baydemir have been needlessly provocative in their initiatives. One analyst with a major human rights organization said that the mayors should know better than to work blatantly outside of the system. "The Kurdish people are suffering because their leaders are not realistic about what Turkey can accept right now," she said. This refrain is repeated by people on all sides of the problem. And perhaps Turkey is not ready for major change, but you wonder how it will ever become so. Demirbas and Baydemir, and to a lesser extent their colleagues all over the southeast, have chosen to forge new fiefs in what may

ultimately prove to be a self-destructive campaign, heavily dependent on a European support whose usefulness is itself questionable.

The mayors' efforts are as much as anything evidence of desperation. "In primary school, every day and especially on Fridays, I was supposed to say, 'I am Turkish, and I am righteous and hardworking,'" Baydemir says, referring to the pledge that schoolchildren make each



morning. "But all those things did not actually turn us into Turks. This system is somehow creating fake personalities. Diversity is the constitutive element of this society; and when there is that perception, then Turkey will be the model democracy."

Baydemir can be convincing, but a surprise development in July's parliamentary elections may have weakened calls for multicultural reform like his. To widespread surprise, a significant percentage of Kurds in the southeast did not vote for the Kurdish party. Just over half of the region did, while just under half voted for the ruling Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P. According to Kurban of the Tesev institute, this is evidence that Kurds are looking for more of the economic benefits that the A.K.P. has already delivered. "If you ask people what is more important to them — the restoration of historical sites in the Sur district or cash to send their children to school — which will they choose?" she asks, referring to the popular cash-transfer program that the ruling party has established, giving poor families stipends for sending their children to school and vaccinating their infants. She adds that the party wisely fielded a number of ethnically Kurdish candidates from the southeast, politicians who are sympathetic to Kurdish cultural rights but are working outside official Kurdish parties. "The people in the southeast who voted for the A.K.P. didn't vote against Kurds," she says, "they just voted for different Kurds." The A.K.P.'s interest in Islamic rights was a significant motivator, since religion is an important part of life for many Kurds in the southeast. Perhaps above all, the A.K.P. was an outsider to the traditional centers of power. It was the underdog, and Kurds responded to the fact that a party that the nationalists hated had a chance to take over.

The A.K.P. has been kinder to the Kurds than any of the other major parties, but that isn't saying much. The party's commitment to minority rights in general has been spotty and varies significantly from one party leader to another. One of Erdogan's deputy prime ministers, Cemil Cicek, for example, was until recently the justice minister under whom the much-criticized Article 301, which limits freedom of expression, gained traction among nationalist lawyers. He is also the person who in 2005 said that scholars at the country's top universities were "stabbing the nation in the back" when they planned a conference on the Armenian issue — hardly a sign that

he is ready to help loosen the grip of Turkish nationalism.

The revised constitution that the A.K.P. is currently drafting for a 2008 referendum will be the moment of truth for some of these issues, not least for Turkey's faltering European Union bid, but it may well stop at putting a slight polish on existing laws without touching the underlying issues. For example, the use of Kurdish in municipal affairs is not addressed in the early draft, but there is a guarantee that Kurds who wind up in court could have Kurdish-speaking translators. In the meantime, Turkish courts continue to penalize writers, politicians and human rights advocates for all manner of activities: offending the military by criticizing its operations against the P.K.K., offending the memory of Ataturk by writing about his personal life, offending Turkishness itself by discussing the Armenian issue or any number of other taboos. Lawyers working on behalf of those singled out under such laws are blocked at every turn in their investigations and are frequently subject to investigation themselves.

An extraordinary state investigation, disclosed last month, illustrates both the depth of the problem and the possibility of progress. A retired general, an ultranationalist lawyer and other prominent figures were arrested on accusations of plotting the murder of the novelist Orhan Pamuk and of being responsible for the killing of the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, whose death a year ago led to huge rallies and counterrallies and transformed the Turkish political scene. The group has also been linked to several other murders and bombings. The handling of this investigation will be the most significant test yet of Turkey's capacity to match promised reforms to action.

Demirbas was forced out of office in July. He fought the case against him into the winter of last year, through a maze of appeals, accusations of mistrial and further postponements. An Ankara-appointed vice governor moved in to do his job. He recently told me in an e-mail message that he continued to work on his projects "from a historic house inside the city walls." In public statements, meanwhile, Baydemir called his colleague "the mayor in our hearts," and by all accounts the locals still saw him that way. An election to replace him has been delayed indefinitely by Ankara-appointed authorities. Now he is returning to Strasbourg — where his troubles began in 2006, when he spoke openly about using Kurdish — to seek a judgment from the European Court of Human Rights. He always put a great deal of faith in outside intervention. He had shown me framed photos of him with these European Parliament members, the op-ed articles that he wrote and tried to publish in foreign newspapers and the giant binders in which he stores the business cards of anybody who comes to see him, no matter how insignificant the visit.

"I mean, my dismissal won't change the fact that there is cultural diversity in this country," he told me. "Like those who judged Galileo and wanted to execute him, that didn't change the fact that the earth was revolving around the sun."

Meline Toumani has written about Turkey for n+1, The Boston Globe and other publications. A 2007 journalism fellow at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, she is writing a book on national identity.

KURDISTAN IS HOSTILE TERRITORY FOR IRAQI ARABS

LEILA FADEL, McClatchy Newspapers

IRBIL, IRAQ - Every three months, Munawer Fayeeg Rashid goes to the Asayech, an intelligence security agency in Irbil, and hands over his identification. The Shiite Muslim Arab never goes alone. He has to bring a Kurdish sponsor to vouch for him.

Although Irbil is part of Iraq, Iraqi Arabs who move there or elsewhere in Iraqi Kurdistan have learned that they're not considered fellow Iraqis. "They treat us like foreigners," Rashid said.

When he moved to Irbil from Baghdad, worried about the safety of his Kurdish wife and his children, Rashid had to find a Kurd who would swear that he was a good man. Then Kurdish authorities questioned him intensely before issuing him a residency permit that's good for only three months. He must carry it with him everywhere.

"They asked every detail about me," Rashid said. "Where do

you live? Who are your relatives? Who were your neighbors in Baghdad?' But the most nerve-racking question was: 'Are you Sunni or Shiite?' " Officials of the Kurdistan Regional Government say they have no choice but to vet people who want to move to the country's northern provinces, where violence has been far less common than it is in other parts of Iraq. If the government weren't so strict, it would run the risk of letting violent militants into the region, said Esmat Argoshi, the head of security in Irbil.

"We have to know who they are," he said. "Kurdistan is part of Iraq, but at the same time we need someone from here to sponsor them, to say, 'I know this person, and I'm going to be responsible.' ... It's to keep the security situation very strong and stop terrorists from coming to Kurdistan."

Kurdish rules

More than 50,000 Iraqis from

outside Kurdistan now live in Irbil, and each has registered with the Asayech, Argoshi said, including Kurds who were born and raised in mostly Arab provinces.

After a battery of questions and the testimony of a Kurd to vouch for them, would-be residents are issued special ID cards that allow them to live in the city. The card must be renewed every three months. If a person wants to visit another city in the Kurdish region, he or she must have a Kurdish sponsor in that city, too.

The rules have created tension between Kurds and Arabs, both of whom are citizens of Iraq but who speak different languages and have different histories. Most Kurds are Muslims, but they shudder at the thought of traveling to the dangers of Baghdad.

Safer than Baghdad

Sisters Hannah and Asraa Waleed moved to Irbil nearly

two years ago. They've slowly gotten used to life in Kurdistan and are thankful for the refuge.

Hannah Waleed's husband worked as a merchant in the Baghdad market of Shorja, but the bombings became too frequent. A Kurdish friend offered to sponsor the family, and they came to Irbil.

The two sisters spend their time at Naza Mall, an Arab hangout, where they can shop for clothes, cell phones and home appliances, or sit outside and enjoy coffee surrounded by people speaking Arabic.

They can't imagine moving back to Baghdad, but they know they don't belong in Irbil. "You walk outside and you can't speak your own language," Hannah Waleed said in the Naza Mall cafeteria.

Her sister pulled out her passport and her residency ID card. "We have to carry this everywhere we go," she said.

JOHN C. BERSIA:

For inspiration in Iraq, look to Kurdistan

McClatchy-Tribune News Service

WASHINGTON - Aside from the obvious benefit of dethroning former dictator Saddam Hussein, the U.S.-led intervention in Iraq - which is rapidly approaching its fifth anniversary - has prompted more questions than answers for most Americans.

In one part of Iraq, though, the Kurdistan region, the way forward has never been clearer, as I learned last week during a detailed briefing here by high-level insiders. Quite frankly, the nation's northern realm - popularly known as "the other Iraq" or "the Iraq that works" - provides ongoing inspiration not only for the rest of the country but the entire Middle East.

In the interest of appropriate disclosure, let me state up front that the university where I spend most of my time is shaping a Kurdish political studies emphasis, and I have been active in its development. But my belief in soaring possibilities for Kurdistan predates that program by several years,

and my general interest in the Kurds goes back more than two decades.

One cannot help being impressed by the Kurds, famously known as a stateless people who have waged a long, lonely struggle for recognition and acceptance, all the while maintaining their dignity, spirit and optimism.

Kurds in Kurdistan have taken a further step: the establishment of a rare system in the Middle East, one with increasingly democratic features and an economy based on free-market principles. It is worth underscoring that the 2003 U.S.-led intervention did not generate Kurdistan's advance. The region has enjoyed substantial autonomy and witnessed a good measure of progress since the early 1990s. Of course, change in Kurdistan certainly has gained momentum in the aftermath of Saddam's demise.

From the post-war construction of new international airports in the capital city of Erbil and

Sulaimania to the widespread, rapid sprouting of new homes and businesses, Kurdistan is on the move, driven by hefty oil and gas reserves and growing agricultural prowess. A newly released book, "The Kurdistan Region: Invest in the Future," offers more details.

Although "The Kurdistan Region" - and the briefing, for that matter - is designed primarily to attract investment, it also presents useful insights into Kurdish history, culture and politics. If one's interests extend to education, as mine do, the book yields interesting information, such as the fact that two of Kurdistan's seven universities teach exclusively in English.

Now, if the preceding is too much for the skeptics, let me hasten to add that a stable and secure future for Kurdistan is not a foregone conclusion. Getting there will require a strenuous effort and consistently expanding ties with the outside world. Also, as much as Kurdistan rightfully touts an

enviable record of security, it cannot escape its rough neighborhood. The specter of instability casts an unmistakable shadow from elsewhere in Iraq and the surrounding region.

Moreover, Kurdistan itself, as its leaders willingly admit, is very much a work in progress. It remains an emerging civil society, where fundamentals such as human rights, press freedom and political pluralism have yet to take their full and proper place.

Kurdistan is, however, distinguished by its practice of deliberate tolerance toward opposing beliefs and opinions. Blend in a can-do attitude and abundant resources, and it is easy to see why the Kurds have reason to bet on long-term success in "the other Iraq," the one that works.

John C. Bersia is the special assistant to the president for global perspectives at the University of Central Florida. Readers may send him e-mail at johncbersia@msn.com.

TODAYS ZAMAN

February 19, 2008

Academics want Gül's involvement in Kurdish issue

A group of nearly 100 academics and civil society leaders yesterday conveyed to President Abdullah Gül their wish to see him more actively involved in finding a solution to the Kurdish issue.

Today's Zaman İstanbul

The group in a letter addressing the president announced that they have "missed living in brotherhood." Among the group were some of the most well-known members of the Turkish intelligentsia, including such academics, journalists and authors as İonna Kuçuradi, Halil Berktaş, Şerif Mardin, Murat Belge, Mete Tunçay, Ayşe Buğra, Fuat Keyman, Gençay Gürsoy, Baskın Oran, Jale Parla, Turgut Tarhanlı, Osman Kavala, Can Paker, Cengiz Aktar, İbrahim Betil, Oya Baydar, Şevket Pamuk, Tarık Ziya Ekinci and Zey-

nep Tanbay.

The letter recalled the government's earlier promises to find a solution to the Kurdish issue by means of dialogue and reason and shared the observation that mounting violence and nationalist sentiment were blocking rational searches for a peaceful solution. It also protested against a trial process under way to shut down the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP).

"The closure of the DTP would deepen the impasse and tension and deal a most severe blow to democracy at this crucial time when urgent economic, political and

humane solutions [to the Kurdish question] should be sought," the group said.

At the heart of the Kurdish issue lies an understanding that rejects differences and that would like to see homogeneous and obedient citizens, while also condemning everyone who does not agree with this view, the group stated in its letter. The letter noted that the government was talking about the Kurdish question with US and EU officials, but avoiding talking to the directly involved party, the Kurds, which they said was an attitude that was "hurtful" and also "meriting of concern."

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20 February 2008

Barzani's patience with Turkey "limited"

Barzani criticized the Baghdad for their position on Turkey against Kurdish area.

The Globe- Erbil

Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani firmly criticized the central Iraqi government for their position on Turkish air strikes against Kurdish areas the Turks claim harbor PKK fighters.

President Barzani described Nouri al-Maliki's government as "weak," adding that it needed essential reform. Concurrently, he assured that the PKK doesn't exist in the region.

"It is impossible to ask the Iraqi central government to take a position on the Turkish violation on Iraq's sovereignty?as it daily sees Turkish violations on the country's sovereignty," Barzani said in a private interview on Al-Arabiya TV.

"There is a limit to our patience. If Turkish raids continue against Kurdistan and continue to affect people's lives, we will not keep silent much longer."

Barzani pointed out that Turkish authorities have other intentions toward Kurdistan Region, and the issue of prosecuting PKK fighters is mere attempted justification. Also, he stressed his readiness to negotiate with Turks to find a peaceful political solution to the crisis, saying, "If Turkey insists on a military solution,

we are not a side in the military operations."

Barzani considered Turkey's problem with PKK fighters a Turkish internal problem, stating, "We have no affairs in it," and asserted that Ankara seeks to export its internal problems to the region.



Concerning Kurdish demands on Article 140, Barzani stressed that there are strong external interventions working to prevent its implementation. "We will not allow the execution of any regional country's agenda in Kirkuk city, at any price."

In response to reports as to whether the Kurdistan Regional Government succeeded in sending Kurdish families back to Kirkuk, in turn displacing Arab and Turkmen families, in order to change the demographic reality of the city, Barzani said, "I challenge all of the claims that Arab or Turkmen families were evicted from Kirkuk."

Barzani denied that there are settlements of Kurdish families coming from Syria, Turkey, and Iran, adding that they have not even been able, so far, to return half "of the displaced Kurds" of Kirkuk.

Foreign oil companies flock to Iraqi tender

Reserves will help fund reconstruction

Reuters

BAGHDAD: More than 70 international companies have registered to compete for tenders to help develop Iraq's oil reserves, seen as vital to financing reconstruction of the shattered country, the Iraqi oil ministry said on Monday.

Iraq produces a fraction of its reserves, among the largest in the world and among the cheapest to exploit. International oil companies have been positioning themselves for years to gain access. Big oil companies like Royal Dutch Shell, Total, Repsol, ConocoPhillips, BP, and StatoilHydro of Norway are among those that have said they have registered or intended to do so.

"We are going to carefully study and check the documentation," said Asim Jihad, an Oil Ministry spokesman. "Next month we will declare the companies which are permitted to work in the Iraqi oil fields."

Iraq produces about 2.3 million barrels of oil a day, dwarfed by its 115 billion barrels of proven crude oil reserves. Only those of Saudi Arabia and Iran are larger.

An oil official said last year that the Iraqi oil sector could need as much as \$75 billion in investment.

Iraq has not said what fields it will tender, or on what terms, but the service and extraction contracts on offer are considered a stop-gap until an oil law is passed. They will not provide the long-term involvement that big oil companies crave.

Violence and political wrangling over the oil law, which will decide how to share Iraqi oil wealth among its different regions, has stifled foreign input in the oil sector.

The Iraqi cabinet agreed to a draft

oil law a year ago but disputes with the Kurdistan regional government and objections from Shi'ite and Sunni Arab politicians have delayed it.

No end to the impasse is in sight, Iraqi officials and lawmakers say.

Some oil companies had already signed deals with the largely autonomous northern Kurdistan region, a move that has angered the government in Baghdad, which has threatened to blacklist them and declare the deals illegal.

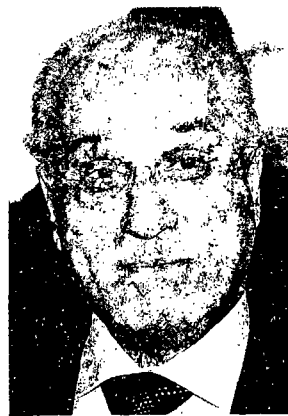
BP has no plans to send personnel into Iraq until the security situation improves, but has said that it would be interested in service agreements and cooperation with Iraq.

Violence has fallen 60 percent across Iraq since 30,000 additional U.S. troops became fully deployed in June, and Sunni tribal leaders turned against Sunni Islamist al Qaeda.

Attacks have also fallen since Shi'ite cleric and militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr called a cease-fire. Declared last year, it is due to expire this month and he has not decided whether to extend it, a Sadr spokesman said last week.

Meanwhile, the oil infrastructure in Iraq is still frequently targeted by insurgents, and rival groups in Iraq's mainly Shi'ite south — the country's oil-exporting hub — are locked in a bloody battle for supremacy. "The crucial points are still security and the oil law," said Alex Munton, an analyst at Wood Mackenzie, a consultancy.

"The outside perception is that things have improved on security, but it is still a concern," he said. "The issue of the oil law is throwing up more interesting questions. Is the federal government signaling it intends to proceed with oil development without a clear legal framework in place?"



Heinz-Peter Bader/Reuters

Hussain al-Shahristani, the Iraqi oil minister, above. With an oil law in limbo, the ministry is seeking other ways to bring in technology and investment. Iraq produces about 2.3 million barrels of oil a day. At right, the Baiji refinery is the biggest in Iraq.

With the oil law in limbo, the Oil Ministry is looking for other ways to get foreign companies involved and to bring in at least some of the investment and technology needed.

The new contracts will very likely be offered for a set fee for two or three years to rehabilitate and expand facilities at fields that are already producing oil, analysts and company executives said.

That may not be what the oil companies want, but they have signed up to ensure they are part of any deals for the country's giant oil fields, should they be offered.

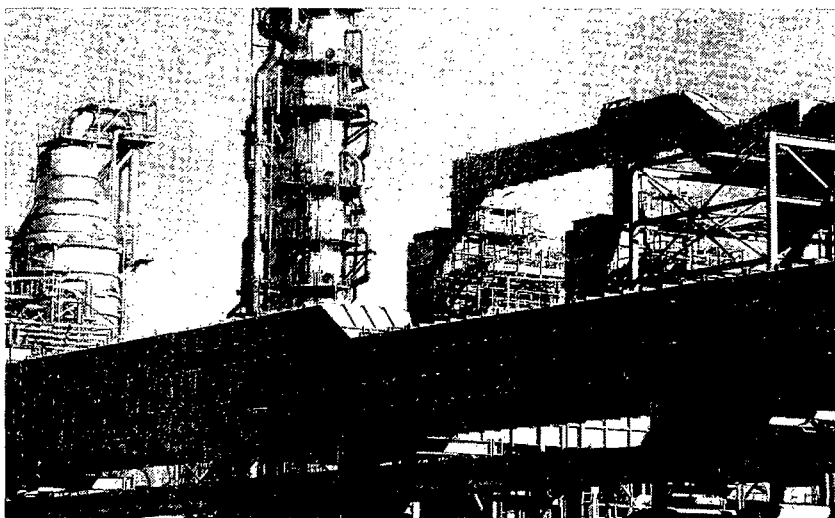
"We will do the acrobatics that the Oil Ministry requires of us," said one oil company executive, referring to the process of registering for tenders.

"But in the end big oil companies have similar financing, shareholders, pension schemes and analysts," he said. "And with poor security and absolutely no legal framework in place, it is going to be a long time before we can persuade them that it is a good idea for the company to invest \$5 billion to \$10 billion in Iraq."

The executive spoke on condition of anonymity because he was personally involved in the ongoing negotiations.

Big oil companies have made no secret of the fields they favor. Total has extensive knowledge of the giant Majnoon and Bin Umar fields and has teamed up with Chevron to pursue Iraqi contracts.

Shell has studied the northern Kirkuk field and has also looked at Maysan province in the south with BHP Billiton. BP has studied the southern Rumaila field. Lukoil of Russia hopes to revive a Saddam Hussein-era deal for the West Qurna oil field, and Conoco has said it wants to be an active partner.



'Ruining' Turkey's image

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune February 19, 2008

Secular elite growing angry over the scarf

By Sabrina Tavernise

ISTANBUL: When two women in Islamic head scarves were spotted in an Italian restaurant in this city's posh new shopping mall this month, Gulbin Simitcioglu did a double take.

Covered women, long seen as backward peasants from the countryside, "have started to be everywhere," said Simitcioglu, a sales clerk in an Italian clothing store, and their presence is making women like her more than a little uncomfortable.

"We are Turkey's image," she said. "They are ruining it."

As Turkey lurches toward a repeal of a ban on head scarves at universities, the country's secular upper middle class is feeling increasingly threatened.

Religious Turks, once the underclass of society here, have become educated and middle class, and are moving into urban spaces that were once the exclusive domain of the elite. Now the repeal of the scarf ban — pressed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, passed by Parliament and now just awaiting an official signature — is again setting the two groups against each other, unleashing prejudices that have as much to do with class rivalry as religion.

While the public debate here typically revolves around Islam and how much space religion should have in Turkish society — a legitimate concern in a country whose population is overwhelmingly Muslim and deeply conservative — the struggle over power is a glaring, if often unspoken, part of the tension between the two groups.

Secular women at parties speak disdainfully of covered women and the neighborhoods they populate. Older people shake their heads and cluck their tongues at them. High school boys yell, "Go back to Iran."

Adamantly secular Turks "hate religious people," said Atilla Yayla, a Turkish political philosophy professor teaching in England. "They don't encounter them as human beings. They want them to evaporate, to disappear as fast as possible."

That attitude surfaced with the repeal of the ban by Parliament this month.

"In the past, when a person with a scarf walked by me, I didn't feel anything toward them," said a 24-year-old lawyer in a Starbucks in a fashionable Istanbul neighborhood the day after the repeal. "Now I just want to hit them."

One professor declared bluntly that universities should "close the gates until the administrators of the country come back to their senses." Another argued that covered students could cheat by using cellphone headsets under their scarves.

The worry, secular Turks said, is that covered women in universities would soon graduate and expect to wear their

scarves in civil service jobs, transforming the Turkish state from secular to religious.

Turks who support lifting the ban have drawn analogies with school integration in the United States. In a speech to Parliament, Nursuna Memecan, a deputy from Erdogan's party, referred to a 1957 photograph of a white girl shouting at a black student entering Little Rock Central High School, highlighting the girl's apology decades later.

"There is a reaction that we may regret," Memecan said. She argued that secular fears about growing religiosity were groundless. Observant Turks are not growing in numbers, she said. They have always been there but were not visible in educated society.

"We weren't sitting with them on planes," she said. "They didn't go to our restaurants. We have to learn to share the cake with them."

Hasan Bulent Kahraman, a professor at Sabanci University in Istanbul, put it this way: "Cleaning ladies are all in head scarves and no one says anything. But if a judge wants to cover her head, the problem is triggered."

But Turkey is different from the United States, secular Turks argue. The

fight here is not about skin color, but a religious belief that seeks to impose an ideology, they say. Islam dictates specific rules for daily life, many of them extremely limiting for women, and secular women argue passionately that Islam's growth in Turkey will inevitably lead to a society that is less free for women.

"To associate the head scarf with freedom sounds a little cynical," said Ayse Bugra, a political economist at Bogazici University in Istanbul, "since it is clearly about limiting the way in which a woman can appear in public."

Women are "clearly inferior" in Islam, whose rules limit inheritance for women and allow men multiple wives,

she argued, pointing out that Turkey's president, Abdullah Gul, at the age of 30, met his wife, Hayrunnisa, when she was just 14.

"If you ask her, did she choose freely to wear the head scarf, she'd say yes," Bugra said. "What does that mean?"

Turkey is one of the world's most permissive Muslim societies, a result, in part, of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk's secular revolution that began in the 1920s. Only 10 percent of the population was literate at the time, and a secular elite took control of religion and gave women rights.

But years passed, and observant Turks became educated and wealthy, without losing their religion, traveling abroad and taking part in politics, forming a new Islamic elite in large western cities, where they mix with their secular counterparts.

"Most of the head scarf women are doing something that their mothers didn't," said Nil Mutluer, a lecturer at Kadir Has University in Istanbul. "There is a change in the society. How do we define what is modern? We need to rethink these terms."

Indeed, the strongest reactions to the ban seem to come from older Turks.

A sizable portion of Turkey's secular society is uncomfortable limiting liberties, including wearing head scarves, but does not trust Erdogan to work as hard for other communities as he does for the religious one. Turkey does not have a tradition of tolerance, and secularists are afraid that religious Turks, now settling deeply into the bureaucracy, will change the laws and wield power to benefit religious Turks instead of secular ones.

"An Islamic way of thinking can bring its own authoritarianism," said Burhan Senatalar, a professor at Bilgi University.

Society has already grown more religious, he argued, pointing out that special state-run religious schools — strongly supported by Erdogan's party — have been allowed to flourish. Erdogan himself comes from a background of political Islam, and memories of his sharp Islamic rhetoric from the 1990s left secular Turks deeply suspicious of his motives.

Still, the fear of what might occur in the future is not a good enough reason to keep the ban on head scarves, said

Yildiray Ogur, an editor at Taraf, a liberal daily newspaper.

"I don't see any real arguments," he said. "I'm afraid, so I'm right." This is the motto of the adamantly secular class in Turkey now.

He added: "You are afraid of totalitarianism, but you can support it today in order to prevent it in the future."

Meanwhile, universities across Turkey are preparing for the final approval of the ban's repeal, which will go into effect after Gul signs it into law this week. The rector of Istanbul Technical University, Faruk Karadogan, said he was expecting confusion.

"The problem is not the scarf — it's their way of thinking, their minds," he said of observant Turks. "If you have somebody brainwashed like that, it's very hard to get her back to a way of contemporary thinking."

But a few buildings away, in a cafeteria bustling with students of all varieties — young men with long hair, women Goths, and science and math geeks — Ece Ulgun, a 20-year-old chemistry student whose classmates include covered women (they wear hats, wigs or go uncovered on campus) offered a different view.

"I have many friends who wear the head scarf," she said. "I enjoy their friendship. They're clever, smart women. Not like what people say: unscientific and only interested in religion."



La Turquie annonce son intention de continuer à frapper le PKK en Irak

ANKARA, 21 fév 2008 (AFP) -

L'armée turque continuera à frapper les rebelles séparatistes kurdes basés dans le nord de l'Irak "quand ce sera nécessaire", a annoncé jeudi le Conseil de sécurité nationale, qui regroupe les plus hauts dirigeants civils et militaires du pays.

"Les opérations transfrontalières menées par l'armée turque contre l'organisation terroriste se poursuivront à chaque fois que ce sera nécessaire", a affirmé dans un communiqué le Conseil de sécurité nationale, dont font partie le chef de l'Etat, plusieurs des principaux ministres et les chefs militaires.

Ce communiqué a été publié à l'issue d'une réunion de routine, quelques heures après l'annonce par des responsables kurdes irakiens que l'artillerie turque avait une nouvelle fois visé des positions présumées du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak, où les séparatistes kurdes de Turquie ont établi des bases.

Soutenus par les services de renseignement américains, les avions turcs ont mené cinq raids aériens contre des cibles du PKK dans la région depuis le 16 décembre, ainsi qu'une opération terrestre transfrontalière afin d'empêcher un groupe de rebelles de s'infiltrer en Turquie.

Jeudi, les médias turcs ont affirmé que l'armée acheminait des renforts et des équipements vers la frontière irakienne, ce qui pourrait être la phase préparatoire à une vaste incursion dans le nord de l'Irak.

En octobre, le Parlement avait donné au gouvernement turc l'autorisation de mener pendant un an des opérations contre le PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, une région montagneuse où, selon Ankara, 4.000 rebelles ont établi leurs bases et y préparent des attaques contre des cibles en Turquie.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, a lancé en 1984 une insurrection armée contre le pouvoir turc, pour obtenir l'autonomie de l'est et du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplés majoritairement de Kurdes. Le conflit a fait jusqu'à présent plus de 37.000 morts.



Les Kurdes, peuple sans Etat au cœur d'une zone de fractures

PARIS, 22 fév 2008 (AFP) -

Au cœur des tensions entre Ankara et Bagdad, les Kurdes, un peuple sans Etat, vivent au rythme des crises dans une région explosive, aux confins de la Turquie, de l'Iran, de l'Irak et de la Syrie.

"Les montagnes sont nos seules amies" assure un dicton kurde, résumant l'histoire d'un peuple situé sur l'une des lignes de fracture les plus instables du globe, entre les mondes irano-perse, turco-ottoman et arabe.

Privés d'accès à la mer, sans Etat pour les représenter, les quelque 25 à 35 millions de Kurdes ont su préserver leurs dialectes, leurs traditions et un mode d'organisation largement clanique.

"Jusqu'à la fin du XIXème siècle, les Kurdes ont été instrumentalisés par les divers pouvoirs impériaux perse et ottoman, qui leur laissaient une assez grande latitude et les utilisaient comme supplétifs" pour faire régner l'ordre aux frontières ou mater d'autres minorités, relève le chercheur Oliver Roy, spécialiste de la région.

"C'est quand les deux nationalismes turc et persan se sont laïcisés" avec Atatürk en Turquie et les Pahlavi à Téhéran "que les Kurdes ont développé en miroir une revendication ethnico-nationale", ajoute-t-il.

Mais les pays de la région savent aussi faire front commun pour mater les velléités indépendantistes. En 1937, Bagdad, Téhéran et Ankara signent ainsi le pacte de Saadabad, destiné à coordonner leurs efforts contre les "bandes armées".

Aujourd'hui encore la Turquie laïque, l'Iran islamiste et l'Irak sous tutelle américaine évoluent toujours entre crainte du séparatisme et instrumentalisation de la question kurde dans leurs relations avec leurs voisins.

Le jeu des grandes puissances s'est aussi montré incertain pour les Kurdes. La première guerre mondiale voit l'effondrement de l'empire ottoman, sans parvenir à une solution stable pour le Kurdistan, toujours

âprement revendiqué par la Turquie.

La Société des Nations (SDN) cresse un moment le projet d'un Etat indépendant, mais en 1926 elle opte pour le rattachement la région de la grande ville kurde de Mossoul au mandat britannique en Irak.

Il faudra de fait attendre la première guerre du Golfe, en 1991, pour voir les Occidentaux protéger résolument les Kurdes face aux exactions de Saddam Hussein.

Alliés des Etats-Unis, ils sont largement bénéficiaires de l'intervention américaine, qui consacre leur large autonomie et leur relative stabilité au sein d'un pays livré au chaos.

Le renversement du régime de Saddam Hussein à Bagdad est également venu profondément bouleverser la donne régionale.

"On assiste maintenant à une jonction entre les Kurdes du nord de l'Irak et les Kurdes turcs sur le plan culturel, linguistique, économique, qui n'a jamais existé auparavant", souligne Olivier Roy.

L'Iran est aussi concerné, avec une "très nette aggravation de la répression au Kurdistan iranien", contrecoup de l'évolution irakienne, relève-t-il.

Pour Soner Cagaptay, spécialiste de la région au Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "la région autonome kurde du nord de l'Irak a créé beaucoup d'effervescence parmi les nationalistes kurdes des autres pays", notamment en Syrie.

Et dans les jeux d'alliance complexes de la région, soutenir une opération turque au Kurdistan irakien pourrait être une bonne occasion pour Téhéran de se rapprocher d'Ankara, au détriment des Américains.

"Les Iraniens sont prêt à tout pour desserrer l'étau américain en cherchant les bonnes grâces des Turcs" estime M. Cagaptay. "Dans cette stratégie l'appui à une opération turque contre la rébellion kurde du PKK dans le nord irakien pourrait être "une utile monnaie d'échange".



Ankara doit éviter toute action militaire "disproportionnée" (Bruxelles)

BRUXELLES, 22 fév 2008 (AFP) -

La Commission européenne, qui dit suivre "attentivement" l'incursion terrestre de l'armée turque dans le nord irakien, a appelé vendredi la Turquie à éviter "toute action militaire disproportionnée".

"Nous suivons la situation de près", a commenté une porte-parole de la Commission, Krisztina Nagy devant la presse.

"Pour le moment, je peux uniquement répéter notre position, qui dit que l'Union européenne comprend le besoin de la Turquie de protéger sa population du terrorisme et qui dit aussi que la Turquie doit éviter de

mener une action militaire disproportionnée et respecter les droits de l'Homme et l'état de droit", a-t-elle dit.

"Nous encourageons la Turquie à continuer le dialogue avec ses partenaires internationaux sur cette question", a-t-elle poursuivi.

L'armée turque a annoncé vendredi avoir lancé la veille une opération terrestre dans le nord de l'Irak pour y pourchasser des rebelles kurdes séparatistes qui y sont basés, opération confirmée par l'armée américaine en Irak qui l'a qualifiée de "limitée".

AFP

Opération terrestre turque en Irak: Gül invite Talabani à Ankara

ANKARA, 22 fév 2008 (AFP) –

Le président turc Abdullah Gül a invité son homologue irakien Jalal Talabani à Ankara jeudi soir lors d'une conversation téléphonique pendant laquelle il lui a informé qu'une opération terrestre turque était en cours dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé vendredi la présidence.

Le président (turc) a informé son homologue de l'"objectif de l'opération terrestre lancée hier" (jeudi) et l'a invité à se rendre en Turquie, souligne un communiqué des services de presse de M. Gül.

Le chef de la Etat turc a également fait part à M. Talabani que la Turquie était décidée à "développer ses relations avec l'Irak dans tous les domaines".

L'armée turque a annoncé que ses troupes étaient entrées jeudi soir dans le nord de l'Irak pour pourchasser des rebelles kurdes séparatistes qui y sont basés. Selon elle, l'opération terrestre fait suite à des frappes aériennes et d'artillerie de l'armée turque visant des camps du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

AFP

Irak: l'offensive turque "n'est pas la meilleure réponse", selon M. Solana

BRDO PRI KANJU (Slovénie), 22 fév 2008 (AFP) –

LE DIPLOMATE en chef de l'Union européenne Javier Solana a estimé vendredi que l'offensive turque dans le nord de l'Irak n'était pas la réponse la plus appropriée aux problèmes du terrorisme kurde.

"Nous comprenons les préoccupations des Turcs", a-t-il déclaré à la presse à l'issue d'une réunion des ministres de la Défense de l'UE en Slovénie, mais "cette action n'est pas à notre avis la meilleure réponse".

M. Solana a souligné que "l'intégrité territoriale de l'Irak est à nos yeux très importante".

L'armée turque a annoncé vendredi avoir lancé la veille une opération terrestre dans le nord de l'Irak pour y pourchasser des rebelles kurdes séparatistes qui y sont basés, opération confirmée par l'armée américaine en Irak qui l'a

qualifiée de "limitée".

La Commission européenne a, elle-même, appelé la Turquie, vendredi à Bruxelles, à éviter "toute action militaire disproportionnée".

"Nous suivons la situation de près", a commenté une porte-parole de la Commission, Cristina Nagy devant la presse.

"Pour le moment je peux uniquement répéter notre position, qui dit que l'Union européenne comprend le besoin de la Turquie de protéger sa population du terrorisme et elle dit aussi que la Turquie devrait éviter de mener une action militaire disproportionnée et respecter les droits de l'Homme et l'Etat de droit", a souligné la porte-parole.

"Nous encourageons la Turquie à continuer le dialogue avec ses partenaires internationaux sur cette question", a-t-elle ajouté.

AFP

Irak: Berlin appelle Ankara à respecter le droit international

BERLIN, 22 fév 2008 (AFP) –

L'ALLEMAGNE suit avec "beaucoup de préoccupation" l'opération terrestre turque en cours dans le nord de l'Irak et appelle Ankara à s'en tenir au "respect du droit international", a déclaré vendredi un porte-parole allemand.

"Dans tous les cas, le respect du droit international doit être le critère de toute action", a affirmé le porte-parole du ministère des Affaires étrangères, Martin Jäger, lors d'un point-presse du gouvernement.

"Nous appelons le gouvernement turc, dans sa lutte contre le terrorisme, à se limiter aux mesures qui, en dernier recours, sont nécessaires pour la protection de la population turque et nous mettons en garde contre une aggravation

supplémentaire de la situation", a dit M. Jäger.

La présence de soldats turcs dans le nord de l'Irak "représente un risque de déstabilisation non négligeable et notre ambassade à Ankara s'efforce de nouer des contacts avec le secrétaire général du conseil national de sécurité (turc) pour avoir des informations plus précises", a-t-il ajouté.

L'armée turque a annoncé que ses troupes étaient entrées jeudi soir dans le nord de l'Irak pour traquer des rebelles kurdes séparatistes qui y sont basés. Selon elle, l'opération terrestre fait suite à des frappes aériennes et d'artillerie de l'armée turque visant des camps du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

AFP

Ban Ki-moon appelle au respect de la frontière turco-irakienne

NEW YORK (Nations unies), 22 fév 2008 (AFP) –

LE SECRETAIRE général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, appelle au respect de la frontière turco-irakienne, a indiqué vendredi son service de presse, après le lancement d'une vaste opération militaire turque dans le nord de l'Irak.

"Le secrétaire général est préoccupé par l'escalade de la tension le long de la frontière turco-irakienne. Bien que conscient des préoccupations de la Turquie, il réitère son appel à la plus grande retenue et au respect de la frontière internationale entre la Turquie et l'Irak", déclare un communiqué.

"Il réitère également ses appels pour une cessation immédiate des incursions par les éléments du PKK venus du nord de l'Irak qui commettent des actes

terroristes en Turquie", poursuit le communiqué.

"La protection des civils des deux côtés de la frontière demeure le principal souci. Le secrétaire général appelle les gouvernements irakien et turc à oeuvrer ensemble pour promouvoir la paix et la stabilité le long de leur frontière", conclut le texte.

L'armée turque a annoncé vendredi avoir lancé la veille une opération terrestre dans le nord de l'Irak pour y pourchasser des rebelles séparatistes kurdes du PKK qui y sont basés, opération confirmée par l'armée américaine en Irak qui l'a qualifiée de "limitée".

AFP

Raid turc en Irak: cinq soldats, plus de 40 rebelles kurdes tués (armée)

ANKARA, 22 fév 2008 (AFP) –

CINQ SOLDATS turcs et plus de 40 rebelles kurdes ont été tués dans une opération lancée jeudi soir par l'armée turque contre les membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé vendredi l'état-major turc dans un communiqué.

"Vingt-quatre terroristes ont été mis hors de combat et de nombreux terroris-

tes ont été blessés dans les combats survenus le 22 février. Le nombre de terroristes mis hors de combat par les hélicoptères (...) dans la zone de contact est évalué à au moins 20 de plus", a-t-il déclaré sur son site internet.

"Cinq de nos personnels sont devenus des martyrs au cours de ces combats. Les accrochages se poursuivent avec intermittence dans certaines zones", a-t-il ajouté.

AFP

L'armée turque annonce la destruction d'un de ses hélicoptères en Irak

ANKARA, 24 fév 2008 (AFP) -

UN HELICOPTERE a été "détruit" au cours d'une vaste offensive de l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak dimanche, a annoncé l'état-major turc alors que les rebelles kurdes ont affirmé avoir abattu un appareil.

"Un de nos hélicoptères a été détruit dans une zone proche de la frontière pour une raison inconnue. Des techniciens examinent l'hélicoptère sur le site", a

affirmé l'état-major dans un communiqué diffusé sur son site internet.

Les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) avaient auparavant annoncé avoir abattu un hélicoptère turc samedi à Cham Chu, une région irakienne proche de la frontière turque, près de la ville irakienne de Amadiyah, à 50 km au nord-est de Dohuk.

AFP

Des milliers de manifestants à Diyarbakir contre l'opération turque en Irak

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 25 fév 2008 (AFP)

DES MILLIERS de personnes ont manifesté lundi à Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, pour réclamer la fin de l'opération militaire turque dans le nord de l'Irak, ont rapporté des journalistes sur place.

Réunie à l'appel du principal parti pro-kurde de Turquie, le Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), la foule, entre 4.000 et 10.000 personnes selon ces sources, a scandé des slogans hostiles au Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan tels que "Erdogan terroriste" et "Erdogan hypocrite".

"Il faut écraser la main qui tente de s'emparer des monts Qandil", ont crié les manifestants, faisant référence au massif montagneux du nord de l'Irak abri-

tant le quartier général des rebelles séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), près de la frontière iranienne.

Ils ont également déployé une banderole mettant en garde le président irakien, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, accusé par le PKK de soutenir l'opération armée turque.

"Ne t'endors pas, Talabani, nous sommes au menu de midi, tu sera au menu du soir", affirmait le calicot.

La manifestation s'est dispersée sans incident majeur, mais quelques heurts sporadiques se sont produits dans les quartiers avoisinants entre de petits groupes de manifestants et la police, selon les journalistes. Les autorités n'ont pas fait mention d'interpellations.

LaTribune

23 FÉVRIER 2008

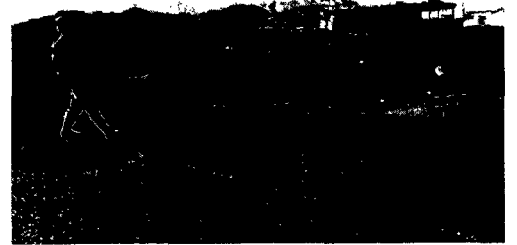
Les rebelles kurdes disent avoir tué 22 soldats turcs en Irak

SOULAIMANIA, Turquie (Reuters) - Les rebelles séparatistes kurdes ont tué 22 soldats turcs au cours d'accrochages dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé samedi un porte-parole du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

"En conséquence d'affrontements hier entre le PKK et les forces turques, 22 soldats turcs ont été tués, tandis que seuls cinq soldats du PKK étaient blessés",

a précisé à Reuters par téléphone Ahmed Danees, porte-parole du mouvement insurrectionnel.

L'armée turque a annoncé vendredi que 24 rebelles kurdes et cinq soldats avaient trouvé la mort dans les combats. Il est difficile de vérifier les informations des deux camps, les combats se déroulant dans une région montagneuse inaccessible.



TRIBUNE DE GENEVE

23 FÉVRIER 2008

Les rebelles kurdes menacent d'attaquer les villes turques

SOULEYMANIYAH (AFP)

Les rebelles kurdes, retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak, ont menacé samedi de lancer des "opérations de guérilla" en Turquie si son armée poursuivait une offensive contre leurs positions.

L'Irak a tenté pour sa part de rassurer le marché mondial du pétrole en indiquant que l'opération turque n'avait pas affecté les exportations de pétrole à travers le terminal turc de Ceyhan.

Le prix du pétrole brut à New York, qui avait atteint mercredi un record de 101,32 dollars, avaient reculé avant de reprendre 58 cents, atteignant 98.81 dollars vendredi en rai-

son des craintes sur les livraisons irakiennes.

"Si la Turquie poursuit ses attaques, nous mènerons des opérations de guérilla dans les villes turques, sans viser les populations civiles", a affirmé à l'AFP Ahmad Danis, un porte-parole des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Ankara doit "cesser ses attaques contre le Kurdistan sinon nous déplacerons le théâtre des combats à l'intérieur des villes turques", a-t-il ajouté.

Le gouvernement de la région autonome du Kurdistan a de son côté annoncé qu'il appellerait à une "résistance générale" si des civils étaient tués par l'armée turque.

"La région du Kurdistan n'est pas partie dans les combats entre la Turquie et le PKK sauf si des civils ou des zones peuplées sont attaqués", a-t-il indiqué le communiqué.

Dans une telle éventualité, "le gouvernement a donné des ordres en vue d'une résistance générale et a effectué tous les préparatifs nécessaires". Aucun détail n'a été fourni sur ces mesures.

L'armée turque a poursuivi ses opérations militaires, entamées jeudi, dans le nord de l'Irak, une région montagneuse très



difficile d'accès, pour traquer les rebelles du PKK accusés d'utiliser la région comme base arrière.

Vendredi, l'état-major turc a affirmé que l'opération avait fait jusqu'ici cinq morts dans ses rangs et que 24 rebelles

kurdes avaient été tués. L'armée turque a souligné qu'une vingtaine d'autres membres du PKK avaient probablement péri dans des bombardements ayant précédé l'incursion.

Le PKK n'a confirmé aucune perte jusqu'à présent.

Selon des sources turques et kurdes, des appareils turcs ont bombardé plusieurs zones kurdes frontalières.

Le gouvernement du Kurdistan irakien a également fait porter la "responsabilité" de l'opération turque dans le nord de l'Irak aux Etats-Unis, accusés

d'avoir donné leur feu vert à Ankara.

La Maison Blanche s'est gardée vendredi de toute objection à l'opération terrestre turque contre les séparatistes kurdes, affirmant en avoir été informée par avance et avoir pressé Ankara de faire preuve de retenue.

Elle a souligné que les Etats-Unis, comme la Turquie, considéraient le PKK comme une organisation terroriste, et a laissé entendre que Washington et Ankara avaient partagé le renseignement avant le lancement de l'opération.

Le gouvernement régional a souligné qu'il n'apportait "aucun soutien au PKK et a pris une série de mesures pour limiter ses activités dans la région", et a appelé à un "dialogue direct entre Ankara, Washington et Erbil".

Sur le plan économique, le gouvernement irakien s'est efforcé de rassurer le marché mondial du pétrole, qui a atteint cette semaine des niveaux records.

"Les exportations de pétrole irakien continuent normalement vers le port de Ceyhan et les opérations militaires (dans

le nord du pays) ne les affectent pas", a indiqué Asim Jihad, le porte-parole du ministère du Pétrole.

"L'Irak et la Turquie souhaitent que les exportations de pétrole irakien se poursuivent, au rythme d'environ 300.000 barils de brut par jour", a-t-il dit.

L'oléoduc qui rejoint le port turc de Ceyhan traverse le Kurdistan irakien.

L'Irak dispose des troisièmes réserves de brut au monde, soit 115 milliards de barils, et exporte actuellement 2 millions de barils par jour.



23 FÉVRIER 2008

La Turquie appelle les Kurdes à ne pas cacher de rebelles du PKK

L'armée turque a demandé aux Kurdes d'Irak de ne pas aider les rebelles du PKK. Ce week-end, les combats entre les troupes turques et les rebelles kurdes du PKK se sont intensifiés.

L'armée turque a appelé dimanche les Kurdes d'Irak à ne pas protéger ni offrir de refuge aux rebelles kurdes fuyant l'opération qu'elle mène depuis jeudi soir dans le nord de l'Irak, où les combats s'intensifient.

Les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) "essaient de fuir vers le Sud dans la panique", a affirmé l'état-major de l'armée turque dans un communiqué. "Il est attendu des groupes locaux irakiens qu'ils empêchent les membres de l'organisation terroriste du PKK - le principal ennemi de la paix et de la stabilité régionales - d'entrer dans leur région et de s'y voir offrir une protection", ajoute le communiqué.

L'éventualité d'une confrontation entre Turcs et Kurdes irakiens, tous deux alliés des Etats-Unis, est une source d'inquiétude pour Washington qui souhaite préserver le calme relatif régnant dans le nord de l'Irak.

L'appel de l'état-major turc survient alors que les combats se sont intensifiés dimanche dans les montagnes du Nord de l'Irak entre les troupes turques et les rebelles kurdes du PKK qui s'y sont retranchés.

Ils ont fait 33 morts du côté du PKK et huit du côté de l'armée, selon l'état-major turc, ce qui porte le bilan des pertes depuis le début de l'offensive à 112 pour les rebelles et à 15 pour les troupes turques.

Les rebelles tués dans les bombardements ne figurent pas dans le décompte, a précisé l'état-major, qui indique qu'un de ses hélicoptères a été "détruit dans une zone proche de la frontière pour une raison inconnue".

Le PKK avait auparavant annoncé avoir abattu un hélicoptère turc samedi, près de la ville irakienne d'Amadiyah. Il a pour sa part fourni un bilan de 47 soldats et trois

rebelles tués, selon l'agence de presse Firat News, considérée comme le porte-voix des rebelles.

Des membres des "peshmerga", les forces armées kurdes du nord de l'Irak, ont déclaré avoir entendu des explosions et des tirs dans la région d'Hakurk, un bastion du PKK à une vingtaine de kilomètres de la frontière turque, et avoir vu des hélicoptères déposer des troupes dans cette zone.

Un correspondant de l'AFP a vu passer plus d'une dizaine d'avions de chasse se dirigeant dans cette direction.

L'artillerie turque a pilonné pendant une heure plusieurs objectifs en territoire irakien depuis la localité turque de Cukurca, selon les peshmerga. Firat News a fait état de raids aériens et de combats dans la zone de Zap.

Le chef de l'aile militaire du PKK, Bahoz Erdal, a appelé les jeunes Kurdes de Turquie à mener des actions violentes dans les villes en représailles à l'offensive. "S'ils (l'Etat turc) veulent nous détruire, nos jeunes doivent rendre la vie dans les grandes métropoles insupportable (...). Les jeunes Kurdes doivent se réunir par groupes de deux pour brûler chaque soir des centaines de voitures", a-t-il déclaré.

Erdal a également accusé les Etats-Unis de jouer un rôle actif dans l'offensive turque. Les Etats-Unis, qui considèrent à l'instar de nombreux pays le PKK comme un groupe terroriste, fournissent à la Turquie depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel sur les mouvements des rebelles en Irak.

Le secrétaire américain à la Défense, Robert Gates, qui doit se rendre à Ankara la semaine prochaine, a appelé la Turquie



à trouver des réponses autres que militaires pour résoudre le problème kurde. "Les mesures économiques et politiques sont réellement importantes car, passé un certain seuil, les gens deviennent insensibles aux attaques militaires. Si l'on ne met pas en place ce genre d'initiatives non militaires, les efforts de l'armée deviennent de moins en moins efficaces", a-t-il estimé.

Le porte-parole du gouvernement irakien Ali Dabbagh a estimé que l'offensive ne portait pas pour l'heure atteinte à la souveraineté de l'Irak. "Nous ne pensons pas que ces opérations représentent une atteinte la souveraineté de l'Irak", a-t-il affirmé. "Mais nous avons fait savoir à la Turquie que cette opération ne devait pas déstabiliser l'Irak et la région".

Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a assuré dimanche que le seul objectif de l'opération était le PKK. "Il s'agit d'une opération de nettoyage contre les camps des terroristes, rien de plus", a-t-il déclaré au cours d'un meeting. (AFP)



24 février 2008

Le PKK appelle les Kurdes de Turquie à la rébellion

Le PKK appelle les jeunes Kurdes de Turquie à lancer des actions de violences urbaines après le lancement, par l'armée turque, d'une opération terrestre contre les rebelles dans le nord de l'Irak.

Les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont appelé dimanche les jeunes Kurdes de Turquie à lancer des actions de violences urbaines après le lancement par l'armée turque d'une opération terrestre contre les rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak.

"Dans les grandes villes, les jeunes Kurdes doivent donner une réponse (à l'opération). La guérilla du Kurdistan, ce n'est pas 7.000 ou 10.000 personnes, ce sont des centaines de milliers de personnes", a déclaré le chef de l'aile militaire du PKK Bahoz Erdal, cité par l'agence de presse Firat News.

"S'ils (l'Etat turc) veulent nous détruire, nos jeunes doivent rendre la vie dans les grandes métropoles insupportable (...) Les jeunes Kurdes doivent se réunir par groupes de deux pour brûler chaque soir des centaines de voitures", a affirmé Erdal à Firat News, considéré comme le porte-voix du PKK.

Le dirigeant a appelé les jeunes Kurdes à "empoisonner la vie" des habitants des grandes agglomérations turques. L'armée turque a lancé jeudi soir une opération terrestre dans le nord de l'Irak pour en déloger les rebelles du PKK qui y sont retranchés et utilisent la région comme une base arrière pour leurs actions en Turquie.

Au moins 79 rebelles kurdes et sept soldats turcs ont été tués jusque là, selon l'armée turque.

Les Etats-Unis fournissent depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel sur les mouvements des rebelles en Irak à l'armée turque, qui a déjà mené plusieurs raids aériens et une opération terrestre de faible ampleur dans la région depuis le 16 décembre.



24 FÉVRIER 2008

L'Irak appelle la Turquie à retirer ses troupes "au plus vite"

CIZRE (AFP)

L'Irak a réclamé dimanche à la Turquie un arrêt "au plus vite" de son offensive dans le nord du pays, affirmant qu'elle "menace (sa) souveraineté", alors que l'armée d'Ankara a appelé les Kurdes irakiens à ne pas protéger les rebelles du PKK pourchassés par ses troupes.

Sur le terrain, les combats se sont intensifiés et ont fait plus d'une centaine de morts chez les rebelles depuis le début de l'opération jeudi, selon un bilan de l'état-major turc qui fait état de 15 morts parmi ses soldats.

Tout en assurant comprendre les "préoccupations légitimes" de la Turquie, le gouvernement irakien a appelé Ankara à retirer ses troupes du sol irakien au plus vite, estimant que "l'opération est une menace pour la souveraineté de l'Irak" ainsi que pour "la sécurité et la stabilité de la région".

Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a assuré de son côté que le seul objectif de l'opération était le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan. "Il s'agit d'une opération de nettoyage contre les camps des terroristes, rien de plus", a-t-il déclaré. Les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak "essaient de fuir vers le sud dans la panique", a affirmé l'état-major de l'armée turque.

"Il est attendu des groupes locaux irakiens qu'ils empêchent les membres de l'organisation terroriste du PKK - le principal ennemi de la paix et de la stabilité régionales - d'entrer dans leur région et de s'y voir offrir une protection", a-t-il ajouté dans un communiqué.

Les combats dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak ont fait dimanche 33 morts du côté du PKK et huit du côté de l'armée, selon l'état-major turc, ce qui porte le bilan des pertes depuis le début de l'offensive à 112 pour les rebelles et à 15 pour les troupes turques.

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des hélicoptères déposer des troupes dans cette zone.

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Le chef de l'aile militaire du PKK, Bahoz Erdal, a appelé les jeunes Kurdes de Turquie à des actions violentes en représailles à l'offensive. "S'ils (l'Etat turc) veulent nous détruire, nos jeunes doivent rendre la vie dans les grandes métropoles insupportable (...). Les jeunes Kurdes doivent se réunir par groupes de deux pour brûler chaque soir des centaines de voitures", a-t-il déclaré. Le Komalen Ciwan, décrit par Firat News comme une organisation de jeunesse du

PKK, a pour sa part appelé à une propagation des actes de violence en Europe et dans d'autres pays dotés d'importantes minorités kurdes.

Erdal a également accusé les Etats-Unis de jouer un rôle actif dans l'offensive turque. Les Etats-Unis, qui, comme l'Union européenne, considèrent le PKK comme un groupe terroriste, fournissent à la Turquie depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel sur les mouvements des rebelles en Irak.

Le secrétaire américain à la Défense, Robert Gates, qui doit se rendre à Ankara la semaine prochaine, a appelé la Turquie à trouver des réponses autres que militaires pour résoudre le problème kurde.

"Les mesures économiques et politiques sont réellement importantes car, passé un certain seuil, les gens deviennent insensibles aux attaques militaires", a-t-il estimé.



24 Février 2008

RIPOSTES DU PKK A LA TURQUIE

Le Journal du Dimanche Par Julien SOLONEL (avec Reuters)

Au troisième jour de l'offensive turque contre la guérilla kurde du PKK, les combats se sont intensifiés au Kurdistan, dans le nord de l'Irak. Depuis jeudi, cette opération critiquée par le gouvernement irakien et les pays occidentaux aurait fait 112 morts dans les rangs des rebelles. Le PKK appelle les Kurdes à se soulever et accuse Washington de soutenir la Turquie.

S'ils veulent nous détruire, nos jeunes gens doivent rendre les villes (de Turquie) inhabitables". Au troisième jour de l'incursion de l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a exhorté dimanche les Kurdes vivant dans des communes turques à se soulever, mais sans s'en prendre à des cibles civiles. "Dans les grandes villes, la jeunesse kurde doit engager une riposte aux opérations militaires. Les combattants du Kurdistan ne sont pas seulement 7000 ou 10000, ils sont des centaines de milliers. Ils sont partout (...) dans toutes les villes turques" a poursuivi Bahoz Erdal, chef militaire du PKK.

Ces appels interviennent alors que les forces turques ont intensifié samedi leur offensive, lancée jeudi pour détruire



les bases arrière du mouvement séparatiste. "Les bombardements aériens et terrestres se poursuivent. Les affrontements deviennent plus violents", a déclaré un haut responsable militaire turc, précisant qu'Ankara avait déplacé 25 chars supplémentaires. Trois jours après avoir passé la frontière, Ankara dit avoir tué 35 combattants ennemis samedi, ce qui porte le bilan à 112 morts. Dimanche, de nouveaux combats auraient coûté la vie à cinq militaires d'Ankara, portant à 12 le nombre de tués depuis le début de l'incursion. Le PKK prétend de son côté qu'elle a abattu 22 soldats turcs. La guérilla a également annoncé avoir détruit un hélicoptère turc Cobra. Des informations difficiles à vérifier en l'absence d'observateurs et d'images.

Une opération critiquée de toute part

Le chef de la diplomatie turque, Ali Babacan, qui qualifie l'opération de "succès", a ré-

pondu samedi aux nombreuses critiques émises contre l'option militaire. Il s'est défendu de vouloir s'attaquer "à l'intégrité territoriale et à l'unité politique de l'Irak : la seule cible est l'organisation terroriste PKK", a martelé M. Babacan. Les 8000 soldats turcs engagés n'auraient donc pas vocation à rester longtemps sur place.

Le gouvernement irakien avait protesté contre les incursions turques dans le nord du pays, estimant que l'offensive ne mettrait pas fin aux activités des rebelles. "Nous comprenons parfaitement l'ampleur de la menace qu'affronte la Turquie, mais la crise du PKK ne se règlera pas par des opérations militaires", a déclaré Ali al Dabbagh, porte-parole du gouvernement, lors d'une conférence de presse à Bagdad. "La Turquie a essayé la solution militaire, mais cela n'a pas produit de résultats durables", a-t-il ajouté.

Washington et l'Union européenne, alliés traditionnels de

la Turquie en Occident, ont également demandé à Ankara de limiter ses opérations et de quitter l'Irak au plus vite. Le secrétaire général des Nations unies, Ban Ki-moon, a exhorté les belligérants à respecter la frontière irako-turque. "Tout en étant conscient des préoccupations de la Turquie, Ban Ki-moon réitère son appel à la plus grande retenue et au respect des frontières internationales entre l'Irak et la Turquie", a déclaré un porte-parole de l'ONU. Il a également appelé le PKK à "mettre immédiatement fin à ses incursions et à ses attaques terroristes en Turquie à partir du nord de l'Irak".

De leur côté, les leader du PKK ont accusé les Américains de soutenir l'offensive turque.

"Les Etats-Unis ne soutiennent pas seulement activement, ils prennent aussi part aux opérations", a déclaré Bahoz Erdal.

"Les avions de reconnaissance américains survolent la région. Ils fournissent instantanément des renseignements à l'armée turque sur les positions de nos forces et les avions turcs viennent alors bombarder la zone", a-t-il ajouté. Informés ou non par le Pentagone, les F-16 de l'aviation turque continuaient de bombarder dimanche les positions rebelles.



25 février 2008

Kurdistan: offensive ambitieuse de la Turquie

La vaste opération déclenchée jeudi par l'armée turque sur le territoire du Kurdistan irakien était attendue. Mais le déploiement le plus ambitieux de la décennie écoulée surprend par son ampleur et sa précocité. Analyse.

Vincent Huguex

Annoncée depuis la mi-décembre 2007 par divers indices convergents -raids aériens et incursions limitées-, la vaste opération déclenchée jeudi par l'armée turque sur le territoire du Kurdistan irakien était attendue. Mais le déploiement le plus ambitieux de la décennie écoulée surprend par son ampleur comme par sa précocité.

De fait, Ankara n'a pas cette fois attendu le printemps et la fonte des neiges pour pilonner les bastions haut-perchés des rebelles séparatistes du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, recourant à toutes les ressources de son arsenal: bombardiers, hélicoptères d'attaque et artillerie. Il s'agit dans l'immédiat, de prévenir les infiltrations, classique au retour des beaux jours, de commandos autonomistes sur le sol turc. Dessein plus

réaliste que le rêve, aussi récurrent que chimérique, d'un anéantissement définitif d'une insurrection née en 1984. Sait-on assez que depuis lors cette "sale guerre" -on en connaît peu de propres- à coûté la vie à près de 40 000 personnes?

Pour autant, il est vrai que l'assaut transfrontalier bénéficie d'une conjonction astrale favorable. Et notamment de la bienveillance des Etats-Unis et de

L'Europe, qui s'accordent à ranger le PKK dans la catégorie des "organisations terroristes". Certes, le secrétaire américain à La Défense Robert Gates invite l'allié turc à la retenue, appelant de ses vœux une intervention "courte, précise" et conduite de manière à "épargner les vies innocentes"; de même, il insiste sur la nécessité pour Ankara de traiter aussi la "question kurde" sur les registres politique et économique. Reste que Washington n'en approuve pas moins le principe de l'intrusion armée. Le Pentagone fournit d'ailleurs à l'état-major d'Ankara des renseignements en temps réels sur les mouvements des rebelles kurdes.

L'Irak, pour sa part, s'en tient à des protestations formelles, même si cette offensive place le président Jalal Talabani, lui-même Kurde, dans une position délicate. Bagdad a d'ailleurs durci le ton dimanche, sommant la Turquie de retirer ses troupes "au plus vite", au nom du respect de sa souveraineté comme de la stabilité et

de la sécurité régionales. On notera que la formulation de l'injonction laisse à Ankara, dont on dit au passage comprendre les "préoccupations légitimes", une confortable marge de manœuvre.

Cela posé, Talabani ne peut rester indifférent à la profonde amertume de ses frères d'Irak du Nord, de plus en plus hostile aux Etats-Unis qui, après les avoir lâchés en 1991, dans le sillage de Tempête du Désert, épaulent maintenant la Turquie dans sa traque. Si l'offensive, meurtrière, virait pour les civils kurdo-irakiens à l'hécatombe, nul doute que l'impératif de solidarité l'emporterait.

La riposte de Bahoz Erdal, chef de l'aile militaire du PKK, reflète le désarroi d'une mouvance affaiblie militairement et politiquement par l'arrestation, en 1999, de son leader historique Abdullah Ocalan. Erdal enjoint ainsi les jeunes Kurdes de Turquie de "se réunir par groupe de deux pour brûler chaque soir des centaines de voitures". Quant au Komalen Ciwan,

mouvement de jeunesse affilié aux séparatistes, il promet de "transformer les villes du pays en enfers" et de semer la violence dans les cités où vivent de fortes minorités kurdes, tant en Irak qu'en Syrie, en Iran ou en Europe.

Il ne s'agit, à en croire le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, que d'une "opération de nettoyage de camps de terroristes et rien de plus". Voire. Compte tenu de l'insuccès de tentatives analogues menées dans le passé, certains stratèges turcs préconisent le maintien sur le sol irakien d'un contingent de soldats aguerris. Perspective inacceptable pour Bagdad et ingérable pour Washington.

25 février 2008.

L'EXPRESS

L'IRAK CRAINT DES ACCROCHAGES ENTRE SOLDATS TURCS ET PESHMERGAS

La prolongation de l'opération militaire turque contre les séparatistes du PKK retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak fait craindre au gouvernement de Bagdad des affrontements graves entre soldats d'Ankara et peshmergas du Kurdistan autonome irakien.

Reuters

Mouaffak al Roubaïe, conseiller à la sécurité nationale du gouvernement irakien, a déclaré lundi que de tels heurts pourraient avoir des "conséquences très graves" pour cette région de l'Irak jusqu'à relativement épargnée par les violences qui déchirent le reste du pays.

L'armée turque a lancé jeudi une opération aéro-terrestre contre les bases des séparatistes du PKK dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien.

"Plus les soldats turcs resteront longtemps et étendront leur offensive à l'intérieur du territoire irakien et plus cette hypothèse risquera de devenir réalité", a déclaré Roubaïe à la presse à Bagdad, en réponse à une question sur le risque d'affrontements entre les militaires turcs et les peshmergas.

"Nous devons éviter cela à tout prix. Cela aura de très graves conséquences même si cela se produit accidentellement", a-t-il ajouté.

Bien que les Kurdes irakiens aient peu de sympathie pour les revendications du PKK, l'offensive turque suscite la colère de la population.

"RÉSISTANCE MASSIVE"

La présidence du Kurdistan irakien a prévenu que toute attaque contre des civils déclencherait une "résistance massive"

des combattants peshmergas, qui ont été placés en état d'alerte.

Ankara assure mener une offensive limitée contre le PKK, accusé d'être responsable de la mort de 40.000 personnes depuis le déclenchement de sa lutte armée en 1984.

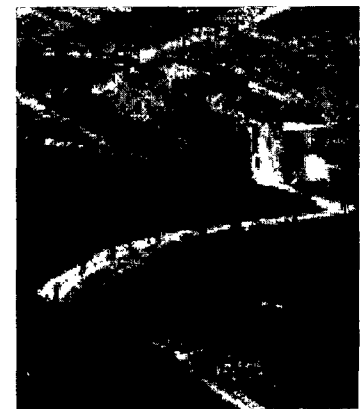
Selon des responsables américains, les autorités turques ont assuré que tout serait fait pour éviter des pertes civiles.

Le président turc, Abdullah Gül, a reporté un séjour en Afrique prévu cette semaine en raison de l'offensive, rapporte l'agence de presse anatolienne. Il devait partir mardi pour une tournée de quatre jours en Tanzanie, en République démocratique du Congo et au Congo-Brazzaville.

Lundi, le président a fait une visite inopinée au QG de l'état-major interarmes à Ankara, où il a été informé du déroulement des opérations en Irak.

"Le voyage (en Afrique) a été reporté en raison de l'offensive terrestre des forces armées turques contre l'organisation terroriste dans le nord de l'Irak", écrit l'agence.

Aucune victime civile n'a pour l'instant été signalée mais les habitants de villages situés près de la frontière entre la Turquie et l'Irak disent avoir été la cible de frappes aériennes et de tirs de barrage de



l'artillerie turque.

Elément inquiétant, les forces terrestres turques se sont retrouvées face à face avec des peshmergas à deux reprises ces derniers jours. Selon un responsable kurde irakien, des peshmergas ont notamment empêché des blindés turcs de quitter une base dans le nord de l'Irak.

Le gouvernement irakien a appelé la Turquie à retirer ses troupes aussi vite que possible et à engager des discussions avec Bagdad pour régler la question du PKK.

Avec la contribution de Cherko Raouf à Zakhou, version française Gwénaëlle Barzic

Dans les hauteurs du Kurdistan, Washington et Téhéran se livrent à un chassé-croisé

Un conflit en cache un autre... Alors que l'armée turque attaque les rebelles du PKK, Téhéran et Washington mènent, eux, une guerre par procuration dans le nord de l'Irak.

De notre envoyée spéciale à Erbil et Souleymanié

LOIN des tensions irano-américaines sur la question nucléaire, les montagnes de Qandil, au Kurdistan irakien, offrent, en apparence, un des paysages les plus paisibles de cette zone tourmentée du Moyen-Orient. Au détour d'une vallée, des écolières trottent le long des sentiers, en se frayant un passage à travers des troupeaux de moutons. C'est ici, pourtant, dans cette chaîne de montagnes qui sépare l'Irak de la Turquie et de l'Iran, qu'une guerre furtive entre les États-Unis et l'Iran est en train de se dérouler. Une guerre où chaque clan mise sur ses propres pions pour déstabiliser l'adversaire : Washington s'appuie sur Pejak - l'aile iranienne du PKK turc - et Téhéran sur les terroristes sunnites d'Ansar al-Islam, qui s'attaquent aux GI en Irak.

« C'est un chassé-croisé complexe, où chacun essaye d'utiliser les alliés circonstanciels qui sont les siens pour embêter l'autre », remarque le géopolitologue Gérard Chaliand. Depuis deux ans, les rebelles armés du Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan (Pejak) organisent des incursions en Iran où ils multiplient les embuscades, les opérations de sabotages et les attaques d'hélicoptères des gardiens de la révolution. À la frontière, de l'autre côté des sommets enneigés de Qandil, ces derniers répliquent en bombardant leurs positions et en accusant les États-Unis d'armer cette organisation kurde.

C'est, en fait, après l'invasion américaine en Irak, en 2003, que Pejak commence à faire parler de lui. Au nord du pays, les Kurdes irakiens accueillent avec des cris de joie le déboulonnage, à Bagdad, de la statue de Saddam, symbole d'un renforcement de leur autonomie, acquise après l'intifada de 1991. De quoi inspirer les

voisins kurdes d'Iran qui rêvent de plus d'indépendance. Quelques années plus tôt, en 1999, la capture par Ankara d'Abdullah Öcalan, le chef du PKK, avait déjà inspiré la création de Pejak. « Affaiblis par son arrestation, les cadres du parti décidèrent de créer, en parallèle à la section turque du PKK, une branche irakienne (le Parti de la Solution), une branche syrienne (le Parti de l'Union démocratique du Kurdistan) et une branche iranienne (Pejak) », explique le chercheur Farid Assassar, qui dirige, à Souleymanié, le Centre d'études stratégiques du Kurdistan.

« Aide financière et militaire »

Mais de l'aveu même d'Osman Öcalan, frère d'Abdullah et principal fondateur de cette subdivision du PKK, « l'objectif était d'obtenir un soutien américain ». C'est avec l'aide de sa femme, Kawa Ismaël Shodjai, une Kurde d'Iran, qu'Osman Öcalan rédige la charte de Pejak. Rencontré dans les salons d'un grand hôtel d'Erbil, il explique son intention : « Je cherchais à réformer le PKK de l'intérieur, à abandonner la rhétorique marxiste et anti-impérialiste pour pouvoir établir de meilleures relations avec l'Europe et les États-Unis. » Avec, en filigrane, l'espoir de faire retirer le PKK de la liste des organisations terroristes établie par Washington.

Un premier contact est établi dès le début de l'année 2003. « À deux reprises, en février et en avril, deux délégations militaires américaines nous rendirent visite, dans les montagnes de Qandil », se souvient Osman Öcalan. Faute de véritable réforme interne, il finit par quitter, avec son épouse, l'organisation, il y a deux ans. Mais son départ ne remit pas en cause les liens qui étaient en train de se tisser entre Pejak et les Américains. Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi, le nouveau chef, fit même le déplacement, à l'été 2007, jusqu'à Washington.

Pejak compte environ 1 500 combattants, dont un tiers de femmes et beaucoup de diplômés d'universités iraniennes. La moyenne d'âge est de 25 à 30 ans. Sur la base de « sources solides »



Un camp d'entraînement du Pejak dans les montagnes de Qandil. Soutenue par les États-Unis, l'aile iranienne du PKK turc compte environ 1 500 combattants, dont un tiers de femmes. Yahya Ahmed/AP

qu'il a conservées au sein de Pejak, Osman Öcalan affirme pouvoir confirmer « l'existence d'une aide financière, militaire et médicale apportée par les Américains, dont les véhicules font le détour par les montagnes de Qandil tous les deux trois mois ». Ce sont, dit-il, des ONG américaines, qui jouent le rôle d'intermédiaire. « Officiellement, elles sont chargées de construire des cliniques.

Une minorité sous pression en Iran

■ Les Kurdes d'Iran ont une longue histoire de rébellion, symbolisée par la création, en 1946, de la République de Mahabad, au nord-ouest du territoire iranien, vite écrasée par Téhéran. Les deux plus anciennes organisations politiques, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan iranien (PDKI) et le Parti communiste Komala, ont pignon sur rue dans le nord de l'Irak, où elles sont basées, en exil. Depuis l'essor de Pejak, qui est aujourd'hui le seul groupe d'opposition kurde armé, la répression s'est accentuée au Kurdistan : associations étudiantes démantelées, journaux fermés, dissidents arrêtés.

D. M.

Mais il y a des armes qui passent », dit-il. On parle de fusils d'assaut Kalachnikov, de lance-grenades...

« Quelques coups d'épingle »

« Ce ne sont pas quelques coups d'épingle donnés de manière locale qui vont renverser le régime de Téhéran », relativise Gérard Chaliand. Mahan Abedin, chercheur au Centre d'études du terrorisme à Londres, explique que « l'inquiétude de Téhéran est, en fait, alimentée par la crainte de voir les puissances étrangères exploiter les tensions ethniques pour déstabiliser le pouvoir central ». En riposte, l'Iran chiite n'hésiterait pas à s'allier avec un groupe sunnite terroriste comme Ansar al-Islam, une section d'Ansar al-Sunna. En avril 2003, une intervention musclée des forces spéciales américaines avait permis de démanteler ce petit réseau intégriste, basé dans les montagnes kurdes d'Irak. Mais après s'être réfugiés en Iran, de l'autre côté de la frontière, certains de ses rescapés se seraient réorganisés. Pour Farid Assassar, « la raison du soutien de l'Iran à Ansar al-Islam, c'est Pejak. Il n'y a pas de doute là-dessus ».

Sur le terrain, on a récemment assisté à une recrudescence des attaques menées par Ansar. « Des membres des forces de sécurité irakiennes ont été tués à Penjwin et à Haji Homran, à la frontière avec l'Iran. Cela coïncide avec l'aug-

mentation des attaques de Pejak contre les forces iraniennes», remarque Jafar Barzandji, un responsable kurde irakien chargé des questions sécuritaires. « Ce petit jeu respectif revient à casser les équilibres ethniques et géostratégi-

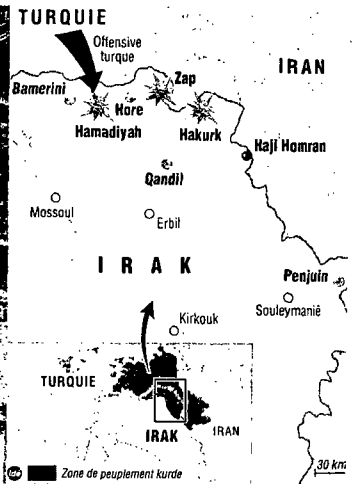
ques qui constituaient une forme de stabilité dans la région », prévient Olivier Roy, spécialiste du Moyen-Orient. « D'un côté, dit-il, les États-Unis soutiennent un mouvement kurde qui déstabilise tous les pays de la région, à com-

mencer par leur allié turc. De l'autre, en soutenant Ansar, les Iraniens offrent à Washington une occasion de les stigmatiser. »

DELPHINE MINOUI

LE FIGARO 25 février 2008

La Turquie porte le fer contre les Kurdes en Irak



Les raids aériens de l'armée turque auraient détruit au total cinq ponts dans les montagnes du Kurdistan autonome d'Irak, bases arrière des rebelles séparatistes. Au sol, Ankara aurait engagé de 3000 à 10000 hommes. AFP

MOYEN-ORIENT

Les États-Unis ont prévenu Ankara hier que la question kurde ne pourrait être résolue uniquement par des moyens militaires.

Istanbul

ENGAGÉS dans des combats en zones montagneuses quasi inaccessibles au nord de l'Irak, les militaires et les rebelles turcs de l'organisation séparatiste PKK se livrent aussi une guerre des chiffres : pour la journée d'hier, l'état-major turc reconnaissait la mort de 8 soldats et affirmait que 33 rebelles kurdes avaient été tués. Selon ce décompte, 15 militaires auraient donc perdu la vie en quatre jours ainsi que 112 séparatistes, depuis le début de l'opération terrestre entamée en Irak jeudi soir. Mais le PKK, via son agence de presse Firat, annonçait 47 soldats tués, seulement 3 pertes dans ses rangs et la destruction d'un hélicoptère turc Cobra.

Bien qu'invérifiables et contradictoires, ces bilans témoignent de la violence des affrontements. Les Turcs auraient engagé de 3000 à 10000 hommes.

L'offensive, destinée à démanteler les bases arrière des rebelles séparatistes dans les montagnes du Kurdistan autonome d'Irak, suscite des craintes quant à une déstabilisation de la région.

Vive condamnation de Bagdad

Après les raids aériens et les pilonnages qui ont débuté fin 2007 avec l'aide du renseignement américain, l'entrée en action des commandos turcs n'est pas une surprise. Mais la phase terrestre était plutôt attendue à la fonte des neiges. En envoyant sans attendre ses troupes en tenue de camouflage blanche et avec un appui aérien, Ankara a voulu prendre de court le PKK.

Les États-Unis ont manifesté leur compréhension. Le PKK, catalogué comme terroriste par Washington comme par Bruxelles et Ankara, est « un ennemi commun », a déclaré Condoleezza Rice, la secrétaire d'État américaine, en réitérant sa « solidarité totale » avec son allié turc au sein de l'Otan. Hier cependant, Robert Gates, le secrétaire à la Défense, a appelé les Turcs à faire preuve de retenue. Il a estimé que l'intervention armée dans le nord de l'Irak,

si elle n'était pas associée « à des initiatives au plan politique et économique », ne suffirait pas à régler « le problème du terrorisme ».

Pour dissiper les inquiétudes et répondre à la vive condamnation de Bagdad, le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a assuré que ses troupes regagneraient la Turquie « le plus rapidement possible ». Les médias turcs avancent une opération programmée pour durer une quinzaine de jours. Un agenda qu'il faut cependant relativiser. « Personne ne peut écarter la probabilité que la Turquie (...) occupe de façon permanente une zone de 10 à 30 kilomètres à l'intérieur de l'Irak le long de la frontière », met en garde Yusuf Kanli dans un éditorial du *Turkish Daily News*, en attirant l'attention sur la réaction des pechmergas dans un tel cas de figure. Les autorités du Kurdistan autonome ont appelé à la « résistance ». Et le territoire turc est concerné par le risque d'extension du conflit : le PKK a exhorté « la jeunesse kurde (à) engager une riposte aux opérations militaires » afin de rendre les villes turques « inhabitables ».

LAURE MARCHAND

Mobilisation à Diyarbakir contre la répression du PKK

Plusieurs milliers de manifestants. Tensions avec le gouvernement kurde irakien.

Des milliers de personnes ont manifesté lundi à Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est de la Turquie, peuplée en majorité de Kurdes, pour réclamer la fin de l'opération militaire turque dans le nord de l'Irak. Réunie à l'appel du principal parti pro-kurde de Turquie, le Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), la foule, entre 4000 et 10000 personnes selon les sources, a scandé des slogans hostiles au Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan tels que "Erdogan terroriste" et "Erdogan hypocrite". "Il faut écraser la main qui tente de s'emparer des monts Qandil", ont crié les manifestants, faisant référence au massif montagneux du nord de l'Irak abritant le quartier général des rebelles séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), près de la frontière irakienne. Ils ont également déployé une banderole mettant en garde le président irakien, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, accusé par le PKK de soutenir l'opération armée turque. "Ne t'endors pas, Talabani, nous sommes au menu de midi, tu seras au menu du soir", affirmait le calicot.

La manifestation s'est dispersée sans incident majeur, mais quelques heurts sporadiques se sont produits dans les quartiers avoisinants entre de petits groupes de manifestants et la police.

Dans le nord de l'Irak, l'aviation turque a bombardé lundi des positions de rebelles kurdes à Hakurk, à 20 kilomètres de la



frontière turque alors que se poursuivait au sol une vaste offensive. L'armée turque a diffusé des images vidéo de l'opération, dans lesquelles on voit des soldats en tenue de camouflage blanche embarquer à bord d'un hélicoptère Sikorsky, qui décolle d'une base non identifiée en compagnie d'hélicoptères d'attaque Cobra. Des images de soldats marchant dans la neige, de convois de véhicules militaires évoluant sur des routes de montagne et de bombardements de cibles non spécifiées font

partie de l'enregistrement.

L'état-major turc a affirmé dimanche qu'au moins 112 rebelles kurdes et quinze soldats turcs avaient péri depuis le début de l'offensive, compte non tenu des rebelles tués dans des bombardements. Un dirigeant du PKK a pour sa part établi lundi le bilan des pertes turques à au moins 81 soldats. Un précédent bilan donné par le PKK faisait état de trois rebelles tués.

Les rebelles "essaient de fuir vers le sud dans la panique", a déclaré l'état-major de l'armée turque. "Il est attendu des groupes locaux irakiens qu'ils empêchent les membres de l'organisation terroriste du PKK [...] d'entrer dans leur région et de s'y voir offrir une protection." L'avertissement a fait surgir le spectre d'une éventuelle confrontation avec l'administration autonome kurde irakienne, qu'Ankara accuse de tolérer les rebelles sur son sol, voire de les soutenir en leur fournissant des armes.

Quelques heures plus tard, le gouvernement irakien a appelé la Turquie "à retirer ses troupes du sol irakien au plus vite", estimant que "l'opération est une menace pour la souveraineté de l'Irak" ainsi que pour "la sécurité et la stabilité de la région". La Maison-Blanche a de son côté dit espérer que l'opération serait de courte durée et se bornerait à viser les séparatistes kurdes de Turquie. (D'après AFP)

5e jour de combat entre armée turque et PKK au Kurdistan irakien

Par Paul de Bendern

ANKARA (Reuters) - Pour la cinquième journée consécutive, des combats ont opposé les forces d'Ankara aux rebelles kurdes dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak, tandis que s'exprimaient des inquiétudes quant à la durée de l'offensive aéroterrestre turque.

Des unités d'infanterie appuyées par des chars, des avions et des hélicoptères de combat ont tué 41 séparatistes lundi, ce qui porte à 153 hommes le total des pertes subies par le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) depuis jeudi dernier, selon un communiqué de l'état-major turc.

L'armée précise que 17 soldats ont trouvé la mort en cinq jours d'offensive contre le PKK, qui a fait des montagnes du Nord irakien une base arrière dans sa lutte pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde.

À Washington, la Maison blanche a exhorté la Turquie à limiter la durée de son intervention. "Nous espérons qu'il s'agit là d'une

incursion de courte durée lui permettant de contribuer à régler la menace", a déclaré à la presse Dana Perino, porte-parole de la présidence.

De son côté, l'Irak a demandé que la Turquie mette fin "au plus tôt" à sa présence militaire au Kurdistan irakien. Bagdad craint que la prolongation de l'engagement militaire turc n'entraîne de graves accrochages entre ses troupes et les peshmergas kurdes irakiens.

LE PRÉSIDENT TURC REPOUSSE UN VOYAGE EN AFRIQUE

Un responsable de la sécurité kurde a déclaré que des soldats turcs et des combattants du PKK s'étaient affrontés la nuit dernière dans la région d'Amadiya, à 10 km au sud de la frontière.

"Des combats rapprochés avec l'ennemi se poursuivent dans deux zones distinctes", dit un communiqué militaire turc. "Les troupes opérant dans les zones clés de l'opération ont été renforcées et certaines ont été remplacées par de nouveaux effectifs."

Ahmed Danees, représentant du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, a affirmé de son côté que 81 soldats turcs et quatre rebelles avaient trouvé la mort depuis le début de l'offensive. Il est impossible de vérifier l'information.

Le vice-Premier ministre turc, Cemil Cicek, a réaffirmé que l'armée se retirerait une fois sa mission accomplie.

"La Turquie s'est efforcée par le passé d'éviter cette issue (l'intervention militaire)", a-t-il dit à des journalistes après le conseil des ministres hebdomadaire à Ankara.

"Quand cette opération aura atteint ses objectifs, nos unités rentreront", a-t-il ajouté sans avancer de calendrier.

À la mosquée principale d'Ankara, des milliers de Turcs ont pris part lundi aux obsèques de trois officiers tués durant l'offensive. En conséquence de celle-ci, le président turc Abdullah Gül a reporté au dernier moment un voyage en Afrique qui était prévu cette semaine.

LaTribune 26 février 2008

L'incursion turque redoutée par les habitants du Kurdistan irakien

The Associated Press –

Ankara assure que les civils ne sont pas visés par les opérations transfrontalières de l'armée turque contre les séparatistes kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak. Mais des habitants du Kurdistan irakien disent vivre dans la peur depuis le début de l'incursion.

Certains habitants du secteur d'Amadiya, à une trentaine de kilomètres de la frontière, se pensaient à l'abri des combats entre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et les forces turques, mais ce n'est plus le cas désormais.

"Les enfants sont effrayés quand ils entendent les opérations militaires", explique Aoni Mashghati, responsable d'une école de la localité. "La plupart des femmes sont venues chercher les enfants. Lorsqu'on entend des bruits de bombardement, l'école se vide."

Hawzan Hussein, 25 ans, qui vit dans une communauté de 150 familles dans la région, raconte que les habitants sont inquiets car certaines cibles des soldats turcs se trouvent à proximité de leur foyer. Les explosions "sont devenues une scène quotidienne et la possibilité que

notre maison puisse être frappée à tout moment me fait peur", dit-elle.

L'armée turque avait rapporté mardi la mort de 19 militaires et plus 150 insurgés, tandis que le PKK affirme que seuls quelques-uns de ses hommes 81 soldats ont été tués. Selon des sources turques, les soldats turcs ont pénétré de plus d'une vingtaine de kilomètres en territoire irakien depuis le début de l'incursion jeudi. L'armée disait mardi que certaines opérations de combat étaient entravées par une forte chute de neige.

La Turquie a assuré à l'Irak et l'armée américaine que l'offensive était dirigée contre les seuls membres du PKK. Masoud Barzani, chef de l'administration du Kurdistan irakien, une région semi-autonome, a averti Ankara qu'il se heurterait à une résistance de grande ampleur si des civils étaient victimes de l'incursion.

Mohammad Mohsin, un haut responsable du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), a également indiqué que les habitants de la région "ne veulent pas être mêlés à ce conflit armé", tout en laissant entendre qu'une attaque turque contre les civils ne serait pas tolérée et entraînerait des re-

présailles.

La Turquie avait déjà conduit des raids aériens contre les forces du PKK au Kurdistan irakien depuis décembre avec l'aide du renseignement américain, et mène régulièrement de brèves incursions, impliquant de petites unités et ne durant parfois que quelques heures, dans la région.

Assis dans un café, Kamil Murad Khan raconte avoir participé récemment à une manifestation contre les forces turques. "J'ai de la sympathie pour le PKK, car ce sont des Kurdes comme nous", dit-il en référence au mouvement des rebelles kurdes de Turquie.

D'autres sont surtout préoccupés par leur propre sécurité. Hawzan, une jeune femme de 20 ans, a gagné la région frontalière après avoir fui la ville de Mossoul, où est implanté Al-Qaïda en Irak, par crainte d'être tuée. Désormais, les chars turcs font partie de son paysage quotidien.

"Chaque fois qu'un soldat turc emballe le moteur du char, j'ai l'impression que je vais mourir", dit-elle. "Je vois tous les jours le bombardement de la montagne qui est derrière." AP

Enlèvement et exécution d'un Kurde : la Turquie condamnée à Strasbourg

AFP

STRASBOURG (Conseil Europe), 26 fév 2008 (AFP) –

LA TURQUIE a été condamnée mardi par la Cour européenne des droits de l'Homme de Strasbourg pour la mort d'un Kurde dont les proches affirment qu'il a été enlevé et exécuté lors d'une opération contre des militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan en 1996.

Dans la région de Tunceli (centre-est) alors soumise à l'état d'urgence, Mazlum Mansuroglu, 24 ans, aurait été, selon ses proches, arrêté à son domicile et emmené par les forces de l'ordre, lors d'une opération pour arrêter trois militants du PKK.

Le cadavre de Mazlum Mansuroglu a ensuite été présenté par les forces de l'ordre aux côtés de ceux de deux des trois militants recherchés. Selon les autorités turques, il est mort en même temps que les deux autres, au cours d'un affrontement avec les forces de l'ordre.

Ses proches prétendent au contraire qu'il a été enlevé et exécuté.

Sans conclure que M. Mansuroglu ait été "sciemment assassiné" par les forces de l'ordre "pour le faire passer pour un présumé terroriste qui leur avait échappé", la Cour de Strasbourg estime que "la responsabilité de l'Etat se trouve assurément engagée faute pour lui d'avoir pu établir que la force meurtrière utilisée contre Mazlum Mansuroglu n'était pas allée au-delà du nécessaire.

"Le non-encadrement par des règles et l'abandon à l'arbitraire de l'action des agents de l'Etat sont incompatibles avec un respect effectif des droits de l'Homme", estime la Cour.

Elle conclut également que la mère de la victime, Emine Mansuroglu, a été maltraitée par les forces de l'ordre alors qu'elle tentait de s'interposer à l'arrestation de son fils.

Elle condamne la Turquie à verser près de 27.000 euros aux proches de la victime au titre des dommages moraux et matériels.

AFP

Le Parlement du Kurdistan irakien réclame la fermeture des bases turques

ERBIL (Irak), 26 fév 2008 (AFP) –

LE PARLEMENT de la région du Kurdistan irakien (nord) a réclamé mardi la fermeture des quatre bases militaires turques présentes depuis plus d'une décennie du côté irakien de la frontière, où les troupes turques mènent une offensive depuis jeudi.

Dans les années 1990, des chefs militaires kurdes avaient invité l'armée turque à établir des bases au Kurdistan irakien, alors que faisaient rage les combats entre factions kurdes rivales.

Nechirvan Barzani, le Premier ministre du gouvernement régional kurde, a indiqué dimanche qu'un accord permettant à la Turquie d'avoir quatre bases militaires dans la région kurde était en vigueur depuis 1997.

Mais mardi, le Parlement régional du Kurdistan a adopté une résolution demandant au gouvernement régional d'exhorter la Turquie à fermer ses bases.

"Nous exigeons que le gouvernement turc quitte les bases qui avaient été

établies dans la région du Kurdistan en raison des circonstances exceptionnelles que la région traversait avant la chute du régime" de Saddam Hussein, indique le texte de la résolution.

Le Parlement a également condamné l'opération militaire de l'armée turque visant depuis jeudi les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui utilisent cette région comme base arrière pour leurs opérations en Turquie.

La résolution demande au gouvernement américain de "protéger la souveraineté de l'Irak et l'espace aérien au-dessus de la région du Kurdistan", et appelle les autorités de Bagdad à soumettre le problème au Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, à l'Union européenne et à la Ligue arabe.

Le gouvernement irakien a qualifié l'opération turque d'"inacceptable", estimant qu'elle menaçait les bonnes relations entre les deux pays voisins.

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Iraqis holding Moktada al-Sadr's portrait in Kufa after prayers Friday. The cleric extended a cease-fire for another six months.

Sadr orders militia to extend truce

By Richard A. Ooppel Jr.

BAGHDAD: The Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr ordered his Mahdi army militia on Friday to extend its cease-fire for another six months, raising hopes that a recent trend toward sharply lower Iraqi civilian and American military deaths in Baghdad would continue.

His announcement, read by Sadrists clerics at mosques throughout southern and central Iraq, came precisely two years after the bombing of a revered Shiite shrine in Samarra that unleashed a wave of sectarian violence and plunged Iraq into civil war. After the bombing, Sadr's huge militia rampaged through Sunni neighborhoods of Baghdad, killing hundreds of Sunnis every week and seizing control of three-quarters of the city.

"If you want to honestly help me, do as you are told and tolerate what I am going to say because I only call for doing good things and staying away from doing bad things," Sadr said in the statement read Friday, the Muslim holy day. "I cannot tolerate the sins of sinners and the wrongdoing of wrongdoers, for I fear the day of judgment."

The decision was immediately welcomed by the American military, which called for dialogue with Sadr officials and predicted the renewed cease-fire would make it easier for the nation's antagonistic political factions to come together and would also allow the military to focus more efforts on Sunni guerrillas, who still dominate parts of northern Iraq.

In the early days of the occupation, American officials frequently dismissed Sadr as a thuggish phony trying to capitalize on the memory of his venerated father, Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, a leading Shiite cleric who was assassinated in 1999 on orders from Saddam Hussein.

But as the occupation wore on and the Mahdi militia proved to be the most

effective — and most bloody — armed force in Baghdad, American officials leaped to embrace any hint of restraint offered by Sadr. Nowadays, American military leaders commonly refer to him with the honorific "Sayyid," a label of deep respect for those believed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad.

"Those who continue to honor al-Sayyid Moktada al-Sadr's pledge will be treated with respect and restraint," the American military said in a statement issued Friday afternoon, after news broke that Sadr had ordered an extension. "Those who dishonor the Sadr pledge are regrettably tarnishing both the name and the honor of the movement."

The Sadr freeze was one of three crucial factors in Baghdad's improved security. Killings carried out for sectarian reasons in the capital dropped to less than 40 in the past month from nearly 800 in February 2007, according to military figures. The number of American deaths in the capital also fell to 12 last month from an all-time high of 59 in June, according to icasualties.org, which tracks fatalities. In addition to the cease-fire, the other factors have been the "surge" of American combat troops and the decision of tens of thousands of former Sunni insurgents and other Iraqis to join the American payroll as neighborhood guards.

The cease-fire also has benefited Sadr, who is believed to be in his mid-30s. As the Mahdi militia's killing spree spun out of control, many Shiites who once favored the protection it brought from roving Sunni insurgents grew troubled by the movement's increasingly bloodthirsty activities and the thuggish and criminal behavior of many fighters. Sadr was widely seen as losing control over much of the force.

Under the cease-fire, Sadr has sought to wipe some of the stain away from the militia's more brutal past activities. And

many believe it has allowed him to consolidate some of his hold on the militia.

But the cease-fire has been deeply unpopular with many Sadrists in southern Iraq, where militiamen loyal to a rival Shiite cleric, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, dominate many elements of the Iraqi security forces. Many Sadrists there believe that the freeze has prevented them from fighting back as Hakim's militia — acting in the name of the Iraqi security forces — has systematically targeted and arrested them, as the two groups battle for dominance in the Shiite-dominated southern provinces.

Moreover, many fighters in Baghdad continue to resist the cease-fire, and carry out rocket and mortar attacks against American and Iraqi forces. These cells, which the American military calls "special groups" and describes as having Iranian backing, are believed to have carried out a string of deadly attacks recently, including a barrage of Katyusha rockets aimed at the large American military base in western Baghdad that killed five Iraqi civilians.

■ Evidence in torture case

Lawyers released evidence Friday that they say shows British soldiers may have tortured and executed up to 20 Iraqis after a battle in 2004 — the most serious allegations of abuse made against British forces in Iraq. The Associated Press reported from London.

Attorneys for five Iraqi men detained by British troops after the battle say witness testimony, death certificates and video footage of mutilated bodies all support the claims. They are demanding a public inquiry.

The British military strongly denies the accusations, and says the dead were insurgents killed in a gun battle after ambushing British troops.

Turkish soldiers deployed into Iraq

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune FEBRUARY 23-24, 2008

'Limited' operation against Kurd rebels

By Sebnem Arsu and Sabrina Tavernise

ISTANBUL: The Turkish military said Friday it had sent troops into northern Iraq on Thursday night, in a limited operation to weaken Kurdish militants there.

The military announced the operation on its Web site Friday, but Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan later played it down, describing the mission as "limited" in size and emphasizing that the soldiers would return to Turkey "in the shortest possible time."

Reports of the numbers of troops varied. Reuters cited the Turkish foreign minister and an unidentified American official in Baghdad as saying that only a few hundred had been deployed, while Turkish television reported that about 10,000 troops had been deployed.

In Baghdad, Rear Admiral Gregg Smith described the incursion as "an operation of limited duration to specifically target PKK terrorists in that region."

The militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, also known as the PKK, want greater autonomy for the Kurdish minority in Turkey and have fought the Turkish military from hideouts in both Turkey and Iraq for decades.

Erdogan said he had called President George W. Bush around midnight to tell him of the operation. The White House said Turkey had informed the United States beforehand. The conflict has been problematic for the United States, as it sets Turkey, a NATO member and one of its closest allies in a troubled region, against the Iraqi Kurds, the most important American partners in the war in Iraq.

The Bush administration agreed to share information and open airspace to the Turkish military last year, after attacks by the Kurdish group intensified, and Turkish airstrikes against Kurdish targets that began in December were sanctioned by the United States.

Matthew Bryza, U.S. assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, said the incursion was "not the greatest news," Reuters reported from Brussels, while a Pentagon spokesman said the U.S. military had urged Turkey to bring the operation to a "swift conclusion," Reuters reported from Washington. Even so, a flurry of recent visits by senior officers of both countries, including one this month by General Ergun Saygun, deputy chief of the Turkish General Staff, seem to indicate a relatively high level of mutual cooperation.

The operation is "more than a random hunt," said Sedet Laciner, head of the International Strategic Research Institution, which is based in Ankara.

It is "based on advanced technology, international cooperation and fine targeting," he said. "It is much more sophisticated and professional than operations in the past."

The military said the reason for the operation was to "prevent the region from being a permanent and safe base for the terrorists."

The European Union foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, speaking in Slovenia, said: "We think this action is not the best response," Reuters reported. "The territorial integrity of Iraq is for us very important."

It was unclear whether the offensive would complicate relations between the United States and Iraqi Kurds, led by Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi president, and Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdish north. But the Iraqi foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, also a Kurd, gave an early clue that the impact would be minimal, when he said, "there has not been any major incursion," Reuters said.

Kurdish leaders gathered Friday in meetings in Erbil, capital of northern Iraq. The tone of reports suggested that they were attempting to tamp down the political rhetoric and avoid some of the more nationalist statements that have

come out in the past.

In an apparent effort at damage control, President Abdullah Gul of Turkey called Talabani on Thursday night after the operation began to inform him about it, according to a statement on the Web site of the presidency. Gul invited Talabani, who has never been to Turkey because of Turkish suspicions, for a visit, the statement said, an invitation that the operation Friday will make almost impossible for Talabani to accept.

Turkish domestic politics were also in play. The military's image had been damaged in bruising political battles with Erdogan and his party last year, and a successful campaign against a common enemy could help repair it.

On Friday afternoon, the military air base in the southeastern town of Diyarbakir was buzzing with activity, the state-run Anatolian News Agency said. The agency reported that fighter jets and helicopters were taking off from the base to monitor the border.

Nearly 40,000 people have died in the fighting between the Turkish military and the PKK, though in recent years casualty tolls have fallen dramatically.

Turkey staged frequent incursions into northern Iraq before the American invasion. In 1992, as many as 70,000 Turkish troops crossed into Iraq under an agreement with the country's former ruler, Saddam Hussein. Turkey also has outposts inside Iraq, where small numbers of Special Forces troops perform largely monitoring functions.

But Turkey's problems with its native Kurds — about a quarter of the country's population — appear impossible to solve through military means alone, and even former military officers have acknowledged the need for greater inclusion of the Kurds, who speak their own language, into Turkish society.

Some analysts expressed concerns that the incursion could create a broader conflict by drawing Iraqi Kurdish troops into the fight, but on Friday that outcome appeared unlikely. Colonel Hussein Tamuer, a Kurdish border guard, said local Iraqi Kurdish forces viewed the incursion as a "struggle between the Turks and the PKK."



Turkey sends troops into Iraq against Kurds

Turkish armor near the town of Silopi, on the border with Iraq, on Friday. The Turkish military said it had sent troops into northern Iraq on Thursday night in a limited operation to weaken Kurdish militants there.

ESSAY

Veiled Hostility

Turkey's struggle over head scarves is about history, class and what it means to be modern

BY PELIN TURGUT/ISTANBUL

I MAY BE PART OF THE MILDLY APATHETIC GLOBAL Gen X brigade, but like many an urban Turk, I was raised on a solid diet of modernist mantras. The secular zeal of Turkey's nation-builders runs in my blood. As an air force pilot, my grandfather fought alongside Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, modern Turkey's founder, in the country's war for independence. After it was won in 1923, his job was to help build Turkey's first fleet of biplanes. My grandmother was what's called an "Ataturk girl"—like many others, she was put on a train to Germany, on her own at age 13, and told to study because the nascent republic needed educated women. Needless to say, they did not wear head scarves. Indeed, the fervor with which they spurned them explains a lot about the conflict now, as the government seeks to lift a ban on wearing them at universities.

To that generation of reformers, the West was the shiny future, progress the ultimate good. English and French were spoken round the dinner table, and the women gathered to knit the latest Paris fashions. These children of a revolution dreamed of a westernized Turkey, and naively believed a little social engineering would get them there. Modernity was their religion.

My last relative of that generation, a great-aunt, died recently in Ankara. In her lifetime, the capital's population went from 75,000 to 4 million, swelled by inflows of rural migrants looking for a better life. In time, a pious and conservative urban middle class emerged, and with it a different vision of Turkey's future. Atatürk's palace is now occupied by a former Islamist, whose wife wears a head scarf.

Predictably, my great-aunt didn't cope well with the changes. To her, Atatürk's most profound legacy was to get women out of their veils and their homes. She was unable to understand why anyone would choose to wear a head scarf. For her, being modern and wearing a head scarf were incompatible; my live-and-let-live attitude infuriated her.

To most Americans and Europeans, the head-scarf issue is a no-brainer. In a functioning democracy, an 18-year-old has the right to attend university dressed however she chooses. That much is indisputable. By lifting the ban, Turkey will have righted a wrong that has been a thorn in its side for far too long.

But the current clash over the ban isn't just about democracy. It is also a reflection of class struggle between the old élite (the "White Turks") and a new ruling class. At an upscale shopping mall in Istanbul last week, I overheard a group of teenage girls with big hair and designer jeans proclaim loudly as two head-scarved young women approached: "Why do they have to come here? Can't they go somewhere else?" That's the ugly face of secularist snobbery. Some university professors have even declared they won't teach head-scarved students, while Deniz



Marking back Many Turks dismiss head scarves as a relic of the past

Baykal, leader of the opposition Republican People's Party, speaks of the head scarf in militaristic terms as a "uniform imposed by outside forces."

But in rejecting that intolerance, let's not kid ourselves that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is a champion of women's rights. I have attended meetings where his Justice and Development Party (AKP) deputies chose not to shake my hand simply because I'm a woman. I know that hardly any of the AKP deputies have wives who work; when one of them sought to file charges against her husband for allegedly beating her, she was quickly dissuaded. I have watched Erdogan's daughter (who studied in the U.S. because of the ban) come home, get married and disappear. There was not a single female MP on the commission that drafted the current constitutional amendment ... about women!

Erdogan seized on the chance to lift this ban with an enthusiasm that he hasn't shown for any of the many other democratic reforms Turkey needs. The government has shelved plans to lift Article 301, which makes it a crime to denigrate "Turkishness," under which writers and intellectuals like Nobel prizewinner Orhan Pamuk have been tried. Erdogan has made little progress in addressing the grievances of Turkey's Kurdish minority. If he is really out to prove his democratic mettle, these are the kinds of issues he needs to address.

Turkey is facing a reality check. Both the secularist hardliners and the overzealous AKP must face the fact that democracy is messy. Turkey must learn to trust in its institutions and civil society, and be tolerant of difference. My grandparents' generation mustered great courage to make Turkey into a modern country. Now my generation, both secular and veiled, has to gather that same dedication to the pressing task of making it democratic, too. ■

TIME

February 22, 2008

TURKISH TROOPS ENTER NORTH IRAQ

By AP/CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA

(ISTANBUL, Turkey) — Turkish troops have launched a ground incursion across the border into Iraq in pursuit of separatist Kurdish rebels, the military said Friday — a move that dramatically escalates Turkey's conflict with the militants.

It is the first confirmed ground operation by the Turkish military into Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein. It also raised concerns that it could trigger a wider conflict with the U.S.-backed Iraqi Kurds, despite Turkish assurances that its only target was the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK.

The ground operation started after Turkish warplanes and artillery bombed suspected rebel targets on Thursday, the military said on its Web site. The ground incursion was backed by the Air Force, the statement said.

Turkey has conducted air raids against the PKK guerrillas in northern Iraq since December, with the help of U.S. intelligence, and it has periodically carried out so-called "hot pursuits" in which small units sometimes spend only a few hours inside Iraq.

The announcement of a cross-border, ground incursion of a type that Turkey carried out before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a major development in the conflict, which started in 1984 and has claimed as many as 40,000 lives.

The Kurdish militants are fighting for autonomy in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast, and have carried out attacks on Turkish targets from bases in northern Iraq. The U.S. and the European Union consider the PKK a terrorist organization.

"The Turkish Armed Forces, which values Iraq's territorial integrity and its stability, will return as soon as planned goals are achieved," the military said. "The executed operation will prevent the region from being a permanent and safe base for the terrorists and will contribute to Iraq's stability and internal peace."

Private NTV television said 10,000 troops were taking part in the offensive and had penetrated six miles into Iraq.

The state-run Anatolia agency reported that warplanes were seen taking off from the air

base in Diyarbakir in southeast Turkey. It said planes and helicopters were conducting reconnaissance flights over the border region, and that military units were deployed at the border to prevent rebel infiltration.

Dogan News Agency reported that the Habur border crossing, a major conduit for trade between Iraq and Turkey, was closed to vehicle traffic.

CNN-Turk television, however, quoted Deputy Prime Minister Hayati Yazici as saying the border gate was not closed but that priority was being given to Turkish military vehicles. Trucks routinely ferry supplies bound for U.S. military bases in Iraq through the Habur crossing.

Rear Adm. Gregory Smith, a U.S. spokesman in Iraq, said the military had received assurances from its NATO ally Turkey that it would do everything possible to avoid "collateral damage" to innocent civilians or infrastructure.

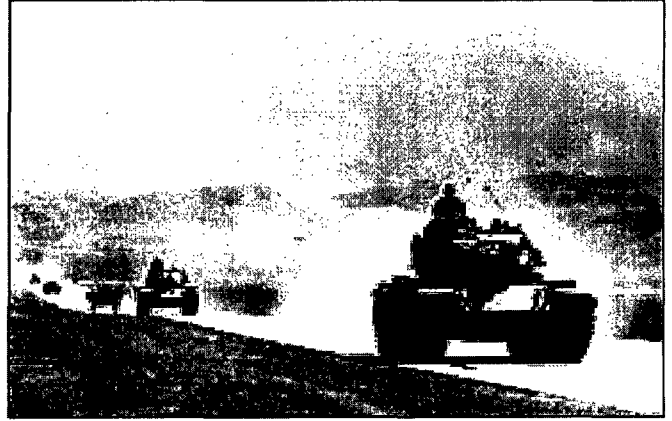
"Multi-National Forces-Iraq is aware Turkish ground forces have entered into northern Iraq, for what we understand is an operation of limited duration to specifically target PKK terrorists in that region," Smith said in a statement.

"The United States continues to support Turkey's right to defend itself from the terrorist activities of the PKK and has encouraged Turkey to use all available means, to include diplomacy and close coordination with the Government of Iraq to ultimately resolve this issue," he added.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul spoke with his Iraqi counterpart Jalal Talabani late Thursday and gave him information about the goals of the operation, Gul's office said. Gul also invited Talabani to visit Turkey.

The military said its target was PKK rebels and that it does not want to harm civilians "and other local groups that do not act in enmity against the Turkish Armed Forces."

Nihat Ali Ozcan, a terrorism expert with the research center TEPAV, said the operation was launched at this time to hit the group



before any infiltration by rebels into Turkey in the spring, the traditional start of the fighting season.

"I think it is aimed to keep the PKK under pressure before the group starts entering Turkey," he said on CNN-Turk television.

Iraqi border forces officer Col. Hussein Tamer said Turkish shelling on Thursday hit several Kurdish villages in the Sedafan area, some 20 miles from the border.

Fouad Hussein, a spokesman for the semi-autonomous Kurdish government in Iraq, said the Kurdish Peshmerga forces had been put on alert.

He said Iraqi Kurdish forces also had tightened security around bases housing Turkish military monitors operating in northern Iraq with permission from local authorities under a 1996 agreement.

"The government of Kurdistan ordered the Peshmerga forces to be on alert in fear of any Turkish incursion on Iraqi territory," he said, claiming that Turkish military monitors had tried to leave their bases in violation of the accord.

"Those troops tried to move out, but the Peshmerga forces forced them to return to their camps within half an hour," he said.

StarTribune

February 22, 2008

US military says Turkish incursion in northern Iraq is limited and aimed at Kurdish rebels

Associated Press BAGHDAD

The U.S. military said Friday it understands a Turkish incursion into northern Iraq "is an operation of limited duration" specifically targeting Kurdish rebels.

The statement came after the Turkish military said on its Web site that it had sent ground forces across the border into Iraq in pursuit of Kurdish rebels after Turkish warplanes and artillery bombed suspected rebel targets.

Rear Adm. Gregory Smith, a U.S. spokesman in Iraq, said the military had received assurances from its NATO ally Turkey that it would do everything possible to avoid "collateral damage to innocent civilians or Kurdish infrastructure."

He said the Turkish operation was specifically targeting members of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK.

"Multi-National Forces-Iraq is aware Turkish ground forces have entered into northern Iraq, for what we understand is an operation of limited duration to specifically target PKK terrorists in that region," Smith said in an e-mailed statement.

"The United States continues to support Turkey's right to defend itself from the terrorist activities of the PKK and has encouraged Turkey to use all available means, to include diplomacy and close coordination with the Government of Iraq to ultimately resolve this issue," he added.

TURKEY INVADES KURDISH IRAQ IN BATTLE WITH REBELS

Its fight with PKK separatists crosses the border, drawing an angry response from Iraqi leaders. The White House knew in advance of the offensive.

By Tina Susman and Yesim Comert

Special to The Times

BAGHDAD — Turkish troops clashed with Kurdish militants in the snowy mountains of northern Iraq on Friday after staging an invasion, the most serious offensive in years in Turkey's conflict with anti-government rebels.

Iraq's government reacted angrily, demanding the troops' withdrawal and accusing Turkey of destroying five bridges in violation of its pledge to target only rebel bases. The White House confirmed that it knew in advance of the invasion.

The offensive could inflame ethnic tensions in what has been the most peaceful region of Iraq. Iraqi Kurds sympathize with their Turkish brethren's quest for autonomy and want to expand Iraq's own semiautonomous Kurdistan region. But Arabs in the north fear greater Kurdish clout will sideline them.

There were conflicting accounts on the scope of the operation, which began Thursday night. Turkish media said 10,000 troops were on the move and had gone about six miles into Iraq to pursue guerrillas from the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, who use the border region to launch raids on Turkish forces. The media indicated about 60 tanks had crossed the border, but some had returned to Turkey by Friday afternoon. The operation reportedly centered on the Hakurk region south of the Turkish city of Cukurca.

Rebels said the Turkish claims were exaggerated and reported that two Turkish troops had been killed in clashes.

"We don't think there are as many as 10,000. Probably a lot less," said Fozdar Aresta, a rebel leader. Aresta said Thursday's aerial bombardments had been "very heavy" and that clashes continued Friday. "We have the men and weaponry to face them," he said.

There was no way to independently confirm either

side's claims.

Turkey's military posted photographs on its official website showing troops clad in heavy boots trekking across a snow-covered landscape. In one photograph, a soldier propped his weapon over a giant snow mound. In another, a line of troops walked single-file along a slushy road.

Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said the military "will rapidly return [to Turkey] as soon as it reaches its aim," which he said was the elimination of PKK hide-outs.

In Washington, White House spokesman Scott Stanzel confirmed that Turkey, a NATO ally, had notified the U.S. of its plan, and he suggested that the United States had shared intelligence with Turkey before the movement.

Washington considers the PKK a terrorist organization and has said Turkey has the right to defend itself against guerrilla attacks.

The conflict, which began when PKK rebels took up arms against Turkey's government in 1984, has put Washington in an awkward position as it juggles its alliance with Turkey with its need to keep peace in northern Iraq. Some Iraqi Kurdish political leaders have pressed the United States to intervene militarily in the situation, but it has limited its involvement to urging a diplomatic solution.

"We urged [Turkey] to work directly also with the Iraqis, including Kurdish government officials, in determining how best to address the threat of the PKK," Stanzel said.

Tensions have been building in the region since October, when Turkey sent as many as 100,000 troops to the border to counter increased PKK raids. Since then, there have been several aerial attacks and one minor ground incursion involving about 300 troops.

The latest invasion was the biggest since U.S. forces moved into Iraq in 2003.

"It is a serious escalation, no doubt," Iraq's foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, said on Al Arabiya TV in Iraq. He said Turkish forces had destroyed five bridges, "contrary to the promises made by the Americans or other sides that the Turkish forces won't target the infrastructure or population."

"The situation is sensitive, delicate, and very tense," Zebari said. "We fear some military mistakes might happen in the sites or targets and lead to unfavorable consequences for all sides."

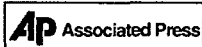
The Kurdistan regional government also protested the Turkish actions. "This is against international protocols, and it is a violation of international laws," spokesman Fouad Hussein said. He warned that if Turkish troops hit civilian areas, Iraqi Kurdish forces "would answer those attacks."

Maj. Gen. Jabbar Yawir, a Kurdistan military official, said about 2,000 Iraqi Kurdish forces had been moved to the border region "just in case of confrontations."

Elsewhere on Friday, police in Baghdad announced an indefinite ban on animal-drawn carts after a bomb hidden inside one killed three people and injured seven in the capital's Karada neighborhood. The cart was attached to a horse, which also died.

In the western province of Anbar, a suicide bomber killed four people in Ferris, about 15 miles south of Fallouja, U.S. officials said. The U.S. military said the bomber was waved through a checkpoint near a mosque, then walked up to two Iraqi police officers, hugged them, and detonated his explosives.

The military said three policemen and one civilian died. Iraqi police said four civilians died. There was no explanation for the discrepancy.



GATES: TURKEY RAID WON'T SOLVE PROBLEMS

February 23, 2008 | By LOLITA C. BALDOR

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Turkey's military assault into northern Iraq will not solve the terrorist problem there, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Sunday, calling for greater political and economic initiatives by the Turks to win over supporters of the Kurdish rebels.

Speaking as the Turkish military continued its first major ground incursion into Iraq since 2003, Gates said it will take a broader approach, similar to U.S. and coalition efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan, to erode support for the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, in northern Iraq.

"I think all our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan shows us that while dealing with a terrorist problem does require security operations, it also requires economic and political initiatives," Gates told reporters. He said a consistent message from the U.S. to the Turkish government is that military efforts must be supplemented by other political and economic outreach to Kurds.

"After a certain point people become inured to military attacks," he said, "and if you don't blend them with these kinds of non-military initiatives, then at a certain point the military efforts become less and less effective."

Gates, who is wrapping up a three-day visit to Australia, said

the U.S. has continued to provide the Turks with intelligence for its military operations. And, noting that Turkey warned the U.S.-backed Iraqi government of the incursion, he said such communication and coordination must continue.

"In terms of the current operation," Gates added, "I would hope it would be short, that it would be precise and avoid the loss of innocent life, and that they leave as quickly as they can accomplish the mission." He would not specify how soon he hoped the Turks would halt the assault, saying only, "The shorter the better."

The Turks have consistently complained that the Iraqis and the U.S. have not done enough to combat the PKK's guerrilla operations, as rebels carry out attacks on Turkey from bases in the heavily mountainous Kurdish region in Iraq. The rebels have been fighting for autonomy for more than 20 years.



KURDISH PESHMARGA MOVES TO DOHUK

Some 2000 Kurdish Peshmarga forces moved to the Iraqi-Turkish borders.

Some 2000 Kurdish Peshmarga forces from the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan on Friday moved from the northern Iraqi city of Erbil to the Iraqi-Turkish borders prepared for further attacks with the Turkish army, Kurdish Peshmarga sources said.



"Additional Kurdish troops were sent to the city of Dohuk to support the already existing forces there, after Turkish forces had attacked the eastern part of the city," the source said.

He added the Kurds were preparing for a

sudden military operation against the Turks.

On Thursday, Turkish artillery shelled Kurdish rebel positions in northern Iraq while Turkish warplanes hovered over the area.

Warplanes have been flying overnight into the early hours at low altitudes over several areas in northern Iraq, including Safa Qandil, Qalit Duza, Zarwa, Sinsakir and Raniya, Iraq's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) said on its website, quoting a local official.

Turkey has carried out regular cross-border airstrikes and small-scale operations targeting positions of the separatist Kurdistan's Workers' Party (PKK) rebels.

The PKK, which is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, has been fighting for a separate homeland for Turkey's Kurdish minority. The Turkish army is preparing for a big offensive in northern Iraq in the spring, according to reports

The Washington Post, February 24, 2008

KURDISH SOLDIERS IN IRAQ CAUGHT BETWEEN COMPETING ALLEGIANCES

By Joshua Partlow and Ellen Knickmeyer *Washington Post Foreign Service* Sunday

BALINDA, Iraq, Feb. 23 -- The Iraqi Kurdish soldiers stood at the edge of the collapsed steel bridge and looked down into the teal waters rushing below. The last sign of the Iraqi government, a small border checkpoint, was far behind them down in the river valley.

Ahead were snow-dusted mountains, abandoned villages and more bridges bombed by Turkish warplanes. The soldiers were at least 15 miles from Turkey's border. They could go no farther.

It is in these rugged, largely inaccessible mountains along the border, an area inside Iraq but uncontrolled by any nation, that Turkish soldiers are fighting Kurdish guerrillas. For the third day, Turkish attack helicopters and artillery bombarded guerrilla bases inside Iraq, blasting cave hideouts, arms caches and anti-aircraft positions, Turkey's military said Saturday.

Although the Turkish government is describing the military incursion as a limited operation that will end as quickly as possible, it is the first major ground incursion into Iraq since Saddam Hussein's government fell in April 2003. U.S. and Iraqi officials estimate that 500 to 1,000 Turkish soldiers are involved, but Turkish news reports put the number as high as 10,000. Turkey said it has killed at least 79 guerrillas and lost seven soldiers.

For the Kurdish soldiers who control most of northern Iraq, the violence along the border has put them in an increasingly uncomfortable position. They said the recent bombing campaigns have targeted Kurdish civilians in villages that are often far from the bases of the guerrilla group, known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. The group, which uses a corner of northern Iraq as a base, seeks greater autonomy for Kurds in Turkey.

Local officials in northern Iraq said thousands of farmers, shepherds and villagers fled south during the months of bombing that preceded this week's ground incursion. The Iraqi Kurdish soldiers, known as the pesh merga, have spread out across the northern region and are on high alert, awaiting orders from their commanders, soldiers said.

"The Turkish army doesn't have the right to come into our country. What they are doing is against the law," Maj. Hussein Jafar, a pesh merga officer, said at the edge of the destroyed Avamarke bridge, a roughly 40-yard span built in 2004 that was blasted by Turkish missiles on Thursday, according to residents and local officials. It was one of five bridges in the border region destroyed in the Turkish bombardments, Kurdish soldiers said.

"They bombed the bridge because they say there are PKK in this area, but actually the PKK are very far from here. They want to destroy the economy of our country," Jafar said.

Many pesh merga soldiers risked their lives defending Kurdish territory from Hussein's forces, and they say Turkey's offensive is a violation of their sovereignty. Several said that they are upset that the U.S. and Iraqi governments have largely condoned Turkey's attacks on the PKK and that they are prepared to defend their people if Turkey continues its advance. The United States and Turkey consider the PKK a terrorist organization.

"If Turkey comes farther than they are now, then 100 percent we will stop them," said Maj. Gen. Hashim Sitae, a pesh merga commander in the northern city of Dahuk.

In a statement on its Web site, the Kurdistan Regional Government offered no sup-

port for the PKK but condemned the Turkish military operations, saying it was "imperative that Turkey immediately withdraw its military forces from the Kurdistan Region in Iraq." The statement called on the United States to help stop the offensive.

"The Turkish army came into Iraq and hit our villages and hit our civilians, and we have to be ready to protect them," said Col. Humaid Muhammed Abdullah, a pesh merga officer in Dahuk. "We are waiting for the Americans to do something to solve this situation."

Turkey's military released few details of the fighting Saturday, saying only that Turkish forces were battling Kurdish guerrillas in four areas in Iraq's Kurdish north. The military said on its Web site that the guerrillas were trying to flee south in a "panicked state."

The news dominated Turkish television, which broadcast clip after clip of Turkish soldiers in white winter camouflage rolling up mountains in open-sided trucks. Crawls across television screens provided a running tally of the military's figure for guerrillas killed. Turkish news media said the country's jets were striking as far as 10 miles into northern Iraq.

A PKK spokesman, Ahmed Denize, said small teams of PKK fighters continued to strike the Turkish military in quick ambushes from multiple locations. He said that the fighters had taken the corpses of 15 Turkish soldiers, a claim that could not be verified.

Many of the mountain bases hit by Turkey's military were probably only sparsely populated by the guerrillas, who often leave their mountain camps to spend winters in lower-lying villages. Turkey's government approved a cross-border

incursion last year, and an early spring offensive such as the one launched Thursday had been widely expected, giving rebels months to prepare. The Kurdish government has effectively allowed the PKK to create a mini-state along the border where they can live unchallenged.

Sardar Kakameen, the mayor of Deralouk, a Kurdish town in northern Iraq near the border, said that the bombing campaign in recent months has been the most intense he has seen and that more than 100 villages have emptied out as residents have moved in with relatives in his city and in neighboring areas.

"Because of the bombing, there is nobody

left in the area," he said. "The civilian people are the ones who have suffered the most from this bombing."

Three days ago, mortar shells began to rain down on the tree farms and apple orchards in Hish, a predominantly Christian village along the border, residents said.

"The bombing came down directly in our area, it was very strong," said Fual Hoshaba Kashool, 43, a farmer from the village. Kashool and his family, 12 people in all, fled on foot at dawn to the nearby town of Sheladeze. The next day, the Avamarke bridge was destroyed, cutting off the one road to home.

"Fortunately, all the humans were safe; we ran away, but our lands were destroyed," Kashool said. "And now our problem is we left all our belongings on the other side of the bridge and we can't bring them back."

Another villager who fled, Abdul Rahman Piro, 50, said he believed that Turkey wanted to drive out all civilians from the area. "There is no difference between us and the PKK to them," he said. "We are all Kurds."

Knickmeyer reported from Istanbul. Special correspondent Dlovan Brwari in Balinda contributed to this report.

BBC NEWS

24 February 2008,

Turkey admits loss of helicopter

Turkey says that one of its helicopters taking part in an offensive against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq has been destroyed near the border.

It said the incident happened "due to an unknown reason". Earlier, Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels claimed to have shot down a Turkish helicopter.

Turkey says more than 112 PKK militants have been killed as well as 15 of its own soldiers in three days of fighting.

Iraq has urged Turkey to withdraw its forces and hold talks on the PKK issue.

And the US has called on Turkey to keep its military campaign as short as possible.

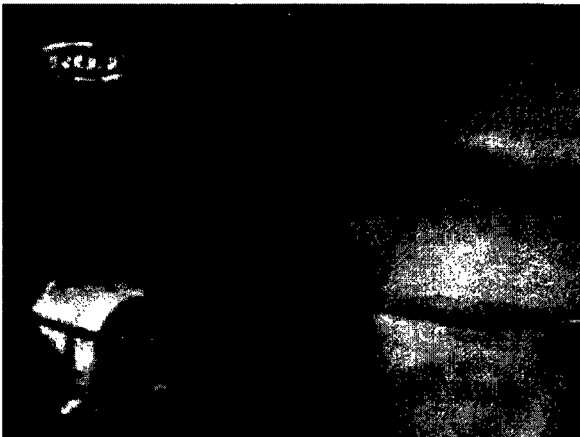
The Turkish authorities launched the cross-border attack on Thursday night, after accusing the Iraqi government of failing to stop members of the PKK from using the area as a safe haven.

More than 30,000 people have been killed since the PKK began fighting for a Kurdish homeland in south-eastern Turkey in 1984.

The US, the EU and Turkey consider the PKK to be a terrorist organisation.

The PKK disputes that, claiming that it has killed 47 Turkish troops.

Ahmed Danees, head of foreign relations for the PKK, said his group had on Saturday shot down a Turkish Cobra attack heli-

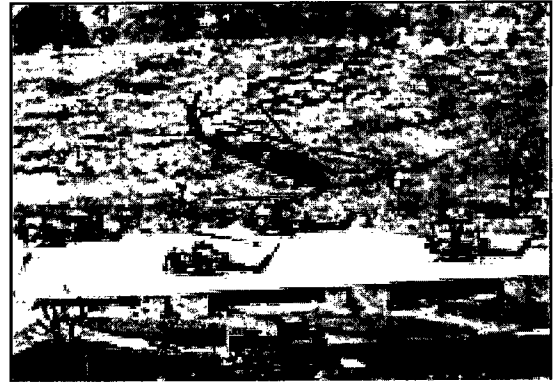


copter.

He added that this had happened in the remote Chamsku area, close to the border.

Escalation threat

In its latest internet statement, the Turkish military says its ground troops, supported by fighter jets and helicopter gunships, are fighting PKK separatists in three locations inside northern Iraq.



It says that that over 60 PKK targets, including shelters and weapons stores, have been destroyed and that PKK militant are retreating to the south.

The BBC's Sarah Rainsford in Turkey says that if that is true and Turkish troops follow them, the danger of the conflict spreading will increase.

Iraqi-Kurdish Peshmerga have already vowed massive resistance if local civilians are harmed.

Political measures

Iraq's government on Sunday renewed a call for Turkey to remove its troops from Iraqi territory "as soon as possible," calling the offensive "a threat to the stability of the region and a violation of Iraq's sovereignty".

Speaking at the end of a visit to Australia, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said military strikes by Turkey would not be enough on their own to end the long-running dispute with Kurdish rebels.

He said Ankara should employ political and economic measures to isolate the PKK and erode its support base.

He said America's experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan showed that military muscle should be complemented by efforts to address grievances held by minority groups.

"These economic and political measures are really important because after a certain point people become inured to military attacks," he said.

"And if you don't blend them with these kinds of non-military initiatives then at a certain point the military efforts become less and less effective."

The American defence secretary will deliver his advice in person when he travels to Ankara next week.



Iran reinforces Iraq border after Turkish attack

24 February 2008

TEHERAN (Reuters) - Iran has reinforced its borders after Turkish forces launched an offensive into northern Iraq targeting Kurdish rebels, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said on Sunday.

Turkey said it launched the offensive after Iraqi authorities failed to stop an estimated 3,000 members of the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) from using northern Iraq as a base to stage attacks on Turkish territory.

Iranian forces have also often clashed in Iraqi border areas with rebels from the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), an offshoot of the PKK and which analysts say has bases in northeastern Iraq from where they operate against Iran.

Teheran brands PJAK a 'terrorist' group.

'Necessary measures have already been taken to reinforce our borders,' Foreign Ministry spokesman Mohammad Ali Hosseini told a weekly news conference.

'Regarding the PKK and other terrorist factions active in the region, we stress

that the best way to face regional terrorists is for security cooperation between the regional countries,' he said.

But Iran, which has been seeking to improve ties with Iraq, urged Turkey to heed Iraqi government concerns in its bid end Kurdish rebel attacks.

'Regarding the attack of the Turkish forces into Iraq, we believe the opinion of the Iraqi government must be valued although we also believe the terrorists must stop their terrorist operations there,' the spokesman said.

Hosseini repeated Iran's position that the presence in the region of 'foreign forces', a term usually used to refer to the United States and its allies, was creating instability.

Iran has postponed talks with US officials on Iraqi security, due to be held in Baghdad, citing technical reasons. But Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is expected to become the first Iranian president since the 1979 revolution to visit Iraq next month.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

February 25, 2008

IN KIRKUK, ETHNIC STRIFE TAKES TOLL

By Gina Chon Wall Street Journal

KIRKUK, Iraq — As Turkish troops pursue Kurdish rebels inside Iraq, an ethnic political dispute is heating up in this largely Kurdish town where the country's northern oil industry is based.

Kirkuk is home to ethnic Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, all of whom lay claim to the area. A referendum scheduled for June to determine whether residents want to become part of Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish enclave in the north could exacerbate tense relations between the ethnic groups that could possibly turn violent.

Meanwhile, Kurdish, Arab and Turkmen politicians are wrangling over the details of the Kirkuk referendum and the fate of this once-prosperous oil town.

The vote had been scheduled for the end of 2007. The United Nations brokered a delay because of bickering between politicians over whether a vote should be allowed at all. Kurdish politicians are pushing for it, saying it is mandated by Iraq's constitution. Arabs and Turkmen are resisting, threatening more delays. Kirkuk's ethnic makeup has long caused tensions that have been sharpened by the region's oil resources. In the 1990s, Saddam Hussein expelled 120,000 Kurds and other ethnicities from the region, making way for Arabs. After the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, Kurds returned, displacing many of the Arabs. Kurds are now estimated to make up at least 50% of the population, Arabs at least 30% and Turkmen less than 20%.

Kirkuk is also Iraq's oil hub in the north. An export pipeline linking the country's northern fields here has the capacity to export 1.6 million barrels per day to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. But because of repeated attacks, it has been mostly shut down since the U.S. invasion. After security improvements were made last summer, the pipeline began pumping about 300,000 barrels per day, although the supply can be erratic. The Iraqi government hopes to

raise exports to 400,000 barrels per day. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is working with Iraqi contractors to build a \$28 million protective fence around a pipeline that runs from Kirkuk to the Beiji refinery, which is scheduled to be completed in April.

Despite the challenges, some political tensions here have eased. Sunni Arabs last December ended a boycott of the local government that had lasted over a year. Since then, an Arab deputy governor, Rakan Said, has been appointed. Kurds and Arabs are working on an agreement to release some of the 1,500 Arab detainees that Arab politicians say have been unfairly jailed in prisons in Kurdistan. Kurdish officials say the detainees are terrorists.

But the province's Turkmen bloc is still holding out. It holds nine seats on the province's 41-member council, and is refusing to rejoin the government, saying the Kurds, who hold 26 seats, have undue influence on the council. The other six seats belong to Sunni Arabs. Earlier this month, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, visited to try to convince the Turkmen to join the government.

The standoff is frustrating for citizens, who watch their once-proud city crumble. "We don't care who the ruler of Kirkuk will be," says Jassem Obaidi, a Sunni Arab. "We just care about services, jobs and a place to sleep."

Kirkuk suffers from 50% unemployment along with erratic supplies of electricity and water. The region has had five years of drought. Early this month, water was shut off for up to 10 days in some areas.

Uncollected garbage is strewn across many Kirkuk streets. An Iraq cholera outbreak started here last summer, and health officials fear cases could crop up again this year as the weather gets warmer.

"We don't have a sewage system, the streets are bad and the government doesn't serve the regular citizens," says Ahmed Mohaldin, a Kurd.

His salary of about \$124 a month running a small market isn't enough to pay his rent and pay for living expenses for his family. He said that government officials should take care of those kinds of problems, instead of fighting over control of the city.

Resolution is unlikely to come from joining Iraqi Kurdistan. The Kurdish region, like the rest of Iraq, suffers from similar problems of unemployment and lack of basic services.

U.S. military officers, diplomats and Iraqi officials here are pushing to create jobs and restore basic, municipal services, reflecting an emphasis this year on making economic gains across Iraq. U.S. reconstruction officials are pushing Iraqi counterparts -- increasingly subsumed with the referendum in the city -- to look for ways to help residents in the rural provinces. For instance, Howard Keegan, an American reconstruction official, said farmers in the province need fertilizer and improved irrigation systems.

Rizgar Ali, a Kurdish provincial council chairman, said the government's focus on the referendum is understandable because it is a matter of democracy and self-determination for the people of Kirkuk.

But officials realize they have to do a better job in providing for residents. Earlier this month, mayors from around Tamim province came to Kirkuk to talk to provincial officials about their needs.

Kirkuk residents, however, are growing impatient with all the politics.

"Let Kirkuk be whatever it will be," says Ateela Unis, a Turkmen, who complains he can't afford a doctor for a 10-year-old son suffering breathing problems. His poor neighborhood lacks water and power. "I just want my son's health back, good services and a good life for my family."

REUTERS

IRAQ FEARS CLASH BETWEEN TURKISH TROOPS AND PESHMERGA

February 25, 2008

By Mohammed Abbas

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq fears that a prolonged Turkish incursion into northern Iraq could trigger clashes between Turkish troops and Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga security forces, the country's national security adviser said on Monday.

Mowaffaq al-Rubaie said such fighting could have "very serious consequences" for a part of Iraq that has been relatively stable compared with the rest of the country.

Ankara launched a ground incursion on Thursday in a remote part of Iraq's largely autonomous region of Kurdistan to hunt down Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) rebels. The PKK uses the area as a base to stage attacks inside Turkey in pursuit of its goal of a Kurdish homeland in southeastern Turkey.

"The...longer Turkish soldiers stay inside Iraqi territory, the more likely this is going to happen," Rubaie told reporters in Baghdad when asked if he was concerned about clashes between Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces breaking out.

"We need to avoid this at any cost. This has very serious consequences even if this happens by accident."

A Kurdish security official said Turkish troops and PKK rebels clashed during the night in the Amadiya area, 10 km (6 miles) south of the border. He did not know if there had been any fighting on Monday.

He said the Turkish military had shelled PKK targets on Monday, after launching several air strikes overnight.

So far the battle-hardened Peshmerga have stayed on the sidelines of the Turkish military operation, which is taking place in a sparsely populated mountainous region. Kurdish officials regard the area as outside their control.

While Iraqi Kurds have little sympathy for the aims of the PKK, there is widespread anger over the incursion.

The leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan has said any targeting of Kurdish civilians would result in "massive resistance" by its Peshmerga forces, which have been put on a state of alert.

Turkey says it is carrying out a limited operation against the PKK, which it blames for the deaths of nearly 40,000 people since it began its armed struggle

in 1984.

TURKISH PRESIDENT PUTS OFF AFRICA TRIP

Turkish government spokesman Cemil Cicek said Turkish troops would withdraw once they had completed their mission.

"Turkey tried hard in the past to avoid this outcome (of military action)... The operation targets only the separatist terrorist organization, we have no other target," Cicek told reporters after a weekly cabinet meeting in Ankara.

"When this operation has hit its targets, our units will return home," he added, without giving a timeframe.

Turkish President Abdullah Gul has postponed a planned trip to Africa this week due to the offensive, Turkey's state Anatolian news agency added.

U.S. officials say Ankara has given assurances it will do all it can to avoid civilian casualties in northern Iraq.

There have been no reports of civilian casualties, but residents in villages near the border say they are being targeted in Turkish air strikes and artillery barrages.

In a worrying sign, Turkish ground troops have come face to face with Peshmerga forces twice in recent days.

In one incident, a senior Iraqi Kurdish official said Peshmerga soldiers stopped Turkish tanks leaving a base just inside northern Iraq. Turkey has kept small contingents of troops in northern Iraq since earlier offensives in the 1990s.

Iraq's government said on Sunday Turkey should withdraw its troops as soon as possible and urged Ankara to sit down with Baghdad for talks to resolve the crisis over the PKK. It said Turkey was sending a special envoy to Baghdad on Wednesday.

Iraq has called for a diplomatic solution to the PKK presence, saying it has taken some measures to deal with the rebels but is focused on trying to stabilize the rest of Iraq.

Ankara says it has the right under international law to hunt and kill members of the PKK, which is classed as a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Al Jazeera FEBRUARY 25, 2008

Turkey ignores Iraq pull-out plea

Hheavy fighting between the Turkish military and PKK fighters in northern Iraq has continued despite pleas by the Iraqi government for Turkey to withdraw.

Turkish troops on Monday fired more than 40 salvos of artillery shells across the Iraqi border and witnesses said helicopters continued to target Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) bases in Iraq.

A day earlier, a Turkish helicopter crashed in Iraq and at least eight soldiers were killed during a ground operation against the banned Kurdish group.

Turkey's five-day incursion has focused on border towns and Al Jazeera has learned of troops and helicopters heading towards the town of Goli.

'Heavy fighting'

James Bays, Al Jazeera's correspondent in northern Iraq, said: "[Goli] is a place that has been a PKK camp, its in a mountainous area, and we believe that attack is about to get under way or is already under way."

With Turkish and Iraq's regional Kurdish government denying journalists access to the clashes are taking place, it is difficult to independently confirm the fighting, he said.

"What is clear from both Turkish and PKK figures, although they're very different," Bays said, "is that there are still casualties on both sides and that heavy fighting is continuing."

The Turkish military says 15 soldiers have been killed since Thursday but PKK fighters say they have killed 47 troops so far.



Turkey also said it had killed 33 more PKK members, taking the Kurdish toll to 112 since the launch of the cross-border incursion on Thursday evening.

Withdrawal calls

The Iraqi government on Sunday called for Turkey to withdraw its troops from northern Iraq.

A statement by Nuri al-Maliki's government urged Turkey "to withdraw its forces from Iraqi soil as soon possible".

"The government of Iraq calls on Turkey to respect its sovereignty and unity and considers that the unilateral operation across the border is a threat to the region," the statement said.

It came after Turkey's military warned Iraqi Kurds not to shelter Kurdish fighters fleeing its offensive.

The PKK is fighting for autonomy in predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey and have carried out attacks on Turkish targets from bases in the semiautonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq.

Started in 1984, the conflict has claimed as many as 40,000 lives.

REUTERS 

Turkish troops claim victories

February 25, 2008

Shamal Aqrawi Reuters

ZAKHU, Iraq -- Turkish troops engaged Kurdish PKK rebels in close combat on Sunday that left scores dead in a major ground offensive into northern Iraq.

Iraq's government said NATO member Turkey should withdraw its troops as soon as possible and urged Ankara to sit down with Baghdad for talks to resolve the crisis over the PKK.

The rebels said on Sunday they had shot down a Turkish Cobra attack helicopter. Baghdad and Washington fear the offensive could further destabilise Iraq.

Ankara launched the cross-border attack on Thursday after months of aerial bombardment of suspected PKK targets in the remote, mountainous region. It accuses rebels of using northern Iraq as a base to stage deadly attacks inside Turkey.

Turkey's General Staff said 33 PKK rebels, including a leader, and eight soldiers died in heavy, close combat in poor weather conditions on Sunday. It said at least 112 rebels and 15 soldiers have died since the operation began.

"The hot pursuit continues in three different regions (of northern Iraq) and our teams will carry out the operation with the same decisiveness and heroism," the General Staff said in a statement.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has been battling for decades to create a Kurdish homeland in southeast Turkey, disputed the figures.

It said that 47 Turkish troops and two rebels had been killed since Thursday.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan sought to reassure the international community that Turkey's cross-border operation -- possibly its largest in a decade -- was focused on the PKK and would be limited in duration.

"Our Iraqi brothers should know that this operation is only to clean the terrorist camps and terrorists," Erdogan said.

But Iraq's government said it viewed the military action as "a threat to the stability of the region and a violation of Iraq's sovereignty and calls on Turkey to pull its troops from Iraq as soon as possible".

"The Iraqi government calls on Turkey to enter into bilateral dialogue with the Iraqi government and considers the threat of the PKK as a threat to Turkey and to the border areas," it said in a statement.

Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh told Reuters Erdogan would send a special envoy to Baghdad on Wednesday to discuss security issues.

The PKK said it downed a Cobra attack helicopter on Saturday evening in the Chamsku area.

The military said a helicopter had been rendered ineffective but said the cause was unknown.

FINANCIAL TIMES

February 25 2008

Turkish strike inside Iraq takes heavy toll

By Vincent Boland in Ankara and Demetri Sevastopulo in, Canberra

Eight Turkish soldiers and 33 Kurdish separatist militants were killed yesterday as Turkey continued a ferocious assault on PKK bases in northern Iraq.

The assault appears to have inflicted heavy damage on militant hideouts in the mountains that straddle the two countries' border.

Despite a plea by Robert Gates, the US defence secretary, to Ankara to keep its operation "short and precise", the Turkish military appears determined to inflict as much damage as it can on the PKK in a sustained ground and air assault that began on Thursday and may last for two weeks.

The deaths of the eight soldiers bring to 15 the number of Turkish troops who have been killed in the operation, the largest incursion by Turkey into northern Iraq in a decade. At least 112 PKK rebel fighters have also been

killed, according to the military.

The casualty figures give some indication of how fierce the fighting is, despite the winter conditions and differing accounts of how many Turkish troops are involved. The PKK disputed the casualty figures on its side and claimed it had killed 47 Turkish troops. It also claimed to have shot down a Cobra helicopter. Ankara confirmed it had lost a helicopter but did not suggest it had been shot down.

In a statement yesterday confirming the deaths of the eight "martyrs", as Turkish soldiers who die in conflict are known, the military said: "Many terrorist shelters and logistics installations and weapons and ammunition in the hideouts were destroyed during the operation."

Ankara's operation has at least tacit US support, despite alarm about how

it could destabilise northern Iraq and possibly lead to clashes between Turkish and Iraqi Kurdish forces. Ankara insists the operation is targeted only at the PKK and is aimed at preventing northern Iraq from becoming a "terrorist safe haven".

The PKK has staged several deadly attacks on Turkish targets in recent months and is mostly based in the mountains of northern Iraq.

Addressing Iraqi fury over the incursion yesterday, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Turkey's prime minister, said: "Our Iraqi brothers should know that this operation is only to clear the terrorist camps and terrorists."

Mr Gates urged Turkey to withdraw its forces "as quickly as they can accomplish their mission". He also urged Ankara to open a dialogue with the Iraqi Kurdish regional government, which Turkey does not accept

as an interlocutor. Indeed, the Turkish government accuses the regional government of tolerating and perhaps giving succour to the PKK on its territory. Mr Gates said there needed to be "regular dialogue and openness between the Turkish government and the Iraqi government and also the government of Kurdistan in terms of their [Turkey's] intentions, their concerns, their plans and their activities and to work with the Iraqi government in trying to deal with this problem."

Turkey has imposed what is in effect a state of emergency in two provinces bordering Iraq and has tens of thousands of troops there. The military has posted photo-graphs of the operation on its website, showing soldiers laden with backpacks and winter clothing trudging through remote and snowbound terrain.

FINANCIAL TIMES

February 25 2008

Iraq too fragile for Turkish incursion

Turkey's decision to send ground forces into northern Iraq, its biggest incursion into the Kurdish territories across its border for a decade, may be an understandable response to the reviving campaign by rebel separatists hiding there. But it is the last thing an Iraq trying to claw itself back from the precipice needs. The palpable improvement in the security situation in Iraq over the past

year is fragile and uneven. Any destabilisation of Iraqi Kurdistan, the only relatively calm area of the country, could put paid to what is only a small chance that improvement can be turned into a political settlement enabling Iraqis to live together in peace.

Ankara should end its incursion - and has the right to expect closer co-operation from Iraq and its US allies

in fighting the PKK. Its best protection, nevertheless, is to continue the modest but tangible progress the government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made in reconciling Turkey's Kurdish minority.

Force alone will not resolve this. The rebels are well dug in in the near-impregnable Kandil mountains and Turkey's attempts to cut them off are already taking its troops close to open

confrontation with Iraqi Kurds. If that happens, the Kurdish *peshmerga* forces used by the US to hold down parts of central Iraq will be redeployed northwards.

The situation in Iraq hangs by a thread, or rather several threads. The "surge" of US troops of the past year, though hailed as a triumph by the Bush administration, is only one of four factors behind the relative fall in

violence from very high levels. US recourse to Sunni tribal militias to fight al-Qaeda, the decision by Moqtada al-Sadr to stand down his Mahdi army (for reasons of mainly intra-Shia politics), and the fact that ethno-sectarian cleansing in Baghdad and central Iraq has largely been

completed are at least equally important reasons. Yet all these factors are temporary. The US will not maintain force levels much beyond the summer. The minority Sunni are stronger now that the US is using them militarily - and are still violently opposed to Shia

supremacy in Iraq. Mass sectarian killing could resume if millions of refugees start returning. True, Mr Sadr has extended his ceasefire, a plus. But US forces are arming other Shia tribal militias against the Sadrists in south Iraq, where they also back the Iran-allied Badr militia

against the Mahdi army, itching to resume fighting both the Americans and its rivals.

There is precious little room already for national reconciliation and governance to emerge in Iraq. Turkey must not further reduce it.

 THE AUSTRALIAN

February 25, 2008

Kurds threaten suicide bombings

KURDISH rebels have threatened to launch suicide strikes in Turkish cities in response to the second large-scale attempt by Ankara in six months to rout them from mountain strongholds in northern Iraq.

Martin Chulov, Middle East correspondent

Turkish troops continued to roll across the border last night four days after the latest attempt to eradicate the militiamen, who have shown little sign of stepping back from a bloody 24-year guerilla campaign for independence, despite widespread international pressure.

Unlike the last incursion in August, which pitched Ankara into a diplomatic standoff with the White House over fears of further destabilising Iraq, the US and Iraqi governments have been measured in their reaction to the current strike.

"We know the threats that Turkey is facing but military operations will not solve the PKK problem," Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said. Turkey had resorted to military options, but this never resulted in a good thing.

The Kurdish administration, which runs northern Iraq semi-autonomously, has also refrained from escalating rhetoric after threatening last time to defend its territory by pitching its regular forces against the Turkish army.

Massoud Barzani, head of the regional Kurdish administration, warned that Turkey would face large-scale resistance only if it targeted civilians.

US Defence Secretary Robert Gates, speaking in Canberra on the latest leg of a whistle-stop tour of Asia, said: "I think it's important for everybody to bear in mind the importance of the sovereignty of Iraq."

Appearing to confirm that Iraq and the US had been consulted before the invasion, Mr Gates continued: "There has been contact at high levels about this activity that is in northern Iraq right now. I think that there can always be improvement in the timeliness and in the depth of the dialogue. It can't be just a one-time event. It needs to be an ongoing dialogue.

"I think all of our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan shows us that, while dealing with a terrorist problem does require security operations, it also requires economic and political initiatives.

"The kinds of military activities that they have been engaged in should be complemented with initiatives to try and address some of the concerns of those who are reconcilable among the Kurds, to win their loyalty to Turkey if they are living in Turkey and to try and eliminate whatever popular base exists that supports the terrorist activities of the PKK."

The US fears the violence that has devastated central and southern Iraq will spread to the Kurdish north, which has been largely spared from insurgent attacks.

However, Turkey has long said its fears of terror attacks inside its borders override US concerns.

The PKK is believed to have "sleepers" in Kurdish communities in cities such as Istanbul and Ankara who are ready to bomb military and government targets.

Ankara complained bitterly last year that the US

would not characterise as terror attacks the numerous strikes made by rebels of the Kurdish Workers Party on Turkish soil.

The three-decade insurgency is thought to have claimed up to 40,000 lives on both sides.

Iraq's Kurds have long been the target of attacks from Turkish troops and the henchmen of Saddam Hussein, who feared them as a subversive threat to his Baathist regime and also coveted the vast oil lakes under their feet.

Northern Iraq's oil wealth is so far largely untapped. But it is the territorial ambitions of the Kurds that has led to most of the conflict of the past three decades. The Kurdish bid for a homeland includes a cross-border section of the mountainous terrain of southwestern Iran.

Tehran is also taking a keen interest in Turkish military action, after emerging as an arbitrator to end the last round of fighting.

Fighting over the weekend is believed to have killed about 80 rebels and 15 Turkish soldiers, although estimates vary widely on both sides. Ankara has said it will confine the military operation to 15 days. Turkish media said several thousand troops had crossed the border into Iraq.

Late yesterday, guerillas said they had shot down a Turkish Cobra attack helicopter during clashes with Turkish forces in northern Iraq. There were no details of casualties.

February 25, 2008

 CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

Turkish raid strains U.S.-Kurd ties

American support in strike against PKK rebels threatens relations with key Iraqi allies.

By Sam Dagher | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

Amadiyah, Iraq

Peshmerga Gen. Muhammad Mohsen took down his American flag, folded it up, and placed it in his office corner Sunday, reflecting the growing anger in Iraq's Kurdish north with US support for Turkey's campaign against separatist rebels operating in the region.

The intermittent offensive against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) reached a crescendo Thursday when

ground troops crossed into Iraq in a campaign involving nearly 8,000 soldiers. Officials here say it is Turkey's most significant strike against the rebels in more than 10 years.

Frustration over the Turkish incursion cuts across the spectrum. Many average Iraqi Kurds sympathize with the PKK rebels' aim to form an independent Kurdistan and officials say Turkey's real goal is to destabilize its semiautonomous government, the leaders of which have long been

American allies.

"We think the United States is making a big mistake," says General Mohsen, who once led Iraqi Kurdish fighters alongside US forces when they entered the northern city of Mosul during the US invasion of Iraq in 2003.

On Sunday, eight Turkish soldiers were killed, bringing the death toll among the Turks to 15. Turkey said it killed 112 PKK rebels, which has been denied by a rebel spokesman

quoted by Reuters. He said that 47 Turkish soldiers and only two rebels were killed.

Amid the distant sound of occasional explosions on Sunday, Turkish warplanes buzzed over a desolate mountain pass in the village of Sirya in Amadiyah, 15 miles from the Turkish border. Besides vultures hovering over the jagged mountain peaks, Kurdish government forces were the only fighters in the area. A bridge over a gushing creek in the area was

reduced to a pile of metal.

Turkish artillery and warplanes are targeting a west-east border belt that extends from Amadiyah in Dohuk Province to the Sidakan area in Arbil Province.

Kurdish anger toward US for providing assistance to Turkey, its NATO ally, in its bombardment of suspected PKK targets has been simmering since last fall. It has led to public outbursts and now it appears to have become more serious, threatening one of the most important partnerships for the US in Iraq at a time when Washington is anxious to translate security gains into more lasting stability.

Adding to the stakes is the fact that US forces, with the help of Iraqi forces dominated by Kurdish contingents, continue to battle Al Qaeda-linked militants and other insurgents in areas such as Mosul and Kirkuk, which border Kurdistan and have significant sectarian and ethnic tension.

The event that unleashed most of the Kurdish anger here was what took place Thursday when about 350 Turkish soldiers rolled out of their barracks inside Iraq at Bamerne, west of Amadiyah, in 13 tanks to join their comrades coming from across the border, according to Mohsen. About 1,200 Turkish soldiers are stationed at Bamerne.

Hundreds of Peshmerga fighters, backed by local residents, rushed to the area to prevent Turkish forces, who were already two miles outside the base (a remnant from the last major Turkish incursion into northern Iraq in the mid-1990s), from going any farther.

"The Peshmergas told them if you go any further we will kill you," Mohsen says.

In a sign of the gravity of the situation, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) leader Massoud Barzani rushed to Dohuk, the main city in the area.

"He told me I will be the first to die in fighting the Turks," according to Mohsen.

The region's prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, says the Turks have been emboldened by the support and intelligence they received from the

"They know the United States has been very soft with them [Turks], so they want to take advantage," says Mr. Barzani, a nephew of the president. "They gave them intelligence and allowed them to bombard our territory, so they ask for more now. This was a big mistake by the US to allow them to use the airspace."

Barzani says he's convinced the PKK is only a pretext for what he says is a Turkish war against the KRG. "Turkey publicly says their target is the PKK, but based on the movement that we see, we do not believe that's their only target. The target is the KRG....

red line along the Mateen mountain range in the area that he says if Turks crossed would trigger direct war with his forces.

Metehan Demir, a veteran defense correspondent now with the Hurriyet newspaper in Ankara, says the Turkish operation was carried out now, in the winter season, to catch the PKK off guard. "Everybody was expecting this operation to be carried out in the spring - as well as the PKK.... Such a move by the Turkish Army destroys the PKK's [spring defensive] plans because it was carried out in this season."

He says that while there has been much criticism for the operation among Kurdish officials in Iraq, it will not have much impact on the military decisionmaking in Ankara, Turkey's capital. He says senior Turkish politicians and generals have laid the groundwork with the US and Iraqi governments, and even Iraqi Kurds, to minimize criticism.

"Don't look at what [Iraqi Kurdish leader] Barzani and other Kurdish authorities say; this is just a good boy, bad boy game and it's not so surprising for Ankara," says Mr. Demir. "This time the political climate has been arranged.... It's not so bad for Turkey."

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates - who will visit Ankara this week - said Sunday that Turkey's campaign would not solve its problems with the rebels.

"After a certain point, people become inured to military attacks and if you don't blend them with these kinds of nonmilitary initiatives, then at a certain point the military efforts become less and less effective."



Prepared: Two farmers from the village of Sirya, in Iraq's Kurdish north, claim to be former Kurdish Peshmerga fighters. They say they're ready to fight if Turks cross into their area.

SAM DAGHER

US military in December to carry out a sweeping air assault against the PKK that Ankara said killed 175 rebels and hit more than 200 targets. The decades-old confrontation between the Turkish Army and the PKK has been escalating since the fall.

We will resist. If they cross that border to come to us, we will fight."

Thousands of Peshmerga forces have been dispatched to the border area as a precaution against any further Turkish advance. Mohsen points to a

The Boston Globe

February 26, 2008

GLOBE EDITORIAL

Turkey's Iraq war

TURKEY'S current military offensive inside northern Iraq has touched off a crisis - one to which several other players in the region have contributed. Although the ultimate responsibility for ending this crisis falls on Turkey, all of the others, including the United States, must do their part to prevent a larger regional conflagration.

Turkey's ostensible reason for sending 10,000 troops into the mountainous north of Iraq is to punish the separatist guerrilla group known as the PKK for its terrorist operations and attacks on Turkish soldiers inside Turkey. However, the Kurdistan Regional Government in the north of Iraq has charged that Turkey has an ulterior motive: to destabilize that relatively peaceful and prosperous area.

The Kurds of northern Iraq fly their own flag; they have their own disciplined armed forces, known as pesh merga; and they prohibit the Iraqi army from setting foot on their soil. The Kurdistan Regional Government suspects that

Turkey's fiercely nationalistic generals want not only to deliver a blow to the PKK, but also to show that they will not tolerate independence for the Iraqi Kurds. This is a reasonable assumption. Nationalistic forces in Turkey make no effort to hide their anxiety about self-determination for Kurds in Iraq. They worry that Turkish Kurds - who have recently gained greater cultural and linguistic rights because of Turkey's efforts to gain acceptance by the European Union - will contemplate an autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq and demand similar self-government for themselves. This intersection of unfounded paranoia with genuine security concerns has to be addressed by the Bush administration, the government in Baghdad, and others who stand to suffer if Turkey's violation of Iraqi sovereignty sets off a spiral of destabilizing violence. Already the Shi'ite militia leader Moqtada al-Sadr has threatened to send fighters to the north if Turkish troops do not withdraw from Iraqi

soil. And Turkey is warning that it may leave troops in northern Iraq, to block PKK routes into southeastern Turkey, even after its main invasion force returns home in two or three weeks.

The Bush administration should lean on Turkey, a NATO ally, to stop its helicopter gunship and artillery attacks - which are hitting civilian villages, bridges and roads - and withdraw its forces immediately. America's only true ally in Iraq, the Kurds, should be asked to prevent the PKK from conducting cross-border operations in Turkey.

The soundest way for Turkey to thwart the PKK, though, is to grant full cultural rights to Turkish Kurds and to devote economic development funds to the undeveloped southeast. Turkey ought to be a showcase for minority rights in the region - instead of the power that accelerates the ethnic and sectarian mayhem that is tearing that region apart.

February 25, 2008

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune



Ilyas Akengin/Agence France-Presse

The sister of a Turkish soldier killed in battle with Kurdish rebels was overcome at his funeral Sunday in Diyarbakir, Turkey.

Turkish incursion kills scores

From news reports

ZAKHU, Iraq: Turkish troops and Kurdish rebels battled in northern Iraq on Sunday, leaving scores dead in a major offensive that Baghdad and Washington fear could further destabilize Iraq.

A Turkish helicopter crashed and eight soldiers were killed during the incursion, the Turkish military said. The guerrillas claimed to have shot down a Turkish military helicopter, which went down close to the border, but it was not clear whether any of the reported troop casualties were on board the aircraft. Turkish investigators were trying to determine the cause of the crash.

The eight deaths bring the Turkish toll since the start of the incursion Thursday to 15, according to statements on the military's Web site. Turkish news reports said the slain Turkish soldiers included an army major.

Thirty-three rebels were killed in the fighting Sunday, bringing the rebel death toll since Thursday to 112, including a guerrilla leader, according to the Turkish armed forces.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, disputed the figures. It said 47 Turkish troops and 2 rebels had been killed since Thursday.

The military said clashes with the rebels, which began after Ankara launched the cross-border attack late Thursday after months of aerial bombardment of suspected PKK targets in the mountainous region, were taking place in four areas of northern Iraq, but did not specify any location.

"Terrorist hideouts have been effectively destroyed by warplanes, heli-

Offensive in Iraq worries Baghdad

copter gunships and artillery," the military said.

It said advancing troops were destroying rebel shelters, logistic centers and ammunition. Retreating rebels were trying to gain time by setting up booby traps under the corpses of dead comrades or planting mines on escape routes, according to the military.

The bodies of 5 of the 33 rebels killed Sunday had booby traps under them, the statement said.

Late Sunday, several military helicopters took off from a base in the hilltop Turkish border town of Cukurca, flying with their lights turned off. Earlier in the day, Turkish F-16 jets flew into northern Iraq.

Armored personnel carriers transported troops, and four long-range guns were positioned at the edge of the Cukurca base, one of the main support centers for the Turkish operation.

The Turkish military said it attacked rebel hideouts on Saturday with fighter jets, helicopter gunships and artillery. The hideouts had ammunition and explosives inside, the military said.

Turkey's military released photographs Sunday of its troops in positions behind hilltop snow embankments and walking up snow-covered hills with white ponchos worn over combat gear.

The incursion is the first confirmed Turkish military ground operation in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein in 2003.

The rebels are fighting for autonomy in predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey and have carried out attacks on Turkish targets from bases in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq. The conflict started in 1984 and has claimed as many as 40,000 lives.

Turkey has assured the U.S.-backed Iraqi government that the operation would be limited to attacks on rebels. The United States and European Union consider the PKK a terrorist group.

"It is only an operation geared to cleansing the terrorist camps," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey said Sunday in an address to the youth branch of his governing party. "Our Iraqi brothers, friends and civilians should know that they will never be targeted by the armed forces."

The U.S. defense secretary, Robert Gates, said Sunday while visiting Australia that it would take a broader approach to erode support for the PKK in northern Iraq.

"After a certain point people become inured to military attacks," he said, "and if you don't blend them with these kinds of nonmilitary initiatives, then at a certain point the military efforts become less and less effective."

Iraq's government has also criticized the offensive. Massoud Barzani, head of the regional Kurdish administration in northern Iraq, warned Turkey that it would face large-scale resistance if it targeted civilians in its ground incursion.

The office of the Iraqi Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr demanded an immediate withdrawal of Turkish forces from northern Iraq and advised negotiations.

(Reuters, AP)



Ilyas Akengin/Agence France-Presse

Thousands of people carried banners reading "We Fight for Life, We Die for Peace" as they protested Monday in the Hakurk region of northern Iraq against Turkish operations.

Kurdish civilians in Iraq not targets, Turkey says

The Associated Press

AMADIYA, Iraq: Turkey said Monday that it was not targeting civilians as it chases after separatist rebels in northern Iraq, but people in Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region say they have lived in fear since the incursion began.

Some residents of this area about 30 kilometers, or 19 miles, from the Iraq-Turkey border thought they had escaped to a safe haven, having abandoned homes closer to the border to avoid skirmishes between the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and Turkish troops.

But with the Turks mounting their first confirmed ground operation in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, some say they are fearful of getting caught in the deadly crossfire.

The Turkish military says it has killed 153 rebels since fighting began

Thursday. Turks fired barrage after barrage of artillery shells at rebels Monday, and its military said it had hit about 30 targets in the last 24 hours. The Turks have put their own death toll at 17; a funeral service for 3 soldiers was held Monday.

"Whenever the children hear the

military operations, they feel frightened," said Aoni Mashaghti, a school headmaster. "Most of the women came to school to take their kids out. Whenever they hear any sound of bombardment, the school becomes empty."

Hawzan Hussein, who lives in a community of about 160 families in the area, said people were worried because some of the targets are so close to their homes.

The explosions "have become a daily scene that frightened me with the possibility of hitting our house any time," said Hussein, 25.

Footage of the border area from Associated Press Television News showed Turkish tanks dug into barren hillsides, with armored vehicles taking positions in towns.

The PKK wants autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey, and rebels have carried out attacks in Turkey from bases in Kurdish Iraq. The conflict started in 1984 and has resulted in the deaths of as many as 40,000 people.

Turkey has assured Iraq and the U.S. military that the operation will be limited to attacks on rebels. Both the United States and the European Union consider the PKK a terrorist group.

The Iraqi government has criticized

the offensive.

"We know the threats that Turkey is facing, but military operations will not solve the PKK problem," Ali al-Dabagh, an Iraqi government spokesman, said Saturday.

The rebels, meanwhile, warn that they have the advantage of fighting on their home terrain.

"We are using guerrilla fighting techniques and not fighting as one fixed front," said Hawaw Ruaj, a PKK spokesman. The rebels are skilled at fighting in the rocky mountainous area and changing their positions, he added.

Massoud Barzani, head of the regional administration in the semiautonomous Kurdish area, warned that Turkey would face large-scale resistance if it targeted civilians in its incursion.

Kurdish demands have run the spectrum from self-rule to more-limited rights, like increased freedom to educate and broadcast in their language.

The Turkish government granted some cultural rights to Kurds as part of its bid to join the European Union. But many Kurds, who make up 20 percent of Turkey's population of 75 million, chafe under state controls on freedom of expression.



February 26, 2008

IRAQ: TURKISH INCURSION THREATENS TO DESTABILIZE DOMESTIC SITUATION

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari has warned that Turkey's military operation against the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) could destabilize the entire region.

While that is true, it is more likely that a prolonged operation could exacerbate tensions between the Kurdish region and Baghdad and lead to a deterioration in Iraq's domestic security situation.

Turkey's incursion has gained cautious support from the international community. The United States, United Kingdom, Russia, and Germany have urged that Turkey exercise extreme caution and complete the operations as quickly as possible.

While Western states say they prefer to see a diplomatic resolution to the dispute, none have condemned the incursion, which is expected to last another 10 days.

But some observers have warned that a protracted military operation could see clashes between Iraq's Kurdish peshmerga forces and the Turkish military. Iraqi national security adviser Muwaffaq al-Rubay'i said on February 25 that the longer Turkish forces remain inside Iraq, the greater the chance that a clash could take place. "We need to avoid this at any cost. This has very serious consequences even if this happens by accident," Reuters quoted him as saying.

No Longer Peaceful North

One of the most pressing concerns is that a ground incursion could force mass displacement as villagers flee their homes along the Turkish border for areas farther south. Iraq's Kurdish region is already overflowing with displaced people who have left homes in Mosul, Baghdad, and other "insurgent hotbed" areas for the relative tranquility of the north.

Kurdish villagers inside the region began to flee in August 2007 after both Turkey and Iran began shelling border areas. At the time, Foreign Minister Zebari said hundreds of families were forced to leave their homes. The influx of displaced people has further burdened the Kurdistan regional government (KRG) as it tries to house, feed, and provide aid. The situation also brings enormous social strains as cities try to cope with the influx of people and their demands for housing and jobs.

Businessmen in the northern Kurdish governorate of Dahuk told RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq on February 25 that they too are worried that the incursion will damage trade between the KRG-administered areas and Turkey. According to media reports, the border area remains open for the time being.

Some 80 percent of foreign investment in Iraq's Kurdish region comes from Turkey, and a protracted military operation would also ultimately damage Turkish interests. In Dahuk, the seven largest infrastructure and investment projects are being built by Turkish construction companies, "The New York Times" reported on November 7. Turkish ventures include hotels, an overpass, a museum, and housing projects.

Raising Tensions In Kirkuk

The incursion could also further strain tensions in the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which lies just outside the Kurdish autonomous area. Kirkuk's Turkoman population is largely aligned with the Turkish government. Turkomans, who are ethnic Turks, rely on Turkey's patronage and support in their struggle against Iraq's Kurds for control over Kirkuk. Both groups believe Kirkuk is historically theirs.

Meanwhile, Iraqi Arabs, many of whom were moved to Kirkuk under Saddam Hussein's 1980s Arabization campaign, view Kirkuk as inherently Iraqi, not Kurdish, and they stand firmly opposed to the governorate's inclusion in the Kurdish region. The battle over Kirkuk has put the Kurds at a real disadvantage vis-a-vis their Arab and Turkoman brethren, with the latter two groups viewing Kurdish designs on Kirkuk as greedy, and ultimately tied to the issue of oil.

A referendum on the status of Kirkuk was slated to be held in December. When the referendum was delayed, Kurdish leaders saw it as an affront to their "legitimate rights."



No Help From Baghdad

The Turkish incursion also threatens to strain relations between the KRG and Baghdad. Kamal Kirkuki, deputy speaker of the Kurdish parliament, told Al-Sharqiyah television on February 24 that the Kurds "believe Turkey's aims go beyond what is said in the Turkish media." Kirkuki expressed frustration with the central government, saying Baghdad should have pressed the issue at the United Nations. Instead, the central government "did not move," he said. Assessing the reasons why, he said the Iraqi position is weak with regards to Turkey, and Baghdad could probably not convince Turkey to change its course.

Regional Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani also criticized Baghdad in a February 24 press briefing in Erbil. Commenting on Turkey's bombing of civilian infrastructure, Barzani said: "We believe this demonstrates that despite its stated aims, Turkey is targeting the [Iraqi] Kurdistan region itself. I am surprised by Baghdad's weak response to this clear violation of Iraq's sovereignty."

Indeed, Baghdad has aligned with the Turkish, U.S., and European position that the PKK is a terrorist organization. As such, it has reportedly coordinated with the United States and Turkey on the current operation. White House spokesman Scott Stanzel told the press on February 22, "There's an ongoing dialogue between Iraqis and leaders in Turkey about how to best confront the threat of the PKK." He said the U.S. and the Iraqi governments were notified simultaneously about the Turkish military operation. "We urge [Turkey] to work directly also with the Iraqis, including Kurdish government officials, in determining how best to address the threat of the PKK," he added.

Iraq's leaders, including Kurdish leaders in the central government, have thus far adopted a pragmatic approach to dealing with the Turkey-PKK issue. A statement posted to the Iraqi Foreign Ministry's website on February 22 said Deputy Foreign Minister Labid Abawi summoned the Turkish charge d'affaires in Baghdad to express the government's concerns that a "military buildup on the border...could lead to a deterioration of the security situation in the region and affect the stability [in Iraq], and that any military action on the border by the Turkish Army will be intruding" on Iraq's national sovereignty.

Meanwhile, President Jalal Talabani, who is a Kurd, accepted an invitation by Turkish President Abdullah Gul to visit Turkey last week. The visit is expected to take place in April.

For the time being, it appears that the situation will remain stable as long as Turkey adheres to its stated goals, namely to carry out a limited operation targeting the PKK. Should the Turkish Army venture farther south, stability could be affected to a greater degree. If that happens, Turkey may also be subjected to harsh criticism from the international community. But for now, Turkey appears to have the green light from Baghdad and the international community to rein in the PKK.

BBC NEWS

26 February 2008

Iraq denounces Turkish offensive

The Iraqi government has denounced a Turkish incursion into northern Iraq in some of the strongest terms heard since the operation began last week.

In a statement, the Iraqi cabinet expressed its "rejection and condemnation" of the operation.

It called on Ankara to withdraw its troops immediately.

Snow was impeding operations, Turkey's military said, as fighting entered a fifth day and was said to be close to a rebel base in the Zap valley.

The Turkish military says it has killed 153 rebels and lost 19 soldiers since the cross-border attack began on Thursday night.

The rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) say they have killed 81 soldiers. Neither report can be independently verified. Clashes are also reported to be continuing in the mountainous area of Hakurk.

Ankara accuses the Iraqi government of failing to stop the PKK from using the area as a safe haven.

'Fierce fighting'

The Iraqi cabinet statement, released by spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh, condemned Turkish "military interference", calling it a "violation of Iraq's sovereignty".

It came hours after the deputy speaker of the Kurdish regional parliament decried the incursion and the response from Baghdad, during an emergency session.

Kamal al-Kirkuki said the Iraqi central government should have been "taking the lead in dealing with this problem", but had "acted weakly" in its response.

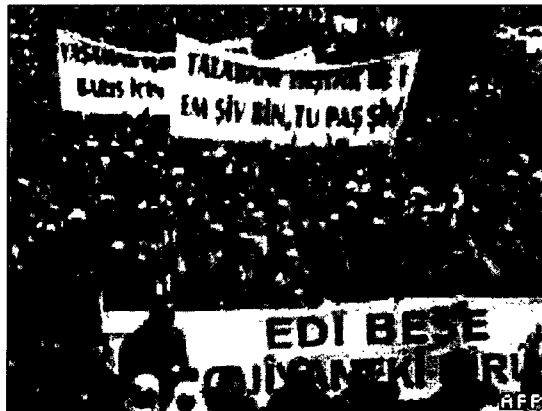
Two Turkish soldiers were killed overnight by rebels using "long-distance guns", the Turkish military said, adding that the attackers had been "silenced". Their losses could not be verified because of the bad weather, it added.

PKK fighters have been taking advantage of the bad weather, which is said to be preventing Turkish air support, to attack Turkish positions, Kurdish media inside Iraq report.

"Fierce fighting erupted, inflicting heavy casualties on both sides" in the Nerwe and Rekan areas, according to the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan media website.

Other Kurdish reports speak of sustained fighting overnight in the Zap valley, about 6km (four miles) from the border.

The camp is used to store rebel equipment and arms, a senior source in the Turkish military told Reuters news agency.



The source said that should the camp fall, it would be "a big blow to the PKK's morale".

Operation defended

On Monday, thousands of residents in Diyarbakir, the main city in Turkey's mainly Kurdish south-east took to the streets to protest against the operation.

Residents of some villages near the Turkish-Iraqi border complain they are being targeted in Turkish air strikes and artillery bombardments.

Speaking in parliament, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan insisted that "terrorists", not civilians, were the targets.

Turkey, he added, had "the right to eradicate those who destroy the peace and comfort of its citizens".

Mr Erdogan thanked the US for providing intelligence for its operation.

Washington has not condemned the offensive, but urges Ankara to show restraint and withdraw its forces as soon as possible.

More than 30,000 people have been killed since the PKK began fighting for a Kurdish homeland in south-eastern Turkey in 1984.

The US, the EU and Turkey regard the PKK as a terrorist organisation.

San Francisco Chronicle

February 26, 2008

Iraqi Kurds fear for their lives in Turk incursions

Civilians who moved for safety can still hear tanks as troops chase separatist rebels

Yahya Barzanji, Associated Press

Amediya, Iraq -- Turkey says it is not targeting civilians as it chases after separatist rebels in northern Iraq, but people in Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region say they have lived in fear since the incursion began.

Some residents of this area 18 miles from the Iraq-Turkey border thought they'd escaped to a safe haven, having abandoned homes closer to the border to avoid skirmishes between the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, and Turkish troops. The United States and the European Union consider the PKK a terrorist group.

But with the Turks mounting their first confirmed ground operation in Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, some say they are fearful of

getting caught in the deadly cross fire.

Already, the Turkish military says it has killed 153 rebels since fighting began Thursday. Turks fired barrage after barrage of artillery shells at rebels Monday, and its military said it had hit 30 targets in the last 24 hours. The Turks have put their own death toll at 17; a funeral service for three guards was held Monday.

"Whenever the children hear the military operations, they feel frightened," said school headmaster Aoni Mashaghti. "Most of the women came to school to take their kids out. Whenever they hear any sound of bombardment, the school becomes empty."

A 20-year-old woman who identified herself only as Hawzan said she fled to the border region from the al Qaeda in Iraq stronghold Mosul for fear of being killed. Now, Turkish tanks have become her neighbor.

"Whenever a Turkish soldier revs the engine of the tank, I feel that we will die," she said. "My daily view is the bombardment of the mountain behind us."

Associated Press Television News footage from the border area showed Turkish tanks dug into barren hillsides, with armored vehicles taking positions in towns. The PKK wants autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey, and rebels have carried out attacks in Turkey from bases in

Kurdish Iraq. The conflict started in 1984 and has killed up to 40,000 people.

Turkey has assured Iraq and the U.S. military that the operation would be limited to attacks on rebels. Lt. Gen. Carter Ham, director of operations for the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters at the Pentagon on Monday that the United States has no indications that the Turks are straying from their original assurance to Washington that their incursion would be "limited in depth and in duration."

The Iraqi government criticized the offensive on Saturday, saying military operations will not solve the PKK problem.

The rebels, meanwhile, warned they

have a home-court advantage. "We are using guerrilla-fighting techniques and not fighting as one fixed front," said Havaw Ruaj, a PKK spokesman. The rebels are skilled at fighting in the rocky mountainous area and changing their positions, he said.

Massoud Barzani, head of the regional administration in the semi-autonomous Kurdish area, warned that Turkey would face large-scale resistance if it targeted civilians in its incursion.

Kurdish demands have run the spectrum from self-rule to more limited rights, such as increased freedom to educate and broadcast in their language.

The Turkish government granted some cultural rights to Kurds as part of its bid to join the European Union. But many Kurds, who comprise 20 percent of Turkey's population of 75 million, chafe under state controls on freedom of expression.

Turkey has conducted air raids against the PKK guerrillas in north-

ern Iraq since December, with the help of U.S. intelligence, and it has periodically carried out "hot pursuits" in which small units sometimes spend only a few hours inside Iraq.

Sitting in a cafe watching TV, Kamil Murad Khan said he joined in a recent demonstration against the Turkish forces, during which the Kurdish forces surrounded the demonstrators.

"I feel the sympathy with PKK, because they are Kurds like us," he said.

But some residents worry less about taking sides than they do about surviving.

Hawzan Hussein, who lives in a community of about 160 families, said people are worried because some of the Turkish targets are so close to their homes.

The explosions "have become a daily scene that frightened me with the possibility of hitting our house any time," the 25-year-old said.

Los Angeles Times

February 26, 2008

Iraq calls on U.S. to intervene in Turkish incursion

The fighting between its ally and a Kurdish separatist group it considers a terrorist organization puts the Bush administration in a bind. 'They could do more,' an Iraqi official says.

By Asso Ahmed and Tina Susman, Special to The Times

SHILADEZAH, IRAQ -- Artillery and gunfire echoed through the mountains of northern Iraq on Monday during continued clashes between invading Turkish troops and Kurdish rebels, with Turkey saying that 153 guerrillas had been killed in four days.

Iraqi Interior Minister Jawad Bolani suggested that the United States should do more to stop the fighting, which has left villagers stranded by bombed-out bridges.

"They are the greatest force on the ground. They have certain obligations," Bolani said Monday of the U.S. military, which has neither intervened in nor commented on the Turkish incursion. "They could do more."

The conflict between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, has put American officials in an uncomfortable position. Turkey is a NATO ally, and the U.S. government considers the PKK to be a terrorist organization. The rebels are seeking a separate Kurdish state.

The White House has confirmed that it knew in advance of Turkey's latest military operation, which began Thursday night. American officials have said Turkey has the right to defend itself against the PKK, which has bases in northern Iraq.

But the U.S. also has an allegiance to Iraq's government, which has protested the Turkish incursion.

"Iraq has requested that the Turkish troops go back to Turkey and respect Iraq's sovereignty," Bolani said at a meeting with foreign journalists.

In Washington, Nabi Sensoy, Turkey's ambassador to the U.S., said in an interview that he could not say how long the military operation would last but promised it would be "limited in size, scope and duration."



"This is only targeted at the PKK," he said. "We have no other agenda."

Sensoy said that Turkish media reports that 10,000 troops were involved in the operation were "greatly exaggerated," but he would not say how large a force was taking part.

Turkey said 15 of its soldiers had been killed so far. However, PKK spokesman Ahmed Denis said the Turkish death toll was far higher.

There was no way to independently confirm the number of casualties on either side, but the frustration and anger of locals in the rugged region was clear.

"Why are the Turks doing this, in our land, our country?" said Aska Shazeen, who said she was unable to reach her home in the village of Rashya because the bridge she had to cross was destroyed. "Who is responsible?" she cried.

At a cafe in Shiladezah, about 20 miles south of the Turkish border in Iraq's Dahuk province, Nijrvan Khalil expressed the sentiments of many locals as he vowed to fight the Turks if the clashes caused any civilian casualties or targeted regions outside of PKK areas of operation.

"I'll be the first to take up arms against them," he said of the Turks.

Most Iraqi Kurds sympathize with the demands of Turkey's minority Kurds for their own homeland.

"They are Kurds like us," said Khalifa Qadir, another customer in the cafe, where a TV was showing news coverage of some Kurds in Turkey demonstrating for independence.

"This is a nation that won't vanish easily," said Qadir. "Their demands should be answered."

The latest fighting has raised concerns that the peshmerga, the fighting forces of Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdistan regional government, could become entangled in the clashes if the Turks are seen as violating their vow to hit only the PKK.

An official with the Kurdistan regional government, Mohammed Muhsin, said the local administration did not want to become part of the conflict but that there was a line over which Turkey must not cross.

"From our side, we have a red line: when our safe villages and the citizens are being attacked by the Turkish army," he said. "We will strike with all that we've got, and the people will participate with the peshmerga."

At the site of a bridge that once connected people from dozens of villages in the Amadiya district, about 15 miles from the Turkish border, the sounds of gunfire and artillery shells were clear. Jets flew over without opening fire, but a peshmerga soldier quickly ushered visiting journalists from the area.

"We must get back," he said. "It is possible the area will be bombarded."

Kurdish Battles

The tension on the Turkish-Iraqi border is a time bomb that Washington must defuse

Grenville Byford

It's a 30-year-old story between Iraq and Turkey: the snow melts, the Kurdish fighters of the PKK emerge from hibernation in Iraq's Kandil Mountains, and fighting starts in Turkey's southeast. This year the Turkish Army started early, pushing thousands of men across the border in the first significant ground incursion since America arrived in Iraq. The Turks apparently procured Washington's acquiescence, but Iraqi Kurds of all stripes, ranging from the central government to ordinary Kurdish citizens to dissident Shiite leader Moqtada al-Sadr, demand Iraqi sovereignty be defended. That demand is addressed to Iraq's Kurdish leaders, Jalal Barzani and Mustafa Talabani. Their Peshmerga fighters, the most and perhaps only, effective part of the new Iraqi Army would do the defending. A Turkish-Peshmerga firefight would be disastrous, and Washington, if alert, will already have brokered a tacit understanding that the incursion will end before Barzani or Talabani feel they must act. The Turks by then will have destroyed supply dumps and inflicted casualties but not dealt the PKK a fatal blow, just like the previous 20-odd incursions.

This year, 2008, is different however. The PKK does face a serious threat, not from Turkey's soldiers but its politicians. In last summer's election, Turkey's governing AK Party displaced the PKK-associated DTP (think IRA and Sinn Fein) as the largest party in the predominantly Kurdish southeast. Nor is AK finished competing for Kurdish votes. Its leader, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan says he "wants" DTP stronghold Diyarbakir, Turkey's largest Kurdish city, in the 2009 local elections. If he gets it, and Erdogan tends to get what he wants, he will deal a death blow to the PKK's claim that only it represents the aspirations of Turkey's Kurds.

What are these aspirations though? Historically, the PKK fought for an independent Kurdistan, but since its leader, Abdullah Ocalan, was captured in 1999, the group has focused on Kurdish rights. Turkey's secular establishment however, sees any move to legitimize Kurdish language and culture as dismembering the republic. They speak of "separatism," whereas Erdogan admits to a "Kurdish problem." My travels in Turkey's southeast suggest few Turkish Kurds want separation, but all yearn for cultural recognition. "We [Turks and Kurds] built this country together" one Kurdish politician told me "Turks have rights in Diyarbakir, and Kurds have rights in Istanbul."



The problem goes back to the republic's beginnings. "Happy is he who can say, 'I am a Turk'" proclaimed Turkey's founder, Kemal Ataturk. It's a slogan Turkey's Army has plastered across the southeast. Unfortunately, the word "Turk" means both citizen of the republic and ethnic Turk. Ataturk originally meant "citizen," but most Kurds today hear "ethnic Turk." They might say "I am a Turkish citizen" more or less happily, but being Kurds, they are damned if they will say they are Turks. A start has been made at multicultural reform, but much remains to be done. Erdogan's problem is that while his political ambitions in Diyarbakir require he attempt it, his base has insisted that he first remove the ban on women with headscarves attending university. For this, he needs the help of Turkey's nationalist MHP, which adamantly opposes multiculturalism. As do Turkey's generals, the longtime cheerleaders for today's incursion. In approving it finally, Erdogan probably calculates that he gets the generals off his back and maybe blunts the PKK summer offensive, so he can push ahead with political reform.

The PKK in fact faces a defining moment: absent terrorist violence, Erdogan will have the running room to enact reform, but he will gain politically if he seizes the opportunity. If the PKK truly cares about reform, it will accept its partial eclipse by AK as the necessary price. If the PKK, however, cares only to demonstrate its own importance, then it will struggle to overcome its losses during the incursion and visit violence upon Turkey's southeast this summer. No Turkish government will push reform while soldiers die in terror attacks. History suggests the PKK will opt for its own narrow interests, which may be why AK is gaining Kurdish support.

Meanwhile Barzani and Talabani hold a critical card. One axiom of counterinsurgency is that a guerrilla force with significant local support is undefeatable. Against Turks (or Americans), Iraqi Kurds will support the PKK. Only their own

Peshmerga have greater claim on their loyalty. So only Barzani and Talabani can control the PKK, though they deny this capability because they have no wish to fight fellow Kurds. What do they want, though, that might alter their calculus? The short answer is independence, or as much devolution as they can negotiate with their fellow Iraqis. To secure their gains, however, they need a lifeline that does not come through southern Iraq. Something only Turkey can provide.

The deal is evident: Barzani and Talabani control the PKK, if Turkey acquiesces to whatever level of independence they can get. Turkey fears this quasi-Kurdistan would attract its own Kurds, but surely the PKK is the larger problem. Anyway, serious political reform should defang the threat. Northern Iraq may look peaceful and democratic to Westerners focused on the south, but Turkey's Kurds understand it is really two mutually antagonistic, quasi-feudal statelets named Barzanistan and Talabanistan.

The United States can and should broker this deal as the best way to avoid a border war between Iraq and Turkey. Superficially it foreshadows the effective breakup of Iraq. But who are we kidding? Barzani and Talabani are going to go for as much independence as they can get anyway, and with their powerful, American-armed Peshmerga, this will be a lot. They will likely be more cooperative if they think their gains are secured by Turkey's acquiescence. Meanwhile, helping the Turkish government draw the poison of the PKK will promote Turkey's development as a real, First World democracy. That's something as important to America's long-term interest as a unitary Iraq.

Grenville Byford researches and writes about Turkey and the Muslim world. He is a former affiliate of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and currently lives in Paris.

THE TURKISH INVASION COULD DESTROY A UNIFIED IRAQ

The biggest ground invasion since 2003



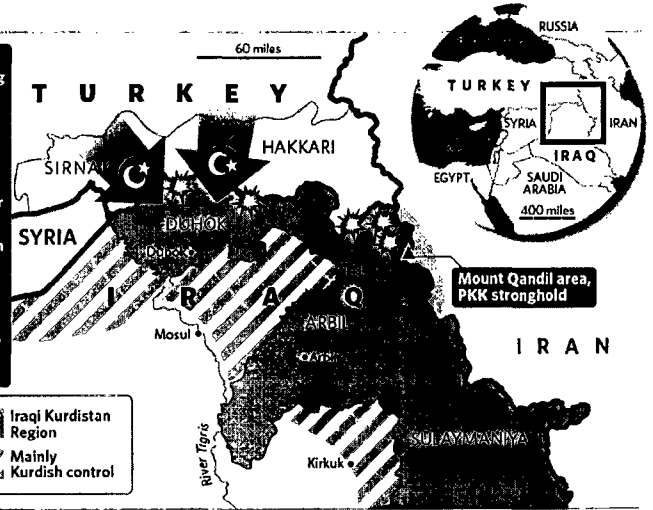
24 Oct 2007: Turkish fighter jets begin bombing PKK bases and mountain paths used by rebels to cross from Iraq to Turkey

15 Dec 2007: Turkish jets kill 10 people – civilians and the PKK – in three days of bombing in border area

18 Dec 2007: 300 Turkish troops move two miles into northern Iraq

Yesterday: Turkish army launches a ground offensive, deploying up to 10,000 troops, reaching 16 miles into Iraq

 Turkish incursions	 Iraqi Kurdistan Region
 Turkish air strikes	 Mainly Kurdish control



Patrick Cockburn:

Iraq is disintegrating faster than ever. The Turkish army invaded the north of the country last week and is still there. Iraqi Kurdistan is becoming like Gaza where Israel can send in its tanks and helicopters at will.

The US, so sensitive to any threat to Iraqi sovereignty from Iran or Syria, has blandly consented to the Turkish attack on the one part of Iraq which was at peace. The Turkish government piously claims that its army is in pursuit of PKK Turkish Kurd guerrillas, but it is unlikely to inflict serious damage on them as they hide in long-prepared bunkers and deep ravines of the Kurdish mountains. What the Turkish incursion is doing is weakening the Kurdistan Regional Government, the autonomous Kurdish zone, the creation of which is one of the few concrete achievements of the US and British invasion of Iraq five years ago.

One of the most extraordinary developments in the Iraqi war has been the success with which the White House has been able to persuade so much of the political and media establishment in the US that, by means of "the Surge", an extra 30,000 US troops, it is on the verge of political and military success in Iraq. All that is needed now, argue US gener-

als, is political reconciliation between the Iraqi communities.

Few demands could be more hypocritical. American success in reducing the level of violence over the last year has happened precisely because Iraqis are so divided. The Sunni Arabs of Iraq were the heart of the rebellion against the American occupation. In fighting the US forces, they were highly successful. But in 2006, after the bombing of the Shia shrine at Samarra, Baghdad and central Iraq was wracked by a savage civil war between Shia and Sunni. In some months the bodies of 3,000 civilians were found, and many others lie buried in the desert or disappeared into the river. I do not know an Iraqi family that did not lose a relative, and usually more than one.

The Shia won this civil war. By the end of 2006 they held threequarters of Baghdad. The Sunni rebels, fighting the Mehdi Army Shia militia and the Shia, dominated the Iraqi army and police, and also under pressure from al Qa'ida, decided to end their war with US forces. They formed al-Sahwa, the Awakening movement, which is now allied to and paid for by the US.

In effect Iraq now has an 80,000 strong Sunni militia which does not hide its con-

tempt for the Iraqi government, which it claims is dominated by Iranian controlled militias. The former anti-American guerrillas have largely joined al-Sahwa. The Shia majority, for its part, is determined not to let the Sunni win back their control of the Iraqi state. Power is more fragmented than ever.

This all may sound like good news for America. For the moment its casualties are down. Fewer Iraqi civilians are being slaughtered. But the Sunni have not fallen in love with the occupation. The fundamental weakness of the US position in Iraq remains its lack of reliable allies outside Kurdistan. At one moment, British officers used to lecture their American counterparts, much to their irritation, about the British Army's rich experience of successful counter-insurgency warfare in Malaya and Northern Ireland. "That showed a fundamental misunderstanding of Iraq on our part," a former British officer in Basra told me in exasperation. "In Malaya the guerrillas all came from the minority Chinese community and in Northern Ireland from the minority Roman Catholics. Basra was exactly the opposite. The majority supported our enemies. We had no friends there."

This lack of allies may not be so immediately obvious in

Baghdad and central Iraq because both Shia and Sunni are willing and at times eager to make tactical alliances with US forces. But in the long term neither Sunni nor Shia Arab want the Americans to stay in Iraq. Hitherto the only reliable American allies have been the Kurds, who are now discovering that Washington is not going to protect them against Turkey.

Very little is holding Iraq together. The government is marooned in the Green Zone. Having declared the Surge a great success, the US military commanders need just as many troops to maintain a semblance of control now as they did before the Surge. The mainly Shia police force regards al-Sahwa as anti-government guerrillas wearing new uniforms.

The Turkish invasion should have given the government in Baghdad a chance to defend Iraq's territorial integrity and burnish its patriotic credentials. Instead the prime minister Nouri al-Maliki has chosen this moment to have his regular medical check up in London, a visit which his colleagues say is simply an excuse to escape Baghdad. Behind him he has left a country which is visibly falling apart.

The land operation: For how long and to what extent?

Militarily speaking, the difference between launching a 'security operation' and becoming an 'occupying force' is as thin as a stick

Cengiz CANDAR

The land operation launched by the Turkish military into northern Iraq is obviously not a "picnic," as the death toll reveals. The involvement of special units makes loss of life more meaningful and the magnitude of the incursion brings questions to mind about the length and scope of it.

We hear a quite strong voice rising in Turkey and saying "Let's form a buffer zone; let's settle in northern Iraq." Some "experts" point out that the encounters would continue a couple of weeks and that we should remain in Iraq by the end of April.

If the scope of the operation is not clearly defined, Turkey could face a risk of losing stability in the southeast, in addition to being stuck in the north of Iraq. Militarily speaking, the difference between a "security operation" and becoming an "occupying force" is as thin as a stick. Serious deviations could be seen in calculations made at the table and the necessities surface in the battlefield.

All the way to Kandil?:

It is no secret that the political-military headquarters of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) are located in the Kandil mountain range together with a significant part of its armed forces. The land operation, on the other hand, is taking place in a relatively remote area from Kandil. Almost everyone knows that a frontal fight by regular forces against an irregular one is impossible. And by looking at the map, we see that the operation plans to block the routes of PKK infiltration to Turkey and to ruin the organization's logistic infrastructure in the region. However, one realizes that the PKK would relocate in the areas evacuated after the "mission is accomplished." In this case, will the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) remain in the Iraqi side of the border? If so, for how long? Is this possible "politically?" These are valid questions, but are not yet answered. This is a "United States-approved"

incursion by all means. A military operation "despite the U.S." would not be possible. But we have to realize that the U.S. "green light" is for a limited distance and period. Iraqi Kurds have already officially begun to accuse the U.S. The statement issued by the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates who is expected in Ankara next week and who dramatically fine tuned the U.S.-Turkey policy by giving support to Turkey against the PKK, despite "isolating Iran," is more critical. Gates clearly announced that the incursion cannot alone resolve the "PKK issue." And he directly answered to a related question with "No." Then the defense secretary said:

"I think all our experience in Iraq and Afghanistan shows us that while dealing with a terrorist problem does require security operations, it also requires economic and political initiatives. Military efforts must be supplemented by other political and economic outreach to Kurds. After a certain point people become inured to military attacks and if you do not blend them with these kinds of non-military initiatives, then at a certain point the military efforts become less and less effective."

The short translation of this is that Turkey is expected to come up with "political projects" to resolve the "Kurdish issue." As for the on-going operation, Gates said that he wants the incursion to "come to a quick end."

If the operation lasts longer, the European Union will raise objections. Besides the central Baghdad administration, which was criticized previously by the regional Kurdish administration in northern Iraq as an excuse to make a flimsy objection to the incursion, will assert that the "sovereignty of Iraq is being violated" and speak out louder.

If the Turkish military remains in Iraq for a longer period of time, we would be in trouble, not only militarily but also politi-

cally and diplomatically. We cannot not say yet that Turkey has already stuck, or is about to get stuck, in the northern Iraq quagmire but this will happen, if the Turkish troops fight against the Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga units next to the PKK.

The thick red line:

Until now the operation region consists of relatively isolated areas rarely populated with the peshmerga units. The PKK wants to pull Turkish troops inside the region and make them fight against the Iraqi Kurdish forces. The PKK leaders already claim that the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani invited the Turkish land operation. By doing so, they are trying to form public opinion in favor of the PKK and forcing Iraqi Kurdish leaders to resist against Turkey. If the field of operation is stretched to the south, to inside regions, this would have an impact on all balances in Iraq and more importantly could have political outcomes. The structure in Iraq is quite fragile. Deployment of the peshmerga forces in Baghdad, Mosul and traditional Shiite-Sunni conflict areas played a role in relatively decreasing acts of violence taking place in the middle parts of the country. If Kurds pull out these forces from where they are deployed now and move them up to the north, the security balance in central Iraq, which is hung by a thread already, will collapse. And the U.S. does not have the capacity to fix this at the moment.

Consequently the U.S. "green light" given to Turkish forces would transform into a "thick red line" in case of a possible fight between the Turkish military and the peshmerga.

The decision mechanism in Ankara and politics is to show some talent to make this "fine tuning." How can we ensure that this is done already, or would be done? We have to wait and see the developments in the coming days to have a full-fledged answer to this question.

Residents fear more Turkish attacks

The call for Turkish base closures grows amid residents and government officials.

By Khidhr Domle
The Kurdish Globe

"We fear that our land will become the battlefield and we will lose the stability and source of our lives."-Osman Ibrahim, Sereevillage resident. During an

extraordinary session held on Tuesday, Kurdistan Region's Parliament asked Kurdistan Regional Government to close Turkish military bases inside the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Parliament called for the cancellation of all agreements and

treaties signed between the former Iraqi system and Turkey, and also called on the current Iraqi authorities to publicize past and present agreements signed between Iraqi government and Ankara concerning Kurdistan.

The Peshmerga and Interior ministries read from reports concerning the Turkish border offensive, which included "asking the United States to prevent Turkish attacks because they cause instability in the area."

Both ministries requested that the U.S. "commit to its obligations toward Iraq," and requested that Baghdad "hold a session of the Security Council" on the issue. Closing Turkish Army bases inside Kurdistan Region and the withdrawal of the Turkish troops were top demands in the reports.

The Turkmen Bloc in Kurdistan Parliament also voiced their call for Turkey to think of peaceful and democratic solutions.

Border residents frightened and worried As Turkish troops destroyed four bridges across a remote mountain river on the Iraqi Kurdistan border, border residents are experiencing fear and anxiety at the sounds of Turkish aircraft.

"The continuous Turkish air strikes and troop operations have planted fear in the hearts of the people of the border districts, and people have started to flee," said Hassan Osman, who was with his friend, breeding sheep and cows, to The Globe.

Osman added: "A month ago, this district [Gali Balinda] was full of shepherds, peasants, farmers, and landowners. But now, the district is deserted because they are worried about their lives."

The district of Gali Balinda is 15 kilometers from the Turkish border. It was previously shelled, causing residents to flee. The most recent Turkish

attack destroyed three bridges, and Osman stated: "We are filled with terror when we come here, but we have no other choice because it is the source of our living."

stand against them with all the forces that we have, and we can say that the Turkish troops have no place in our district," Hussein Qudshi, who is 63 years old, told the independent

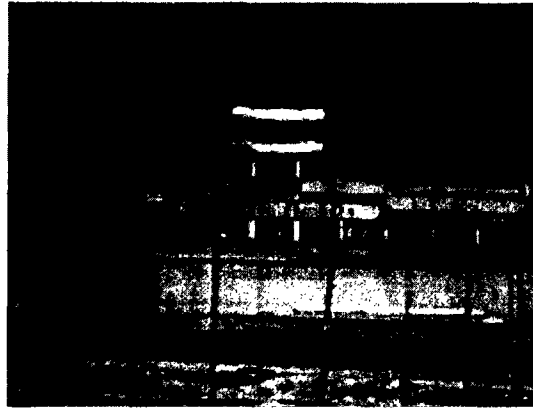
Turkish operations would increase to this extent.

"We don't know to what degree our life will continue like this; the threats, shelling, and military maneuvers have affected us and we are anxious about the situation," said Muhammad Salim Sawar, 53, adding: "Why don't they leave us and let us be safe? What's our relationship with Turkish problems?"

The continuous Turkish shelling has struck fear in the people of Seree village because the base of Turkish troops is also present there.

"I wish I had an opportunity to close the Turkish base here, and we want the problem solved," said Abdullah Salih Gabriel, 43. Gabriel added: "The Turkish shelling has destabilized our lives, from stability to thinking. The war means destabilization in our future and it causes fear; we hoped that our future would be better, but Turkish threats have changed everything."

Another resident, Osman Ibrahim, who also fled the area, added: "We are afraid and we cannot move freely in our land; fear has conquered our lives. Turkey wants to share its problem with us, and its troops shell our place where there are no PKK guerrillas. That's why we fear that our land will become the battlefield and we will lose the stability and source of our lives."



This picture shows a view of the Turkish army base in Bamarne, February 25. Residents prevented Turkish tanks moving forward from the base on Friday, 45 kilometers from northern Duhok city. GLOBE PHOTO/ Safen Hamed

There is massive discontent with Turkish troop presence in the district and most want them to leave. Residents resisted the arrival of Turkish troops, preventing Turkish tanks moving forward from the Bamarne base, 45 kilometers from northern Duhok city.

"We stood against the Turkish tanks coming from their bases in Bamarne, and if the tanks come again, we will again

news agency Voices of Iraq.

Qudshi, who was not far from the Turkish base, added: "It is enough that they, the Turkish troops, have attacked us for many years, and the sooner they leave the better it is because we are not going to leave our land and let them conquer it and walk freely. We are defending and will defend our land." In the border villages, residents didn't expect



27 February 2008

Big powers react to Turkish invasion

A Kurdish member of Iraqi Parliament holds U.S. responsible.



A Kurdish Peshmarga soldier guards at the Ibrahim Khalil crossing border point with Turkey while tankers are still moving and transporting fuel in and out, Saturday February 23. GLOBE PHOTO/ Safen Hamed

By Qassim Khidhir

The Kurdish Globe

AS THE region's sovereignty is

invaded, Peshmarga forces are on full alert and ready to defend the region's interests and citizens.

Britain called for Turkey to withdraw its forces from Kurdistan Region in "northern Iraq," but at the same time it condemned Turkish-Kurdish PKK militants for mounting cross-border attacks.

In a statement, the British Foreign Office said, "The United Kingdom condemns PKK attacks in Turkey and the loss of life that these attacks have caused and understands Turkey's desire to counter the PKK."

"We would encourage Turkey to withdraw from Iraqi territory as early as possible and to take the greatest possible care to avoid causing harm to the civilian population."

Britain, which supports Turkey's European Union ambitions, said it was working with the governments in Ankara and Baghdad, plus the Kurdish regional authorities in northern Iraq, to resolve the issue diplomatically. It also said it wanted to prevent I

raqi territory from being used as a base for attacks on Turkey. Also, Germany warned Turkey of the "risk of destabilization" following its military incursion into Iraqi Kurdistan and said it must act within international law.

German government spokesman Martin Jaeger said that Berlin was watching developments with "a great deal of anxiety."

"In all events, respect for international law must be the criteria for any action," he told a press briefing in the German capital. "We call on the Turkish government, in its fight against terrorism, to restrict itself to measures which, in the last resource, are necessary for the protection of the Turkish population, and we warn against an additional worsening of the situation."

The presence of Turkish troops in Iraqi Kurdistan "represents not a small risk of destabilization and our embassy in Ankara is trying to make contact with the Secretary-General of the [Turkish] National Security Council to have clearer information," he added. Australian Foreign Minister Stephen Smith called on Turkey to withdraw its troops from Iraqi Kurdistan Region "as soon as possible."

Smith said Turkey should recognize Iraq's sovereignty and that its soldiers in Iraq should leave. "Irrespective of the number of troops, the Turks should respect Iraq's sovereignty and they should retreat back over the border as soon as possible," he told the Nine network.

The Kurds believe that Turkey is using PKK as an excuse to invade Kurdistan Region, and they judge the Turkish raids have a secondary purpose of discouraging a referendum on Kirkuk city. On Saturday, February 23, the Kurdistan Region Presidency warned Turkey that if civilians come under attack or harmed, then the Kurds would have no option but to defend themselves against Turkish troops.

"Nowadays we have doubts about the real intention of Turkish attacks either targeting Kurdistan Region or the PKK. If not, why were the bridges located deep in civilian settle-

ments destroyed?" read the statement issued by the Kurdistan Presidency. The White House called on Turkey to limit its incursion inside Iraq.

"It's obviously not an ideal situation," White House spokeswoman Dana Perino told reporters. "We hope that this is a short-term incursion so that they can help deal with the threat." The White House hopes Turkey's latest armed raids in Kurdistan will not harm civilians, a spokeswoman said on Monday. She said that U.S. officials were in contact with the Turkish government and praised the dialogue between Ankara and Iraqi leaders over the problem.

"We are in communication and dialogue with them to make sure that this is handled in a way that is narrow, narrowly targeted, to hit the PKK and to limit and hopefully cause no civilian casualties," she said. Meanwhile, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said he hopes Turkey keeps its ground campaign against PKK militants in Kurdistan Region "short," and urged it to do more to reconcile with its Kurdish minority.

"In terms of the current operations, I would hope that it would be short, that it would be precise and avoid the loss of innocent life, and that they leave as quickly as they can accomplish the mission," Gates told reporters. Asked how short, he said, "The shorter the better." Gates, who travels next week to Ankara, said he did not think Iraq's stability was threatened by the Turkish operations, and he said Turkey has suffered from PKK attacks on Turkish troops and civilians in its territory. But he said Turkey should show respect for Iraqi sovereignty by being more open with the Iraqi and Kurdistan Region governments

about its plans and intentions.

"I think there can always be improvement in the timeliness and the depth of the dialogue. I think it can't just be a one-time event. There has to be an ongoing dialogue," he said.

Gates cited the counter-insurgency lessons the United States has learned in Afghanistan and Iraq in urging Turkey to complement its military operations with initiatives aimed at addressing Kurdish grievances and eliminating popular support for the PKK.

"But these economic and political measures are really important because after a certain point people become injured to military attacks," he said.

"And if you don't blend them with these kinds of non-military initiatives, then at a certain point the military efforts become less and less effective."

Kurds say U.S. responsible for Turkish aggression

"Everybody knows that the mission of coalition troops is to protect the Iraqi borders, [especially] after disbanding the former army in 2003 and until the [new] Iraqi security forces are fully prepared to assume the task," said Sami Atroshi, Kurdish MP in Baghdad. The Kurdish MP considered the U.S. approval of the Turkish attacks "illogical" and said it harmed the Kurds. He

stressed the importance of Turkey adopting diplomatic relations with Iraq instead of military measures to resolve the PKK issue. Kurdistan Region PM Nechirvan Barzani, in a press conference on Sunday, February 24, said: "The Americans told us that the Turkish operations would be limited and would end by the beginning of the current year, but unfortunately, we are approaching the third month and the problem remains."

What are the real casualties of PKK and Turkish forces?

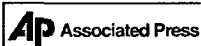
The PKK says since the Turkish attacks began last Thursday, February 21, PKK fighters have killed 80 Turkish soldiers and shot down a Turkish helicopter; PKK fighters also killed several Kurds who collaborated with the Turkish Army. But the PKK denies this information announced by the Turkish Army regarding PKK casualties.

"What was mentioned by the Turkish Army regarding PKK casualties is far from the truth since last Thursday only four PKK guerrillas were killed and 18 were wounded," said the chief of PKK foreign relations, Ahmed Deniz, to The Kurdish Globe in a phone call.

Deniz said heavy clashes continue between PKK fighters and Turkish forces in the areas of Zab, Ava Shin, and Basti in Amadya district. He said Turkish forces retreated in four areas in this district, and the Turkish Army is now just three kilometers inside Kurdistan Region territory. The Turkish Army said it has killed 153 Kurds

fighters since sending troops into northern Iraq on February 21, as it resisted calls by the U.S. to end the military operation. The official Web site of the Turkish military reported that the Turkish Army has killed 41 PKK militants in the past 24 hours. Two Turkish soldiers also died in the fighting, bringing the death toll among Turkish troops to 17.

Turkey won't end the military operation until "targets are reached," government spokesman Cemil Cicek told reporters in the Turkish capital of Ankara, adding that Turkey was permitted to enter northern Iraq under articles of the United Nations Charter governing rights to self defense



February 27, 2008

Lawmakers: Europe Must Do More in Iraq

BRUSSELS, Belgium (AP) -- EU efforts have failed to help improve the situation in Iraq, a European Parliament report said Wednesday, calling for the 27-nation union to expand its presence on the ground.

Since 2003, the European Union has committed more than \$1.2 billion for reconstruction.

But "Europe can do much more and much better, namely by ... considerably expanding its presence on the ground and by finding more creative ways to use its resources," the report said.

Lawmakers from the European Parliament's foreign affairs committee called for the EU to expand its presence by operating on the ground in the Kurdish region in the north, among others, and by boosting its operations in the cities of Basra and Irbil.

They urged the EU to debate a new strategy in Iraq with the United States and

with Washington, to hold talks with Syria and Iran to discuss Iraq's future "without prejudice to any other issue of concern."

The report also recommended channeling aid into justice, human rights, financial and budget management, health and education. Lawmakers also called for strengthened border controls that would reduce the flow of weapons into the country, and for a legally binding EU code of conduct on arms exports.

The EU should make it easier for Iraqis to find refuge in its member states and scrap "arbitrary criteria to granting protection and prevent any forced return," the report said.

Some 40,000 Iraqi refugees are estimated to have reached the EU in 2007 - double the number in 2006, which was twice the number as in 2005.

The 785-member European Parliament is based in Strasbourg, France.

L'armée turque mène de durs combats dans le nord de l'Irak

Des milliers de soldats turcs sont engagés dans une bataille qui vise les places fortes du PKK et qui pourrait durer plusieurs semaines

ISTAMBOUL
De notre correspondante

Les combats entre l'armée turque et les activistes kurdes du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) se sont intensifiés, hier, au cinquième jour de l'opération «Soleil» lancée par Ankara dans le nord de l'Irak. Selon certaines sources nord-irakiennes, les vallées de Cemco, de Hakurk et de Zap étaient la proie hier «d'intenses bombardements».

Si Ankara n'a pas confirmé la prise de Zap, l'un des principaux bastions du PKK dans la région, l'encerclement de ce site est déjà en soi un symbole pour l'armée turque qui ne s'y est pas introduite depuis 1996. La prochaine étape pourrait être les monts Kandil, situés à l'extrême sud-est de la frontière turco-irakienne. C'est là que se trouvent les quartiers généraux du PKK. Ankara estime à environ 4000 le nombre de rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak.

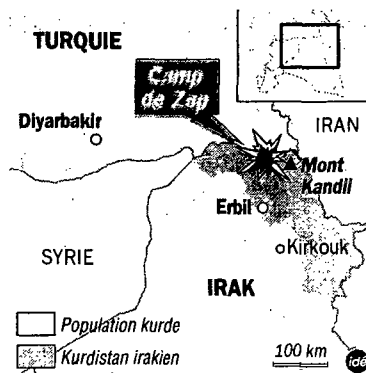
Les bilans humains fournis par les deux parties constituent les seuls indicateurs de la violence des combats, à défaut de pouvoir confirmer sur le terrain – quasiment inaccessible – l'intensité des opérations. Selon un communiqué publié lundi soir par l'armée turque, 17 soldats et plus de 153 terroristes seraient tombés en quatre jours de combat.

L'agence Firat, proche du PKK, évoque de son côté la mort de trois militants kurdes et de 81 soldats turcs. Interrogé sur la durée de cette opération, le gouvernement tentait hier d'éluder la question. Le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a simplement affirmé que



STRANGEY TURKISH PRESS

Soldats turcs dans la province de Sirnak. Cette incursion terrestre est la plus importante menée depuis dix ans par la Turquie dans le nord de l'Irak.



les soldats rentreraient «le plus tôt possible.» La plupart des observateurs évoquent une opération pouvant durer de deux semaines à deux mois.

Cette incursion terrestre, la plus importante menée depuis dix ans par l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak, reste toutefois très éloignée, par son ampleur, des opérations menées dans les années 1990. Bien que l'armée refuse de préciser le nombre de troupes engagées, les estimations ne dépassent pas 10000 hommes, dont 3000 soldats d'élite. En 1995, la Turquie avait envoyé 35000 hommes dans le nord de l'Irak, dans le cadre de l'opération «Acier» et y avait instauré une zone tampon. Autre différence de taille, à l'époque de Saddam Hussein, l'armée

turque avait obtenu le soutien de certaines formations kurdes d'Irak, dont celle de Massoud Barzani, actuel président de la région autonome kurde d'Irak. Or, aujourd'hui, si l'armée turque intervient avec le soutien implicite des Américains, très présents dans la région, elle n'a pas l'aval des autorités locales, accusées du coup par Ankara d'entretenir des relations de «connivences» avec le PKK.

L'armée turque, dans un communiqué publié dimanche, avait ainsi pris à partie l'administration kurde d'Irak, attendant qu'elle «empêche l'organisation terroriste kurde (...) d'entrer dans la région et d'y trouver protection». Selon Ankara, de nombreux militants seraient en train de

« Nous défendrons notre sol si les opérations prennent davantage d'ampleur. »

fuir les montagnes et chercheraient un abri auprès des autorités locales. Le pouvoir central irakien, à Bagdad, a de son côté haussé le ton hier. «Nous défendrons notre sol si

les opérations prennent davantage d'ampleur», a déclaré le ministre de l'intérieur irakien.

Au cinquième jour de cette opération, la tension commence à monter en Turquie. Les enterrements de militaires tombés au combat sont quotidiens et se sont transformés, notamment lundi à Ankara, en manifestation contre le PKK. Dans le même temps, plus de

10000 personnes ont défilé avant-hier à Diyarbakir, principale ville de la région kurde du pays, pour exiger l'arrêt des opérations. Le rassemblement, auquel ont participé les dirigeants locaux du parti prokurde DTP et l'ancienne députée Leyla Zana, s'est transformé en meeting politique, avec cette fois drapeaux kurdes et posters d'Abdullah Öcalan, le chef du PKK, incarcéré dans une prison turque où il purge une peine

de prison à vie.

Hier, des incidents ont été observés à Van, où une dizaine de personnes ont été interpellées lors d'un rassemblement. En dépit de ces tensions, l'opinion publique se montre assez modérée. La vague d'ultranationalisme qui avait grossi à l'automne dernier à l'occasion du vote de la loi autorisant l'intervention transfrontalière ne s'est pas encore manifestée.

DELPHINE NERBOLLIER

L'offensive turque contre les rebelles kurdes en Irak s'amplifie

L'infanterie et les avions chasseurs turcs opèrent jusqu'à plusieurs dizaines de kilomètres à l'intérieur du territoire irakien. Bagdad demande que les combats cessent « au plus vite »

Présentée par Ankara comme « limitée », l'offensive aéroterrestre lancée par l'armée turque, jeudi 21 février, contre les rebelles autonomistes du Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK), retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak, s'est singulièrement amplifiée ces derniers jours. Selon Ankara, qui a reconnu la perte, samedi, d'un hélicoptère de combat et de quinze de ses soldats – 47 selon ses adversaires –, 112 combattants du PKK auraient été tués depuis le début des opérations.

Initiée par un barrage de tirs d'artillerie, jeudi, contre les camps et les redoutes implantés depuis des années par le PKK dans les montagnes enneigées du nord irakien, l'offensive est « uniquement destinée », selon le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, à « nettoyer les camps terroristes ». « Nos frères irakiens, amis et civils doivent savoir qu'ils ne seront jamais la cible de [notre] armée », a-t-il rassuré.

Appuyés par des dizaines de chars d'assaut, des chasseurs bombardiers F16 et des hélicoptères, environ deux mille soldats de l'infanterie turque ont, selon l'agence Reuters, pénétré jusqu'à plusieurs dizaines de kilomètres à l'intérieur du Kurdistan irakien. Ils sont aux prises avec trois à quatre mille guérilleros du PKK disséminés dans les montagnes qui bordent la frontière irako-turque.

Lancée avec l'accord et la coopération

militaires – au moins en matière de renseignements – des Etats-Unis, présents en Irak depuis avril 2003 et qui « doivent » leur aide à Ankara en tant qu'alliés de l'OTAN, l'offensive turque, qui n'est pas la première mais la plus large depuis près d'une décennie, « doit se terminer au plus vite » a demandé, dimanche, le gouvernement irakien. Embarrassé, ce dernier a fait savoir que les opérations turques, initialement considérées comme « comprises et légitimes », représentaient désormais « une menace pour la souveraineté de l'Irak » et « un risque pour la sécurité et la stabilité de la région ». Largement autonome, le Kurdistan irakien où se déroulent les combats était, jusqu'à présent, la seule région d'Irak à disposer d'une relative sécurité.

La République islamique d'Iran voisine, elle aussi aux prises avec les rebelles kurdes de la branche anti-iranienne du PKK (baptisée Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan, Pejak), qui mène des raids réguliers contre les troupes iraniennes basées dans le nord-ouest du pays à majorité kurde, a annoncé le renforcement des mesures de sécurité sur sa frontière avec le nord de l'Irak.

Samedi, Massoud Barzani, le président du Kurdistan irakien, une région d'environ 5 millions d'habitants, ouvertement accusé par les politiciens turcs d'entretenir des « relations de connivence » avec le PKK, a prévenu que si « des civils » kurdes irakiens étaient touchés par les combats, il lancerait « un appel à la résistance générale ». On redoute à Washington et dans les capitales européennes pour qui le PKK est une « organisation terroriste », que les dizaines de milliers de peshmergas, qui forment l'armée autonome du Kurdistan irakien – et qui comptent des anciens combattants du PKK turc dans leurs rangs – finissent par entrer dans la bataille.

Washington redoute que l'armée autonome du Kurdistan irakien finisse par entrer dans la « bataille »

Pour l'instant, ces derniers se tiennent à l'écart des affrontements, qui ont lieu assez loin des zones urbaines de l'entité autonome. Ils ont néanmoins mis en garde Ankara contre tout empiètement sur leurs

positions. « Les peshmergas sont en état d'alerte et se défendront si les forces turques lancent une incursion dans les territoires sous le contrôle du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan », a prévenu leur porte-parole, Jabba Yawar.

En position difficile, le PKK a lancé, dimanche, un appel à ses sympathisants, à répondre à l'offensive turque. « S'ils (l'Etat turc) veulent nous détruire, a déclaré Bahoz Erdal, chef de l'aile militaire du PKK, nos jeunes doivent rendre la vie, dans les grandes métropoles, insupportable. Les jeunes Kurdes doivent se réunir par groupes de deux pour brûler chaque soir des centaines de voitures. » Le Komalen Ciwan, considéré comme une organisation de jeunesse du PKK, a pour sa part appelé à une propagation des actes de violence « en Syrie, en Iran et en Europe » – où vivent beaucoup de Kurdes – et à « transformer les villes turques en enfer ».

D'Australie, Robert Gates, le secrétaire américain à la défense, qui doit se rendre à Ankara cette semaine et qui avait approuvé le principe de l'offensive – la secrétaire d'Etat Condoleezza Rice ayant évoqué jeudi « l'absolue solidarité des Etats-Unis avec la Turquie » – a dit « espérer » que les opérations seraient « brèves, précises », et que l'armée turque quitterait l'Irak « sitôt la mission accomplie ». Laisant entendre que le conflit avec le PKK, qui a fait plus de 37 000 morts depuis 1984, ne pouvait être réglé militairement, il a souligné que des « mesures économiques et politiques » devraient être mises en œuvre par Ankara, car « passé un certain seuil, les gens deviennent insensibles aux attaques ». ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

Le Monde

Mardi 26 février 2008

IRAK

Les Kurdes trahis par l'ami américain

Sans le soutien des Américains, la Turquie n'aurait jamais osé lancer une offensive dans le Nord irakien. Une opération qui viserait le Kurdistan et non le seul PKK, estime-t-on sur place.

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR
(extraits)
Boston

Le 24 février, le général kurde Mohammed Mohsen a descendu le drapeau américain, l'a plié et l'a rangé dans son bureau. Son geste traduit la colère qui gronde dans le Nord kurde de l'Irak devant le soutien des États-Unis à la campagne menée par la Turquie contre les rebelles séparatistes opérant dans la région. L'offensive turque contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a atteint son paroxysme le 21 février, quand l'infanterie est entrée sur le territoire irakien, dans le cadre d'une campagne mobilisant près de 8 000 soldats. Selon les autorités locales, c'est la plus importante opération turque visant les rebelles depuis plus de dix ans.

L'incursion suscite l'indignation générale. Nombre de Kurdes irakiens considèrent avec sympathie l'objectif du PKK de créer un Kurdistan indépendant. Pour les autorités, le but réel d'Ankara est de déstabiliser le gouvernement semi-autonome, dont les dirigeants sont pourtant des alliés de longue date des Américains. "Les États-Unis sont en train de commettre une grosse erreur", prévient le général Mohsen, qui dirigeait les combattants kurdes irakiens aux côtés des forces américaines durant l'invasion de l'Irak en 2003.

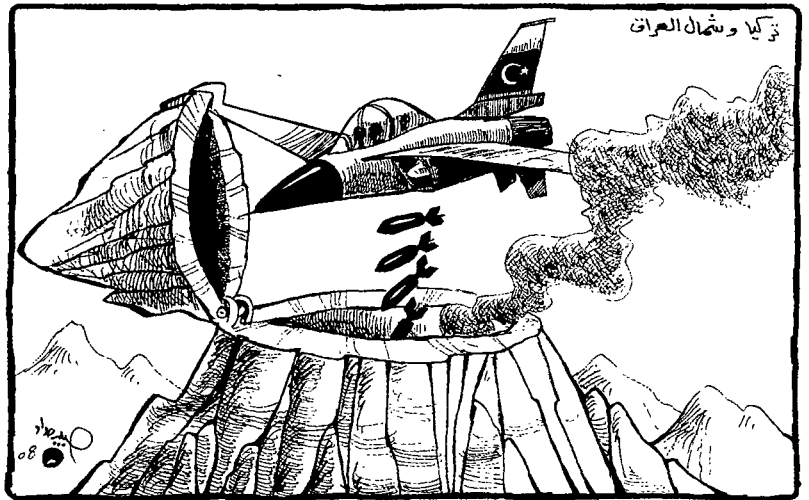
Le 24 février, alors qu'on entendait de temps en temps une explosion dans le lointain, des avions de guerre turcs bourdonnaient au-dessus du col d'une

montagne désolée. Hormis les vautours tournoyant aux alentours de pics montagneux déchiquetés, les forces gouvernementales kurdes étaient les seuls combattants dans la zone. Un pont enjambant un cours d'eau tumultueux a été réduit en tas de ferraille. L'artillerie et les avions turcs prennent pour cible une zone frontalière qui s'étend d'ouest en est, de Dahuk jusqu'à Erbil.

La colère gronde depuis l'automne dernier chez les Kurdes contre les États-Unis, à cause de l'assistance que ces derniers ont apportée à la Turquie, leur alliée de l'OTAN, pour le bombarde-

► *Dessin de Haddad paru dans Al-Hayat, Londres.*

■ **Contexte**
"L'intervention militaire turque dans le nord de l'Irak constitue un précédent sur le plan politique. En effet la présence militaire américaine en Irak depuis 2003 rendait jusque-là toute incursion turque impossible. Toutefois, isoler l'Iran est devenu l'objectif principal de la politique américaine au Moyen-Orient. Cette réorientation a impliqué un rapprochement avec les régimes sunnites de la région. C'est dans ces conditions que Washington a autorisé cette incursion armée turque, qui ne doit pas affecter l'entité kurde du nord de l'Irak", note Referans.



ment de cibles présumées du PKK. Elle a éclaté au grand jour à plusieurs reprises, mettant en péril l'un des partenariats les plus importants pour les Américains en Irak, à un moment où Washington souhaite ardemment tra-

duire les progrès réalisés en matière de sécurité en une stabilité plus durable. Un autre enjeu tient au fait que les troupes américaines, avec l'aide des forces irakiennes, où les contingents kurdes sont majoritaires, continuent de combattre des militants d'Al-Qaïda dans des régions proches du Kurdistan.

L'événement qui a déclenché la fureur des Kurdes en ce lieu s'est produit le 21 février, lorsque environ 350 soldats turcs et 13 chars sont sortis de leurs cantonnements à Bamerne, en Irak, à l'ouest d'Amadiyah, pour rejoindre leurs camarades venus de l'autre côté de la frontière, selon Mohsen. Environ 1 200 soldats turcs sont stationnés à Bamerne. Des combattants kurdes, soutenus par la population locale, se sont rués vers la région pour barrer la route aux forces turques.

Signe de la gravité de la situation, le chef du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (GRK), Massoud Barzani, s'est précipité à Dahuk, la principale ville de la région. "Il m'a affirmé qu'il serait le premier à mourir au combat contre

les Turcs", se souvient Mohsen. Selon Nechirvan Barzani, Premier ministre de la région et neveu du président, les Turcs, forts du soutien et des renseignements qu'ils avaient reçus de l'armée américaine en décembre, ont lancé une attaque aérienne massive contre le PKK, qui, à en croire Ankara, a fait 175 morts dans les rangs des insurgés et touché plus de 200 cibles. L'affrontement entre l'armée turque et le PKK s'est intensifié depuis l'automne. "Ils savent que les États-Unis sont d'une grande indulgence vis-à-vis d'eux [les Turcs], alors ils en profitent", estime Nechirvan Barzani. "Les Américains leur fournissent des renseignements et leur permettent de bombarder notre territoire, alors, les Turcs demandent plus."

Barzani est convaincu que le PKK n'est qu'un prétexte pour ce qu'il considère comme une guerre des Turcs contre le GRK. "Nous allons résister. Si les Turcs franchissent la frontière pour venir à notre rencontre, nous nous battons."

Des milliers de peshmergas ont été déployés vers la zone frontalière par mesure de précaution, en cas d'avance turque. D'après Metehan Demir, reporter de *Hürriyet*, l'opération turque a été engagée en hiver pour prendre le PKK par surprise. "Tout le monde, PKK compris, s'attendait à ce qu'elle soit lancée au printemps..."

Sam Dagher

Allemand d'origine turque OU Turc d'Allemagne ?

En Allemagne, la mort de neuf personnes d'origine turque dans l'incendie d'un immeuble a relancé le débat sur la situation des travailleurs étrangers. L'intégration ne nie pas les différences culturelles, mais elle suppose l'acceptation des principes démocratiques

Cem Özdemir

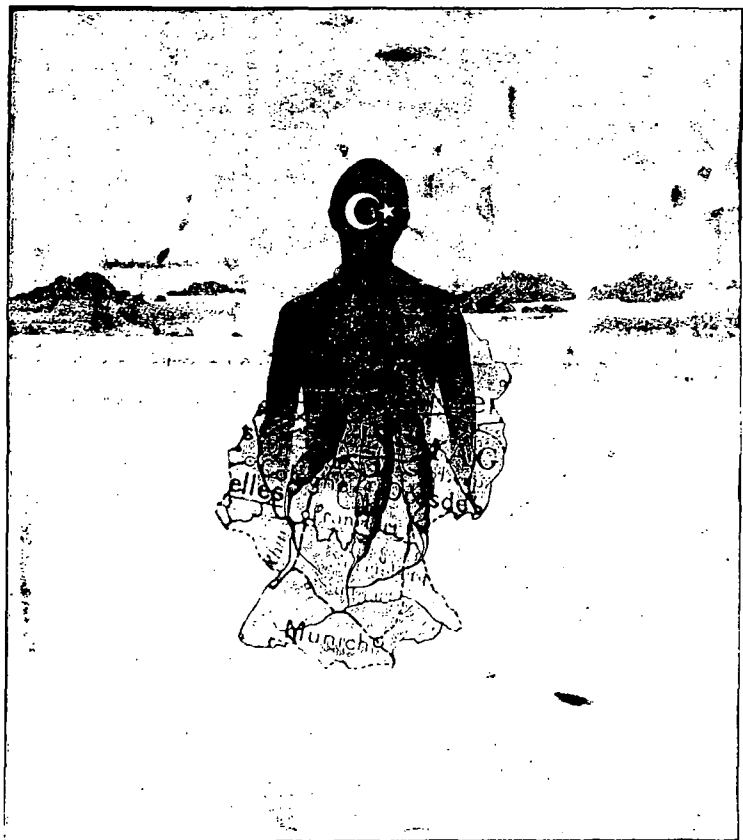
Député européen,
membre du groupe
des Verts-Alliance libre européenne

D'origine turque, vous avez été naturalisé allemand à l'âge de 18 ans. Avant d'être député européen, vous avez été pendant huit ans membre du Bundestag. Que pensez-vous du débat qui a eu lieu en Allemagne après la mort de neuf immigrés dans un incendie à Ludwigshafen et après le discours du premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, à Cologne, jugé déplacé à cause de ses accents « nationalistes » ?

Je suis content que les voix de la raison aient fini par s'imposer, aussi bien en Allemagne qu'en Turquie. La clarification apportée par un conseiller de M. Erdogan sur ce que le premier ministre avait voulu dire en affirmant que l'assimilation était « un crime contre l'humanité » a mis fin aux interprétations. Le ministre allemand de l'intérieur, Wolfgang Schäuble, a déclaré sans équivoque que les Turcs étaient des partenaires. Et il a salué le fait que, pour M. Erdogan, les Turcs ont, en tant qu'*Inländer* [les gens du pays, par opposition aux *Ausländer*, les étrangers] en Allemagne, une identité indépendante et non une identité de diaspora.

Indépendante par rapport à quoi ?

Ils ne doivent pas se situer dans un entre-deux entre deux Etats. Ce serait au détriment aussi bien des Turcs que des Allemands, de la Turquie que de l'Allemagne. Tous les gens raisonnables sont d'accord : on doit apprendre la langue du pays dans lequel on vit ; on doit respecter sa Constitution et, dans les Etats démocratiques, la Constitution est la loi commune des chrétiens, des musulmans, des athées... Le système scolaire et le monde du travail sont les éléments-clés de l'intégration. Qu'à la maison je retire mes chaussures ou non, que je croie en Dieu ou pas, que mes enfants soient ou non circoncis, tout cela me concerne personnellement.



Ça ne regarde ni M. Erdogan ni Angela Merkel. L'assimilation est possible, mais c'est une affaire individuelle. L'Etat ne peut pas la décréter. La politique doit fixer le cadre général de la vie en société. Cette tâche lui suffit amplement.

Sur un point, je ne suis pas d'accord avec M. Erdogan. Que des parents turcs veuillent ou non faire apprendre le turc à leurs enfants, c'est une décision personnelle. Ce qui est important, en revanche, s'ils vivent en Allemagne, c'est que leurs enfants maîtrisent l'allemand. Pas à cause de je ne sais quelle satisfaction cocardière, mais pour l'avenir même de ces enfants. Celui qui ne comprend pas l'allemand ne peut pas défendre ses droits. Si les enfants savent aussi le turc, c'est formidable. C'est un plus, mais ce n'est pas une obligation.
Que pensez-vous de la proposition de

M. Erdogan d'avoir en Allemagne des écoles et des universités turques ?

S'il s'agit d'écoles et d'universités germano-turques, elles sont les bienvenues. Je trouverais très bien que nous ayons de très bonnes écoles ou universités germano-turques. Pour une raison pratique : le turc n'a pas bonne réputation, alors que l'espagnol est à la mode. Ma femme est argentine, et notre fille va à un jardin d'enfants germano-espagnol. Excellent. Il y a peu d'excellents jardins d'enfants germano-turcs à Berlin. Si on veut changer cette situation, on a besoin d'institutions performantes, où les enfants maîtrisent parfaitement les deux langues. Mais il ne saurait être question, et je ne pense pas que M. Erdogan ait cela à l'esprit, d'écoles purement turques. Ce serait une impasse.
Revenons à la phrase de M. Erdogan qui a choqué en Allemagne : l'assimilation est

un crime contre l'humanité. Vous avez parlé de clarification. Dans quel sens ?

Dans le fond, ce que veulent les hommes politiques turcs comme allemands, ce n'est pas l'assimilation, mais l'intégration. Ankara et Berlin sont d'accord sur ce point. Le problème avec cette phrase d'Erdogan n'est pas l'Allemagne, c'est la Turquie. Si l'assimilation est ainsi à rejeter, où sont les universités et les écoles kurdes en Turquie ? Où est-il possible d'étudier le kurde ou la langue de mon père, le tcherkesse, dans une université turque ? Je n'en connais aucune. Il n'existe que des institutions privées. L'Etat affirme que ce n'est pas son rôle. Donc, si l'assimilation est un crime contre l'humanité – ce qui est une thèse surprenante –, alors, s'il vous plaît, cher monsieur Erdogan, commencez chez vous !

Quelle distinction faites-vous entre assimilation et intégration ?

Je ne suis pas contre l'assimilation. Assimilation sur le lieu de travail, par exemple, qui suppose que chacun ait des chances égales. Assimilation à l'école, etc. Mais je ne veux pas changer de religion, je ne veux pas éclaircir mes cheveux... Je ne représente pas un danger pour la sécurité de l'Allemagne si je retire mes chaussures en entrant chez moi. Moins la politique se mêle de ces questions, mieux ça vaut. La politique doit se soucier d'instaurer l'égalité des chances, notamment entre les enfants, quelle que soit la consonance de leur nom, en fonction de leurs capacités et non de leur origine sociale ou ethnique.

Voyez-vous réapparaître la « culture dominante », qui est de temps à autre un thème de débat en Allemagne ?

Tout à fait. J'aurais aimé que la réaction au discours d'Erdogan sur l'assimilation soit la suivante : très bien, mais dites la même chose à Ankara. Au contraire, la réaction semble montrer que les Allemands ne savent pas très bien ce qu'ils veulent, que ce qu'ils rejettent c'est tout autant l'intégration que l'assimilation. Ils ne savent pas ce qu'ils attendent des immigrants, bien qu'on ait abandonné l'idée stupide selon laquelle l'Allemagne n'était pas un pays d'immigration.

Le ministre-président du Land de Hesse, Roland Koch, a fait de la lutte contre la délinquance des jeunes étrangers un des thèmes de sa campagne électorale.

M. Erdogan a fustigé l'assimilation. Certains pensent en Allemagne que les deux ont contribué à exacerber les malentendus. Qu'en pensez-vous ?

Je dis toujours que l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement) en Turquie est un peu comme la démocratie chrétienne en Allemagne. Et dans la CDU-CSU, on trouve toutes les tendances, des plus sociales aux plus conservatrices. Le problème en Turquie, c'est qu'il n'y a pas

« Si l'assimilation est un crime contre l'humanité, comme l'a dit M. Erdogan – ce qui est une thèse surprenante –, où sont alors les universités d'Etat en Turquie où il serait possible d'apprendre le kurde ou le tcherkesse ? »

d'opposition laïque, européenne, libérale, au Parlement. M. Erdogan parle toujours d'Europe, de réformes, mais il s'adresse aussi à sa base. Et sa base n'est pas toute en faveur des réformes et de l'intégration européenne. Elle est souvent très conservatrice. Aussi je ne m'étonne pas du discours de M. Erdogan. Ce qui m'étonne en

revanche, c'est que le parti républicain CHP soit toujours membre de l'Internationale socialiste, bien qu'il soit contre la réforme du paragraphe 301, qui limite la liberté d'expression, et contre les droits des minorités.

Les Verts ont-ils abandonné leur thèse favorite sur la société multiculturelle ?

Ce sujet mériterait une sérieuse étude. J'ai toujours regretté que mon parti ne soit pas à l'avant-garde de la discussion sur l'immigration. Nous ne l'avons pas été parce que ce n'était pas politiquement correct. J'ai été un des premiers à évoquer la violence à l'intérieur de la famille. Dès le milieu des années 1990, j'ai dit que nous devions nous comporter vis-à-vis de nos pères comme les soixante-huitards vis-à-vis des leurs. Rompre avec un certain conformisme. Et précisément parce que nous, les Verts, voulions défendre les droits des immigrants, nous aurions été les mieux placés pour soulever les questions gênantes que le politiquement correct interdisait.

Cela dit, nous n'étions pas alors au pouvoir. Avec la coalition rouge-verte (1998-2005), nous avons introduit la double nationalité ; nous avons complété le droit du sang par une forme de droit du sol. Nous avons été les premiers à insister sur la nécessité, pour les immigrants, de posséder des connaissances d'allemand. J'habite un quartier à Berlin, Kreuzberg, sur lequel d'autres dissertent. Je reçois régulièrement des Kurdes qui ne veulent pas payer l'impôt « révolutionnaire » au PKK [*le parti extrémiste kurde*], des femmes qui sont battues à la maison... Je connais tout cela. Si l'on veut une société ouverte, pluraliste, multiculturelle – je n'ai aucun problème avec ce concept –, on doit veiller au respect des principes : la violence dans le domaine privé comme public est inaccep-

table ; les parents ne peuvent pas se reposer totalement sur l'Etat ; eux-mêmes ont des devoirs, notamment veiller à l'éducation de leurs enfants. C'est ainsi que je définirais la politique des Verts.

L'Union européenne pourrait-elle faire plus pour l'intégration ?

Des choses se passent. Si vous prenez les lois antidiscrimination, l'Allemagne ne les aurait sans doute pas adoptées d'elle-même. Elle n'en aurait pas eu la force politique. Nous l'avons fait parce que Bruxelles nous l'a ordonné, pour respecter les critères européens. Je souhaiterais que nous arrivions à une attitude commune en Europe à propos du droit de vote aux élections locales, pour donner ce droit aux immigrants de longue date. Sinon, il ne faut pas s'étonner que les Turcs d'Allemagne se précipitent pour écouter Erdogan. Nous avons besoin de règles communes pour l'immigration légale et aussi des droits minimaux pour le traitement de l'immigration illégale.

Etes-vous inquiet de la montée des tendances nationalistes en Turquie ?

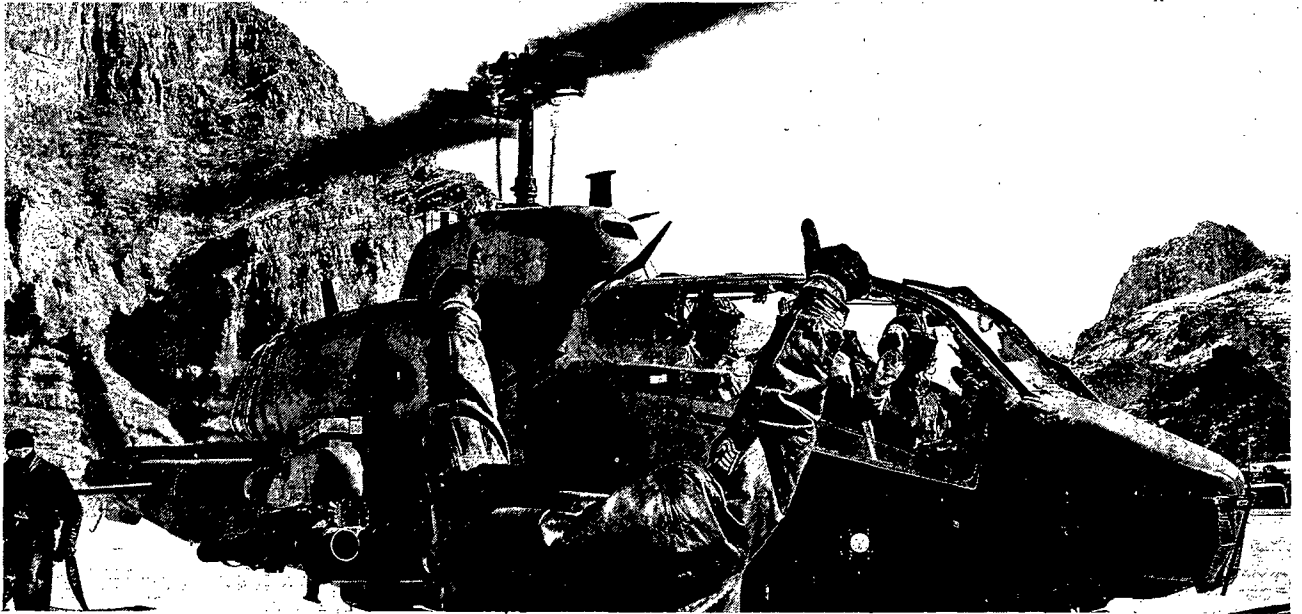
L'euphorie proeuropéenne qui a caractérisé l'AKP à ses débuts au pouvoir a disparu. Les Turcs ont l'impression que, pour les adversaires de leur entrée dans l'Union européenne, les réformes sont plutôt une mauvaise nouvelle parce qu'elles les privent d'arguments. Ce n'est pas sans conséquences en Turquie. Les réformistes se sentent abandonnés par l'Europe. Je suis très inquiet de la coopération entre M. Erdogan et le parti nationaliste MHP. La politique consistant à vouloir démocratiser le pays avec l'aide du MHP me rend très sceptique. C'est un euphémisme. ■

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR DANIEL VERNET

ILLUSTRATION FRANÇOIS SUPLOT

La Turquie entend poursuivre son offensive dans le nord de l'Irak

Le Monde
Jeudi 28 février 2008



Un hélicoptère turc décolle, dimanche 24 février, pour le nord de l'Irak, où l'armée mène ses offensives contre les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). De source militaire, 153 combattants kurdes auraient été tués lors de ces opérations. ARMÉE TURQUE/REUTERS

Ankara justifie ses opérations militaires contre les rebelles séparatistes kurdes par « son droit légitime à l'autodéfense ». L'armée turque progresse en territoire irakien

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

L'opération transfrontalière menée par la Turquie est le résultat de son droit légitime à l'autodéfense », a répété, mardi 26 février, le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, à Ankara. Une réponse au gouvernement irakien qui parlait un peu plus tôt de « violation de la souveraineté de l'Irak » et de source potentielle de déstabilisation de la région.

Au sixième jour de l'offensive terrestre et aérienne lancée contre les camps des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK), nichés dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak, Ankara n'entend pas renoncer à son objectif, conforté par le soutien de la communauté internationale. Malgré d'importantes chutes de neige, les troupes en tenue de camouflage continuent à progresser vers le sud. Elles contrôlèrent déjà une zone de 25 à 50 km en territoire irakien. De violents combats se sont déroulés, mardi, dans la vallée de Zap, l'une des principales bases arrière du PKK. Sept autres camps auraient été détruits, selon les informations livrées par l'état-major.

Une fois les vallées frontalières « nettoyées », l'armée turque doit ensuite marcher sur le mont Qandil : un nid d'aigle situé à la frontière iranienne, à une centai-

ne de kilomètres au sud de la Turquie, où sont retranchés les principaux chefs de la guérilla.

« Le but est de détruire entièrement les installations du PKK, son arsenal et ses voies d'accès à la Turquie ou à l'Iran », détaille Sedat Laçiner, expert pour l'Organisation internationale de recherche en stratégie (USAK). Mais aussi de causer les pertes les plus lourdes possibles dans les rangs des « terroristes ». Selon l'armée turque, qui concède 19 tués parmi ses soldats, 153 rebelles auraient été tués. « Il est impossible de connaître le nombre précis », fait remarquer M. Laçiner.

Mais de nombreuses questions demeurent sans réponse claire quant à l'objectif réel de ces opérations. Le gouvernement assure vouloir ramener les troupes en Turquie dans les plus brefs délais. Mais en haut lieu, les militaires parlent déjà de plusieurs semaines. Certains militent même pour une installation durable, comme le leader du Parti d'action nationaliste (MHP), Devlet Bahçeli.

Le général à la retraite Edip Baser, ancien chef de l'armée de terre puis chargé de coordonner la lutte anti-PKK, est également de ceux-là. « Mon sentiment est que l'armée turque doit rester. L'objectif est d'occuper un territoire d'où on peut avoir un contrôle total sur les frontières. Et il faut rester en Irak du Nord jusqu'à ce que le PKK soit totalement éliminé. Pas seulement en Irak, mais également en Europe, où se trouvent ses réseaux financiers », confie-t-il. D'autres anciens généraux n'hésitent pas, sur les plateaux de télévision, à évoquer Mossoul et Kirkouk comme les véritables cibles des opérations. « Je ne crois pas que

ça ira jusque-là, estime Mehmet Dülger, ex-ministre des affaires étrangères. Mais Mossoul et Kirkouk, que la Grande-Bretagne a récupérées après la première guerre mondiale, sont restées comme deux plaies dans notre cœur. »

Plus plausible, l'instauration d'une zone tampon dans le nord de l'Irak, sous contrôle turc, pourrait permettre à l'armée turque de contrôler la zone frontalière, tout en permettant au gouvernement régional kurde de sauver les apparences. « L'idée peut aussi être de rester là jusqu'à ce que la situation devienne plus claire en Irak, après le retrait américain », suggère M. Dülger.

En cas de retrait des troupes américaines d'Irak, l'armée d'Ankara pourrait jouer un rôle déterminant

En cas de retrait des troupes américaines d'Irak, par le nord du pays et par la Turquie, l'armée d'Ankara et ses bases aériennes pourraient jouer un rôle déterminant. Même si le premier ministre Erdogan s'en défend, les analystes spéculent sur la contrepartie accordée à Washington, contre son soutien aux opérations anti-PKK. Depuis novembre 2007, les Etats-Unis fournissent des renseignements aux Turcs qui bénéficient également d'une aide technique israélienne.

Un renfort en Afghanistan, un soutien logistique en cas d'attaque américaine contre l'Iran, ou les projets de centrales nucléaires turques pour lesquelles Washington ne cache pas son intérêt... Le secrétaire d'Etat américain à la défense, Robert Gates, attendu mercredi soir à Ankara pour une série de discussions avec les responsables turcs, devrait évoquer tous ces dossiers. ■

GUILAUME PERRIER

The Washington Post February 27, 2008

GATES TO TURKS: END IRAQ INCURSION SOON

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) -- Defense Secretary Robert Gates has a message for Turkish leaders: Get your troops out of northern Iraq in the next few days. "It's very important that the Turks make this operation as short as possible and then leave," Gates said before heading to Ankara late Wednesday from India. "They have to be mindful of Iraqi sovereignty. I measure quick in terms of days, a week or two, something like that, not months."

Gates said he also will ask Turkish leaders in a series of meetings Thursday to address some of the complaints of the Kurds, and move from combat to economic and political initiatives to solve differences with them.

It was the first time that Gates put any time limit on the Turkish incursion launched into Iraq last Thursday against separatist rebels from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. The rebels are fighting for autonomy in the largely Kurdish region of south-eastern Turkey, and have carried out attacks from northern Iraq. Overnight, Turkish troops killed more than 70 Kurdish rebels, the Turkish military said.

Meanwhile, a Turkish official insisted that the aim of a military incursion into northern Iraq "is clear and limited" against Kurdish rebels and said no timetable will be set "until the terrorist bases are eliminated." Ahmet Davutoglu, chief foreign policy adviser to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, made the comments at a joint news conference in Baghdad on Wednesday with Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari.

"Our objective is clear. Our mission is clear and there is no timetable ... until the terrorist bases are eliminated," he said shortly after arriving in the capital at the helm of a delegation to discuss the military action.

The Iraqi government demanded for the first time that Turkey immediately withdraw from northern Iraq, warning Tuesday it feared an ongoing incursion could lead to clashes with the official forces of the semiautonomous Kurdish region.



Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had said the operation would only end "once its goal has been reached."

One senior U.S. defense official traveling to Turkey with Gates said that as Pentagon leaders watched events unfold in the Turkish incursion, there was some debate over whether Gates should cancel his visit to Ankara this week.

But, after a "short discussion," the official said, it was determined that the better course of action was to go because it would be more effective for Gates to deliver his message in person, than not go and have his snub be the message. The official agreed to talk about the private discussions only on condition of anonymity.

Gates had just begun his overseas trip when the Turks launched their attacks. He will be meeting with the Turkish president, prime minister, defense minister and military chief of defense.

In other comments just before leaving New Delhi, Gates said the U.S. is in the "early stages" of discussions with India on a missile defense system and is taking about doing a joint analysis to determine what India's needs will be and how the two countries can cooperate.

Gates also said the Indian government needs to move quickly to approve a landmark nuclear coop-

eration pact between India and the United States.

"The clock is ticking in terms of how much time is available to get all the different aspects of this agreement implemented," he told reporters.

Gates said he has not heard from the Turks on how long they intend to continue the attacks in Iraq, and does not know whether the U.S. would consider halting its intelligence assistance to the Turks if it goes on too long.

He also said it is critically important for the Turks to communicate closely with the Iraqi government as well as the semiautonomous Kurdish leaders in northern Iraq. And he repeated contentions he made earlier this week, that military action alone will not solve the problems there.

"There certainly is a place for security operations, but these also need to be accompanied with economic and political initiatives that begin to deal with some of the issues that provide a favorable local environment where the PKK can operate," Gates said. "They need to address some of the issues and complaints that some of the Kurds have and move this in a nonmilitary direction in order to get a long term solution."

Gates said that since the U.S. provides intelligence and surveillance help to the Turks, other help might also be possible for economic and other efforts.

Gates, who is on an eight-day, around-the-world trip to four countries, spoke at length about the improving relations between India and the U.S. But while noting the U.S. must be respectful of local Indian politics, he said New Delhi must act soon on the nuclear pact to give the U.S. Senate time to ratify it.

Talks between the two countries have stalled on the nuclear deal, which would allow the U.S. to send nuclear fuel and technology to India. The agreement would reverse decades of U.S. anti-proliferation policy with a country that has tested nuclear weapons and refused to sign nonproliferation treaties.

AP Associated Press

Turkey Attacks Kurds; US Calls for Halt

February 27, 2008 By BURHANETTIN OZBILICI Associated Press Writer

CUKURCA, Turkey (AP) -- Turkish fighter jets, helicopters and hundreds of commandos streamed across the border into northern Iraq Wednesday despite Iraqi and American calls to swiftly end an operation to root out Kurdish insurgents.

U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said before departing for Turkey that he will tell officials there that the six-day assault must not last longer than a week or two.

It was the first time that Gates, who that Turkey must be "mindful of Iraqi sovereignty," put any time limit on the incursion.

Gates also said before leaving India that he will call on Turkey to use economic and political initiatives to address some of the complaints of the Kurds - who are the majority in Turkey's southeast and neighboring northern Iraq. Iraq has demanded an immediate end to the cross-border operation against the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.

In Baghdad, Turkish envoy Ahmet Davutoglu, chief foreign policy adviser to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said the aim of the incursion was "clear and limited" and said no timetable will be set "until the terrorist bases are eliminated."

More than 40 Turkish military trucks ferried hundreds of commandos toward the Iraqi border and F-16 warplanes were seen flying over the border town of Cukurca toward Iraq. Helicopters brought dozens of troops to a base on the outskirts of the town. Some helicopters also headed toward Iraq.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said after meeting Davutoglu that, "We condemn the terrorists and the PKK, but we also condemn the violations of the

sovereignty of Iraq at the same time and we have to be very clear on that."

Turkey said its troops had killed 77 Kurdish rebels in overnight clashes that were the most intense of the incursion in northern Iraq. Five soldiers were also killed.

The remote battle sites are inaccessible to the press and casualty reports cannot be independently confirmed.

The total death toll for the rebels since the operation began Feb. 21 reached 230, the military said. Two dozen soldiers and three pro-government village guards also have been killed.

PKK spokesman Ahmad Danas denied the Turkish military's claim that 77 Kurdish rebels had been killed in the overnight clashes, saying the rebels had only lost one fighter since Tuesday night and seven others were wounded. The rebels have said only a few PKK fighters and more than 80 Turkish soldiers have died.

It is the first confirmed Turkish military ground operation in Iraq in about a decade against the rebels, who are fighting for autonomy for southeastern Turkey and have carried out attacks from northern Iraq. The conflict has killed up to 40,000 people since 1984. The U.S. and European Union consider the PKK to be a terrorist group.

The Turkish military said warplanes have hit 225 targets, including anti-aircraft batteries, caves, shelters, training facilities, command and communication centers, while artillery units struck 475 similar targets.

"There are sporadic clashes with terrorists that arrived as reinforcements to the region in two separate areas on the sixth day of the operation," the military

said on its Web site.

"There are signs that some high-level names of the organization might still be among terrorist groups in the (combat) zone," it said. In past operations, the military has monitored radio communications of rebels.

Turkey has long suspected the Iraqi Kurd administration in the north of allowing the PKK to operate and ignoring calls for a crackdown on the group. Turkey's military said this week that it had received information that some wounded rebels were being treated in hospitals in northern Iraq.

The Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq denied the allegations.

"We challenge anyone who says that PKK wounded fighters are receiving treatment in our hospitals," spokesman Jamal Abdullah said. "We have nothing to do with PKK fighters and routes to areas where clashes are taking place are closed."

Turkish Kurds protesting the incursion in the eastern town of Dogubayazit threw stones at the local branch of the ruling party as well as the main police station, NTV television showed. Police used tear gas to disperse the crowd, it said.

REUTERS

February 27, 2008

A SHINING EXAMPLE IN KURDISTAN

OPPORTUNITIES are rich in oil, agriculture and other sectors in Iraq's Kurdish north, according to US and Kurdish officials, but US investment is still paltry in what promoters bill as "the other Iraq".

US business and government officials, seeking to encourage investment and ease fears about doing business in war-torn Iraq, called the autonomous Kurdistan region a "shining example" of what the entire country might one day become.

Boosters point to rich natural resources, a favourable investment climate and greater security.

The region, with its own government and parliament, has boasted a lower level of violence than the rest of Iraq, which is now cautiously embracing security improvements in Baghdad and elsewhere almost five years after the US-led invasion.

The Iraqi government is hoping to rebuild an economy, and public infrastructure, battered by years of sanctions and war, which plunged many Iraqis into poverty and joblessness.

But the employment outlook is far brighter in Kurdistan, and median incomes are up to 25 per cent higher than in the rest of Iraq, the regional government says.

Even so, Qubad Jalal Talabani, the Kurdistan Regional Government's representative to the United States and son of the Iraqi president, said US business accounts only for one per cent of total investment in Kurdistan. "The United States lags behind most other countries," he said.

Major investor

Turkey is a major investor in Kurdistan's bridges, banks and oil sector, Talabani said, despite longstanding tension with Ankara over the Kurdish rebels who have launched attacks from their mountain enclaves.

While opportunities may abound, evidence is hard to find that investors are willing to put aside concerns about general security in Iraq, along with doubts about the country's political stability, and come to Kurdistan in droves.

Neither Kurdish nor US officials were immediately able to provide figures for US investment in the region.

Oil is certainly a lure. The Kurdish government has clashed with Baghdad over petroleum deals it has signed with foreign oil firms, which the central government deems illegal.

Talabani, speaking at the US Chamber of Commerce in Washington, insisted the Kurdish government's oil contracts would benefit the entire country.

Kurdish officials are also hoping that agribusiness will become another driver for foreign investment in Kurdistan, a traditional wheat producer.

The region's acreage of field crops, mostly wheat and barley, was about 2.3 million acres (950,000 hectares) in 2007, according to the Kurdish Regional Government.

Processing and export facilities are needed to invigorate those sectors, along with tobacco, fruits and nuts, maybe even wine, Talabani said.

"The right investments will turn Kurdistan into the breadbasket of the region," he added.

SPIEGEL February 27, 2008

FIGHTING THE PKK

Can Turkey Succeed in Northern Iraq?

Turkish military leaders as well as Turkish papers have reported success in northern Iraq, but how effective has the invasion been? US and Iraqi leaders are impatient, while Kurdish militants have probably melted away.

By Jürgen Gottschlich in Istanbul

"Kandil Mountains Taken," read a headline in Turkey's largest newspaper on Tuesday, showing a couple of soldiers packed in cold-weather outfits marching along a snowy road. More specifically, *Hürriyet* reported that the Turkish army had won control of the roads leading in and out of the Kandil Mountains.

So is it just a matter of time before special forces in helicopters take Kurdish militant leaders from their headquarters in the notorious Kandil Mountains, and drag them before a Turkish court?

Well, no.

Six days after the start of Turkey's operation in northern Iraq against a stronghold of the Kurdistan Workers Party (or PKK), the insertion of special forces may have

good political resonance at home, since Turkish public debate about the PKK, a homegrown terrorist organization, tends to focus on the Kandil Mountains as the seat of evil. But not much will come of the invasion. Neither Murat Karayılan -- the PKK's military commander -- nor the group's co-founder Cemil Bayik have been waiting around for the Rambos of the Turkish army to arrest them.

Still, Turkish officials were deflecting calls for a "timetable" from both Washington and Baghdad on Wednesday afternoon. US and Iraqi leaders are tolerating the incursion but want to know when it will end. "Our objective is clear, our mission is clear and there is no timetable until ... those terrorist bases are eliminated," said senior Turkish envoy Ahmet Davutoglu in Baghdad, after a crisis meeting on Wednesday with Iraqi Foreign Minister



Hoshiyar Zebari.

"This is a very dangerous, precarious situation," said acting Iraqi Prime Minister Barham Saleh, adding that the invasion had "not been conducive to Iraq-Turkey

relations."

Not Winning Hearts and Minds

The Kandil Mountains lie a good hundred kilometers (62 miles) from the Turkish border, and the PKK has operated there long enough to know how to disappear in the rugged terrain. Karayilan may have been there as late as last Thursday, when the Turkish offensive began, but by now he could just as easily be in one of northern Iraq's larger cities -- like Süleymaniyah or Erbil -- in a café, talking to his lieutenants by mobile phone.

Karayilan and Bayik are both on a list of wanted terrorists which the Turkish government has shown to the Americans as well as the Iraq government. So far no one has caught them. And what goes for PKK leaders also goes for average foot soldiers -- they can simply take off their uniforms, lay down their weapons, and disappear among the other Kurds in northern Iraq.

Local sympathy for the PKK is one reason to doubt figures quoted by Turkey on the number of militants killed so far. On Wednesday, Turkey's General Staff said 77 more Kurds had been killed in fighting since Tuesday night, bringing the death toll since last week to 230. Measured

against the 17 soldiers Turkey admits to having lost, it sounds like a rout.

But the Kurdish guerrillas know the Kandil Mountains. Turkish soldiers don't. Even with help from the Turkish air force and American satellite intelligence, the lopsided casualty figures are unlikely. The Kurds' report of 80 Turkish soldiers killed is just as unreliable. What's more probable than any of these figures is that most of the PKK fighters have attempted to melt away to the south.

The Turkish army is reported to have surrounded a strategically important PKK camp on Monday night and engaged the militants in heavy fighting. Even if that's true, and Turkey manages to kill or drive hundreds of guerrillas out of their strongholds along the border, what will keep them from taking up position again after the soldiers go home? If General Staff estimates are correct, there are 4,000 to 5,000 fighters in northern Iraq and their recruiting potential in Europe and Turkey will not be easy to overcome.

Progress in the fight against the PKK will only succeed if the Turkish government succeeds in undermining support among Turkish Kurds for both the group and its terrorist methods -- and when it can stir

the Kurds in northern Iraq to shove the PKK out.

But the political steps for winning "hearts and minds" are lacking. Leyla Zana, an icon of the Kurdish rights movement in Turkey, reminded a party congress of the pro-Kurdish DTP on Monday that Kurds were still second-class citizens in Turkey: She demanded equal-rights recognition for her people in the Turkish constitution. And the Islamic ruling party, the AKP, hopes to seize the imagination of the country's largely conservative Kurdish population with religious slogans. With piles of money and a snappy motto -- "We're all Muslims" -- the leaders in Ankara are trying to defeat the secular and largely leftist radicals of the PKK.

Meanwhile the army drives into the Kandil Mountains, and US Defense Secretary Robert Gates sounds impatient. "It's very important that the Turks make this operation as short as possible and then leave, and to be mindful of Iraqi sovereignty," he told reporters on Wednesday, before embarking on a trip to Ankara to discuss the military incursion. "I measure quick in terms of days -- a week or two, something like that. Not months."

ASIA TIMES

February 28, 2008

A wild Turkey chase?

By Kaveh L Afrasiabi

History indeed does repeat itself and, unfortunately, more so tragically. So it is profoundly irritating to students of history, particularly modern US history and politics, to see that the US government has committed yet another foreign policy blunder. This it has done by tacitly consenting to the ongoing Turkish incursions into northern Iraq in pursuit of Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) fighters.

This vividly reminds one of a similar blunder in the summer of 2006, when US officials backed Israel's cross-border incursions into southern Lebanon with the stated aim of "neutralizing" a terrorist organization (Hezbollah) and destroying its "organizational infrastructure".

The vocabulary used in both occasions, and the reactions solicited from Washington, are so strikingly similar that, inevitably, they invite comparisons between Israel's ultimately futile misadventure in Lebanon and Turkey's operation that is already a week long. Despite the US's prodding to "keep it short", it may end up approximating Israel's 33-day campaign against Hezbollah. This is particularly so since the Turkish army has to endure harsh winter conditions in addition to a resilient foe of about 3,000 or so PKK fighters.

In both cases, Israeli and Turkish leaders have tried to elicit world sympathy by stressing their "rightful cause", and in the expressions of

"understanding" by both the US and the European Union seen at the beginning of both conflicts, one can detect the undercurrents of a failed Western policy that simply does not learn from history.

There are important differences between the two cases, but the similarities are unmistakable. This is particularly so in the area of asymmetrical warfare and the not-so-declared motives of the invading armies, ie, in Lebanon for Israel to fight a proxy war with Iran and in Iraq for Turkey to undermine the Kurdish path toward greater autonomy and, perhaps, eventual independence.

While it is still too early to tell whether or not Turkey has just carved itself a mini quagmire in Iraq, or whether it can achieve all its objectives in a speedy and relatively expense-free and harmless (to civilians) fashion, it is already abundantly clear that the US has played its cards wrong: it has not denounced Turkey's violation of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity, just as the Iraqi government has done.

Instead, it is vesting its hope in the mirage of a quick and decisive victory by the Turkish army to devastate the PKK forces with the help of its combined air and ground assault. Indeed, who can forget the major blunder of US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who in the summer of 2006 constantly bought more time for the Israeli assault on Lebanon with the

lame excuse that Israel "has the right to defend itself".

Today, however, Rice is comparatively quiet, letting other US officials, including the US ambassador in Ankara, do the talking, such as of a short campaign that is fueled in part by the faulty rationalization on the part of certain neo-conservative pundits in the US who cite the necessity of a shifting US policy away from the Kurds, whose help is no longer needed, that is, they can be discarded as useless allies. Call it a mini-betrayal, not far removed from post-World War I, when the US initially backed and then reneged on its promises to the Kurds - who are now viewed with suspicion by Washington as being unduly "pro-Iran".

That is not true, given the context of post-Saddam Hussein power politics in Iraq, with the US and Iran both backing the same horses. Are respected US neo-cons ready to sell out the Baghdad government, about to play host to Iran's president, as well? And if so, what really will remain of the US's Iraq policy, one that, at least officially, has been anchored in the commitment to Iraq's integrity and sovereignty?

The answer is that the US has now made a bad joke of its Iraq policy by not even paying lip service to Iraq's sovereignty in the wake of Turkey's aggressive violation of Iraq's territorial integrity, with so many Turkish pundits openly wishing for a Turkish

"buffer" inside Iraq, ostensibly to prevent the PKK access to southeastern Turkish towns and villages. This error in judgment on Washington's part is a serious one that could come to haunt its policy-makers, who have opted to pawn the US's Iraq policy into Turkey's hands, just as they did with respect to Israel in Lebanon two years ago.

Much has been said about the potential for a regional flare-up caused by Turkey's move inside Iraq, and it is precisely here that Turkey's close Israel connection, most recently highlighted by Ankara's bid to export Central Asian oil to India via Israel [1], may prove a decisive contributing factor in not only causing a major dent, if not irreparable harm, to Ankara's relations with Tehran, but also with the Arab-led Middle East.

In turn, this could sour the US-Israeli bid to form an anti-Iran alliance in the Arab world. Rather, the chances are Iran will forge closer ties to the Arab world, via Iran-friendly Baghdad, against Israel-backed Turkish influence and power projection - which many Israelis see as a potential counterweight to Iran. And this is an Iran that is poised to take its bilateral relations with the new Iraq to the "next level", per a statement by Iran's Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki.

Hence, it is a sure bet that come next week, when Iran's President Mahmud Ahmadinejad makes his historic visit

to Iraq, should the Turkish forces still be present in northern Iraq, it will be difficult for Iran to resist Baghdad's demand for a firm stance on this subject. So far, Iran, cautious of avoiding any unwanted damage to its hitherto cordial ties with Turkey, has opted for self-restraint. That may unravel shortly, and Ahmadinejad is reportedly even interested in going to Irbil in Kurdish northern Iraq.

This raises questions about the timing of Turkey's military move inside Iraq, just a few days ahead of Ahmadinejad's trip, seeing how Turkey had refrained for months from committing to such a large-scale military opera-

tion, bound to sour Tehran-Ankara relations.

Have the US's "chess-players", who are forced to play at multiple strategic chess sets in the Middle East these days, cooked up something here? Or should we rely on the public information that the US is simply caught between two allies - Iraq and Turkey unable to play much of a role beyond that of a disquieted observer?

It is highly improbable that Turkey has gone into Iraq without prior discussions with the US, and one may even include the recent US trip of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as an important

catalyst for the current pro-Turkey stance of the White House. Lest we forget, unlike the US, Israel has no loyalty to the notion of a unified, integrated Iraq and may consider that as a sort of nightmare scenario in light of the pro-Iran sentiments of Iraq's political leaders.

Little surprise, then, that known pro-Israel voices in American politics have been vocal critics of Iraqi Kurds and they have supported Turkey's military gambit in Iraq, where the tragedy of force of arms over dialogue is unfolding once again. However, as stated above, Turkey is likely not fated to any better prospect in north-

ern Iraq than Israel has managed in southern Lebanon.

Kaveh L Afrasiabi, PhD, is the author of After Khomeini: New Directions in Iran's Foreign Policy (Westview Press) and co-author of "Negotiating Iran's Nuclear Populism", Brown Journal of World Affairs, Volume XII, Issue 2, Summer 2005, with Mustafa Kibaroglu. He also wrote "Keeping Iran's nuclear potential latent", Harvard International Review, and is author of Iran's Nuclear Program: Debating Facts Versus Fiction.

BBC NEWS 28 February 2008

Turkey must end Iraq raid - Bush

US President George W Bush has urged Turkey to complete its military operation in northern Iraq swiftly.

Mr Bush told a news conference, he said the Turks needed to "move quickly, achieve their objective and get out."

Turkey sent troops into Iraq last week in an operation it said was aimed at getting rid of PKK Kurdish rebel bases.

It says 237 rebels and more than 20 soldiers have been killed so far. The PKK says it has killed more than 100 soldiers. There is no confirmation.

'No threats'

Mr Bush dismissed suggestions that Turkey should be threatened with the removal of American intelligence co-operation.

"The key for us is to make clear what our interests are, our concerns about the situation in Iraq," he said.

Mr Bush's comments followed an earlier statement by US Defence Secretary Robert Gates during a visit to Turkey.

Turkey's incursion into northern Iraq "should be as short and precisely targeted as possible", he said after talks with his Turkish counterpart Vecdi Gonul in the capital, Ankara.

Mr Gonul said the assault on the PKK separatists, who want an independent homeland in south-east Turkey, would last "as long as necessary".

Heavy clashes

In the latest fighting, a PKK spokesman was quoted as saying heavy clashes broke out when rebels surrounded 200 Turkish soldiers in a mountain valley.

Iraq says the incursion, launched last Thursday, is unacceptable and violates its sovereignty.

Since November, the US has been providing real-time intelligence to help Turkey target the PKK across the border.

Ankara will not want to jeopardise that vital support, the BBC's Sarah Rainsford in Istanbul says.

But now that Turkish troops are engaging the PKK on the ground, apparently successfully, the military will not be keen to leave too soon either, our correspondent says.

More than 30,000 people have been killed since the PKK its campaign in 1984.



Fostering democracy ■ Aliza Marcus and Andrew Apostolou

Talking to Turkey's Kurds

The crisis between Turkey and Iraq, with the United States playing the uneasy role of mediator and friend to both, has escalated with the Turkish land operation launched on Friday. Following the spate of attacks last fall inside Turkey by the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, the Bush administration gave Turkey intelligence to facilitate air strikes against key PKK bases in remote Iraqi Kurdish mountains. Washington hoped this would prevent any Turkish military offensive inside Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraq's most stable region and the PKK's unwilling host. This policy has clearly failed.

The inability of the United States to rein in Turkey, and the dangers the Turkish invasion poses to Iraqi Kurdistan, demonstrate that a better approach is needed. The core of Turkey's "Kurdish problem" is not the PKK. It is Turkey's denial of basic political and cultural rights to its Kurds, who are about one-fifth of the population. Any resolution of the decades-old conflict was unthinkable because often there were no credible nonviolent Kurdish partners for the ever-suspicious Turkish state to talk to. Such partners now exist and the United States should help Turkey to recognize this.

In July 2007, Turkey's Kurds elected 20 members of Parliament from the Democratic Society Party, or DTP. A Kurdish nationalist group, DTP also has 54 mayors in largely Kurdish municipalities in Turkey's southeast. These democratically elected politicians are not PKK members. They may sympathize with PKK fighters — who often hail from the same towns and villages. And contrary to government demands, they refuse to label the rebels "terrorists." But DTP politicians oppose violence, whether from the state or the rebels. They call for a state-rebel cease-fire and want to work with Turkish officials to end the conflict.

These elected DTP officials matter because they articulate a Kurdish case separate from PKK violence. In November 2007, DTP called for decentralizing power to Turkey's regions, the first time this Kurdish party has presented a viable political vision. Unlike the PKK, whose demands have ranged from independence to broad cultural rights, DTP's ideas are not punctuated by gunfire.

Unfortunately, Turkey has responded with hostility, not dialogue. Turkey's chief prosecutor may shutter DTP because he claims that statements by party officials, including using the taboo word "Kurdistan" and praising a PKK cease-fire, are tantamount to supporting terrorism.

The Democratic Society Party offers alternatives to endless guerrilla war.

If the state is successful, this will be at least the fifth time it has closed this Kurdish party (or its predecessors) since 1993. Turkey has already jailed DTP's chairman for allegedly avoiding compulsory military service at a time when he would probably have had to fight fellow Kurds. The state is also investigating DTP's parliamentary chairman for allegedly insulting the Turkish military — he had objected to being barred from an official function by Turkey's politically active armed forces. The popular mayor of Diyarbakir, Turkey's largest Kurdish city, says 30 lawsuits have been filed against him for using the Kurdish language in official settings.

This is where the United States can help. The United States should strengthen these democratically elected Kurdish officials as potential alternatives to the PKK. Washington can do this in two ways. First, Ankara should be told openly and repeatedly that putting Kurdish politicians on trial for representing the ethnic-based interests of their voters is counterproductive. Second, U.S. diplomats in Turkey should meet Kurdish parliamentarians and mayors regularly, especially

in their municipal or parliamentary offices. Visiting members of Congress should also see their Kurdish counterparts.

By talking to many genuine Kurdish representatives in Turkey, the United States would oblige the Turkish state to stop treating all expressions of Kurdishness as potential terrorism. Just as usefully, the United States would allow Turkish liberals to embrace these Kurdish politicians.

Above all, a U.S. stamp of approval would enhance the credibility of these democratically elected Kurdish leaders.

With U.S. approval, they could acquire the strength to build a nonviolent alternative to the PKK. The rebel group will not disappear, but Kurdish officials could claim their rightful position as political leader of Turkey's Kurdish community.

The war with the PKK is just one aspect of a conflict that has prevented democratization in Turkey. By fostering a democratic alternative to the PKK, and encouraging the Turkish state to talk rather than repress, the United States could put both sides on the path to accommodation and away from violence.

Aliza Marcus is author of "Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence." Andrew Apostolou is an analyst of Kurdish politics. This article first appeared in The Boston Globe.

Iraqi panel rejects bill on provincial elections

From news reports

BAGHDAD: The Iraqi presidential council on Wednesday rejected a measure that would have paved the way for provincial elections, sending it back to Parliament for review after failing to reach a consensus.

The provincial powers law defines ties between Baghdad and the local authorities and is seen by Iraqi officials as a key step before a date can be set for provincial elections, which are supposed to be held by Oct. 1.

Provincial elections are seen as a chance for parties that boycotted polls in 2005 to win some local power, drawing more disenfranchised Iraqis — especially minority Sunni Arabs — into the political process.

The council said it had signed off on two other bills passed this month, the 2008 budget and an amnesty law that could lead to the release of thousands of prisoners from custody.

Parliament approved all three bills on Feb. 14 in what was seen as a major legislative breakthrough and a step to-

ward reconciliation between Iraq's divided communities.

The panel is composed of President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd; Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi, a Shiite, and Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, a Sunni.

One member of the presidential council "objected to articles regarding the authority of the governor and the process to dismiss the governor," said the head of the presidential office, Naseer al-Ani, declining to identify the member.

It was unclear how long Parliament would need to review the law. Legislators are on recess until mid-March.

Also Wednesday, Shiite pilgrims headed to a major religious gathering

were again targeted by extremists, when a roadside bomb detonated near a bus in Baghdad, killing one traveler, the police said.

Shiites from across Iraq and some foreign visitors are marking Arbaeen, the end of a 40-day mourning period following the anniversary of the death of Imam Hussein, one of the most revered figures in Shiite Islam.

The U.S. military blamed Sunni-led Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia for earlier attacks on pilgrims, which seemed aimed at provoking sectarian violence. Shiite religious festivals have been targeted repeatedly in the past few years.

With the latest fatality, at least 64 people have been slain this week in as-

saults targeting pilgrims. The worst of the attacks occurred Sunday when a suicide bomber detonated in a roadside refreshment tent packed with worshipers taking a break as they walked to Karbala. At least 56 people were killed.

In Karbala, the rituals surrounding Arbaeen were reaching their peak. The Iraqi and U.S. authorities have said at least 8 million people will join in the ceremonies, under the eye of 40,000 troops, snipers and plainclothes security officers — plus air support monitoring the outskirts of town to prevent rocket attacks.

Reacting to the string of attacks on Shiite pilgrims, one of the most respect-

ed clerics in Shiite Islam called Wednesday for action against a school of thought used by militants to justify killing other Muslims.

Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Hussein Fadlallah described an attack on pilgrims in Iraq on Sunday as "the pinnacle of barbarism." Fadlallah is based in Lebanon and has Shiite followers across the Muslim world.

In a statement, he said the phenomenon of Muslims charging others with nonbelief, known as "takfir" in Arabic, was "one of the most dangerous issues" faced by the Muslim world. A person accused of nonbelief is regarded as a legitimate target by some militant Muslims.

(AP, Reuters)

Washington s'inquiète de l'offensive turque en Irak

LE FIGARO jeudi 28 février 2008

TURQUIE

Le secrétaire à la Défense Robert Gates est venu à Ankara pour convaincre les dirigeants turcs de ne pas se limiter au volet militaire contre les Kurdes du PKK.

Istanbul

PRÉSENTÉE comme un symbole du feu vert américain à l'offensive turque dans les montagnes enneigées du nord de l'Irak, l'arrivée de Robert Gates, le secrétaire américain à la Défense, hier soir à Ankara, a été précédée de déclarations discordantes entre les deux alliés au sein de l'Otan. Depuis New Delhi, la veille, Gates avait souligné les inquiétudes américaines quant à la durée de l'opération au Kurdistan : « Je veux parler de jours, d'une ou deux semaines à peu près, pas de mois. » Mais la Turquie refuse de fixer une date de retrait. « Notre objectif est clair, notre mission est claire. Il n'y aura pas de calendrier avant que ces bases terroristes ne soient éliminées », a martelé à Bagdad une délégation turque.

Au cours de ses rencontres avec les dirigeants turcs aujourd'hui, Robert Gates entend égale-

ment convaincre ses interlocuteurs de ne pas se limiter au volet militaire pour en finir avec le PKK, mais de mettre en place « une solution sur le long terme » en privilégiant « les initiatives économiques et politiques ». Ce triptyque commence désormais à faire son chemin au sein de l'état-major turc. Cependant, « il n'y a toujours pas de consensus, ni au sein de l'armée, ni au gouvernement, composé d'une aile nationaliste », confie un observateur politique. Malgré les divergences de vues, l'offensive terrestre turque bénéficie du réchauffement des relations turco-américaines sur le dossier irakien. Après avoir soutenu et s'être appuyé sur Massoud Barzani, Washington a commencé à prendre ombrage de l'entêtement du président du Kurdistan à vouloir rattacher la ville irakienne de Kirkouk et ses riches réserves pétrolières à la région kurde, et de sa tolérance pour les activités du PKK aux frontières turques.

Contreparties

Les États-Unis, qui étaient restés sourds aux demandes d'Ankara de lutter contre le PKK en Irak, ont donc donné une nouvelle impul-

sion à leur alliance traditionnelle avec la Turquie. « Ils ont fini par réaliser que nous allions intervenir, avec ou sans leur accord », estime Gündüz Aktan, député du Parti de l'action nationaliste (MHP) et ancien président d'Asam, un think-tank proche des militaires. Mais ce feu vert de la Maison-Blanche suppose des contreparties.

En haut de la liste, figurerait l'effort militaire des Turcs en Afghanistan. Washington souhaiterait que le contingent turc actuellement à Kaboul s'engage dans le sud du pays. « Nos deux peuples entretiennent des liens très forts, argumente Gündüz Aktan : bien que nous soutenions le régime en place, nos soldats ne doivent pas aller combattre les talibans : nous devons juste assurer une mission de maintien de l'ordre. » Autre intérêt divergent entre les Turcs et les Américains : l'Iran. Un front commun dans la lutte contre le PKK, des accords énergétiques et commerciaux, Ankara tient à ses bonnes relations avec son voisin. « Si on nous demande de prendre nos distances, nous aurons du mal à dire non », analyse Soli Özel, professeur de relations internationales à l'université Bilgi.

LAURE MARCHAND



Osman Orsal/Reuters

Turkish guards Wednesday carrying coffin of a commando killed fighting PKK rebels.

Gates urges Turks to quit Iraq by middle of March

By Richard A. Oppel Jr. and Khalid al-Ansary

BAGHDAD: Defense Secretary Robert Gates urged the Turkish military on Wednesday to abandon by mid-March their invasion of guerrilla-controlled lands in the northernmost reaches of Iraq.

But Turkish officials said the government had no intention of ending military operations in Iraq before all its targets had been destroyed.

Gates's call for an end to the offensive came amid signs that the American and Iraqi governments were growing increasingly worried that fierce fighting along the mountainous Turkey-Iraq border could widen into a much broader and bloodier conflict.

"It's very important that the Turks make this operation as short as possible and then leave," Gates told reporters in India on Wednesday as he prepared to leave for Ankara, the capital of Turkey.

His comments appeared to be a departure from earlier, more unambiguous American statements that backed the Turks in their combat operations against guerrillas from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK.

"I measure quick in terms of days, a week or two, something like that, not months," Gates said, becoming the first senior American official to demand a strict timeline for the Turkish operation to end.

But, publicly at least, the Turks show no sign of letting up. Ahmet Davutoglu, a senior adviser to Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, told reporters on Wednesday that there was "no timetable" for ending the operation.

Targets must first be hit, they reply

Meeting in Baghdad with the Iraqi foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, Davutoglu warned that the operation would not stop until the PKK bases inside Iraq were "eliminated."

As American officials worried that the fighting could destabilize the Kurdish-controlled north, efforts to mend deep rifts between the other two main sects in Iraq hit a roadblock in Baghdad on Wednesday when the three-member Iraqi presidency council rejected an important new law that calls for provincial elections by October. (Page 8)

The law would presumably do away with severe electoral distortions in some provinces that exist partly because Sunnis boycotted the previous provin-

cial ballots, leaving Kurds and Shiites with vastly more power. For example, Shiites dominate the Diyala provincial government even though Sunnis constitute a majority of the region, a condition that exacerbated the fierce sectarian violence there during the past two years.

Turks launched their most ambitious operation in years, using thousands of troops according to Turkish media reports supported by helicopters and fighter aircraft to push well into the high mountains and valleys on the Iraq side of the border that have long been controlled by the guerrillas.

The Turkish military claims that it has killed 230 PKK guerrillas, including 77 in bitter fighting since Tuesday. A PKK spokesman, Ahmed Denis, scoffed at the Turkish numbers in a telephone

interview on Wednesday, saying that body bags with more than 100 dead Turkish soldiers had already been taken from the battlefield. Neither claim could be independently verified.

American officials have backed the right of Turkey, a crucial NATO ally, to defeat the PKK, which the United States government classifies as a terrorist organization.

In recent years Turkey has sometimes sent troops over the border in temporary "hot pursuit" raids against guerrillas. But this is the first time that American officials have been so adamant in urging a Turkish withdrawal.

Though the Turkish invasion has so far been limited, Iraqi officials also fear what it could turn into. The Iraqi cabinet issued a statement Tuesday night condemning the operation as a violation of Iraqi sovereignty and warning that "unilateral military action is not acceptable."

In Washington, Nabi Sensoy, the Turkish ambassador to the United States, said

in a phone interview that while Turkey was still cooperating closely with the United States, it had no intention of ending military operations in Iraq before all its targets had been destroyed.

"This operation is limited in size, scope and duration," he said. "There are certain targets in mind, and plans have been made to attain those targets, and when those are achieved, they will come back. So 'limited' will stay 'limited.'"

"The military never reveals the targets or the time frame," Sensoy said. "It won't be open-ended, but we can't pinpoint when it's going to stop."

Sensoy said that Gates would be given more information in his meetings in Ankara, and he said he did not anticipate that U.S.-Turkish military cooperation — which the ambassador described as greatly improved in recent months — would suffer over the timing of the operation's end.

"Before and during the operation, everyone is really sharing all kinds of information as to what's happening," he said, "so I don't really expect that we will in any way be out of step with the United States."

Sensoy, describing the PKK as "by far the deadliest terrorist organization in the world," asserted that the military operation targets only PKK militants and is being conducted in a rugged area where, Ankara believes, no civilians live.

"The sole target of the airstrikes and the ground operation is the PKK terrorist organization, nothing else," Sensoy said. "We have no hidden agenda, we have no hidden target, we make it very clear."

Brian Knowlton in Washington, Sebnem Arsu in Turkey and an Iraqi correspondent in Sulaimaniya, Iraq, contributed reporting.

TIME

Feb. 28, 2008

Turkey's Anti-War Diva

By Pelin Turgut/Istanbul

Better known for her tabloid love affairs, plastic surgery and husky voice, transsexual Turkish diva Bulent Ersoy makes the unlikeliest political activist. Yet she has caused a storm of outrage by becoming the only public personality to speak out against Turkey's invasion of northern Iraq. So pervasive is the nationalist climate that Ersoy has been vilified for declaring — on a national TV equivalent of *American Idol*, where she is a judge — that if she had a son, she would not have sent him to fight this war. She is now under investigation for being "anti-military".

Ersoy is widely popular but the response to her declaration has been bellicose. Turkey's TV watchdog said it has been inundated with calls protesting Ersoy's comments. Officials at the Star TV channel are said to be contemplating dropping her as a judge on the show. An Istanbul prosecutor has begun an investigation into her remarks on the grounds that they could put people off military service, compulsory for men over the age of 18. Many of those killed in Iraq have been conscripts. (This is not the first time Ersoy has been on the wrong side of the military: she was banned from performing for several years following a military coup in 1980.)

When she delivered her remarks on the air, Ersoy immediately got into a fight with a fellow celebrity judge, the singer Ebru Gündeş, countered that were she to have a son, she would have no hesitation in having him "fight like a lion." "Martyrs killed in action do not die, the country will never be divided," she said. Ersoy retorted that there was no point taking refuge in

clichés.

Turkey's military has said it has killed 230 PKK rebels in the current operation while Turkish losses stood at 27, but the casualty reports cannot be independently confirmed. The conflict has killed up to 40,000 people since 1984.

The U.S., mindful of upsetting Iraq's only fairly peaceful region, is urging Turkey for a quick end to the invasion targeting separatist Kurdish rebels based in the mountains of north Iraq. U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, in Ankara today, called for the operation to be over shortly and for the government to address the economic and social concerns of its Kurdish minority, which complains of cultural and other restrictions as well as deep poverty.

But his call appears to be falling on deaf ears. Turkey is awash in fervent nationalism — newspapers are emblazoned with military heroics and jingoistic slogans. The government of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is loathe to upset a cosy alliance with the far right Nationalist Action Party, which helped it push through a recent law allowing headscarves in universities. Although thousands of Kurds in the southeast have taken to the streets in recent days to protest the invasion, there has otherwise been virtually no public opposition (with the exception of Ersoy's comment) to the invasion. A political solution to the Kurdish issue appears a long way off.



Since November, the U.S. has been providing military intelligence to the Turkish army, helping target air strikes. Now that the Turkish army is engaged on the field in north Iraq, it may not want to pull back quickly. Ankara is deeply suspicious of the regional Kurdish government there, which it accuses of supporting the PKK. It is also concerned that the largely autonomous region may seek independence, in turn fomenting similar demands by its own restive Kurdish population. In response to Gates' remarks, the Turkish military did not set a timetable for withdrawal. "Short term is a relative notion. Sometimes it is a day, sometimes a year," Chief of Staff Yasar Buyukanit said after his meeting with Gates.

FINANCIAL TIMES

February 29 2008

Turkey rebuffs US call for quick Iraq exit

By Demetri Sevastopulo and Vincent Boland in Ankara:

Turkey declined to offer any assurances yesterday that its military incursion into northern Iraq would end quickly, despite US calls for the operation to be limited.

On a visit to Ankara, Robert Gates, the US defence secretary, urged the Turks to keep their action against Kurdish PKK rebels - now entering its second week - "as short and precisely targeted as possible", although he did not repeat earlier comments that it should last no more than two weeks.

General Yashar Buyukanit, Turkey's top military chief, appeared to dismiss Mr Gates's concerns, saying: "Short is a relative notion." He gave no hint of when his troops might withdraw and said the US "understands" the Turkish position.

Turkish political leaders also refused to say how long the incursion

would last.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, prime minister, said after meeting Mr Gates that troops would return "once the operation reached its goal", the Anatolian news agency reported.

Asked how Turkish officials responded to his urgings, Mr Gates said: "I think we'll see."

Turkish troops, backed by military jets, entered northern Iraq on February 21 in pursuit of PKK guerrillas who have carried out several deadly attacks inside Turkey in recent months. Ankara insists the operation targets only bases belonging to the Kurdish separatist group, which is branded a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the US and the European Union.

The US has been taken by surprise by the ferocity of the Turkish as-

sault on the PKK. At least 230 rebels and 24 Turkish military personnel are reported to have died so far. Washington is also worried about the possibility of a clash between Turkey and the forces of the Kurdistan regional government that controls northern Iraq. Both are close US allies.

European diplomats said the apparent rift between Ankara and Washington suggested that Turkey wanted to be seen to be making its own decisions about when to withdraw its forces.

Mr Gates welcomed Turkey's dispatch of a diplomatic delegation to Baghdad this week, headed by a close aide to Mr Erdogan. But he also suggested that Ankara needed to be more transparent about the incursion and what it hoped to achieve.

"The Turkish government should make clear to the Iraqi government and everyone concerned exactly what their intentions are and the limited goals and scope of the operations," he said.

The Turkish operation has broad domestic support and is being facilitated, at least in part, by US intelligence sharing. But this cannot hide growing concerns in Washington that there might be more at stake in northern Iraq than Turkey's security.

Mr Gates said: "I believe there is a growing appreciation of the complexity of the situation to balance the right of Turkey to defend itself against the need to maintain Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity."



The Kurds

Turkey invades northern Iraq

ANKARA AND ERBIL

With scores of fighters on both sides killed, the latest battle between Turkey and its rebel Kurds with havens in Iraq may get out of hand

THE latest incursion by Turkish forces into northern Iraq in an effort to squash the rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which draws its support from Turkey's own Kurds, is the biggest in a decade. It is also one of the most worrying for the region as a whole. The danger is that it may draw in the *peshmerga*, the Kurdish forces loyal to the government of the Kurds' autonomous region in northern Iraq, and destabilise all of Iraq, just when the insurgency across the country is gradually being contained. The most striking development is that America, whose relations with Turkey, its old ally in NATO, have been chilly, this time appears to have sided more plainly with the Turks. The Americans have even sent high-tech specialists to work alongside the Turks to provide "real-time" intelligence to help Turkish helicopters and artillery to target the PKK in its mountain fastnesses.

The government in Baghdad is dismayed by Turkey's breach of Iraq's territorial sovereignty, but seems grudgingly prepared to sit on its hands provided that the incursion lasts no more than a week or two and that Turkish forces do not penetrate deeper than 30km (19 miles) or so into the rugged mountains of northern Iraq.

It is a lot harder for Iraq's Kurdish regional government to stomach the intrusion, but it too is keen not to let its forces tangle with the Turks, despite rising anger among ordinary Iraqi Kurds against what they consider Turkey's aggression. Iraq's Kurds have little love for the PKK, and insist that they do not help it with logistics or weapons. But they also say the Turkish government should do more to accommo-

date Turkey's 14m or so Kurds by giving them greater cultural and political rights.

The Americans naturally still want to be friendly with all sides—an almost impossible task. Iraq's Kurds depend on what they see as an informal American guarantee of their right to secure their almost unprecedented autonomy—and there is no

sign that the Americans are likely to ditch them. But more recently American diplomats and soldiers have been concentrating on trying to draw other Iraqi constituencies, especially the Sunni Arabs, as well as recalcitrant Shia radicals loyal to a fiery cleric, Muqtada al-Sadr, into a *modus vivendi* with the Shia-led establishment in Baghdad. In a hopeful move, Mr Sadr told his militia to extend a ceasefire that was due to expire last week.

What is new is America's readiness to risk annoying Iraq's Kurds by acquiescing in Turkey's latest effort to bash the PKK. George Bush has called the PKK "our common enemy". An American official has even called military co-operation between Turkey and America since November, when the Turks launched their latest round of attacks on the PKK, "the most intense since the Korean war" in the 1950s, when Turkish forces within the NATO alliance won a reputation for bravery.

Whether the latest campaign will succeed is another matter. The Turks say they must root out some 400 PKK fighters strung out in a swathe of exceptionally harsh mountains stretching some 100km from north of Zakho to the Kandil mountains near where Turkey, Iraq and Iran all meet (see map on next page). The Turks particularly want to destroy PKK bases in

the Zap and Haftanin districts. Above all, they hope to stop the PKK spring offensive that usually begins later this month. Thanks to American intelligence technology, they may be better able to do so. "These are tailored, precise operations, taking place in a relatively small area," says a Western military observer.

Early claims of success by both sides are hard to verify. The Turkish press says that 10,000 troops have crossed into Iraq; non-Turkish analysts reckon the figure is 2,000-3,000. Turkish officials say at least 150 PKK fighters have been killed since the assault began, on February 21st, for the loss of a score of Turkish soldiers; the PKK says it has had minimal losses, but has killed at least 80 Turks.

What is likely, in any event, is that the fog, brutal terrain and deep snow will make it very hard for the Turks altogether to eradicate the PKK, which has been extraordinarily resilient since it started fighting for self-rule in 1984. Since then, some 40,000 people, mostly Kurds, have died. Numerous cross-border attacks have fizzled out. The PKK may be going through a bad patch; their logistics have been battered, their weapons stock may have been reduced, their morale may be low. And this attack may be more comprehensive than previous ones. But it is unlikely to knock out the guerrillas for good. "We will draw the Turks in and they will get stuck in a quagmire," says a PKK commander.

Moreover, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, who heads the ruling Justice and Development (AK) party, risks alienating the many Turkish Kurds who had proven increasingly ready to vote for him and his moderately Islamist party. But he has once again become wary, in recent months, of Turkey's self-appointed secular guardians, the generals, breathing down his neck and muttering baleful warnings against going too far down an Islamist path. In particular, a recent AK law (not yet enacted) to let female students wear the previously banned headscarf in universities has aroused the ire of secular-minded Turks, including the generals.

Mindful of such divisive emotions at home, Mr Erdogan has been using increasingly hawkish and nationalist language. He has dismissed the Kurds' latest demands for more education in their own language. This week, misty-eyed, he began reciting the works of a nationalist poet, Mehmet Akif Ersoy. Letting the generals have another go at the PKK may be part of this political strategy. During the latest row over headscarves, the generals have been notably—and unusually—silent.

At the same time, Mr Erdogan may still hope to promote Islam among the Kurds as the best antidote against Kurdish nationalism. His AK advisers even hope to win the mayor's race in Diyarbakir, the biggest Kurdish-dominated city in south-eastern Turkey, in elections due next year. "If the AK gets Diyarbakir, the Kurdish nationalist movement will suffer a major setback," says Serafettin Elci, a prominent independent Kurdish politician. "It will take them

years to recover." But Mr Erdogan's recent hawkishness could turn many sympathetic Kurds against him.

In any event, hopes of an accommodation between the Turkish government and the Kurdish regional government in Iraq are less fanciful. There is still a chance that Jalal Talabani, Iraq's president, who is also the leader of one of the two parties that jointly run the Kurds' regional government, may make a ground-breaking visit to Turkey later this month. While Turkish troops have been battering the PKK, senior Turkish diplomats have been in Baghdad talking to Hoshyar Zebari, Iraq's foreign minister, and Barham Saleh, Iraq's acting prime minister (while Nuri al-Maliki is abroad for a medical check-up), both of whom are leading Kurds. A senior Turkish general also visited Baghdad to brief the central Iraqi government on Turkey's military intentions towards the PKK. Economic links between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey have continued to grow.

To complicate matters, the Iraqi Kurds, who have a history of internecine strife, may not be at one over how to react. Some say that the Americans are tiring of Masoud Barzani, the Kurds' president, who is said to be more hostile towards the Turks than is his nephew, Nechirvan Barzani, the Kurds' prime minister. Others say that the Turks are keen to cultivate Mr Talabani, who has been notably reticent about the incursion, perhaps hoping to drive a wedge between him and the Barzanis.

An even bigger question, in the long run, is whether Turkey will ever really tolerate, let alone welcome, autonomy for Iraqi Kurds, which they fear may turn into virtual independence and act as a magnet for Kurdish nationalists in Turkey. Many Iraqi Kurds, including those who dislike the PKK, doubt whether the Turks will ever let them build up their proto-state. "Even if they withdraw now or next week and remove the PKK, they will come back," says a senior Kurdish official. "Just wait and see."

The Americans say that Iraq's Kurds have helped isolate the PKK, denying them weapons and logistics, and stopping journalists from visiting their camps, but must still do more. "Iraqi Kurdish leaders have taken steps to deter and block the flow of terrorists and their supplies," says an American diplomat in Ankara. "We have urged those authorities to strengthen these efforts. It is in the interest of both Turkey and Iraq that the PKK be eliminated from northern Iraq and the two countries need to continue to work together towards that goal." This week a White House official said: "Obviously we support Turkey and we support Iraq." How simple. ■



Valeurs actuelles 29 février 2008

DÉCRYPTAGE

Ankara mine l'Irak

Par FRÉDÉRIC PONS



L'opération aéroterrestre lancée par l'armée turque, le 21 février, contre les bases de rebelles kurdes en Irak, mine gravement la stabilité de la région. Elle ne peut que rallumer la fièvre nationaliste en Irak, en Syrie et en Iran où vivent de fortes minorités kurdes. Elle déstabilise de nouveau le Kurdistan irakien, qui avait pourtant retrouvé la sécurité et un début de prospérité. « C'est un désastre qui ralentit notre marche pour la paix, la démocratie et la prospérité », assure Nechirvan Barzani, le premier ministre du gouvernement régional autonome du Kurdistan.

Pour les Américains aussi, c'est une catastrophe. L'opération turque risque d'entraver la laborieuse pacification entreprise en Irak. Les progrès réalisés en 2007 faisaient espérer à la Maison Blanche et au Pentagone un début de retrait du contingent américain dès ce printemps. Malgré les appels au calme lancés par Washington à son allié de l'Otan, le gouvernement turc n'en fait qu'à sa tête: « Ce à quoi nous essayons de parvenir, déterminera la durée de l'opération, a-t-il sèchement répondu ce lundi. Les forces se retireront dès qu'elles auront achevé leur mission. »

Ankara justifie cette seconde incursion en trois mois par la nécessité d'en finir avec les « bases terroristes » installées au nord du Kurdistan. C'est de là qu'opèrent depuis 1984 les rebelles du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), estimés à 4 000 hommes agueris. Le 21 octobre, un de leurs commandos infiltrés en Turquie avait tué 12 soldats turcs dans une embuscade. Inscrit sur les listes des organisations terroristes dressées par l'Union européenne et les États-Unis, le PKK

revendique l'autonomie du tiers oriental de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes.

La vaste opération de "nettoyage" lancée au nord de l'Irak permet en réalité à la Turquie de rappeler au monde l'un de ses intérêts vitaux, "non négociable": l'interdiction de toute forme d'indépendance aux Kurdes du Moyen-Orient. Les premiers visés sont ceux d'Irak parce qu'ils ont su refaire leur unité, après vingt ans des guerres fratricides. Profitant de l'affaiblissement du pouvoir central à Bagdad, ils affirment chaque jour leur autonomie, premier pas, à leurs yeux, vers l'indépendance promise naguère par les États-Unis.

Washington leur a demandé de patienter. En attendant, les Kurdes



L'armée turque affronte 4 000 Kurdes au nord de l'Irak.

d'Irak mettent leur région en ordre. Après le drapeau kurde qui a remplacé presque partout le drapeau national irakien, ils préparent leur souveraineté économique. Leur sous-sol recèle suffisamment de pétrole autour de Kirkouk pour rendre leur État viable. Ils commencent à l'exploiter.

La réaction militaire turque contre le PKK veut retarder une nouvelle fois cette "échecance inacceptable", avec un objectif immédiat: essayer d'entraîner dans la bataille les 5 millions de Kurdes d'Irak, peu ou prou solidaires de leurs "cousins" de Turquie. Au besoin en embrasant tout le nord de l'Irak. Voire au-delà si nécessaire.

L'armée turque "plutôt responsable" jusqu'alors, selon la Maison Blanche



WASHINGTON, 26 fév 2008 (AFP)

LA MAISON BLANCHE a répété mardi que l'opération militaire turque dans le nord de l'Irak devait être courte, mais s'est gardée de fixer des limites à l'allié turc, estimant que celui-ci s'était comporté de manière "plutôt responsable" jusqu'alors.

"Nous voulons que ce soit pour le court terme, et nous voulons que les cibles soient très restreintes", a déclaré devant la presse la porte-parole de la Maison Blanche, Dana Perino.

Mais "je ne vais pas mettre de limite dans le temps" à cette opération, a-t-elle dit, tandis que le gouvernement irakien dénonçait cette incursion commencée jeudi comme une atteinte à la souveraineté du pays.

L'offensive menée par l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak contre les séparatistes kurdes de Turquie qui se servent du Kurdistan irakien comme base arrière place les Etats-Unis dans une position délicate entre leurs deux alliés irakien et turc.

Mme Perino a dit comprendre la "consternation" irakienne, mais "nous pensons que la Turquie a le droit de se défendre".

"C'est donc une situation dont, évidemment, personne ne voudrait, mais (...) nous pensons que les Turcs se sont montrés plutôt responsables jusqu'à présent dans la conduite de cette opération", a-t-elle dit.

Elle a souligné la nécessité de la concertation entre les gouvernements turc et irakien, mais a assuré qu'elle avait lieu.

Washington demande à Ankara de limiter dans le temps son incursion en Irak



ANKARA, 27 fév 2008 (AFP) -

ALORS que la controverse enfle entre Ankara et Bagdad sur l'opération menée par l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak contre les rebelles kurdes, les Etats-Unis ont demandé mercredi à la Turquie de limiter leur incursion à "une ou deux semaines".

L'opération militaire lancée le 21 février devra se mesurer "en termes de jours, voire une ou deux semaines. Mais pas en mois", a déclaré à New Delhi le secrétaire américain à la Défense Robert Gates, attendu mercredi à Ankara pour des entretiens jeudi avec les dirigeants turcs.

M. Gates a indiqué qu'il s'efforcera de convaincre ses interlocuteurs turcs que "l'action militaire seule ne résoudra pas le problème du terrorisme pour la Turquie".

"Il y a une place pour les opérations de sécurité, mais elles doivent être accompagnées d'initiatives économiques et politiques (...) Il faut répondre aux problèmes et aux plaintes des Kurdes, dans le cadre d'initiatives pas seulement militaires afin de trouver une solution sur le long terme", a-t-il dit.

Les Etats-Unis, qui fournissent depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel sur les déplacements des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak, ont cependant souligné que leur allié turc s'était à leurs yeux comporté jusque-là de manière "plutôt responsable".

"Nous pensons que la Turquie a le droit de se défendre", avait déclaré mardi soir la porte-parole de la Maison Blanche, Dana Perino.

"C'est donc une situation dont, évidemment, personne ne voudrait, mais (...) nous pensons que les Turcs se sont montrés plutôt responsables jusqu'à présent dans la conduite de cette opération", a-t-elle dit, encourageant les gouvernements turc et irakien à se concerter.

Les déclarations américaines interviennent alors que Bagdad a sévèrement condamné mardi l'opération militaire, tandis qu'Ankara faisait valoir

son droit à l'autodéfense.

"Le cabinet a fait part de son rejet et de sa condamnation de l'incursion de l'armée turque qui est considérée comme une violation de la souveraineté de l'Irak", a déclaré le gouvernement irakien.

Peu auparavant, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait estimé que l'opération "est le résultat du droit légitime à l'autodéfense".

"La Turquie mène un combat juste contre une organisation terroriste qui menace la paix et la stabilité régionales (...) La Turquie a le droit de se défendre elle-même, d'éliminer ceux qui portent atteinte à la paix, l'unité et la solidarité de ses citoyens", avait-t-il ajouté.

La Turquie a indiqué qu'elle retirerait ses troupes aussitôt leur mission achevée, mais n'a pas donné d'échéance.

Sur le terrain, des sources de sécurité kurdes irakiennes ont affirmé que les bombardements turcs s'étaient poursuivis dans la nuit de mardi à mercredi.

L'état-major de l'armée turque a indiqué mardi que de fortes chutes de neige avaient "partiellement" empêché la progression de l'opération terrestre, mais que l'aviation et l'artillerie avaient pu poursuivre leurs bombardements.

Le dernier bilan des victimes de l'opération fourni par l'état-major turc fait état de 19 soldats et au moins 153 rebelles tués.

Dans un communiqué cité tard mardi par l'agence de presse Firat News, considérée comme le porte-voix des rebelles, l'aile militaire du PKK a annoncé la mort de 13 soldats au cours des deux derniers jours, ce qui porte son décompte à 94 soldats et trois rebelles tués.

Ankara estime à 4.000 le nombre de rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak. Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 37.000 morts depuis le début en 1984 de l'insurrection du PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis.



Cinq soldats turcs, 77 rebelles kurdes tués en Irak

ANKARA -AFP / 27 février 2008

- CINQ SOLDATS turcs et 77 rebelles kurdes ont été tués lors de combats dans le nord de l'Irak depuis mardi soir, a affirmé mercredi l'état-major de l'armée turque dans un communiqué diffusé sur son site internet.

Evoquant "les plus lourds combats" depuis le début de l'offensive, l'état-major a aussi mentionné la mort de trois miliciens kurdes supplétifs de l'armée turque dans les combats.

Ces nouvelles pertes portent à 230 le nombre de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) tués depuis le début de l'opération, jeudi soir, et à 27 dans le camp de l'armée turque, miliciens compris, selon son propre décompte.

Les combats se poursuivent et des indications semblent établir que des dirigeants de haut rang du PKK figurent parmi les rebelles impliqués dans les accrochages, a indiqué le communiqué.

L'aviation et l'artillerie ont poursuivi leurs bombardements tandis que les troupes au sol ratissaient les zones de combat.

Depuis le début de l'offensive, les troupes ont partiellement ou totalement détruit 312 positions et l'artillerie et l'aviation ont frappé 523 objectifs, dont des défenses anti-aériennes, des centres de commandement et des installations de soutien logistique, a affirmé l'état-major



AFP

Turquie: au coeur de la zone kurde, le PKK reste au centre du conflit

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 27 fév 2008 (AFP)

TRAQUE dans la montagne irakienne par les forces turques, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) est encore une référence incontournable pour de nombreux Kurdes à Diyarbakir, le chef-lieu du sud-est anatolien, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes.

20.000 personnes selon les organisateurs -mais pas plus de 10.000 selon les autorités locales- ont manifesté lundi dans cette ville déshéritée de plus d'un million d'habitants pour réclamer la fin de l'opération militaire turque lancée le 21 février dans le nord de l'Irak.

La manifestation organisée à l'appel du Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), la principale formation pro-kurde du pays, a dégénéré en heurts sporadiques entre de jeunes manifestants et la police.

Le PKK, la rébellion séparatiste kurde, avait appelé la veille les jeunes Kurdes des métropoles à se révolter.

"L'opération (de l'armée) attise le nationalisme kurde et turc, et sert les intérêts du PKK", confie à l'AFP Ahmet, journaliste et écrivain kurde qui souhaite que son nom ne soit pas cité par crainte de poursuites judiciaires.

"Tant qu'une amnistie générale comprenant aussi les commandants (des rebelles) n'est pas proclamée, le PKK continuera de survivre", estime cet intellectuel.

Le PKK ne revendique plus un Etat indépendant, mais seulement l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie. L'image de l'organisation n'est plus ce qu'elle était au sein de la communauté kurde (15 à 20% des 70 millions d'habitants de la Turquie), surtout depuis la capture et la condamnation de son chef Abdullah Öcalan en 1999, suivie d'une accalmie de six ans.

Il n'en reste pas moins qu'il est toujours au centre du conflit kurde.

Ferit Demir, un commerçant de la ville, souligne que "les gens d'ici ont un lien de parenté avec la guérilla (le PKK) et cette opération ouvre davantage les plaies".

M. Demir affirme que les jeunes rejoignant les bases de l'organisation - considérée comme terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union euro-

péenne- sont aujourd'hui moins nombreux à cause des réformes démocratiques pro-européennes adoptées par le gouvernement.

Mais, dit-il, "je crains que le sentimentalisme ne l'emporte et que les jeunes ne remontent dans la montagne".

Parmi les demandes de la population: le démantèlement des "gardiens de village", une milice controversée de Kurdes payés et armés par Ankara.

Quelque 5.000 miliciens kurdes (sur 58.000) ont été impliqués dans des crimes ou des délits mais peu ont été poursuivis, selon des chiffres officiels.

"Tant que cette force reste en place, il n'y aura pas de paix", souligne Orhan, un chauffeur de taxi qui ne fournit que son prénom.

"Ces gens ne veulent pas que les combats finissent car ils ne seront plus rémunérés", souligne le jeune homme, affirmant que "%95 des Kurdes (de Turquie) ne veulent pas d'un Etat indépendant, mais qu'il faut quand même un certain dialogue entre le PKK et l'Etat turc.

Ankara a toujours refusé tout contact avec le PKK. Les violences qui se poursuivent depuis 1984 ont coûté la vie à 37.000 personnes, selon les chiffres officiels.

Le DTP est menacé d'interdiction pour collusion avec les rebelles. Mais pour Ahmet il serait erroné de bannir ce parti car c'est une "soupape de sécurité" entre l'Etat turc et le PKK, bien qu'il soit loin de représenter l'ensemble des Kurdes (5% des voix aux législatives).

Refusant de se démarquer du PKK, plusieurs dirigeants du parti sont actuellement en prison ou sont jugés.

"Il faut construire un certain mécanisme de dialogue avec le PKK" soutient Necdet Atalay, chef provincial du DTP qui assure que même si des centaines de militants sont tués par l'armée en Irak, le PKK continuera à exister.

Pour d'autres, l'incursion turque ne rappelle que d'amers souvenirs.

Takiyeddin, le fils de Halim Tanrikulu, a été abattu en 1994 à l'âge de 22 ans lors de heurts avec le PKK.

"Malgré tout, je veux la paix", dit cet homme de 65 ans.

MATCH.com

Mecredi 27 fevrier 2008

La photo du jour



- 19 soldats turcs ont été tués ainsi que 153 membres du Pkk depuis jeudi dernier

De fortes chutes de neige ont «partiellement» empêché mardi la poursuite de l'opération de l'armée turque dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé l'état-major, en faisant état de deux soldats tués la veille au soir dans des combats avec les rebelles kurdes. 19 soldats turcs ont trouvé la mort depuis le début de l'opération ainsi qu'environ 153 combattants du Pkk.

Ankara refuse tout calendrier de retrait de ses troupes d'Irak

Par **Ahmed Rasheed et Mohammed Abbas BAGDAD (Reuters)** –

La Turquie ne fixera aucun calendrier pour le retrait de ses troupes du nord de l'Irak avant d'en avoir fini avec la menace que font planer les rebelles kurdes du PKK, fait savoir un émissaire d'Ankara à Bagdad.

"Notre objectif est clair, notre mission est claire et il n'y aura pas de calendrier avant (...) que ces bases terroristes soient éliminées", a dit Ahmet Davotoglu, principal conseiller du Premier ministre turc Tayyip Erdogan pour la politique étrangère, après un entretien avec le chef de la diplomatie irakienne, Hochar Zebari, qui est kurde.

Il devait également rencontrer le président Jalal Talabani, un Kurde lui aussi.

L'état-major militaire turc a annoncé que 77 autres rebelles kurdes du PKK et cinq soldats turcs avaient trouvé la mort au cours d'intenses combats depuis mardi soir. Cela porte à 230 le nombre de rebelles tués et à 24 celui des soldats turcs qui ont trouvé la mort depuis le début de l'offensive, jeudi dernier.

Plusieurs milliers de soldats turcs ont franchi la frontière avec l'Irak pour s'attaquer aux combattants du PKK qui ont installé leurs bases dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

Le Premier ministre irakien par intérim

a estimé qu'une incursion prolongée de l'armée turque aurait des conséquences "terribles" pour la région.

"SITUATION PRÉCAIRE ET TRÈS DANGEREUSE"

"Les conséquences sont terribles. C'est une situation précaire et très dangereuse", a déclaré Barham Saleh, un Kurde, à Reuters qui lui demandait ce qui se passerait si l'offensive en cours ne prenait pas fin rapidement.

Mardi, l'Irak a durci le ton, qualifiant l'incursion turque de violation de sa souveraineté et appelant à un retrait immédiat des forces turques.

Ankara se dit engagé dans un combat légitime contre ce qu'elle considère, à l'instar des Etats-Unis, comme une organisation terroriste.

Le secrétaire américain à la Défense Robert Gates, qui rencontrera des responsables turcs jeudi à Ankara, a jugé "très important que les Turcs veillent à ce que cette opération soit aussi brève que possible".

Il a estimé par ailleurs que la Turquie ne devait pas se limiter à l'action militaire vis-à-vis des séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), mais prendre aussi des initiatives d'ordre économique et social.

"Il est très important que les Turcs



veillent à ce que cette opération soit aussi brève que possible et qu'ils s'en aillent ensuite, en se montrant attentifs à la souveraineté irakienne", a déclaré Gates à des journalistes à New Delhi.

"Je veux parler de jours, d'une ou deux semaines à peu près, pas de mois", a-t-il ajouté.

L'état-major de l'armée turque a publié mercredi des photos de ses soldats dans le nord de l'Irak, où on les voit assis ou marchant dans la neige, ou encore en mission de reconnaissance. Des avions de guerre, des hélicoptères de combat et l'artillerie appuient les forces terrestres.

Ankara impute au PKK le décès de près de 40.000 personnes depuis le début de sa lutte pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie, majoritairement kurde, en 1984.

La présidence irakienne rejette la loi sur les élections provinciales



BAGDAD AFP / 27 février 2008

- LE CONSEIL présidentiel irakien a rejeté mercredi une loi prévoyant l'organisation d'élections provinciales jugées cruciales pour la stabilisation du pays, la renvoyant devant le Parlement, a annoncé le bureau du président dans un communiqué.

Le conseil a entériné deux lois concernant le budget fédéral 2008 et une amnistie générale mais "la loi sur les élections provinciales n'a pas été approuvée, et a été renvoyée devant le Parlement", déclare le communiqué.

Ces trois lois étaient considérées comme cruciales, en particulier par Washington, pour les efforts de réconciliation en Irak et la stabilisation du pays mais leur adoption avait été retardée pendant des mois en raison des divisions au sein du Parlement.

La loi régissant le scrutin était soutenue par la majorité chiite, la loi sur le budget par les Kurdes et celle sur l'amnistie par les sunnites.

La Maison Blanche a minimisé ce rejet, y voyant une expression démocratique, bien que l'administration Bush ait beaucoup insisté sur l'importance de ce texte.

"S'il est vrai que nous aurions aimé la voir (la loi) passer sans complication, ceci est la manifestation de la démocratie en action", a dit la porte-parole de la Maison Blanche Dana Perino. "Nous pensons que les Irakiens seront capables de trouver une solution", a-t-elle dit.

Selon Nasir al-Ani, le porte-parole du conseil présidentiel, qui compte trois membres, la loi électorale a été rejetée car certaines de ses clauses sont contraires à la Constitution.

Celle-ci doit augmenter le pouvoir des provinces en leur permettant de lancer leurs propres projets économiques, avec le financement du gouvernement central.

L'Irak est divisé en 19 circonscriptions, ce qui correspond au découpage du pays en provinces sauf pour la capitale Bagdad, qui compte deux circonscriptions.

Ces élections étaient prévues initialement le 1er octobre sous supervision de l'ONU.

Elles doivent permettre à la communauté sunnite de peser plus dans le processus politique après avoir boycotté les précédentes élections provinciales.

Elles pourraient également permettre au mouvement de Moqtada Sadr, le plus populaire au sein de la communauté chiite, d'avoir une chance de contrôler des organes politiques comme les conseils provinciaux, dont il affirme qu'ils sont indûment monopolisés par une autre formation chiite alliée au gouvernement.

Ce contrôle s'avère crucial dans les provinces du sud, très riches en pétrole. Les précédentes élections en janvier 2005 avaient désigné des conseils provinciaux provisoires.

Le scrutin doit désigner un conseil dans chaque province qui lui-même élira un exécutif ayant des pouvoirs étendus dans le cadre des efforts de décentralisation entamés en Irak.

Les Irakiens sont devenus de plus en plus critiques de leur gouvernement et de leurs institutions politiques, accusés régulièrement de népotisme et de privilégier les affiliations politiques plutôt que les compétences.

Une chanteuse contre la guerre

Il a fallu que la chanteuse de variétés transsexuelle Bülent Ersoy s'oppose publiquement à l'opération militaire turque en Irak, lors d'une émission télévisée très regardée, pour que d'autres femmes, journalistes, romancières ou artistes, dénoncent à leur tour la guerre.

Pierre Vanrie

LA célèbre chanteuse transsexuelle turque Bülent Ersoy vient de créer la polémique sur la chaîne Star TV, lors d'une émission de variétés, sorte de Star Academy à la turque, en dénonçant le martyr, jugé inutile, des jeunes soldats turcs qui se font tuer dans les combats qui opposent actuellement l'armée turque au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak.

Brisant le tabou du sacrifice pour la patrie selon lequel "les martyrs sont immortels et la nation indivisible", Bülent Ersoy fait désormais l'objet de poursuites judiciaires pour avoir "porté atteinte au prestige de l'armée". Confirmant au quotidien Vatan qu'elle a bien dit de façon indirecte que si elle avait un enfant elle ne l'aurait pas laissé partir au front, Bülent Ersoy a assumé en direct ses propos en expliquant qu'elle avait "exprimé ce que les autres n'osaient pas dire tout haut" et qu'elle se sentait "soutenue" par de nombreuses mères de soldats morts au combat.

"A l'inverse de la Russie et des Etats-Unis, les mères de soldats en Turquie ne peuvent pas manifester contre la guerre",



écrit le journaliste de télévision Fuat Ugu. "Dans ces conditions, la sortie spectaculaire de Bülent Ersoy relève d'un courage confinant à la folie." Bülent Ersoy pourrait ainsi avoir lancé un mouvement anti-guerre féministe.

La romancière Perihan Magden, éditorialiste du quotidien Radikal, qui milite en

faveur de l'objection de conscience (et qui reprochait pourtant à Bülent Ersoy son opposition virulente au slogan Nous sommes tous des Arméniens affiché lors des obsèques du journaliste turco-arménien Hrant Dink le 19 janvier 2007), a cependant pris fait et cause pour la chanteuse en rendant hommage à la justesse de ses propos et en rappelant que "jusqu'à aujourd'hui, jamais aucun, mais alors absolument aucun, fils d'une personnalité puissante ou influente n'était mort tué au front".

Le quotidien Taraf publie par ailleurs en première page un poème antimilitariste de la grande chanteuse turque Sezen Aksu accompagné notamment d'un éditorial de Yasemin Congar, qui écrit : "Au moment où notre classe politique et nos médias ont succombé à la rhétorique guerrière, Bülent Ersoy a eu le mérite de faire entendre une voix différente. Elle a dit ce qui devait être dit. C'est à elle, qui n'a pas eu peur de dénoncer la culture du slogan, qu'est ainsi revenu le devoir de comprendre et de traduire la détresse d'une mère qui enterre son enfant."



27 février 2008

Opération militaire et diplomatique pour Ankara

Avec notre correspondant à Istanbul, Jérôme Bastion

L'armée turque poursuit sa lutte contre les rebelles kurdes du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak. Plus d'une centaine de personnes sont déjà mortes dans les combats commencés jeudi dernier, parmi lesquels figurent « 77 rebelles kurdes et 5 soldats turcs, tués depuis mardi soir » selon l'état-major de l'armée turque. Le secrétaire d'Etat américain à la défense, Robert Gates, doit se rendre ce jeudi en Turquie. Il va demander aux dirigeants turques de cesser rapidement l'opération militaire. Les Etats-Unis craignent que ces combats nuisent à la situation déjà difficile en Irak. Bagdad a condamné l'incursion comme une « violation de la souveraineté de l'Irak ».

Comme l'entente turco-irakienne conclue cet automne sur le cadre d'une telle opération militaire semble mise à mal, Ankara a décidé d'envoyer aujourd'hui même à Bagdad une mission diplomatique de haut rang pour tenter de rassurer le gouvernement irakien sur au moins 3 points.

D'abord, l'intervention militaire ne vise aucunement l'intégrité territoriale et politique de l'Irak, comme le rappelle régulièrement Erdogan et ses ministres ; elle n'entend pas, par exemple, interférer dans les affaires de l'administration kurde locale.

Ensuite, elle ne vise pas les civils et les dégâts seront dédom-



magés promet Ankara. On sait par exemple que de nombreux ponts ont été détruits. Ils seront soit réparés, soit reconstruits.

Enfin, les soldats se retireront dès que leur travail sera terminé. Il n'est pas question par exemple, comme le réclame avec virulence l'opposition, d'établir une zone tampon sur le sol irakien. Et d'ailleurs, le Parlement local kurde a réclamé hier la fermeture des quatre bases que la Turquie entretient depuis sa dernière intervention (c'était en 1997).

Reste à savoir quand justement l'armée turque estimera avoir atteint son objectif. Pour l'instant, elle semble piétiner et plus elle tardera à se retirer, plus les critiques se feront entendre.

Le ton monte entre Ankara et Bagdad

Les Kurdes du nord de l'Irak veulent la fermeture des bases turques

Amadiya --AFP - Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a estimé hier que la Turquie exerçait son droit à «l'autodéfense» en combattant les rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak, alors que Bagdad a condamné l'incursion comme une «violation de la souveraineté de l'Irak».

L'opération transfrontalière menée par la Turquie est le résultat de son droit légitime à l'autodéfense», a affirmé M. Erdogan devant le groupe parlementaire de son parti.

«La Turquie mène un combat juste contre une organisation terroriste qui menace la paix et la stabilité régionales [...] La Turquie a le droit de se défendre elle-même, d'éliminer ceux qui portent atteinte à la paix, à l'unité et à la solidarité de ses citoyens», a-t-il ajouté.

M. Erdogan a fait valoir que la présence des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), cible de l'offensive menée depuis jeudi soir par l'armée turque, était aussi «un élément d'instabilité politique pour l'Irak».

Le gouvernement irakien n'en a pas moins condamné hier l'incursion turque.

«Lors d'une réunion aujourd'hui, le cabinet a fait part de son rejet et de sa condamnation de l'incursion de l'armée turque, qui est considérée comme une violation de la souveraineté de l'Irak», a indiqué le gouverne-



ment dans un communiqué diffusé par son porte-parole Ali al-Dabbagh.

Les États-Unis, qui fournissent depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel sur les déplacements des rebelles et dont le secrétaire à la Défense, Robert Gates, doit se rendre aujourd'hui à Ankara, ont appelé lundi à un retrait rapide des troupes turques.

La Turquie a indiqué qu'elle retirerait ses troupes aussitôt leur mission achevée mais n'a pas donné d'échéance.

Sur le terrain, de fortes chutes de neige ont «partiellement» empêché hier la poursuite de l'opération, a annoncé dans un communiqué l'état-major turc, précisant que l'aviation et

l'artillerie avaient pu poursuivre leurs bombardements.

Le principal parti prokurde de Turquie, le Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), a appelé hier à un arrêt des combats.

«L'histoire punira les fauteurs de guerres, ceux qui se nourrissent de sang et qui font de la politique sur le sang versé», a affirmé devant les députés du DTP le président de leur groupe parlementaire, Ahmet Türk, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

À Van, une ville de l'est de la Turquie à la population en majorité kurde, neuf personnes ont été arrêtées après des heurts entre manifestants antiincursion et forces de police qui ont fait 12

blessés légers, dont quatre policiers, selon Anatolie.

Ankara estime à 4000 le nombre de rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak. Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 37 000 morts depuis le début en 1984 de l'insurrection du PKK.

Par ailleurs, des Kurdes irakiens, dont les députés du Parlement régional du Kurdistan, ont réclamé hier la fermeture des quatre bases turques présentes depuis plus d'une décennie dans le nord de l'Irak, où les troupes turques mènent une offensive contre des rebelles turcs.

Dans les années 1990, des chefs militaires kurdes avaient invité l'armée turque à établir des bases au Kurdistan irakien, alors que faisaient rage les combats entre factions kurdes rivales.

Nechirvan Barzani, le premier ministre du gouvernement régional kurde, a déclaré dimanche qu'un accord permettant à la Turquie d'avoir quatre bases militaires dans la région kurde était en vigueur depuis 1997.

Mais hier, le Parlement régional du Kurdistan a adopté une résolution demandant au gouvernement régional d'exhorter la Turquie à les fermer.

«Nous exigeons que le gouvernement turc quitte les bases qui avaient été établies au Kurdistan en raison des circonstances exceptionnelles que la région traversait avant la chute du régime» de Saddam Hussein, indique le texte de la résolution.

cyberpresse.ca

mercredi 27 fév 2008

Des Kurdes irakiens prêts à prendre les armes contre l'armée turque

A la frontière avec la Turquie, de jeunes Kurdes irakiens se disent prêts coûte que coûte à prendre les armes pour défendre leur village contre l'armée turque, affirmant leur solidarité avec les rebelles du PKK, qui, comme tout le monde, ont le «droit de vivre en paix».

Kamal Taha - Qimary, Irak - Agence France-Presse

La menace turque s'approche dangereusement. Ils viennent avec leurs canons, leurs armes et leurs avions», dit Juthiar Khalil, 25 ans, un habitant de Qimary, un village situé à la frontière avec la Turquie, qui mène depuis une semaine l'offensive contre les combattants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan en lutte contre Ankara, retranchés dans le Kurdistan irakien.

Réunis autour d'un poêle dans un petit commerce d'alimentation du village, Juthiar Khalil et neuf de ses amis le jurent: ils défendront leur maison si les soldats turcs les attaquent.

«Nous sommes prêts à défendre nos villages. Nous n'avons que des armes légères et ne pourrions affronter les chars, canons et avions turcs que si le gouvernement kurde nous aide avec des armes lourdes. Mais nous nous défendrons», assure-t-il. Ankara vient d'intensifier ses opérations, affirmant que 77 combattants du PKK avaient été tués depuis mardi soir et évoquant «les plus lourds combats» depuis le début de l'offensive jeudi dernier.

Juthiar Khalil défend le combat des rebelles du PKK, qui revendiquent l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie. Ils «ont le droit de vivre en paix», juge-t-il. «Ce sont

également des Kurdes, en lutte contre l'ennemi et ils ont le droit de vivre en paix, comme tout le monde».

Le jeune homme montre la montagne qui s'élève derrière lui et explique que jusqu'à 1991 et la guerre du Golfe, c'était là qu'était situé son village, à quelques encablures des villages turcs situés de l'autre côté de la frontière. Puis les habitants ont reconstruit Qimary près de la ville de Zakhō, plus loin de la frontière.

En temps normal, durant l'hiver, les villages de cette région montagneuse tournent au ralenti, emprisonnés sous un manteau de neige. Les routes menant aux villes

sont impraticables et les jeunes gens passent leur temps à couper le bois ramassé durant l'été pour faire du feu.

«Nous ne soutenons pas le PKK mais nous soutenons leurs droits. Si nous combattons la Turquie, ce sera uniquement pour défendre notre terre», tempère pour sa part Ahmed Aouni, 19 ans. «Nous espérons que la situation n'empirera pas. Mais nous craignons que les forces turques n'attaquent nos villages. Nous serons alors contraints de nous défendre et de défendre nos villages».

A Erbil, où siègent le gouvernement et le

Parlement du Kurdistan irakien, les habitants expriment leur lassitude par rapport à un conflit qui dure depuis 30 ans.

«Tout ce dont nous rêvons c'est de vivre en paix. On en a assez de ces tirs, de ces explosions, de ces combats quotidiens», se lamente Hama Saleh, 73 ans. «Qu'avons nous à gagner de cette guerre? Elle ne mènera qu'à la mort et à la destruction», poursuit Hama, expliquant que la région subit déjà des restrictions. «Ces jours-ci, on n'a de l'électricité que deux heures par jour. On paye le prix de ces combats tous les jours».

Dans cette ville d'un million d'habitants, l'anxiété se lit sur tous les visages même si on aperçoit femmes et enfants dans les rues. «Les Turcs n'en n'ont pas simplement marre du PKK mais de tout ce qui a trait aux Kurdes. Il y a une haine historique entre les Turcs et les Kurdes», déclare un vieil homme devant un petit commerce d'Erbil.

«Je suis déjà allé en Turquie et j'y ai vu les villages kurdes. Ils sont sales et négligés alors que les autres villages sont propres et développés. Ils nous détestent simplement parce qu'on est Kurdes».



28 février 2008

Etats-Unis / Turquie / Irak

Gates exige un retrait rapide de l'armée turque

Avec notre correspondant à Istanbul, Jérôme Bastion

LE SECRÉTAIRE américain à la Défense Robert Gates a demandé, jeudi, à la Turquie, lors d'une visite à Ankara, un retrait rapide de l'armée turque du nord de l'Irak. Mais An-



Le secrétaire américain à la Défense, Robert Gates (à gauche), en compagnie du Premier ministre turc, Tayyip Erdogan (à droite), à Ankara le 28 février 2008. (Photo: Reuters)

kara a refusé de fixer un calendrier précis.

Le secrétaire américain à la Défense vient rappeler du bout des lèvres que « la campagne militaire turque en Irak du nord doit être la plus courte possible ». « Quelques semaines tout au plus, mais pas des mois », a-t-il déclaré hier.

Mais probablement vient-il aussi et surtout vérifier ce dont l'armée turque a besoin pour « mener à terme son opération de nettoyage ».

En effet, plus la Turquie peine à conclure cette intervention, dont les Etats-Unis sont partie prenante - parce qu'acteur de la situation en Irak en général, mais aussi partenaire de la lutte contre le PKK, la rébellion kurde - plus les forces américaines en Irak se retrouvent impliquées dans sa réussite. Ce qui peut expliquer d'ailleurs que l'on ait vu beaucoup d'hélicoptères et de véhicules de l'armée américaine venir ces derniers jours jusqu'à la frontière turque, ce qui n'était pas leur habitude.

Reste qu'Ankara insiste sur un point : « Nos soldats se retireront quand ils auront mené à bien leur mission », ce qui veut dire qu'il n'y a aucun calendrier fixe. Sous-entendu, il ne tient qu'aux Irakiens, Kurdes notamment, mais aussi aux Américains de plus et mieux collaborer et de faire que cette incursion se termine au plus vite.

LEXPRESS

28 février 2008

Kurdistan: les états-unis craignent l'enlèvement turc

L'incursion turque dans le nord de l'Irak pour déloger des rebelles kurdes commence à indisposer Washington. Le secrétaire américain à la Défense appelle à ce que cette opération soit aussi courte et ciblée que possible.

L'INCURSION turque dans le nord de l'Irak "doit être courte", "en termes de jours mais pas en mois" et "la plus ciblée possible", a insisté le secrétaire américain à la Défense.

Son homologue turc Vecdi Gonul a réitéré l'assurance de son gouvernement que les forces turques se retireraient d'Irak une fois accomplie leur mission au Kurdistan. "Nous n'avons aucune intention de rester", a-t-il précisé.

Mais la Turquie n'a donné aucune indication claire sur le calendrier de ses opérations militaires contre les rebelles kurdes du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak. Le PKK utilise cette zone montagneuse comme base arrière pour des attaques contre des cibles civiles et militaires en Turquie.

La crainte de l'enlèvement

"Il doit être clair que l'action militaire seule ne mettra pas fin à cette menace terroriste", a ajouté Robert Gates, estimant qu'Ankara devait également prendre des mesures politiques et économiques pour isoler les rebelles du PKK et aider l'importante minorité kurde de Turquie.

Les Etats-Unis, qui fournissent depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel sur les déplacements des rebelles dans le nord de l'Irak, s'inquiètent de l'éventualité d'un conflit entre leurs deux alliés régionaux, les Turcs et les



Kurdes d'Irak, en cas d'enlèvement de l'opération turque.

Interrogé sur ce point, Gates a souligné qu'il ne serait pas de l'intérêt des liens américano-turcs de menacer Ankara d'arrêter de fournir des renseignements pour le forcer à un retrait du nord de l'Irak.

Le chef du Pentagone devait encore s'entretenir avec le président Abdullah Gül, le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et le chef d'état-major turc, le général Yasar Büyükanit.

L'EXPRESS

29 février 2008

Bagdad approuve l'exécution d'Ali "le Chimique"

Le Conseil présidentiel irakien a approuvé l'exécution du bras droit et cousin de Saddam Hussein. "Ali le Chimique" avait été condamné à mort pour le massacre de Kurdes dans les années 1980. La date de son exécution n'a pas encore été arrêtée.

LE CONSEIL présidentiel irakien a approuvé l'exécution du bras droit de Saddam Hussein, Ali Hassan al-Majid, dit "Ali le Chimique", condamné à mort pour le massacre de Kurdes, a indiqué vendredi un responsable irakien.

"Le Conseil présidentiel a approuvé l'exécution d'Ali le Chimique", a déclaré à l'AFP ce responsable sous le couvert de l'anonymat, ajoutant que la date de l'exécution n'avait pas encore été arrêtée.

Le Conseil présidentiel irakien est formé du président de la République Jalal Talabani (Kurde), du vice-président Tarek al-Hachémi (sunnite) et du vice-président Adel Abdel Mahdi (chiite), dont l'accord est nécessaire pour la mise en application de l'ordre d'exécution.

Cousin de Saddam Hussein, Ali Hassan al-Majid, 66 ans, dont le surnom vient de sa prédilection pour les armes chimiques, était l'un des plus proches collaborateurs de l'ex-dictateur lui-même exécuté en décembre 2006.

Al-Majid, ainsi que l'ancien directeur-adjoint des opérations militaires, Hussein Rachid al-Tikriti, et l'ex-ministre de la Défense Sultan Hachem al-Taï, ont été condamnés à mort en juin 2007 par la

justice irakienne pour leur responsabilité dans la répression de la rébellion kurde, la campagne Anfal de 1987-1988, qui avait fait près de 180 000 morts.

Exécution repoussée Selon la loi irakienne, les trois condamnés auraient dû être pendus 30 jours après la confirmation du verdict le 4 septembre dernier, soit le 4 octobre.

Mais leur exécution a été repoussée à plusieurs reprises, malgré la volonté du Premier ministre irakien, le chiite Nouri al-Maliki, Talabani et Hachémi refusant alors d'approuver l'ordre d'exécution.

En décembre, Maliki avait dit attendre toujours une réponse du président américain George W. Bush à qui il avait demandé qu'"Ali le chimique" et les deux autres dignitaires du régime de Saddam Hussein soient remis aux autorités irakiennes pour être exécutés.

Mais les Etats-Unis avaient dit exiger au préalable des clarifications sur la légalité du processus et un consensus politique entre les membres du gouvernement sur l'exécution.

"Une fois que le gouvernement sera parvenu à un consensus sur ce qu'il veut faire



des détenus, nous agirons. Pour le moment, le gouvernement irakien n'est pas parvenu à ce consensus", avait dit en décembre le secrétaire d'Etat adjoint américain, John Negroponte.

Talabani se dit opposé au principe de la peine de mort. Dans le cas de Saddam Hussein, il n'avait cependant soulevé aucune objection. Hachémi avait dit craindre que l'exécution de Sultan Hachem al-Taï ne sabote les efforts de réconciliation et aggrave le ressentiment des sunnites. Il avait indiqué que Taï n'avait fait qu'obéir aux ordres de Saddam Hussein.

De nombreuses voix se sont élevées au Kurdistan pour exiger la pendaison des trois condamnés.

AFP

OFFENSIVE TURQUE: GATES PENSE QUE LES TURCS ONT SAISI LE MESSAGE AMÉRICAIN

28 février 2008 (AFP) -

A BORD D'UN AVION DE L'US AIR FORCE, - Le chef du Pentagone Robert Gates a indiqué jeudi au terme d'une visite à Ankara que les dirigeants turcs avaient compris le message américain qu'il fallait rapidement conclure leur offensive contre les rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak.

"Dans les réunions que j'ai eues, la question d'une date (de retrait) n'a pas été spécifiquement évoquée. Je crois qu'ils ont quand même compris notre message", a-t-il dit aux journalistes dans l'avion le ramenant à Washington.

M. Gates, à qui l'on demandait comment il en était convaincu, a dit en souriant: "parce qu'ils l'ont entendu quatre fois", c'est-à-dire au cours de quatre séries d'entretiens avec les dirigeants turcs, dont le chef de l'Etat Abdullah Gül et le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

M. Gates les a exhortés à un retrait rapide des unités turques qui traquent depuis une semaine les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans la montagne irakienne.

"Ils ont clairement exprimé qu'il était dans leur intérêt de mettre un terme à cette opération rapidement. Mais en même temps ils veulent atteindre les objectifs qu'ils se sont fixés", a précisé pour sa part Geoff Morrell, le porte-parole du Pentagone.

Au cours des entretiens qu'a eus jeudi M. Gates à Ankara, ses interlocuteurs ont refusé de fixer une échéance pour un retrait.

Les Etats-Unis, qui fournissent depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel sur les déplacements des rebelles dans le nord de l'Irak, s'inquiètent de l'éventualité d'un conflit entre leurs deux alliés régionaux, les Turcs et les Kurdes d'Irak, en cas



d'enlèvement de l'opération turque.

Le secrétaire américain à la Défense a aussi précisé qu'il avait souligné aux Turcs la nécessité d'approfondir leur dialogue avec les Irakiens et d'être plus transparents sur l'ampleur de l'incursion.

Il a aussi souligné que l'action militaire seule ne résoudrait pas le problème du terrorisme pour la Turquie.

Ankara estime à 4.000 le nombre de rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 37.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK en 1984, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis.

AFP

LA TURQUIE, SOMMÉE PAR BUSH DE QUITTER L'IRAK, REFUSE DE FIXER UN DÉLAI

ANKARA, 28 fév 2008 (AFP)

LA TURQUIE est restée sourde jeudi aux appels du président américain George W. Bush et de son secrétaire à la Défense à quitter l'Irak "le plus vite possible", se refusant à fixer un délai pour mettre un terme à l'offensive contre les rebelles kurdes.

"Le plus vite possible", a répondu M. Bush à la presse qui lui demandait quand, selon lui, l'armée turque devait se retirer du nord de l'Irak.

"Les Turcs doivent agir, agir rapidement, atteindre leur objectif et partir", a-t-il dit au cours d'une conférence de presse à Washington.

Auparavant, son secrétaire à la Défense, Robert Gates, au cours d'une brève visite à Ankara, avait lancé un appel analogue, mais indiqué n'avoir reçu aucun calendrier précis pour un retrait turc.

Il a cependant insisté sur le fait que l'incursion "devait être brève et la plus ciblée possible".

"La Turquie restera dans le nord de l'Irak le temps qu'il faut", a rétorqué le ministre turc de la Défense Vecdi Gönül.

De violents combats opposaient jeudi troupes turques et rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) à Zap, ont indiqué des sources locales kurdes à l'AFP.

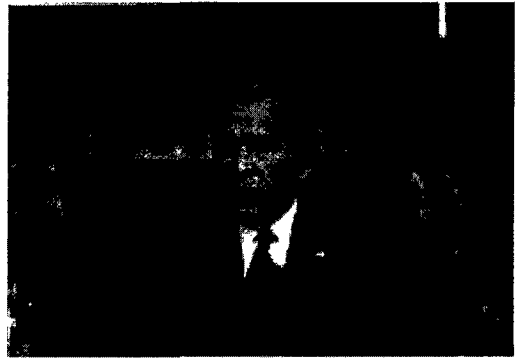
Cette localité en territoire irakien, en face de la petite ville turque de Cukurca, aux confins du Sud-Est anatolien, est un camp d'entraînement et une des principales bases d'où le PKK lance des attaques transfrontalières.

L'artillerie et l'aviation turques ont pilonné les zones de Zap, Nerva Rekan et Cham Chu, proches de la frontière turque et de la ville irakienne d'Amadiyah, a-t-on précisé de mêmes sources.

Des tracts exhortant les rebelles à se rendre ont été largués par les avions turcs sur les zones de combats.

M. Gönül a cependant assuré son homologue américain que son pays "n'avait l'intention d'occuper aucune zone" du Kurdistan irakien.

Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a également assuré à M. Gates que "quand les objectifs seraient atteints, les soldats



rentreeraient", a rapporté l'agence Anatolie.

Washington, qui fournit depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel à son allié turc de l'Otan sur les rebelles dans le nord de l'Irak, s'inquiète de l'éventualité d'un conflit entre ses deux alliés régionaux, les Turcs et les Kurdes d'Irak, en cas d'enlèvement de l'opération turque.

Dans l'avion le ramenant à Washington, le chef du Pentagone a affirmé que ses interlocuteurs turcs avaient compris le message américain.

"Dans les réunions que j'ai eues, la question d'une date (de retrait) n'a pas été spécifiquement évoquée. Je crois qu'ils ont quand même compris notre message", a-t-il dit aux journalistes.

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Il a aussi souligné que l'action militaire seule ne résoudrait pas le problème du terrorisme pour la Turquie.

M. Gates a également rencontré le chef d'état-major général, le général Yasar Büyükanit, qui lui aussi s'est refusé à s'engager à fixer un calendrier de retrait.

"Un délai rapide est une notion relative", a dit le général. "Il peut s'agir parfois d'un jour et parfois d'un an".

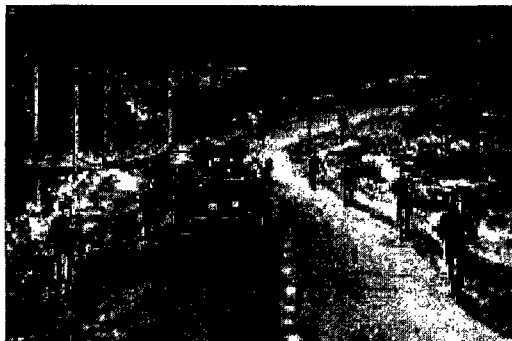
Depuis le début de l'offensive le 21 février, 237 rebelles ont été tués dans les montagnes enneigées du nord de l'Irak, selon un bilan fourni jeudi par l'armée turque, et 27 membres des forces de sécurité turques ont péri.

Sept rebelles ont été abattus mercredi, selon l'armée.

Selon le PKK, 108 soldats turcs ont été tués et seulement cinq combattants du côté du PKK.

Ankara estime à 4.000 le nombre de rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 37.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK en 1984, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'UE et les Etats-Unis.



Comer INTERNATIONAL.com

29 février 2008

TURQUIE • L'AKP a choisi la solution militaire, hélas !

Par le passé, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur au pouvoir), avait opté pour un dialogue avec les mouvements kurdes. Mais l'incursion guerrière menée en Irak du 21 au 29 février pour combattre le PKK montre qu'il privilégie l'option militaire. Le quoti-

dien Yeni Safak, pourtant considéré comme proche des islamistes modérés, regrette ce tournant.

L'opération militaire lancée récemment par l'armée turque dans le Nord de l'Irak [elle s'est terminée ce 29 février] avait pour but annoncé d'accentuer encore un peu plus l'isolement du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en tentant de

réduire ses capacités tactiques. Il s'agissait aussi éventuellement de créer une nouvelle zone tampon. Cette opération de grande envergure lancée par la Turquie aura des conséquences multiples. Les relations entre la Turquie et l'Irak, de même qu'entre la Turquie et l'Union européenne (UE), en seront inévitablement affectées, si elles ne le sont pas déjà. Si la justification d'une telle opération est avant tout militaire, ses conséquences tant à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur seront néan-

moins forcément politiques.

Cette incursion militaire suscite en effet déjà bon nombre de questions dont la principale est probablement celle-ci : la politique kurde du gouvernement turc vaut-elle désormais ne se résumer qu'à des actions militaires ? Le seul angle envisagé par rapport à la question kurde ne sera-t-il donc que de nature sécuritaire ? Juste après l'attaque du PKK [en octobre 2007] au cours de laquelle 12 soldats turcs avaient été tués, tandis que 8 autres étaient enlevés, le gouvernement avait suscité un certain espoir en adoptant une attitude semblant vouloir privilégier des solutions civiles à la question kurde. Mais, assez vite, le gouvernement est revenu aux bons vieux fondamentaux et à une attitude qui, pour le coup, faisait fi des aspects politiques et sociologiques de la question kurde en Turquie.

C'est ainsi que les mesures démocratiques en faveur des droits et des libertés, l'action diplomatique visant à améliorer les relations avec les Kurdes d'Irak, l'espoir d'arrangements légaux – parmi lesquels un projet d'amnistie, incitant le PKK à déposer les armes – sont tombés à l'eau. L'opération militaire en cours dans le nord de l'Irak illustre désormais crûment cette réalité.

L'Histoire récente a pourtant bien montré que le seul usage de méthodes sécuritaires était insuffisant dès lors qu'il s'agissait de résoudre des questions ethniques. On l'a vu aussi bien en Espagne qu'en Irlande du Nord. La Turquie elle-même est sans doute le pays qui a le plus d'expérience en la matière. La crainte, aujourd'hui pour elle, c'est que le parti au pouvoir, l'AKP, adopte finalement sans beaucoup de réticence l'idéologie officielle de l'Etat turc vis-à-vis de la question kurde, à savoir que celle-ci ne se résumerait finalement qu'à un problème de terrorisme et de sous-développement.

Dans ces conditions, il suffirait donc d'écraser les terroristes et de les couper de tout soutien régional, et la question kurde s'évaporerait comme par enchantement. C'est dans ces conditions que l'AKP espère pouvoir remporter les mairies de Diyarbakir, Van, Bitlis et Hakkari [villes à majorité kurde dans le sud-est anatolien, actuellement détenues par le Parti de la Turquie démocratique (DTP, prokurde)] lors des prochaines élections municipales [prévues en 2009]. Cette attitude naïve conjuguée à un réflexe nationaliste turc fait en réalité surtout perdre inutilement du temps et des vies à la Turquie.

Tout cela est vraiment dommage ! Com-

ment en effet peut-on ne pas voir qu'un grand nombre de Kurdes de Turquie, y compris ceux qui sont opposés au PKK, ont, qu'ils le veuillent ou non, des "liens de parenté" plus ou moins éloignés avec les militants de cette organisation séparatiste ?! Comment peut-on ne pas comprendre que ce lien explique précisément la nature des réflexes identitaires, historiques et nationalistes des Kurdes de Turquie ?! Faut-il vraiment rappeler au Premier ministre que les différents soulèvements kurdes qui ont commencé dans les années 1830 et se sont poursuivis sans presque discontinuer jusqu'en 1937 ont forgé une identité politique ?! Y a-t-il besoin d'à nouveau expliquer qu'en 1978 [date de la fondation du PKK] commençait un nouveau soulèvement kurde qui n'a cessé de prendre de l'ampleur et qui dure maintenant depuis trente ans ?!

Il faudrait vraiment essayer de comprendre les Kurdes et de trouver un compromis. Sinon, des attaques se produiront à nouveau, provoquant leurs lots d'opérations militaires et de soldats tombés en martyrs au combat.

Ali Bayramoglu
Yeni Safak

LeNouvelliste^{CH}

28 février 2008

LA SALE GUERRE D'ANKARA

IRAK : Les troupes turques intensifient leurs opérations contre les Kurdes.

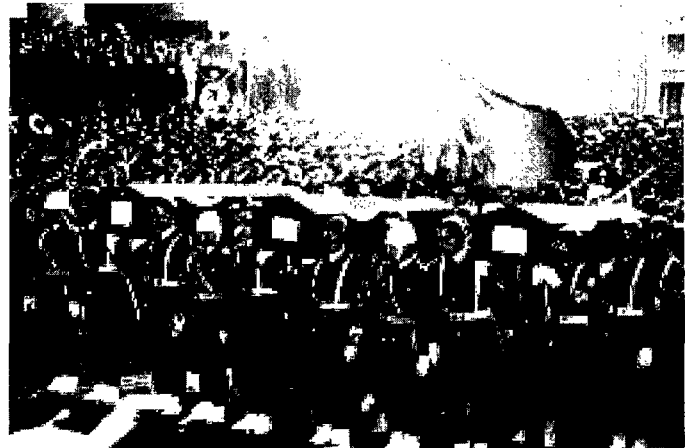
La Turquie a intensifié hier son offensive militaire contre les Kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak. Ankara a refusé de fixer un terme à l'incursion en dépit des appels de Washington à un retrait rapide.

L'armée turque a affirmé avoir tué depuis mardi soir 77 rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), au cours des «plus lourds combats» menés depuis le début, le 21 février, de l'offensive dans les montagnes enneigées du nord de l'Irak. Cinq soldats turcs et trois miliciens kurdes supplétifs de l'armée turque ont péri dans les combats, a ajouté l'état-major. Ces pertes portent à 230 le nombre de rebelles tués depuis le début de l'opération et à 27 celui des morts dans le camp de l'armée turque, miliciens compris, selon son propre décompte. Hier, une amélioration sensible des conditions météorologiques a permis à l'armée turque d'acheminer plus d'une quarantaine de camions de transport de troupes à la frontière irako-turque. Des F16 et des hélicoptères de combat étaient également visibles de la ville frontalière turque de Cukurca au-dessus du territoire irakien.

Pas de calendrier

Alors que l'aviation turque continuait de bombarder des positions du PKK, un conseiller du premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a été dépêché hier à Bagdad pour discuter de l'incursion. Ahmet Davutoglu a affirmé que la Turquie ne fixerait pas de calendrier de retrait de ses soldats tant qu'ils n'auraient pas éradiqué les rebelles.

A Washington, une porte-parole de la Maison Blanche a cependant estimé que les Turcs s'étaient comportés de manière



«plutôt responsable». «Nous pensons que la Turquie a le droit de se défendre», a déclaré la porte-parole Dana Perino.

Ankara estime à 4000 le nombre de rebelles retranchés dans le nord de l'Irak. Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 37 000 morts depuis le début en 1984 de l'insurrection du PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. ATS/AFP/AP

The Charlotte Observer

Feb. 29, 2008

TURKISH TROOPS PULL OUT OF IRAQ

By ANNA JOHNSON The Associated Press

CUKURCA, TURKEY --Turkey's military said Friday it has ended a ground offensive against Kurdish rebels in Iraq, but said that foreign influence didn't play a role in its decision.

The move came a day after Defense Secretary Robert Gates told Turkish leaders during a visit in Ankara that they should end the offensive as soon as possible. In Washington, President Bush made a similar point Thursday, saying Turkey needed to move quickly and get out.

Turkey launched the incursion into northern Iraq more than a week ago against the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a group fighting for the autonomy of predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey. The rebels have carried out attacks in Turkey from bases in Kurdish Iraq.

"Without a doubt, it is impossible to render the entire terrorist organization ineffective with an operation in only one region. However, it is shown to the group that Iraq's north is not a safe area for terrorists," the military said.

The Turkish military said that 300 rebels were detected in Iraq's Zap region, and 240 of them were killed in the operation.

Iraqi authorities have said they do not support the PKK but objected to Turkey's military action.

The PKK took up arms against Turkey in 1984. The fighting has killed up to 40,000 people.



A convoy of Turkish military trucks with elite troops arrive in Cukurca in Hakkari province at the Turkey

Iraq border, Friday, Feb. 29, 2008. The Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari said Friday that the Turkish military has begun withdrawing from northern Iraq .

AP Associated Press

February 29, 2008

Kurdish PKK guerrilla surrounded 200 Turkish soldiers in northern Iraq.

TURKEY'S KURDISH PKK rebels surrounded about 200 Turkish soldiers in a mountain valley in Kurdistan region 'northern Iraq' on Thursday, a spokesman for the rebels said.

Rebel spokesman Ahmad Danas said the soldiers were in a valley between two mountains about 10 kilometers (six miles) from the Turkey-Iraqi Kurdistan border when the rebels surrounded them. Heavy clashes have broken out between the two sides, he added.

A Turkish helicopter in the area was hit by rebel fire, Danas said. Turkish officials were not immediately available for comment.

Turkey launched the incursion into Iraqi Kurdistan last week against Turkish separatist rebels from the PKK, a group fighting for autonomy for the predominantly Kurdish southeastern Turkey. Iraqi authorities have said they do not support the PKK but objected to Turkey's military action.

Turkey's military has said it has killed 230 rebels in the incursion while Turkish losses stood at 27. Danas said 20 Turkish troops were killed in clashes Wednesday, but Turkish officials were not immediately available to comment on that number.

The remote battle sites are inaccessible to the media and casualty and other reports cannot be independently confirmed.

Iraqi Kurdistan politician says, Turkey is using Turkey's Kurdish separatist PKK rebel group (Kurdish freedom fighters) as an excuse to invade Kurdistan region 'Iraq' to prevent the establishment of Kurdistan state in the Kurdish autonomous region in 'northern Iraq', Turkey fears this could fan separatism among its own large Kurdish population in southeast Turkey.

Turkey has never, and still does not, recognize the Iraqi Kurdistan region government (KRG) and refuses to meet with its representatives in any official capacity.

That reflects Ankara's fear that any international respect shown to the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region would only embolden Turkey's own large Kurdish minority to seek similar home-rule status.



The core of Turkey's "Kurdish problem" is not the PKK. It is Turkey's denial of basic political and cultural rights to its Kurds.

Analysts believe the Turkish raids inside Iraqi Kurdistan region had a secondary purpose of discouraging a referendum on Kirkuk city. Ankara fears that if the oil-rich Kirkuk joins Kurdistan, the Kurds will have the economic foundation they need for an independent state.

Turks are also fearful of the autonomy the northern Iraqi Kurdistan region enjoys with its own flag, institutions and even oil exploitation contracts with overseas companies. Since 1984 the PKK took up arms for self-rule in the country's mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey. A large Turkey's Kurdish community openly sympathise with the Kurdish PKK rebels.

The PKK demanded Turkey's recognition of the Kurds' identity in its constitution and of their language as a native language along with Turkish in the country's Kurdish areas, the party also demanded an end to ethnic discrimination in Turkish laws and constitution against Kurds, ranting them full political freedoms.

The PKK is considered a 'terrorist' organization by the U.S. and the EU.

Los Angeles Times

February 29, 2008

Turkish troops begin withdrawing from Iraq

By Alexandra Zavis and Asso Ahmed **Special to the Times**

BAGHDAD — Turkish troops have begun withdrawing from northern Iraq after a weeklong offensive against Kurdish separatist guerrillas, officials said today. But there were conflicting accounts of the extent of the pullback.

Iraq's foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, told The Times that all the Turkish troops had crossed back to their side of the border as of this morning.

"This is good news; we welcome that," Zebari said by telephone.

But there was no official confirmation from Turkey. A Reuters report quoted a senior Turkish military official as saying some troops had returned home but a full withdrawal had not yet happened.

Thousands of Turkish troops, backed by warplanes and artillery, crossed into northern Iraq on Feb. 21 in pursuit of rebels from the Kurdish Workers Party, or PKK, who use the mountainous region as a base to launch attacks on Turkish territory.

The invasion put the United States in an

awkward position as it tried to balance the security needs of Turkey, a NATO ally, against concerns that a large-scale military operation could destabilize the relatively peaceful semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

Washington regards the PKK as a terrorist group and has said that Turkey has a right to defend itself. U.S. officials have pressed Iraq to do more to help crack down on the PKK and have supplied intelligence for Turkish raids. But Iraqi officials complained that the latest incursion, Turkey's largest in years, was a violation of Iraqi sovereignty. "We believe that there are other ways to address the PKK issue," said Zebari, a Kurd.

In meetings with Turkish officials in Ankara on Thursday, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates urged that the offensive be restricted to rebel hideouts and be wrapped up as quickly as possible. But he told reporters that Turkish officials had given him no timetable for a withdrawal. Turkey repeated assurances Thursday that its forces would avoid civilian areas and

only target PKK bases, but said the operation would continue as long as necessary to neutralize the threat against its troops and civilians.

The Turkish military, which has been fighting in difficult winter conditions, has claimed numerous successes in recent days, including the destruction of PKK infrastructure and the killing of scores of its fighters. The militants have disputed the Turkish accounts, which they say are exaggerated.

Ahmed Denis, a PKK spokesman, said empty Turkish trucks had been spotted crossing into Iraq, presumably to collect troops and equipment.

"This morning the Turkish troops were noticed to have withdrawn," he said by telephone.

Turkey has launched dozens of attacks against PKK bases in northern Iraq since the 1990s. The PKK rebels, who took up arms against the Turkish government in 1984, are fighting for autonomy in south-east Turkey.

REUTERS

Turkey targets Iraq Kurds and not just rebels: Kurd PM

Feb 29, 2008

By Shamal Aqrawi

ARBIL, Iraq (Reuters) - Kurdistan's prime minister said he suspected Turkey's incursion into northern Iraq was meant to target the Kurdish region and not just separatist guerrilla bases in the remote mountainous area.

Thousands of Turkish troops, backed by tanks, attack helicopters and warplanes, crossed into northern Iraq on February 21 in an operation which Ankara said was aimed at Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas and their bases.

"We're not convinced whether these attacks are truly against the PKK or if they are actually against the Kurdistan region of Iraq," said Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of largely autonomous Kurdistan in northern Iraq.

"The actions of the Turkish military in attacking bridges in the border areas, which are important to people there, makes us anxious," Barzani told Reuters in an interview late on Wednesday.

PKK fighters have used bases in the area in a decades-long armed campaign for self-rule in the mainly Kurdish southeast of Turkey.

Turkish officials have said they targeted the bridges because they were used by PKK rebels.

Turkey views Kurdish northern Iraq with mixed emotions.

On the one hand, it fears the emergence of a wealthy Kurdish independent state that could fuel a separatist insurgency in its southeast.

On the other, increased trade with the region could help revive the southeastern economy and alleviate the poverty that has fed rebellion there for over 20 years.

Barzani called on Washington to do more to pressure Turkey into withdrawing its troops from northern Iraq.

"America carries great responsibility ... for preserving the stability of Iraq as a whole," he said.

"For that reason America needs to take a firmer stance than it is now about the Turkish military operation."

The United States wants NATO ally Turkey to end its offensive, now in its eighth day, as soon as possible. Defense Secretary Robert Gates said on a visit to Ankara he had been given no timetable for a withdrawal.

The United States is providing significant intelligence to Turkey for its operation against the PKK.

Turkey told Gates it would withdraw its troops from northern Iraq when the operation against the PKK guerrillas was completed.

AP Associated Press

TURKEY SAYS TROOPS WILL RETURN TO IRAQ IF NECESSARY

February 29, 2008

By Christopher Torchia ASSOCIATED PRESS

ISTANBUL, Turkey – Truckloads of weary and unshaven Turkish troops returned Friday from Iraq as Turkey ended an eight-day cross-border offensive against Kurdish rebels, meeting U.S. demands for a quick campaign.

Washington and Baghdad welcomed the move, but Turkey warned that the forces would return if necessary.

A key test of the effectiveness of Turkey's ground incursion could come in the weeks ahead with the arrival of spring, the traditional start of the fighting season of the rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. In the past, guerrillas have taken advantage of the melting snows and infiltrated Turkey from bases in Iraq, and any surge in



The Turkish military has said that further operations against the PKK could be necessary. "There are further lessons that we need to teach," Turkish General Yasar Buyukanit told reporters Monday at a briefing on Turkey's incursion into Iraq. "There will be operations when needed. We will continue. We will try to inflict heavier blows on the PKK."

PKK attacks could trigger another tough response from the Turkish military.

"It is very clear that an established group like the PKK will not be eliminated with one or two more cross-border operations. Turkey needs pinpoint operations against the group's leadership, like Israel's operations against Palestinian groups," said Sinan Ogan, head of the Turkish Center for International Relations and Strategic Analysis in Ankara.

Moreover, the discrimination and poverty that triggered the Kurdish insurgency in Turkey in 1984 persist, although the government has taken steps in recent years to ease restrictions on Kurds as part of its bid to join the European Union. The PKK's power has dwindled since its 1990s heyday, and Europe and the United States consider it a terrorist group, but it still enjoys support in the country's predominantly Kurdish southeast and some urban centers.

The PKK has tempered its demands over the years, initially calling for an independent state and later for autonomy in the southeast and cultural rights. The conflict has killed up to 40,000 people.

Turkey's first major incursion into Iraq for about a decade reflected the sensitive nature of its alliance with the United States, which provided intelligence to the Turkish military but sought a short campaign to preserve the relative calm of the mostly Kurdish region of northern Iraq. The troop withdrawal came a day after President Bush and Defense Secretary Robert Gates told Turkish leaders they should

end the offensive as soon as possible.

"Any influence, either foreign or domestic, on this decision by the Turkish Armed Forces is out of the question," the Turkish military said. "Terrorist activities in Iraq's north will be observed in the future and no threat against Turkey from this region will be allowed."

Gen. Yasar Buyukanit, the military chief, said it was "pure coincidence" that the withdrawal was announced one day after Gates issued his appeal during a visit to Ankara, Dogan news agency reported.

"This decision was made because the operation had reached its targets," Buyukanit said. "When the U.S. defense secretary stepped into Turkey, the withdrawal had been partly realized."

CNN-Turk television quoted Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan as saying: "Everything has been realized according to the plan. No civilian has been harmed in the operation."

Firat, a pro-Kurdish news agency, quoted PKK officials as saying the Turkish withdrawal was made under pressure from Kurdish militants and that it amounted to a victory for the rebels. Senior rebel commander Murat Karayilan congratulated his fighters, the agency said.

Turkey, which barred U.S. troops from using its soil as a springboard to invade Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 2003, had expressed frustration with Washington and the U.S.-backed Iraqi government for their perceived failure to crack down on the PKK.

In Washington, National Security Council spokesman Gordon Johndroe said Turkey's incursion "was a targeted and relatively short operation."

"But I would certainly expect that in the future, that unless the PKK gives up terrorism, that we're going to have to continue to work with the Turks and the Iraqis to go after them," Johndroe said.

Iraqi authorities had said they do not support the PKK but objected to Turkey's military action. Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, himself a Kurd, welcomed the end of the incursion.

"This withdrawal indicates the credibility of the Turkish government's statements that the military operation is limited and temporary," his office said in a statement.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, also a Kurd, credited the U.S. with playing an "instrumental" role in pressing Turkey to leave.

The Turkish military said the operation targeted 300 rebels in Iraq's Zap region, and 240 of them were killed. Turkish losses stood at 27. The PKK has disputed Turkey's estimate of slain rebels, and independent confirmation of the toll in the remote area is virtually impossible. Turkey has previously said there were up to 3,800 PKK militants in northern Iraq, and as many as 1,500 inside Turkey.

"Without a doubt, it is impossible to render the entire terrorist organization ineffective with an operation in only one region. However, it is shown to the group that Iraq's north is not a safe area for terrorists," the military said.

The military said commando units, airborne troops, tanks and armored personnel carriers were used in the operation, and F-16 warplanes and long-range artillery pounded suspected rebel positions. It said troops, trained for winter warfare, took the PKK by surprise. However, there had been reports prior to the incursion that many PKK rebels had dispersed, fearful of an attack.

Soldiers in trucks driving through the border town of Cukurca and into Turkey's interior on Friday gave thumbs-up signs. Some had camouflage paint on their faces, wore snow boots and woolen caps, and held machine guns.

Despite Turkey's avowal that its only target was the PKK, one analyst speculated that Turkey also delivered a warning to Iraqi Kurds who run a virtual mini-state in northern Iraq. Turkish officials fear their separatist aspirations could inflame similar sentiment among Turkish Kurds, who only recently were awarded limited cultural rights such as Kurdish-language courses and television broadcasts.

"They made a point – they can do what they want in that region," Aliza Marcus, author of "Blood and Belief: the PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence," said of Turkey's leadership. "The message to Iraqi Kurds is: 'Be careful. We are here.'"

AFP

IRAK: L'OPÉRATION TURQUE A PRIS FIN SELON NTV, PAS DE CONFIRMATION

ANKARA, 29 fév 2008 (AFP) –

L'OFFENSIVE turque dans le nord de Irak visant les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) s'est achevée tard dans la nuit de jeudi, a affirmé vendredi la chaîne d'information en continu turque NTV.

L'information n'a pas été confirmée de source officielle turque.

D'autres chaînes de télévision ont rapporté un retrait limité des troupes turques.

NTV n'a pas fourni de source précise pour son information, mais les correspondants couvrant l'incursion du côté irakien ont cité des responsables kurdes qui ont fait état d'une cessation des hostilités notamment dans la région de Zap.

La vaste opération de l'armée turque avait été lancée le 21 février. Selon un dernier bilan fourni jeudi par l'état-major turc, 237 rebelles ont été tués. Vingt-sept membres des forces de sécurité turques ont trouvé la mort lors de l'in-

ursion réalisée en plein hiver et appuyée par l'aviation et l'artillerie.

Si l'information est confirmée de source officielle turque, l'offensive turque aura duré huit jours avec la participation de milliers de commandos, jusqu'à 10.000 selon les médias.

Jeudi, le président américain George W. Bush et son secrétaire à la Défense Robert Gates, qui s'est rendu brièvement à Ankara, avaient appelé la Turquie à quitter l'Irak "le plus vite possible".

"Les Turcs doivent agir, agir rapidement, atteindre leur objectif et partir", a déclaré George W. Bush au cours d'une conférence de presse à Washington.

Ankara s'était refusé à fixer un délai pour mettre un terme à son offensive contre le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par les Etat-Unis, la Turquie et l'Union européenne et qui mène depuis 1984 une lutte armée contre l'Etat turc.

Le Point

29 février 2008

L'armée turque retire des troupes du nord de l'Irak

Des soldats turcs ont quitté le nord de l'Irak et regagné leurs bases en Turquie après avoir mené à bien leur mission contre les séparatistes du PKK, déclare un officier supérieur turc en démentant la fin de l'offensive terrestre transfrontalière lancée le 21 février par Ankara.

"Il y a encore des soldats turcs en territoire irakien et pour le moment, il n'y a pas de retrait général", a déclaré ce haut responsable militaire.

Un représentant des autorités américaines en Irak a également estimé qu'il était prématuré d'évoquer la fin de l'opération d'envergure déclenchée par Ankara, comme l'a annoncé la chaîne de télévision turque NTV, sans citer de sources.

"Nous voyons une quantité limitée de troupes entrées en Irak revenir en Turquie. Il est prématuré de parler de retrait", a-t-il dit dans un courriel adressé à Reuters.

Un porte-parole des peshmergas, les forces de sécurité du Kurdistan irakien, a déclaré, en s'appuyant sur les témoignages de gardes-frontières, qu'il n'y avait pas eu d'attaques des forces turques pendant la nuit et que des troupes rentraient en Turquie.

L'armée turque a envoyé plusieurs milliers de soldats dans le nord de l'Irak pour y traquer les séparatistes kurdes de Turquie, qui disposent de camps retranchés dans les montagnes de la région.

Elle affirme avoir tué 237 rebelles depuis le début de son offensive et essuyé la perte de 24 soldats. Le PKK déclare avoir tué plus de 100 militaires turcs et ne fournit pas de chiffre sur ses propres pertes.



Base militaire à Bamerni, en Turquie, près de la frontière irakienne. Selon un officier supérieur turc, des soldats turcs ont quitté le nord de l'Irak et regagné leurs bases après avoir mené à bien leur mission contre les séparatistes du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak mais l'offensive terrestre transfrontalière lancée le 21 février par Ankara n'a pas encore pris fin. /Photo prise le 27 février 2008/REUTERS/Ceerwan Aziz

AFP

FIN DE L'INCURSION TURQUE EN IRAK (MINISTRE IRAKIEN DES AFFAIRES ÉTRANGÈRES)

BAGDAD, 29 fév 2008 (AFP)

- L'INCURSION militaire turque contre les rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak a pris fin, a déclaré vendredi à l'AFP le ministre irakien des Affaires étrangères, Hoshiyar Zebari.

"La Turquie a mis fin à son opération militaire ce matin et a commencé à retirer ses troupes", a dit le ministre. "Nous saluons ce geste. Nous avons toujours maintenu qu'il existe d'autres moyens pour mettre fin au terrorisme du PKK".

Le porte-parole des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), Ahmed Danis, avait déclaré peu auparavant que l'armée turque avait entamé un retrait "limité" de ses troupes du nord de l'Irak.

"Les troupes turques ont entamé un retrait limité de la région frontalière de Zap", avait-il dit à l'AFP. "Nous constatons des mouvements militaires, comme l'entrée de camions militaires vides en provenance de Turquie, qui repartent pour la Turquie avec des soldats à bord".

"S'ils effectuent un retrait total, ce serait une victoire pour le Kurdistan et le PKK", avait estimé le porte-parole du PKK, en lutte contre Ankara et qui maintient des bases dans le nord de l'Irak, d'où il mène des opérations contre la Turquie.

Le PKK dispose d'une grande base d'entraînement à Zap, une région située au nord-ouest de la ville de Dohouk, dans le nord de l'Irak.

L'armée turque n'a ni confirmé ni démenti les informations sur un retrait. "Des informations ont été rapportées par les médias sur un retour des unités engagées dans l'opération transfrontalière. Un communiqué de presse sera publié aujourd'hui (vendredi) par l'état-major", souligne un communiqué mis en ligne sur le site internet de l'armée.

La vaste opération de l'armée turque a été lancée le 21 février contre les bases des rebelles du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak. Il s'agit de la seconde incursion turque dans la région en trois mois.

la turquie met fin à son incursion en irak, menace d'y retourner

ANKARA, (AFP) - La vaste offensive de l'armée turque visant les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de Irak s'est achevée et les unités qui y étaient engagées ont regagné vendredi leurs bases, a annoncé l'état-major turc, menaçant d'y retourner si besoin est.

"Il a été conclu que l'opération a atteint ses objectifs et nos troupes ont regagné leurs bases dans le pays (...) le 29 février au matin", souligne un communiqué mis en ligne par l'état-major.

"Cette décision est indépendante d'une quelconque influence étrangère", souligne l'armée. La veille, les Etats-Unis avaient invité la Turquie, pays membre de l'Otan, à mettre un terme rapide à cette opération.

Le président américain George W. Bush et son secrétaire à la Défense Robert Gates, qui s'est rendu brièvement à Ankara, avaient appelé les Turcs à quitter l'Irak "le plus vite possible".

"Les Turcs doivent agir, agir rapidement, atteindre leur

objectif et partir", a déclaré George W. Bush à Washington. Ankara s'était refusé à fixer un délai pour mettre un terme à son offensive.

La Maison Blanche a qualifié vendredi de "ciblée et relativement courte" l'offensive turque et a prévenu que le PKK pourrait être la cible de nouvelles attaques.

"Une chose reste certaine, c'est que les Etats-Unis, la Turquie et l'Irak vont continuer à considérer le PKK comme une organisation terroriste dont on a besoin de s'occuper", a déclaré le porte-parole de la Maison Blanche Gordon John-droe.

Washington, qui fournit depuis plusieurs mois des renseignements en temps réel à la Turquie sur les rebelles dans le nord de l'Irak, s'inquiétait de l'éventualité d'un conflit entre ses deux alliés régionaux, les Turcs et les Kurdes d'Irak, en cas d'enlèvement de l'opération turque.

Le ministre irakien des Affaires étrangères Hoshyar Zebari avait indiqué auparavant que l'incursion turque était termi-

née. "La Turquie a mis fin à son opération militaire ce matin et a commencé à retirer ses troupes", a déclaré le ministre à l'AFP.

L'armée turque affirme qu'au moins 240 rebelles du PKK ont été abattus en huit jours d'offensive. Côté turc, 27 personnes ont été tuées, selon ce décompte.

L'armée menace en outre de réinvestir le nord de l'Irak.

"Les activités des terroristes dans le nord de l'Irak seront suivies de près et aucune menace depuis ce territoire contre la Turquie ne sera tolérée", précise le texte qui dit : "La lutte anti-terroriste dans le pays et à l'étranger sera poursuivie avec détermination".

Un photographe de l'AFP à Cukurca, petite ville stratégique turque située à quelques kilomètres de la frontière irakienne, a constaté le retour d'une mission périlleuse en plein hiver des troupes vêtues de camouflage blanc et visiblement fatiguées à bord de véhicules militaires.

Les convois militaires turcs rentrant en Turquie se pour-



suivaient en début de soirée.

L'armée turque indique aussi que cette incursion, lancée le 21 février au soir et menée avec des milliers de commandos, "ne va pas mettre l'organisation terroriste (PKK) entièrement hors d'état de nuire", mais a montré que "la zone n'est plus un sanctuaire pour les terroristes".

272 cibles ont été pilonnées par air et 517 autres ont été attaquées par terre lors de l'offensive qui visait surtout la région de Zap, où se trouvait une importante base du PKK, ajoute le document.

La Turquie estimait, avant cette opération, à 4.000 le nombre de rebelles retranchés dans les montagnes enneigées du nord de l'Irak.

L'ARMEE TURQUE SE RETIRE D'IRAK, "MISSION ACCOMPLIE"

Par Gareth Jones et Paul de BERNI
ANKARA (Reuters)

L'état-major de l'armée turque a annoncé vendredi le retrait des milliers d'hommes envoyés il y a huit jours dans le nord de l'Irak pour y traquer les combattants séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK).

La veille, George Bush avait invité en termes non équivoques la Turquie à mettre un terme au plus tôt à son incursion, à laquelle Washington, qui partage ses renseignements sur le PKK avec Ankara, avait donné son feu vert.

Mais l'état-major turc a démenti que sa décision ait pu être influencée par de quelconques pressions étrangères.

"Il n'était pas question de liquider complètement l'organisation terroriste, mais la Turquie a montré à l'organisation que le nord de l'Irak n'est pas un havre sûr pour eux", dit un communiqué de l'état-major.

Selon le bilan turc de l'opération, 240 des quelques 3.000 rebelles du PKK retranchés au Kurdistan irakien ont été tués en huit jours, tandis que l'on compterait 27 morts

dans les rangs de l'armée d'Ankara qui avait déployé quelque 8.000 hommes.

Le porte-parole des relations extérieures du PKK, Ahmed Danees, a attribué pour sa part le retrait turc à la "farouche résistance" de son mouvement, qui affirme avoir tué plus de 130 soldats turcs et perdu seulement cinq hommes.

INITIATIVES DIPLOMATIQUES

Le Premier ministre turc Tayyip Erdogan a salué l'opération.

"Cette offensive a porté un coup important à l'organisation terroriste à un moment inattendu", a-t-il déclaré en faisant allusion au fait que l'offensive a été lancée le 21 février, avant la fin de l'hiver.

L'Irak et les États-Unis ont salué le retrait turc.

"Il faut reconnaître que la puissance militaire seule ne résoudra pas ce conflit", a dit à Reuters le vice-Premier ministre irakien Barhan Salih, lui-même kurde.

"Le temps est venu d'engager toutes les initiatives politiques et diplomatiques en vue de

chercher une solution aux causes sous-jacentes à ce conflit", a-t-il ajouté.

"C'est une bonne chose que cette opération militaire soit bouclée", a déclaré un porte-parole du département d'État.

Le ministre turc de la Justice, Mehmet Ali Sahin, cité par des chaînes de télévision, a souligné qu'Ankara se réservait le droit de renvoyer des troupes en Irak si nécessaire. L'autorisation donnée par le Parlement à l'armée de mener des opérations de l'autre côté de la frontière n'expire qu'en octobre.

La guérilla séparatiste du PKK, organisation considérée comme terroriste par l'Union européenne et les États-Unis, a fait près de 40.000 morts depuis 1984 dans le sud-est de la Turquie.

L'ampleur de la répression militaire turque a contraint le noyau combattant du PKK à franchir la frontière pour se replier sur des zones montagneuses non contrôlées par les "peshmergas", ces anciens rebelles kurdes irakiens devenus force officielle de la région autonome du nord de l'Irak.