

INSTITUT
KURDE
DE PARIS

Bulletin de liaison et d'information

N°277

AVRIL 2008

*La publication de ce Bulletin bénéficie de subventions
du Ministère français des Affaires étrangères (DGCID)
et du Fonds d'action et de soutien pour l'intégration et la lutte contre les discriminations (FASILD)*

Ce bulletin paraît en français et anglais

Prix au numéro : France: 6 € — Etranger : 7,5 €
Abonnement annuel (12 numéros) France : 60 € — Etranger : 75 €

Périodique mensuel

Directeur de la publication : Mohamad HASSAN

Numéro de la Commission Paritaire : 659 13 A.S.

ISBN 0761 1285

INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS

Tél. : 01- 48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01- 48 24 64 66

www.fikp.org

E-mail: bulletin@fikp.org

Sommaire :

- TURQUIE : 53 MAIRES KURDES CONDAMNES
- KIRKOUK : POMME DE DISCORDE OU ATOUT KURDE ?
- L'AKP, LE DTP ET LE CHP MENACES D'INTERDICTION
- TURQUIE-IRAN : REUNION DELA HAUTE COMMISSION DE SECURITE
- LE NOMBRE D'ORPHELINS DECROIT AU KURDISTAN D'IRAK
- AINSI QUE...

TURQUIE : 53 MAIRES KURDES CONDAMNES

RE harcèlement judiciaire contre les élus du DTP et la société civile kurde ne faiblit pas en Turquie. Plusieurs sentences ont été ainsi rendues, et d'autres procès sont en cours, à la fois contre des acteurs politiques, des responsables d'associations, des journalistes ou des particuliers.

La Cour de Diyarbakir a condamné 53 maires kurdes à deux mois et demi de prison pour avoir, en 2005, écrit une lettre commune au Premier ministre du Danemark, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, dans

laquelle ils lui demandaient de résister aux pressions exercées par la Turquie pour fermer la chaîne de télévision Roj-TV accusée de « liens organiques » avec le PKK. Mais prenant acte de la « bonne conduite » des maires durant le procès, la cour a commué la peine en une amende de 900 euros chacun. Ces maires ont été jugés coupables de "soutien délibéré" au PKK.

A l'annonce de cette condamnation, le Premier ministre danois a vivement réagi dans une déclaration écrite envoyée à l'AFP : « Il est incompréhensible qu'une lettre de

ce caractère puisse aboutir à une condamnation. La Turquie souhaite entrer dans l'Union européenne, et nous nous attendons par conséquent à ce qu'elle adopte les mêmes normes que l'UE. C'est une affaire que le Danemark et l'UE suivent de près, et nous l'avons souligné à la Turquie. »

Parmi ces maires, figure Osman Baydemir, le maire de Diyarbakir, qui a été en plus condamné le 17 avril, pour « apologie du crime et du criminel » à 50 jours de prison, peine là encore commuée en une amende de 1.500 livres turques (714 euros).

En 2004, lors des violentes protestations de la jeunesse kurde à

Diyarbakir, survenues après les obsèques de deux combattants du PKK, Osman Baydemir, pour apaiser la foule et éviter que la ville ne sombre dans un bain de sang, s'était porté au devant des jeunes émeutiers et dans un discours prononcé en kurde, avait salué « leur courage » en exprimant sa douleur pour la mort des deux combattants.

Le même mois, Nurettin Demirtas, le président du DTP, incarcéré depuis mars dernier, était jugé avec 52 coaccusés, tous suspectés de s'être soustraits au service militaire en utilisant des rapports, ou bien d'avoir eux mêmes établi ces faux certificats d'inaptitude au service. Or, selon, l'acte d'accusation, un examen médical prouverait l'aptitude que M. Demirtas, âgé de 35 ans, à accomplir son service militaire.

Les accusés ont été finalement relâchés le 28 avril pour être jugés comme « prévenus libres » mais Nurettin Demirtas et quatre autres prévenus ont été immédiatement transférés dans une caserne pour y accomplir leur service militaire. Nurettin Demirtas risque 10 ans de prison ferme.

Il n'y a pas de statut légal d'objet de conscience en Turquie et beaucoup de Kurdes répugnent à faire leur service militaire, de peur d'avoir à combattre contre leur propre peuple dans les opérations menées contre le PKK. Les familles ayant des enfants à la fois dans l'armée et dans la guérilla ne sont pas rares, les appelés envoyés au « front du sud-est » étant choisis de préférence parmi les enfants issus des classes populaires et les Kurdes.

Toujours au sein du DTP, l'ex-députée kurde Leyla Zana, qui a

déjà passé dix ans dans les prisons turques pour délit d'opinion, a été condamnée à deux ans de prison pour « apologie » d'Abdullah Öcalan et « propagande en faveur d'une organisation terroriste ». Lors d'un discours prononcé en mars 2007, dans un festival à Diyarbakir, Leyla Zana, citant les trois leaders kurdes actuels Abdullah Öcalan, Jalal Talabani et Masoud Barzani, avait affirmé qu'ils avaient « tous une place dans les coeurs et les esprits des Kurdes ». Les avocats de Leyla Zana ont indiqué qu'ils allaient faire appel. Un autre maire kurde, Hilmi Aydogdu, a été condamné le 22 avril par un tribunal de Diyarbakir à 15 mois de prison pour « sédition ». Lors de l'intervention militaire de la Turquie contre le Kurdistan d'Irak, il avait en effet

déclaré que les Kurdes de Turquie considéreraient une attaque turque contre Kirkouk comme une attaque contre Diyarbakir. Ses avocats font aussi faire appel.

Enfin, trois adolescents kurdes, âgés de 16 à 17 ans, ont fait l'objet d'une plainte pour avoir chanté, en octobre 2007, au sein d'un groupe de choristes, une « chanson rebelle » sous un drapeau rebelle » lors d'un festival de musique à San Francisco, Los Angeles et San Diego. Il s'agit en fait de l'hymne national kurde, « Ey Raqib » et le drapeau était celui du Kurdistan, les deux n'étant nullement illégaux puisque adoptés officiellement par le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan d'Irak. Mais le procureur accuse les trois jeunes gens de « propagande séparatiste ».

KIRKOUK : POMME DE DISCORDE OU ATOUT KURDE AU SEIN DE L'IRAK ?



FALAH Mustafa Bakir, le ministre kurde des relations extérieures du GRK, a, dans une interview donnée au Kurdish Globe, insisté sur « l'engagement constitutionnel » que représentait l'article 140, même si, une semaine auparavant, il avait tenu des propos plus souples sur l'éventualité d'une solution autre que le référendum, dans laquelle le gouvernement kurde pourrait être un acteur majeur. Ces propos avaient été largement répercutés dans la presse kurde et arabe, avant que Falah Mustafa Bakir ne revienne dessus en affirmant que l'AFP avait tronqué et déformé ses paroles : « Le fait que le GRK appelle à une résolution de ce problème ne signifie

en aucune façon qu'il fera une quelconque concession au sujet des territoires revendiqués et tout particulièrement Kirkouk. »

S'exprimant à ce sujet, le président de la Région du Kurdistan, Masoud Barzani, a réitéré avec fermeté sa volonté de résoudre ce problème « historique à l'origine de tous les conflits entre le gouvernement irakien et les Kurdes. » « Cette question peut être résolue par l'article 140. » Sinon, « ce serait une grave menace pour la stabilité de l'Irak », a-t-il ajouté.

Mais l'opposition, au sein de Kirkouk, de mouvements arabes et turkmènes, est déterminée à empêcher la tenue de ce référendum, qui

verrait très probablement une victoire des Kurdes, lesquels forment la majorité dans la ville et son district. Ahmed Amid al-Obeidi, le leader du Front irakien de Kirkouk, affirme que la crise ne se résoudra pas en trois mois mais en plusieurs années : « Il n'y a aucune solution possible dans le cadre de l'article 140 », en ajoutant que les Arabes n'abandonneront jamais Kirkouk, ni n'accepteront d'être soumis au gouvernement kurde.

Les Turkmènes proches d'Ankara et appuyés par la Turquie dans leurs revendications, font chorus. Kanan Shakir Uzeyragal, un de leurs représentants, souligne qu'aucune des « conditions préalables pour la mise en place et l'organisation de cette consultation n'a été remplie. Sur les 40.000 cas de litiges de propriétés, seulement 10% ont été résolus. Quant au recensement, il n'a même pas commencé. »

Hassan Turan, un Turkmène membre du Conseil provincial de Kirkouk fait part de ses doutes : « Dans la réalité, le référendum est un rêve. Personne ne le soutient, excepté les Kurdes, alors pourquoi sont-ils si obstinés ? La seule solution est un accord politique impliquant une répartition équitable des pouvoirs entre les communautés, au coeur des institutions locales. »

Mais « l'obstination des Kurdes » à ne rien céder sur cette question leur sert aussi d'atout dans leurs négociations avec le gouvernement central, concernant d'autres avancées cruciales pour la survie de la Région du Kurdistan, telles que les lois sur le Pétrole et sur le statut des Peshmergas en Irak. Le 15 avril, un député de la Coalition kurde au Parlement de Bagdad, Mhanna Khalil, avait ainsi révélé à l'organe

de presse Voice of Iraq que la rencontre prévue entre le Premier ministre kurde Nêçirvan Barzani et Nouri Al-Maliki, porterait à la fois sur le statut des Peshmerga et leur financement par l'Irak, la loi sur le pétrole et le gaz et un nouvel agenda pour l'application de l'article 140.

De fait, après une année ponctuée par de multiples désaccords et des déclarations houleuses entre le gouvernement kurde et le ministre irakien du Pétrole, Hussein al-Shahrastani, un accord a été signé le 16 avril, entre Erbil et Bagdad, au sujet de la gestion des ressources naturelles (notamment pétrolières) au Kurdistan. Dans cet accord, officiellement annoncé par le porte-parole du gouvernement irakien, Ali Al-Dabbagh, alors que Nouri Al-Maliki était en déplacement à l'étranger, le gouvernement kurde aurait accepté un report de 6 mois supplémentaires de la tenue du référendum, contre la reconnaissance par l'Irak de la légalité des contrats déjà passés entre le GRK et des sociétés étrangères pour l'exploitation et la gestion des puits de pétrole. Cependant, au sujet de Kirkouk, le porte-parole irakien n'a fait état que d'un accord mutuel pour laisser l'ONU gérer la question des territoires revendiqués par les Kurdes, ce qui n'a pas été toutefois confirmé par Erbil.

Cet accord, s'il devient effectif, est vu par les observateurs irakiens comme un coup rude porté à l'autorité et à la crédibilité du ministre Al-Sharistani, opposant majeur et virulent à l'autonomie de décision et de gestion du gouvernement kurde dans le domaine des hydrocarbures. Rochdi Younsi, analyste du groupe Eurasia pour le Moyen-Orient, estime que cela met à mal la crédibilité du ministre irakien, tout

en ne faisant que repousser le problème de Kirkouk. Une telle concession de la part du gouvernement irakien pourrait avoir été inspirée par le Premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, en quête de soutien politique alors qu'il est aux prises à une violente résistance des factions chiites refusant de se laisser désarmer. Enfin, même si un accord est conclu en ce sens avec les Kurdes, Nouri Al-Maliki n'est pas plus assuré de rallier à lui tous les mouvements chiites. « Mais dans le contexte politique irakien, les leaders en concurrence les uns avec les autres, s'efforceront toujours d'éviter le pire, en cherchant des solutions à court terme à une multitude de conflits sectaires, politiques et économiques. »

Jusqu'ici, le projet de loi sur le pétrole et le gaz qui avait été accepté par le parlement irakien ne satisfaisait pas les Kurdes, qui accusaient l'Irak d'avoir modifié considérablement la teneur de la version initiale, pour laquelle Erbil avait donné son accord, à l'aide d'amendements. Le GRK souhaitait ainsi l'indépendance financière et de gestion des sociétés pétrolières travaillant au Kurdistan et non qu'elles soient supervisées par le ministère irakien du Pétrole. Depuis le mois de juillet dernier, ce n'est pas moins de quatre versions modifiées successivement qui avaient été présentées par la Commission irakienne.

De même, le statut des Peshmerga, sur lequel le vote du budget de l'Irak pour l'année 2008 avait achoppé début janvier, et qui avait été laissé à la décision du Cabinet, a été finalement reconduit. Les Peshmergas qui fonctionnent actuellement comme une force semi autonome, ne sont donc pas

compris dans la loi sur le désarmement des milices. « Les gardes de la province agissent sous couvert de légitimité, car ce sont des forces organisées » a déclaré le Premier ministre de l'Irak à l'issue d'une rencontre avec Nêçirvan Barzani. Les Peshmerga restent ainsi officiellement au sein de l'armée irakienne, formant deux divisions de 25.000 à 30.000 hommes.

De son côté, Nêçirvan Barzani a tenu une conférence de presse à Erbil pour exposer et confirmer les termes de cet accord : « Concernant la loi sur les hydrocarbures, toutes les négociations en cours devront se faire dans un cadre constitutionnel, sur la base du projet de loi préalablement négocié en février 2007, qui sera bientôt soumis au vote de l'assemblée nationale irakienne. Pour les Peshmerga, une commission sera formée par le gouvernement fédéral. Elle visitera la Région du Kurdistan dans un futur proche afin de discuter des questions pratiques. Pour l'article 140, le processus se poursuit dans le cadre établi par les Nations Unies, qui doivent faire part de leurs propositions aux gouvernements kurde et irakien dans un proche avenir. »

Nêçirvan Barzani a par ailleurs nié qu'il y ait, de la part du gouvernement irakien, une volonté d'entraver l'application de cet article. Sur les futures propositions de l'ONU, il indique que les Kurdes « auront leur mot à dire » et qu'il est probable que, comme l'a d'ailleurs annoncé le représentant des Nations Unies pour l'Irak, les premières mesures seront appliquées dans les régions où la question du référendum est la moins conflictuelle.

TURQUIE : L'AKP, LE DTP ET LE CHP MENACÉS D'INTERDICTION



Trois partis représentés au Parlement d'Ankara sont menacés de fermeture par décision judiciaire : la formation gouvernementale AKP, le parti pro-kurde DTP et le vieux parti kémaliste CHP, fondé par Atatürk lui-même. La menace qui pèse sur le premier défraie la chronique bien au-delà des cercles politiques turcs, puisqu'il s'agit non seulement du parti au pouvoir, élu avec 47% des voix, mais aussi de celui qui a bénéficié d'une certaine faveur de la part des instances de l'Union européenne, malgré un enlisement des réformes engagées depuis sa première élection.

Pour un certain nombre de propos et une réforme, au demeurant minime dans les faits, mais à grande portée symbolique en Turquie (celle d'autoriser le port du foulard islamique à l'université), l'AKP et ses dirigeants vont être poursuivis pour « activités antilaïques », avec l'accord de la Cour constitutionnelle. En plus de la dissolution du parti, le procureur général Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya a requis 5 ans d'exclusion de la vie politique à 71 cadres et dirigeants, dont, bien sûr, Abdullah Gül, l'actuel président de la Turquie, et Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, son Premier ministre.

La classe des magistrats en Turquie fait souvent figure de « vieille garde kémaliste », hostile à tout changement qui pourrait remettre en cause les principes fondateurs de l'Etat turc depuis 1923. N'ayant plus aucune représentation politique à l'Assemblée, c'est dans les tribunaux que se manifeste l'oppo-

sition à la « menace islamiste » qu'est censée incarner l'AKP et les atteintes à « la turcité », dont les principaux coupables désignés sont les Kurdes en général et le parti du DTP en particulier.

Mais l'affaire est portée directement au cœur de l'Union européenne, qui juge la procédure peu démocratique et incompatible avec les règles de la vie politique au sein de l'Europe. Le commissaire à l'élargissement, Olli Rehn, a immédiatement critiqué cette décision en soulignant que « dans une démocratie normale, ces problèmes politiques doivent se régler dans les urnes, pas devant les tribunaux » et en laissant entendre que la dissolution de l'AKP, si elle avait lieu, pourrait amener une suspension des négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie. Jan Marinus Wiersma, le vice-président du groupe socialiste au Parlement européen, renchérit en affirmant même que la fermeture du parti au pouvoir entraînerait « automatiquement » l'arrêt des négociations. Le député allemand Jorgo Chatzimakakis, membre du groupe de l'Alliance des démocrates libéraux, également partisan de la suspension de la candidature turque en cas d'interdiction de l'AKP, y voit les menées de « l'Etat profond » contre la démocratie en Turquie, et somme les « kémalistes turcs » de s'adapter au 21^{ème} siècle, en comparant même ces agissements aux dictatures sud-américaines des années 1970 et 1980.

Quant à Joost Lagendijk, le co-président de la Commission parlementaire Europe-Turquie il désapprouve le fait que la Cour constitu-

tionnelle ait accepté de recevoir la plainte, tout en disant s'y être attendu, « car, connaissant la composition de la Cour constitutionnelle, cela ne pouvait qu'arriver. Je pense que c'est très mauvais pour la Turquie, de deux façons. D'abord, cela nuit à son image à l'étranger. Je suis certains que ceux qui sont contre l'accession de la Turquie en Europe vont se réjouir, parce qu'ils auront un argument de plus : pourquoi devrions-nous négocier avec un pays dont le parti au pouvoir risque d'être fermé ? La seconde raison est, qu'en conséquence, les six ou neuf prochains mois, nous ne verrons plus aucune nouvelle réforme. Le gouvernement sera occupé à se battre avec l'opposition (...) une fois encore, cela fera de 2008 une année perdue, comme 2007 l'a été. »

Même son de cloche chez le rapporteur pour la Turquie au Parlement européen, Ria Oomen-Ruijten, qui accuse les magistrats turcs de se comporter comme les « propriétaires de l'Etat ».

Le procureur général Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya est également à l'origine de la procédure de fermeture contre le DTP, le parti pro kurde, qu'il accuse d'être une atteinte à « l'intégrité indivisible de l'Etat et de la nation ». Il réclame aussi 5 ans de prison contre 221 membres du DTP, dont 8 députés.

Ahmet Türk, le chef du groupe DTP au Parlement, s'exprimant sur la fermeture possible de l'AKP et celle de son parti, y voit lui aussi un effet du conflit entre l'Etat profond et le reste de la société en Turquie : « Il y a trois Etats en Turquie. Le premier veut des changements et avancer sur la route qui mène à l'Union européenne ; le deuxième cherche à préserver le statu quo

dans le pays et le dernier veut rendre l'Etat conforme à l'image que s'en fait l'Etat profond et ses gangs. » Mais il met aussi l'AKP face à ses responsabilités dans le pourrissement de la situation : « L'AKP ne doit certainement pas se présenter comme une victime des conflits opposant les forces internes de l'Etat. Ils n'ont pas su tirer parti du pouvoir que leur avait confié la nation, de manière efficace. Malheureusement, le parti dirigeant est responsable de la situation actuelle dans notre pays. »

Ahmet Türk accuse aussi l'AKP de ne pas défendre la démocratie face aux partisans du statu quo. Il appelle le gouvernement à engager enfin des réformes démocratiques et à « lancer une guerre d'indépendance en faveur de la démocratie », notamment en résolvant la question kurde, qui en est une condition majeure.

Mais un troisième parti, plus inattendu, s'est ajouté à la liste des mouvements politiques menacés de

fermeture : il s'agit du CHP, pourtant principal adversaire de l'AKP et du DTP, accusé de transfert de fonds occultes en faveur d'une chaîne de télévision nationaliste, Kanal Türk, d'un montant de 3 millions de liras turques.

Mustafa Özyürek, le leader adjoint du parti, a affirmé, dans une conférence de presse, qu'il ne s'agissait que d'une avance destinée à financer des annonces publicitaires. Mais des experts judiciaires y ont vu le signe d'un partenariat occulte du CHP au sein de Kanal Türk, ce qui est en violation de plusieurs articles de la Loi sur les partis politiques.

Les charges portées contre le CHP ont été présentées au procureur général d'Istanbul et à la Cour constitutionnelle en mai 2007. Cette affaire rend le CHP susceptible d'être dissous, comme cela s'est déjà vu dans le passé, sur des affaires similaires de financements illégaux, mettant en cause des partis politiques.

TURQUIE-IRAN : 12^{ème} REUNION DE LA HAUTE COMMISSION DE SECURITE

UNE fois de plus, la Turquie et l'Iran annoncent un renforcement de leur coopération en matière de sécurité. Lors de la 12^{ème} réunion de la Haute Commission de sécurité (, la dernière réunion ayant eu lieu à Téhéran, en février 2006), qui s'est tenue à Ankara du 14 au 18 avril, les discussions ont tout particulièrement porté sur les activités du PKK et son alter ego iranien, le PJAK.

La délégation iranienne, composée de huit membres, était menée par le représentant du ministre de

l'Intérieur Ali Akbar Mohtaj, la délégation turque par le Sous-secrétaire du ministre de l'Intérieur, Osman Gunesh. La délégation turque comprenait de hauts officiels de la Police nationale, des services de renseignements (MIT), de la Gendarmerie et du ministère des Affaires étrangères.

Cette commission existe depuis 1988 mais n'a guère été active durant la première décennie qui a suivi sa création. A la fin des années 1980 et au début des années 1990, les services iraniens avaient

noué des liens étroits avec des groupes islamistes turcs, en les armant et les entraînant. Ces groupes islamistes turcs opéraient à la fois en Turquie, pour assassiner des dissidents iraniens et en Iran, contre des diplomates étrangers. Quant au PKK, même si le soutien de Téhéran était minime envers cette organisation, l'Iran acceptait de servir de refuge aux combattants kurdes qui opéraient en Turquie.

« Très souvent, j'ai observé les terroristes du PKK qui fuyaient en traversant la frontière vers l'Iran », raconte ainsi Dogan Beyazit, un général turc en retraite, sur le site Web de la Fondation Jamestown. Si nous protestions, ils tergiversaient, avant d'envoyer une voiture à la frontière en nous disant d'aller voir par nous-mêmes. Mais si nous acceptions la voiture, elle ne roulait qu'à 20 km/heure et puis tombait en panne. Le temps que nous arrivions, les terroristes étaient déjà partis. Alors les Iraniens niaient qu'ils avaient jamais été là. C'était un mensonge, bien sûr. »

Mais depuis le début des activités du PJAK en 2004 (et, dans une moindre mesure depuis l'élection de l'AKP en 2002) la coopération s'est renforcée, l'Iran étant bien plus motivé à éradiquer les activités du PKK qui, maintenant, le visent directement. Les deux pays s'échangent des renseignements et l'Iran a déjà extradé des militants du PKK en Turquie. De même, en mars dernier, les forces de sécurité turques ont arrêté à Van Memichir Eminzade, un commandant du PJAK, alors qu'il était entré en Turquie via le Kurdistan d'Irak. Quant aux bombardements contre les camps du PKK au Kurdistan, ils sont menés, depuis 2007, à un ryth-

me assez régulier, même si les attaques iraniennes sont loin d'avoir l'ampleur de la récente opération turque.

Quant à l'attitude des Etats-Unis envers le PJAK, elle est soupçonnée d'être à double face. L'Iran, en tout cas, accuse régulièrement les Américains de soutenir en sous-main les attaques du PJAK, ce que Washington, bien sûr, dément, même si un leader du PJAK, Hadji Ahmedi, a obtenu, en 2007, l'autorisation de se rendre aux Etats-Unis, où il a ren-

contré plusieurs officiels américains (source Jamestown Foundation). Une déstabilisation modérée de l'Iran ne pouvait qu'apparaître opportune aux USA mais depuis l'hiver dernier qui a vu une coopération américano-turque soutenue, au moins en matière d'informations, contre le PKK, on observe un durcissement de la position américaine sur le PJAK, même si un renforcement de la coopération entre la Turquie et l'Iran n'entre guère dans leurs intérêts.

LE NOMBRE D'ORPHELINS DECROIT AU KURDISTAN D'IRAK

CONSÉQUENCE de la paix et de la croissance économique, le nombre des orphelins a décliné depuis le milieu des années 2000, dans la Région du Kurdistan d'Irak.

Zaito Tahir, le directeur général des orphelinats d'Erbil, explique, pour le journal *Kurdish Globe*, qu'avant 2000, il y avait 350 orphelins dans les foyers d'accueil de la province d'Erbil mais que ce nombre est tombé à 155. « Maintenant, seuls 90 enfants vivent à l'orphelinat. Les 65 autres vivent avec des parents, à notre charge. Nous leur fournissons de la nourriture et de l'argent. »

Zaito Tahir, qui est aussi chercheur en sciences sociales, attribue cette chute à la paix et au développement économique qui prévalent dans la Région depuis 2003 : « La plupart de ces « orphelins » sont en fait venus ici après le divorce de leurs parents, ce ne sont pas des enfants qui ont perdu leurs parents en raison de la guerre. » L'orphelinat pour garçon de Shore-

sh comprend des pensionnaires dont l'âge va de 2 à 18 ans. Après 18 ans, la plupart des garçons quittent l'institution pour trouver du travail ou vivre avec des proches parents. Mais certains y restent, ainsi ces deux garçons âgés de 18 ans qui préfèrent y vivre en poursuivant leurs études et aidant à l'orphelinat, plutôt que de retourner chez des membres de leur famille.

Certains enfants, par contre, refusent d'aller à l'école, comme l'explique Zaito Tahir : « La majorité des enfants que nous accueillons ne sont pas normaux, d'un point de vue psychologique. Ils ont subi un stress, un traumatisme et se sentent déresponsabilisés. Ils ressentent l'orphelinat comme étant la cause de l'éclatement de leur famille et parfois brisent les fenêtres ou créent des problèmes. Ils ne comprennent pas que l'orphelinat est le seul foyer qu'ils ont désormais. »

L'armée américaine a alloué 4 millions de dollars pour la construc-

tion d'un grand orphelinat à Erbil, qui est maintenant presque achevée. Le World Orphan (WO) construit également un centre à Erbil destiné à accueillir des orphelins présentant différents handicaps.

Le premier orphelinat d'Erbil a été construit en 1979 et ne recueillait que les enfants au-dessus de 5 ans à moins qu'ils aient perdus leurs deux parents. mais à présent, les orphelinats du Kurdistan accueillent aussi les enfants maltraités.

L'orphelinat construit par l'armée américaine comprendra des bâtiments pour les garçons et les filles, plusieurs salles et équipements, une piscine, un terrain de sport. Les deux bâtiments actuels seront ainsi fermés. « Les orphelinats actuels sont comme des casernes, les enfants dorment tous dans un grand hall. »

Haqi Ismail, le directeur général de World Orphan au Kurdistan, explique au Kurdish Globe que le projet sur lequel ils travaillent consistera en dortoirs, école, hôpital, avec des employés y travaillant 24 heures sur 24. Le Gouvernement régional kurde a alloué à cette organisation 12.000 mètres carrés pour ce projet. « Le centre deviendra un foyer permanent pour les enfants, même après qu'ils aient grandi. Il sera destiné aux enfants sans toit, aux orphelins, aux handicapés. »

En plus de ces orphelinats, Zaitor Tahir dit s'efforcer maintenant de convaincre le gouvernement de verser une pension afin que des enfants puissent continuer à vivre chez de proches parents, ce qu'il trouve préférable, car cela leur per-

met de garder des liens sociaux plus forts.

« Après enquête, nous avons constaté que la plupart des enfants voulaient vivre avec des membres

de leur famille. » Le gouvernement dépense chaque mois 300 \$ par orphelin. Cette somme directement versée à une famille suffirait à l'inciter à prendre soin d'un enfant.

AINSI QUE...

LES SUITES DU NEWROZ EN TURQUIE. Les violences exercées par la police turque contre les manifestations du Nouvel An kurde ont fait une troisième victime, Ramazan Dag, âgé de 25 ans, qui avait été hospitalisé à Van et est resté dans le coma une semaine, avant de succomber, le 1^{er} avril. Il avait été atteint par une balle tirée par les policiers, qui lui avaient en plus cassé trois côtes. Le père de la victime a par ailleurs déclaré qu'il n'avait pas été admis à se rendre au chevet de son fils, jusqu'à sa mort.

Un autre jeune Kurde, âgé de 15 ans, qui avait été capturé par des policiers en civils, lesquels lui avaient délibérément cassé le bras devant des caméras, est toujours emprisonné à Hakkari, sans que ses parents aient pu lui rendre visite. Seul un avocat a pu le rencontrer, mais ignore s'il a été convenablement soigné.

Mais la brutalité de la répression n'a pas touché uniquement les manifestants. Reporters Sans Frontières dénonce ainsi les violences exercées contre 6 journalistes qui couvraient les fêtes du Newroz, le 23 mars, dans la même ville de Hakkari. Senar Yildiz et les 5 autres reporters, Hamit Erkut et Erkan Cobanoglu de l'agence Dogan, Necip Capraz de l'agence Anatolia, Sevket Yilmaz de l'agence Cihan et Sami Yilmaz de l'agen-

ce DIHA, se plaignent d'avoir été bousculés et frappés, tandis que leurs films et leurs magnétophones ont été confisqués. L'un d'eux, Senar Yildiz, travaillant pour l'agence Ihlas et le site Yüksekova Haber, a dû être hospitalisé après avoir été blessé à la tête.

Necip Capraz rapporte que les journalistes ont été pris pour cible quand la police a voulu disperser les manifestants. Ils ont d'abord été chargés par un officier de police, vite suivi de ses hommes, qui les ont poursuivis, frappés, et ont saisi leur matériel : « Notre seule faute est d'avoir été journalistes et de Yüksekova ».

Un autre reporter pour l'agence DIHA, Behçet Dalmaz, rapporte aussi l'attitude agressive des policiers qui l'ont contrôlé quelques jours auparavant, le 18 mars, alors qu'il n'était venu à Hakkari que pour suivre la cérémonie officielle de commémoration des Martyrs, rappelant les soldats tombés lors d'une offensive franco-britannique en 1915. L'un d'eux lui aurait même jeté sa carte de presse au visage, après avoir vérifié son identité.

RSF appelle les autorités locales et nationales à identifier et punir les responsables. « Les journalistes ne doivent pas être traités comme des criminels. »

L'organisation de défense des libertés de la presse critique par ailleurs la décision par une cour d'interdire pour une durée indéterminée deux sites Internet pro kurdes, celui du journal Özgür Gündem et celui de l'agence de presse Firat, pour « propagande en faveur du PKK ».

OUVERTURE D'UNE REPRESENTATION DIPLOMATIQUE ALLEMANDE A ERBIL. Le ministre kurde des Relations extérieures, Falah Mustafa Bakir, a salué l'annonce, par l'ambassadeur allemand à Bagdad, de l'ouverture d'un bureau à Erbil : « C'est un pas très important dans les relations entre la Région du Kurdistan et l'Allemagne. L'Allemagne a la plus forte économie d'Europe et un bureau de l'ambassade ici facilitera les contacts commerciaux et culturels entre notre peuple et le peuple allemand.

Falah Mustafa Bakir s'exprimait lors de la visite d'une délégation allemande à Erbil. « Nous sommes heureux et fiers que l'Allemagne se joigne à la liste toujours croissante des nations étrangères qui ont noué des contacts officiels avec la Région du Kurdistan et nous les accueillons les bras ouverts à Erbil, où ils trouveront beaucoup d'amis. Le gouvernement allemand fournit beaucoup d'aide et de formations ici, et nous espérons que la présence d'un bureau d'ambassade amènera le développement de nouveaux projets, aussi bien que de nouvelles opportunités commerciales pour les sociétés allemandes. »

L'ambassadeur allemand à Bagdad a déclaré que des initiatives avaient déjà été lancées en ce sens, ainsi l'AGEF un programme de forma-

tion professionnelle, et son partenariat public et privé avec la société Daimler sera renforcé et soutenu par l'ambassade à Erbil.

GUERRE EN TURQUIE : UN MOIS D'AVRIL ASSEZ MEURTRIER. En raison de l'intensification des opérations contre le PKK à l'intérieur des frontières turques, le mois d'avril a été assez meurtrier pour l'armée turque. Le 5 avril, un milicien a été tué par l'explosion d'une bombe artisanale dans la province de Sirnak. Trois autres « gardiens de villages » ont été blessés. Le 10 avril, ce sont treize combattants du PKK qui auraient été tués par les forces turques dans les provinces de Tunceli et Diyarbakir, selon les communiqués officiels. Le 17 avril, un soldat a été tué près de la frontière irakienne. Le 20 avril, à Kars, un autre soldat est mort par l'explosion d'une mine tandis que deux autres étaient blessés. L'armée turque attribue, dans son communiqué, cette action au PKK. Le 25, c'est un commandant et un soldat qui ont été tués à Sirnak. Le 27, deux soldats turcs ont été tués et un blessé, lors d'une opération près de Bingol, qui a également fait trois blessés parmi les miliciens. Au total, les opérations d'avril ont causé la mort de sept gardiens de village, six soldats turcs dont un officier, et près de dix blessés. Mais l'armée turque affirme, par ailleurs, qu'en plus des 13 combattants tués à Tunceli et Diyarbakir, de « nombreux » rebelles kurdes ont été tués en Irak, lors des raids aériens des 23, 25 et 26 avril, contre les positions du PKK au nord de l'Irak, dans les régions de Zap, Avashin et Khakourk. Ces raids ont été confirmés à l'AFP par un porte-parole du PKK, qui a cependant démenti toute victime dans ses rangs.

Par ailleurs la police turque a arrêté, le 16 avril, deux hommes dans le centre ville de Diyarbakir. Selon les sources policières, ils auraient été trouvés en possession d'explosifs et projetaient un attentat contre la gare ferroviaire, qui est utilisée par l'armée pour le transport des troupes et de matériel de combat. Le 23 avril, une femme a été arrêtée à Tarsus, dans le sud de la Turquie, alors qu'elle transportait sur elle de la dynamite et s'apprêtait à commettre un attentat-suicide, sans que sa cible ait été précisée.

LISTE NOIRE DE L'UE : LA CEJ INVALIDE L'INSCRIPTION DU PKK. La Cour européenne de Justice (CEJ) s'est prononcée contre l'inscription du PKK sur les « listes noires des groupes terroristes » de l'Union européenne en 2002, estimant que l'UE n'avait pas assez « justifié » sa décision. Comme ces listes sont régulièrement « remises à jour » par le Conseil des ministres de l'UE, sur simple décision administrative et sans consultation du Parlement européen, la décision de la CEJ n'a pas eu d'effet autre que symbolique dans les différentes opinions publiques. La presse proche du PKK, comme Özgür Politika, y a vu une « victoire », tandis que la presse turque et le ministre de la Justice de Turquie, Mehmet Ali Sahin, a accusé ce jugement d'affaiblir « la lutte internationale contre le terrorisme », en parlant de « contre-mesure éventuelle » de la Turquie, sans autre précision.

Ces « listes noires » ne font d'ailleurs pas l'unanimité au sein de l'Union européenne puisqu'en janvier dernier, l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe (ACPE) avait, dans un commu-

niqué de presse, qualifié « *les procédures employées par le Conseil de Sécurité des Nations Unies (CSNU) et l'UE pour inscrire sur liste noire des personnes et des groupes soupçonnés d'avoir des liens avec le terrorisme* » de « *totalelement arbitraires, et « bafouant les droits fondamentaux individuels* ». Les parlementaires européens ont donc redemandé son réexamen «dans l'intérêt de la crédibilité de la lutte internationale contre le terrorisme».

Le rapporteur à l'origine de la résolution de l'Assemblée parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe, le suisse Dick Marty, souligne qu'actuellement, dans le monde, quelque 370 personnes ont leurs avoies gelés et ne peuvent voyager car elles ont été inscrites sur une liste noire par le CSNU, parfois « sur la base de simples soupçons ... Même les membres du comité chargé de décider l'inscription d'une personne sur liste noire ne connaissent pas tous les motifs à l'origine du dépôt de la demande d'inscription. La personne ou l'entité concernée n'est le plus souvent ni avisée de cette demande, ni entendue, ni même parfois informée de la décision prise – jusqu'à ce qu'elle tente de passer une frontière ou d'utiliser un compte bancaire. Aucune mesure ne prévoit de réexamen indépendant des décisions prises.» L'APCE a donc demandé, à une majorité écrasante (la quasi-unanimité), la révision de ces listes. Ces listes, qui existaient dès 1999 ont été très utilisées après les attentats du 11 septembre 2001. L'inscription d'un groupe « terroriste » est faite à la demande d'un Etat « sur la base d'informations qualifiées de «confidentielles» et communiquées au comité des sanctions du Conseil de Sécurité ou du Conseil des Ministres de l'UE ».

Selon Dick Marty, « la règle est que les représentants des autres Etats ne forment aucune objection, de sorte que la véritable décision appartient à l'Etat demandeur. Aucun mécanisme sérieux et indépendant de contrôle n'est en réalité prévu. »

Réagissant à cette décision, les Etats-Unis ont, pour leur part, déclaré qu'ils n'avaient pas l'intention de modifier le statut du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

SELON LE PREMIER MINISTRE TURC L'USAGE DU KURDE N'EST PAS PREVU DANS LE TRAITE DE LAUSANNE. Lors d'une rencontre à Ankara avec la Ligue des Droits de l'Homme en Turquie (IHD), l'Union des employés du service public (KESK) et d'autres organisations non gouvernementales, le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan est revenu sur sa volonté de reconnaissance de la langue kurde, une des conditions sine qua non aux yeux de l'Union européenne pour la candidature turque. Un débat assez vif a eu lieu au sujet de la langue kurde et de son enseignement, débat qui s'est conclu par le départ de Sezgin Tanrikulu, le président de l'Association du barreau de Diyarbakir.

Les ONG ont en effet présenté au Premier ministre un « cahier de doléances » rédigé en kurde, réclamant le droit des Kurdes à l'enseignement de leur langue maternelle. Ces associations ont, en outre, déclaré à Recep Tayyip Erdogan que la question kurde en Turquie n'est pas uniquement un problème économique lié au sous-développement du « Sud-Est », mais bel et bien un problème politique et culturel.

Sezgin Tanrikulu a ainsi vivement débattu avec le Premier ministre sur les aspects « non économiques » de la question kurde en Turquie. Pris de court, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a alors demandé à son interlocuteur de lui citer en exemple un de ces « problèmes ». Sezgin Tanrikulu a mentionné le fait que les Kurdes n'avaient pas le droit de parler leur langue maternelle dans les établissements publics, que ce soit dans l'enseignement ou l'administration. A cela, le Premier ministre lui a répliqué que le droit à l'éducation dans sa langue maternelle ne concernait que les minorités, « qui bénéficiaient d'écoles pour cela ».

Cette réponse renvoie tout simplement au traité de Lausanne, pour lequel il n'y a de minorités que religieuses, citées comme « non-musulmanes » (Section III, article 38), c'est-à-dire les chrétiens et les juifs (mais non les Alévis), en refusant d'accorder toute existence politique et culturelle à une minorité ethnique.

Cependant ledit traité prévoit le libre usage de toute langue sur le territoire de la République turque, que ce soit pour les « minorités » ou les « ressortissants turcs », comme le dit très explicitement l'article 39 de la même section : « Il ne sera édicté aucune restriction contre le libre usage par tout ressortissant turc d'une langue quelconque, soit dans les relations privées ou de commerce, soit en matière de religion, de presse ou de publications de toute nature, soit dans les réunions publiques.

Nonobstant l'existence de la langue officielle, des facilités appropriées seront données aux ressortissants turcs de langue autre que le turc,

pour l'usage oral de leur langue devant les tribunaux. »

Sezgin Tanrikulu a alors évoqué les propos récents du Premier ministre turc au sujet des Turcs d'Allemagne, quand il avait qualifié leur « assimilation » de « crime contre l'humanité ». Recep Tayyep Erdo-

gan a d'abord répondu que les Kurdes de Turquie n'étaient pas les Turcs d'Allemagne, mais comme le bâtonnier du Barreau de Diyarbakir insistait, le Premier ministre, perdant son sang-froid, lui a lancé : « Vous mentez ! Vous n'êtes pas honnête ! » C'est alors que Sezgin Tanrikulu a quitté la salle en répli-

quant qu'il n'avait pas à prouver son honnêteté à qui que ce soit, et que Recep Tayyep Erdogan n'avait pas le droit de l'insulter. Le débat ne se prolongea pas plus de 20 minutes et il n'y eut pas de déclaration à la presse de la part des ONG présentes.

la Croix

1^{ER} AVRIL 2008

Le parti au pouvoir en Turquie mis en procès par le camp laïque

La demande d'un procès contre le parti AKP du premier ministre turc, au nom de la défense de la laïcité, a été jugée recevable hier par la Cour constitutionnelle

ISTAMBOUL

De notre correspondante

Hier, à l'issue de quatre heures de débat, les onze juges de la Cour constitutionnelle de Turquie ont jugé «recevable» le recours du procureur de la Cour de cassation, Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya. Celui-ci a demandé, le 14 mars dernier, qu'un procès soit ouvert afin d'interdire le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), actuellement au pouvoir, en raison d'«activités anti-laïques». Le procureur en veut notamment pour preuve la récente révision de la Constitution autorisant le port du foulard islamique, pour les étudiantes, dans les universités. Désormais, 71 membres de ce parti créé en 2001 encourent cinq années d'interdiction d'activités politiques. Parmi eux se trouvent les plus hauts responsables de l'État: le premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, et le président de la République, Abdullah Gül, élu en août dernier.

Le vice-président de la Cour constitutionnelle, Osman Paksüt, a déclaré hier dans une brève allocution devant la presse que ce recours avait été jugé «recevable» par la totalité des juges. Seule la situation de l'actuel chef d'État, Abdullah Gül, a divisé la Cour. Quatre des onze juges ont en effet refusé de valider l'ouverture de poursuites contre lui pour des faits antérieurs à sa prise de fonction.

Le parti de Recep Tayyip Erdogan doit désormais suivre une voie juridique compliquée. D'ici à un mois, l'AKP devra présenter son dossier de défense. La Cour se penchera alors sur le fond du dossier, sur la base d'un rapport de 162 pages, mais ne rendra pas sa décision finale avant plusieurs mois.

Le sort de l'AKP, qui a obtenu 47 %



Le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, ici en compagnie de son épouse lors d'un meeting, encourt cinq années d'interdiction d'activités politiques, tout comme des dizaines de responsables de l'AKP, si son parti est finalement reconnu coupable de menées «anti-laïques».

dés suffrages lors des élections législatives de juillet dernier, se trouve donc entre les mains de cette Cour constitutionnelle, maillon central de l'establishment kémaliste. Cette bataille, engagée contre le parti au pouvoir par le camp laïque et plus précisément par le corps judiciaire, semble être celle de la dernière chance. L'AKP dispose en effet, depuis l'an dernier, de la plupart des leviers de pouvoirs: majoritaire au Parlement, il dirige le gouvernement et a placé l'un des siens à la tête de l'État. Bientôt, le président de la République pourra nommer des personnalités moins kémalistes, moins persuadées de la nécessité d'une politique laïque en Turquie, aux plus hautes positions juridiques, notamment dans les hautes cours du pays.

Aux yeux de l'establishment turc, cette étape sonnerait la fin de la République laïque. En attendant, les kémalistes restent majoritaires à la Cour constitutionnelle, dont la ma-

Pour les membres de l'AKP, cette décision fait à un parti renforcé par les urnes.

jeurité de ses juges a été nommée par l'ancien chef d'État, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, connu pour son opposition virulente à l'AKP. D'un point de vue arithmétique, l'hypothèse de l'interdiction du parti est donc plausible, et même, depuis hier, bien engagée.

«L'un des problèmes de la Turquie, analyse Jean Marcou, de l'Observatoire de la vie politique turque (Ovipot), c'est que la justice constitutionnelle cherche davantage à défendre l'ordre établi conçu par la République, avec une élite qui dicte la bonne direction, que de faire respecter des normes objectives. La Cour constitutionnelle va donc plutôt dans le sens de l'ordre établi. Toutefois je reste dubitatif sur ce qu'elle peut décider. Elle nous a déjà surpris. Il se peut qu'elle prenne une décision de compromis. N'oublions pas que les juges constitutionnels prennent des risques. Si la décision paraît injuste, ils en paient les conséquences.» Hormis l'hypothèse d'une fermeture pure et simple de l'AKP, il se peut donc que la Cour rejette le recours

déposé par le juge Yalçinkaya ou qu'elle opte pour des sanctions intermédiaires, notamment financières, envers l'AKP.

Au sein de l'AKP, le silence était de mise hier, après l'annonce de cette décision. Pour les membres de ce parti, cette décision est un véritable affront fait à une formation renforcée l'été dernier par le verdict des urnes, après un autre combat frontal qui l'avait opposé au camp laïque au sujet de l'élection présidentielle. C'est ce qu'a rappelé le week-end dernier Recep Tayyip Erdogan. «Ceux qui n'ont pas pu nous battre à travers les voies démocratiques préfèrent des méthodes anti-démocratiques (...). L'histoire ne le pardonnera pas», a lancé le premier ministre turc.

DELPHINE NERBOLLIÉ

IRAK LE PREMIER MINISTRE NOURI AL-MALIKI N'A PAS ATTEINT LES OBJECTIFS QU'IL S'ÉTAIT FIXÉS

L'Iran et Moqtada Al-Sadr renforcés après l'offensive militaire ratée du gouvernement irakien

Le Monde

Jeudi 3 avril 2008

S'IL SUBSISTAIT le moindre doute quant à l'influence majeure désormais exercée par l'Iran dans les affaires de son voisin irakien, le cessez-le-feu conclu, dimanche 30 mars, entre le chef radical chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr et trois missi dominici représentant le premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, également chiite, devrait l'avoir définitivement levé. Car c'est à Qom, le quartier général du pouvoir religieux iranien, que les négociations ont eu lieu. Et c'est, selon une bonne source, sous la houlette d'un militaire iranien, et pas n'importe lequel puisqu'il s'agit du général Qassem Suleimani, chef des brigades Al-Qods du corps des pasdarans, que ce cessez-le-feu a finalement été conclu. Incidemment, au moins deux des trois envoyés spéciaux de M. Maliki, à savoir Hadi Al-Amari et Ali Adib, sont titulaires de la double nationalité irako-iranienne et ils ont, l'un et l'autre, vécu des années en exil à Téhéran. M. Adib est membre du même parti religieux que le premier ministre (Daawa), et

M. Amari est le chef d'une puissante milice alliée, l'organisation Badr, qui domine l'encadrement de la nouvelle armée nationale irakienne et qui fut créée, financée et entraînée en Iran à partir de 1980.

Incitation américaine

Tout au long de la semaine d'affrontements armés qu'ils ont approuvés, auxquels ils ont prêté la main, et qui a fait au moins 470 tués et des milliers de blessés, les Américains n'ont cessé d'encourager Téhéran « à mettre son influence au service de la stabilisation » de la situation.

C'est fait. Washington et Téhéran peuvent s'accuser mutuellement des pires méfaits en Irak, nombreux sont les esprits politiques de ce pays à penser que les deux puissances sont au moins d'accord sur la nécessité de ne pas laisser s'installer, aujourd'hui, un chaos général.

Engagés au nord dans une offensive contre les rebelles sunnites d'Al-Qaida, les Américains qui n'ont pas de présence militaire permanente à Bassora ont, semble-t-il, cru M. Maliki sur parole lorsque celui-ci leur a affirmé que son offensive serait quasiment

une promenade de santé. Comme certains des généraux irakiens eux-mêmes qui l'ont confié, ils ont été « surpris » par la combativité de l'Armée du Mahdi, la milice du courant sadriste et par sa capacité à mobiliser des partisans dans toutes les grandes villes du sud chiite et jusqu'à Bagdad.

M. Maliki n'a atteint aucun des objectifs qu'il s'était fixés. Les « 18 milices » recensées à Bassora par le chercheur franco-irakien Hosham Dawod sont toujours en place et aux commandes de leurs juteux trafics.

Aucun des quartiers de Bassora ou d'ailleurs qui étaient sous la domination de l'Armée du Mahdi n'a été repris. Des centaines de policiers et de soldats à travers le pays ont refusé d'ouvrir le feu sur les miliciens et, parfois, les ont rejoints. Pour leur première grosse opération sous commandement national, et malgré 30 000 hommes sur place, la nouvelle armée et la police irakiennes formées par les Américains ont dû appeler les alliés anglo-saxons à la rescousse pour avancer ou se sortir de mauvais pas.

Théoriquement valide jusqu'au 8 avril, l'offre du premier ministre de « racheter » les armées lourdes

des combattants au prix fort n'a pratiquement rien donné.

M. Maliki, qui s'était imprudemment juré de rester à Bassora « jusqu'à la victoire », a dû se résoudre à rentrer à Bagdad avec une crédibilité politique plus mince encore qu'avant l'offensive. Le fait qu'il ait qualifié, mardi, l'opération de « succès » et qu'il se soit abstenu d'en sonner la fin ne change rien à l'affaire. Il y aura sans doute d'autres affrontements interchiites avant les élections régionales du 1^{er} octobre. En attendant, « c'est une grande victoire de l'Iran », se désole Mahmoud Othman, un élu kurde proche de la présidence de la République et toujours très bien renseigné. « Téhéran a montré que c'est lui et non Washington qui a la haute main sur nos affaires, analyse-t-il. L'objectif de l'Iran est de rendre Maliki aussi faible que possible pour qu'il soit obligé d'accepter ses visées. De fait, il a été obligé de courir à Qom pour négocier. »

Le président Bush qui avait encouragé l'initiative de son allié et jugé qu'il s'agissait en l'occurrence d'un « test historique pour l'Irak libre » doit se mordre les doigts. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE



1ER AVRIL 2008

Les réfugiés irakiens menacés d'expulsion par Londres

Dans un appartement du centre de Londres où l'héberge un couple de retraités, K.(1) presse entre ses doigts un Tasbih, sorte de rosaire musulman. Cet homme au cheveu ras réclame depuis huit ans aux autorités britanniques le droit d'asile. Sans succès. Et l'espoir d'obtenir un jour un statut légal en Grande-Bretagne s'amenuise, les autorités britanniques ferment peu à peu les portes du Royaume-Uni aux réfugiés irakiens, malgré la détérioration de la situation dans leur pays d'origine (lire ci-contre).

Refus. Avocat d'origine kurde, K. avait choisi de s'exiler en 2000 après avoir reçu des menaces de mort pour avoir défendu les droits d'une femme

contre un groupe tribal local. Cueilli par la police britannique, il a demandé l'asile, en vain. Durant de longues années, il a patienté, d'appel en rejet, et de rejet en appel. En mai 2006, il a essuyé un ultime refus. « Je n'attendais que du bon du gouvernement britannique. Je n'ai pas obtenu la protection que j'espérais », commente-t-il. Début 2006, le ministère de l'Intérieur avait mis en place un programme de « départs volontaires ». Moins coûteux que les expulsions (chiffrées à 14 000 euros par tête, selon Amnesty International), il avait l'avantage d'être aussi moins embarrassant pour l'image du pays. Les autorités s'étaient

allouer 1 500 livres (2 000 euros) à tout candidat au retour. Les trois premiers mois, près de

1 376 personnes, toutes nationalités confondues, ont opté pour cette solution et déjà quitté la Grande-Bretagne. Puis, plus personne ou presque. Le gouvernement décide alors de changer d'approche. Dans une lettre révélée par le quoti-

« Nous préférons que ces individus partent volontairement. Mais en cas de nécessité, nous procéderons à leur retour forcé. »

Le gouvernement, à propos des réfugiés

dien britannique *The Guardian*, le 13 mars, l'Agence des frontières et de l'immigration assure que le retour vers Bagdad ou Bassora est « possible et raisonnable ». « Ces citoyens irakiens ne sont plus habilités à recevoir l'aide du gouvernement », souligne l'Agence. Sont concernés 1 400 bénéficiaires de la section 4, un dispositif qui leur permettait de disposer d'un logement et de bons d'achat de 35 livres par semaine. En échange, le demandeur devait partir dès que « les conditions légales ou de sécurité » étaient réunies. Pour l'Irak, cette aide fut souvent réservée aux habitants des régions du Sud et du

centre, jugées trop risquées.

Les révélations du *Guardian* ont suscité la colère des associations de défense des droits de l'homme. «Le gouvernement tente d'affamer les gens pour les pousser à quitter le pays. C'est choquant [...] L'Irak est toujours un pays dangereux et les gens sont terrifiés à l'idée de rentrer», s'indigne Kate Allen, la directrice de la branche britannique d'Amnesty International. Pis, la garantie de sécurité s'ar-

rête dès l'aéroport. Selon le *Guardian*, le ministère de l'Intérieur aurait prévu de faire signer à tous ces «candidats» au retour un document exonérant le gouvernement britannique de toute responsabilité en Irak. «Toutes les demandes d'asile sont examinées au cas par cas par l'Agence des frontières et de l'immigration et lorsque cela est nécessaire, par une procédure judiciaire indépendante, et si des Irakiens ont besoin de notre protection, par exemple d'anciens interprètes, nous leur garantissons

le droit d'asile, assurent les autorités britanniques. Nous considérons cependant raisonnable d'attendre des individus pour lesquels un juge indépendant et une procédure d'appel ont décidé qu'ils n'avaient pas besoin de protection qu'ils rentrent dans leur pays. Nous préférons que ces individus partent volontairement. Mais en cas de nécessité, nous procéderons à leur retour forcé.» Le gouvernement affirme continuer à surveiller «soigneusement» la situation en Irak.

Patrouille. La semaine dernière, 60 Irakiens ont ainsi été renvoyés vers Erbil, au Kurdistan. Dépité, K. confie : «La police arrête à tour de bras et envoie les gens vers des centres de détention où ils doivent attendre leur expulsion. Je ne vais plus dans les gares, ni dans le métro où la police patrouille, je ne voyage plus qu'en bus». Ils étaient 1415 demandeurs d'asile irakiens en 2005, 945 en 2006 et 1835 en 2007.

► KARINE LE LOËT

(1) Pour des raisons de sécurité, le nom a été tronqué.

Editorial

Démons turcs

La Turquie n'en a décidément pas fini avec ses vieux démons. La suite favorable donnée, lundi 31 mars, par la Cour constitutionnelle turque à une procédure d'interdiction visant la formation au pouvoir, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), est une nouvelle étape d'une lutte implacable entre le système judiciaire et le courant islamo-conservateur. Avatar de deux formations déjà interdites, Refah (Prosperité), en 1998, et Fazilet (Vertu), en 2001, l'AKP n'est pas la seule cible de la magistrature, bastion du kémalisme au même titre que l'armée et l'administration. Une formation kurde, le Parti de la société démocratique (DTP), fait, lui aussi, l'objet d'une procédure similaire d'interdiction instruite par le même procureur, Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya.

L'interdiction d'un parti, qui a remporté haut la main les élections législatives en 2007 avec 46,6 % des voix, constituerait un véritable coup d'Etat juridique. Si le DTP devait être également proscrit, 54 % des votes exprimés à cette occasion se trouveraient brutalement délégitimés. Il faut reconnaître que l'empressement de l'AKP, après sa victoire, à vouloir légiférer sur un sujet ô combien symbolique, le port du voile islamique, pour l'instant interdit à l'université, n'a pu qu'alimenter en Turquie les inquiétudes des milieux laïques

Le Monde

Mercredi 2 avril 2008

et libéraux et ceux qui redoutent que la formation conservatrice dispose d'un « agenda caché » qu'elle entendrait imposer au pays.

La défense de la laïcité héritée du kémalisme constitue d'ailleurs l'angle d'attaque choisi par le procureur. Ce souci est louable, à condition qu'il ne masque pas un « laïcisme » qui ne serait qu'une forme de « baasisme à la turque », selon le politologue Soli Özel, comparable aux régimes autoritaires qui ont émergé dans l'ancien Empire ottoman et qui n'ont jamais été des modèles de vertu démocratique.

S'il faut juger l'AKP à ses actes, il faut reconnaître que ce parti, incontestablement « bigot », a fait preuve à la fois de libéralisme économique et de pragmatisme politique. Il s'est bien gardé de remettre en cause les alliances stratégiques avec les Etats-Unis et Israël, ce qui témoigne de sa maturité. S'il a été reconduit au pouvoir en 2007, porté par les couches populaires, c'est incontestablement parce que son bilan a plaidé en sa faveur – stabilité politique, réforme en profondeur de l'économie – mais aussi parce qu'il a affiché sa volonté de s'arrimer à l'espace européen.

C'est cet ensemble qui risque aujourd'hui d'être menacé, à commencer par l'aspiration européenne. Il faut s'attendre, en effet, à ce que les adversaires de l'entrée dans l'espace européen d'une puissance musulmane s'appuient hypocritement sur le coup de force du pouvoir judiciaire contre l'AKP pour mettre en doute la maturité démocratique de la Turquie. ■

La Croix

1^{ER} AVRIL 2008

IRAK Les affrontements de Bagdad et Bassora ont fait 215 morts

Les miliciens du chef radical chiite Moqtada Sadr ont quitté les rues de Bagdad et du grand port pétrolier de Bassora hier, après six jours de combats meurtriers avec les troupes régulières. Selon le porte-parole du ministère de l'intérieur, le général Abdel Karim Khalaf, 215 personnes ont été tuées, 600 blessées et 155 arrêtées dans les combats qui ont éclaté mardi dernier après le lancement d'une opération de « mise au pas ». L'armée américaine a affirmé hier qu'au moins 41 combattants chiites « criminels » ont été tués dimanche à Bagdad.

AFP

TURQUIE: 3 SOLDATS TURCS TUÉS DANS DES COMBATS AVEC LES REBELLES KURDES

ANKARA, 1 avr 2008 (AFP) – Trois militaires turcs, dont un officier, et neuf rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) ont été tués lundi soir lors d'accrochages survenus dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a indiqué mardi l'état-major turc.

Les heurts, qui ont également fait cinq blessés dans les rangs de l'armée turque, se sont produits dans la zone montagneuse de Bestler-Dereleer, dans la province de Sîrnak, frontalière avec l'Irak, selon un communiqué de l'état-major turc publié sur le site internet de l'armée.

Des sources de sécurité locales, avaient indiqué un peu plus tôt que les heurts avaient fait quatre blessés parmi les militaires turcs.

L'armée turque a également indiqué avoir détruit des munitions et des vivres dans les cachettes du PKK.

Les combats dans la zone se poursuivaient mardi, selon l'agence Anatolie.

Samedi, l'armée turque a annoncé avoir abattu au moins 15 rebelles kurdes la semaine dernière dans des bombardements aériens et d'artillerie dans le nord de l'Irak, où les séparatistes ont trouvé refuge.

Aidée en temps réel par les services de renseignement américains, la Turquie a mené plusieurs frappes aériennes dans le nord de l'Irak depuis le 16 décembre. Son armée a également effectué une incursion terrestre d'une semaine en février contre une base du PKK dans la région.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, lutte depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde. Ce conflit a déjà fait plus de 37.000 morts.

AFP

TURQUIE: SEPT REBELLES TUÉS DANS DES COMBATS, 16 DEPUIS LUNDI (ARMÉE)

ANKARA, 2 avr 2008 (AFP) -- Sept membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués mardi dans des heurts avec l'armée dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a annoncé mercredi l'armée turque.

Ces heurts, portent à 16 le nombre de rebelles abattus depuis le déclenchement d'une opération lundi dans la zone montagneuse de Bestler-Dereleer, dans la province de Sîrnak, frontalière avec l'Irak, selon un communiqué sur le site internet de l'état-major général.

Trois militaires turcs, dont un officier, ont également été tués dans les combats, avait indiqué mardi l'état-major.

Samedi, l'armée a annoncé avoir abattu au moins 15 rebelles la semaine dernière lors de bombardements aériens et d'artillerie dans le nord de l'Irak, où les séparatistes ont trouvé refuge.

Aidée en temps réel par les services de renseignement américains, la Turquie a mené plusieurs frappes aériennes dans le nord de l'Irak depuis le 16 décembre. Son armée a également effectué une incursion terrestre d'une semaine en février contre une base du PKK dans la région.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, lutte depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde. Le conflit a déjà fait plus de 37.000 morts.

AFP

ERBIL: BIENVENUE À "DREAM CITY"

ERBIL (Irak), 3 avr 2008 (AFP) - Presque partout en Irak, l'allégresse née de la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein en avril 2003 a tourné au cauchemar. Mais à Erbil, capitale prospère du Kurdistan autonome, le rêve continue.

Sous protection américaine dès 1990, la région a profité de son indépendance de fait puis de son statut particulier après l'émergence d'un Irak plus fédéral en 2003, pour se développer.

Partout, dans le centre historique comme dans les quartiers périphériques, des bâtiments en construction. Maisons rectangulaires à un étage, bureaux aux vitrines clinquantes ou futurs centres commerciaux, Erbil est un vaste chantier.

En plein centre-ville, un cimetière multi-séculaire a cédé la place à de hauts immeubles encore en construction, carcasses de béton au sommet desquels des grues déposent des tonnes de matériaux.

Près de l'aéroport international, où les vols pour le Moyen-Orient et l'Europe sont quotidiens, une tour de béton s'élève vers le ciel. L'Empire Building, futur hôtel de luxe, sera avec ses 22 étages "l'immeuble le plus haut de tout le Kurdistan", selon ses promoteurs.

Des dizaines d'autres hôtels sont en construction, comme Erbil Park, un cinq étoiles qui promet des "chambres de rêve".

De larges panneaux publicitaires annoncent la réalisation prochaine de résidences cossues: "Dream city", "British village" ou "Royal City". Ces vastes "condominium" à la californienne, élevés sur une ex-base de l'armée de Saddam Hussein, proposent de luxueuses maisons individuelles à 250.000 dollars pièce.

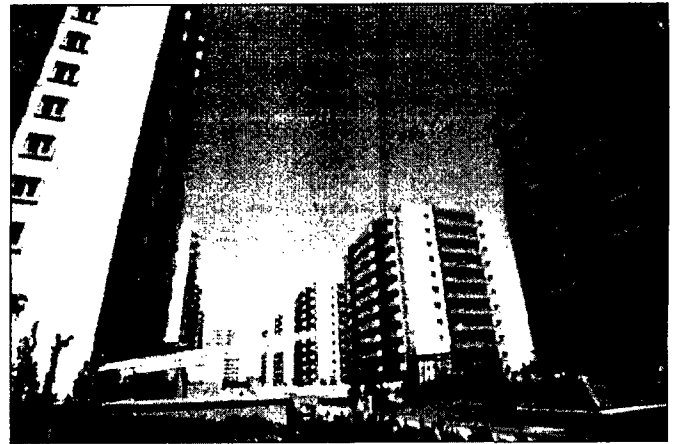
Les cimenteries se comptent par dizaines dans et autour de la ville. Les blocs aux allures de HLM s'étendent à perte de vue dans la périphérie.

"Nous aimerions faire d'Erbil un nouveau Dubai", souffle un guide pour touristes.

De l'ancienne citadelle millénaire qui domine Erbil, la vue offre un spectacle hétéroclite de minarets et toits de briques ocre perdus au milieu de tours de béton inachevées, d'immenses grues et antennes relais d'opérateurs de téléphonie mobile.

Les investisseurs étrangers, souvent turcs ou libanais, y sont accueillis à bras ouverts, les autorités voulant faire du Kurdistan "la porte d'entrée des hommes d'affaires en Irak", selon Falah Mohammad Bakir, responsable des relations extérieures au gouvernement kurde.

Indépendante de facto au sein d'un pays en plein chaos, la région affiche une insolente prospérité, en attendant les prochains revenus d'un prometteur secteur pétrolier en pleine expansion, avec pour objectif une production de 100.000 barils/jour.



Les dirigeants kurdes aiment à présenter leur région, avec ses 4 millions d'habitants, comme un "havre de paix et de stabilité".

Garants de cette "stabilité", les peshmergas ou combattants kurdes et autres services de sécurité, omniprésents, contiennent les violences à une cinquantaine de kilomètres plus au sud.

Les autorités se targuent d'avoir mis en place "une démocratie parlementaire vibrante", affirment que les libertés fondamentales sont assurées et que les minorités -notamment les chrétiens qui y ont trouvé refuge- y sont protégés.

Erbil "connait cependant de gros problèmes d'approvisionnement en électricité, qui revient, avec le coût de la vie assez élevé et la corruption, en tête des préoccupations des habitants", selon un investisseur étranger.

L'incontournable Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) du président de la région, Massoud Barzani, tient la ville mais coopère désormais, dans une logique d'intérêts bien compris, avec son ancien rival de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du chef de l'Etat irakien Jalal Talabani.

Au quotidien, les habitants d'Erbil jouissent d'une situation sans équivalent en Irak, et le contraste avec Bagdad est saisissant.

Les étudiants sont logés gratuitement dans de rutilantes résidences universitaires. Les habitants disposent de distributeurs bancaires, de jardins publics aux pelouses impeccables, d'un bowling, et même d'un parc aquatique.



PKK: LA CEJ CONTESTE TOUJOURS L'ÉTABLISSEMENT DE LA LISTE TERRORISTE DE L'UE

LUXEMBOURG, 3 avr 2008 (AFP) -- Les juges européens ont annulé jeudi une décision de l'UE de 2002 d'inscrire le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) sur sa liste d'organisations terroristes, mais cet arrêt n'empêche pas l'organisation kurde de rester sur cette liste.

La décision annulée par le tribunal de première instance de la Cour européenne de justice remonte à 2002, lorsque la liste terroriste de l'UE a été mise au point pour la première fois dans la foulée des attentats de 2001.

La liste a été plusieurs fois actualisée depuis en vertu de nouvelles décisions européennes, ce qui explique que l'arrêt de ce jeudi soit sans effet immédiat, a expliqué un porte-parole européen.

Les juges de Luxembourg ont estimé que l'UE n'avait pas assez justifié sa décision en 2002, suivant ainsi le raisonnement qu'ils avaient tenu en décembre 2006 pour annuler le gel des fonds d'un autre mouvement, l'organisation d'opposition iranienne des Moudjahidines du Peuple.

Le fait que le Conseil de l'UE ait, après la décision sur les Moudjahidines, fourni les motifs de l'inscription du PKK sur la liste terroriste en tenant compte des observations de la Cour, ne suffit pas, a expliqué en substance la Cour dans son arrêt. Il aurait fallu selon elle le dire dès le départ.

Le PKK continue à figurer sur la liste terroriste que l'UE a remise à jour en décembre dernier, avec 47 autres organisations dont les Moudjahidines ou le mouvement islamiste palestinien Hamas.



Ankara fustige un arrêt de la justice européenne sur le PKK

ANKARA, 3 avr 2008 (AFP) Le ministre turc de la Justice, Mehmet Ali Sahin, a fustigé jeudi l'arrêt de la Cour européenne de justice (CEJ) annulant la décision de l'Union européenne en 2002 d'inscrire le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) sur sa liste des organisations terroristes.

Cet arrêt n'empêche pas que le PKK continue à figurer sur la liste européenne des organisations terroristes, car la décision qu'il annule est ancienne et a été suivie depuis par d'autres décisions identiques de l'UE.

Le ministre turc a néanmoins sévèrement critiqué la CEJ. "Les juges auraient dû bien réfléchir avant d'émettre un tel arrêt, qui affaiblit la lutte internationale contre le terrorisme", a déclaré M. Sahin à Karabuk, une ville du nord de la Turquie, selon l'agence de presse turque Anatolie.

"J'aurais aimé qu'ils viennent en Turquie (...) et qu'ils voient les menaces" que fait peser le PKK, a poursuivi le ministre de la Justice. "Mais bien entendu, ils ont pris la décision chez eux, où

il n'y a aucun risque de terrorisme, loin de la réalité."

Le ministère turc de la Justice va étudier l'arrêt de la CEJ pour voir quelle contre-mesure il peut entreprendre, a indiqué M. Sahin.

Les juges de la CEJ, qui siège à Luxembourg, ont estimé que l'UE n'avait pas suffisamment justifié sa décision en 2002 d'inclure le PKK dans sa liste des organisations terroristes.

Mais un porte-parole de l'UE a indiqué que l'arrêt de jeudi n'entraînait aucune modification, car la liste a été plusieurs fois actualisée depuis en vertu de nouvelles décisions européennes. "La décision de la Cour se réfère à une décision ancienne, qui a déjà été remplacée par d'autres", a-t-il déclaré.

Les rebelles kurdes du PKK, créé en 1978, ont lancé le 15 août 1984 une lutte armée contre le pouvoir central d'Ankara pour la création d'un Etat kurde indépendant dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Les violences liées au conflit ont fait depuis plus de 37.000 morts, selon un bilan officiel.



IRAK: LA POUDRIÈRE DE KIRKOUK

KIRKOUK (Irak), 4 avr 2008 (AFP) - La région de Kirkouk, zone du nord de l'Irak, pétrolière et multiethnique, revendiquée par les Kurdes, apparaît comme un test de la capacité des factions irakiennes à se réconcilier.

A quelque 250 km au nord de Bagdad, Kirkouk avait été placée par l'ancien président Saddam Hussein hors du Kurdistan irakien, une région indépendante de facto depuis 1991.

Alors que les Kurdes ont aujourd'hui consolidé leur autonomie, ils exigent désormais le rattachement de Kirkouk à leur région autonome située à une cinquantaine de km plus au nord. Ils avancent des raisons à la fois historique et culturelle, se plaignant à décrire la ville comme la "Jérusalem des Kurdes".

Les récentes vagues d'immigration successives et les déplacements de populations en ont cependant profondément modifié la physionomie.

Sa population est aujourd'hui mixte, composée de Kurdes, en nombre croissant, de Turcomans, qui se considèrent comme ses habitants historiques, d'Assyro-chaldéen (chrétiens) et d'Arabes, souvent arrivés à l'occasion de la politique d'arabisation forcée pratiquée par Saddam Hussein.

Depuis 2003, les Kurdes, dotés d'une force militaire aguerrie, les peshmergas, ont investi massivement les institutions politiques de la ville et encouragé l'arrivée des leurs afin de peser

sur l'équilibre démographique.

Ils ont également repoussé de plusieurs kilomètres au sud les frontières de la région kurde.

Dans ce contexte, les extrémistes d'Al-Qaïda tentent d'attiser les haines par des attentats, exécutions sommaires et rapt.

Facteur clé de la crise, Kirkouk regorge de pétrole et ses exploitations sont les deuxièmes d'Irak derrière celles du sud.

Avec une annexion de cette région, le Kurdistan irakien, économiquement viable et déjà de facto indépendant du reste du pays, pourrait ainsi être tenté par la sécession, cauchemar des pays voisins où vivent des communautés kurdes.

La Turquie en particulier, qui se pose en protecteur des Turcomans, y voit une ligne rouge à ne pas franchir.

La constitution irakienne, dans son article 140, prévoyait l'organisation avant décembre 2007 d'un référendum local sur un éventuel rattachement au Kurdistan, consultation ardemment souhaitée par les Kurdes mais à laquelle Bagdad et les communautés arabes et turcomane étaient hostiles.

Le référendum, avec en préalable un très sensible recensement des populations, n'a finalement pas eu lieu, et a été repoussé de six mois, après l'intervention in extremis de l'ONU.



9 Kurdish rebels and 3 Turkish soldiers killed in clashes in southeast

April 1, 2008

ANKARA, Turkey – Clashes between Turkish troops and Kurdish rebels left nine rebels and three soldiers dead in Turkey's southeast, the military said Tuesday.

The fighting Monday in the province of Sirnak, which borders Iraq, also left five soldiers wounded, the military said in a statement. Earlier, the private Dogan news agency reported that 10 soldiers were wounded.

Turkey is fighting the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which uses bases in the north of neighboring Iraq to launch attacks against targets inside Turkey. Turkey, like the European Union and the United States, considers

the PKK a terrorist organization.

The fighting followed an attack by Turkish artillery units and warplanes on Kurdish rebel positions in northern Iraq late last week that Turkey's military said killed at least 15 rebels.

Saturday's statement confirmed the first cross-border action by the military since its eight-day ground incursion that ended Feb. 29. The U.S. has been sharing intelligence on the rebels with NATO-ally Turkey since November.

The PKK took up arms against the government in 1984 and tens of thousands of people have been killed in the fighting.

April 1, 2008

Guardian

Turkey's culture wars

A court case aimed at outlawing Turkey's ruling party calls into question the country's commitment to democratic reforms

Stephen Kinzer

The deep cultural and political conflict now shaking Turkey reached a new crescendo this month when the country's chief prosecutor filed a case aimed at outlawing the ruling party. The best way for Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to fight back would be to announce his support for repeal of all laws that limit public freedoms in Turkey.

That would make Erdogan what he now only seems to be: a fully formed democrat fighting to defend the voters' will against a self-appointed clique terrified of change.

In recent months, Turks have been debating the sensitive question of whether women with headscarves should be allowed to attend universities. The headscarf issue, however, was only a firestorm in the epochal social revolution that is reshaping Turkish life. This new battle has far higher stakes.

Turkey's chief prosecutor, Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya, has filed a 162-page brief asserting that the ruling Justice and Development party is a "centre of activities against the secular state". He asked the country's highest court to dissolve the party, which holds about 340 seats in the 550-seat parliament, and ban 71 of its leaders, including Prime Minister Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul, from political activity for five years. On Monday, the court unanimously agreed to hear the case, setting the stage for a period of deep uncertainty in Turkey.

In effect, forces that have lost both of the last national elections are responding by trying to depose the elected government through court action. They seem to have the support of not just the judiciary but also the army.

"In other words, Turkey's democracy is being led into a huge crisis with an unknown outcome," the Istanbul-based commentator Yavuz Baydar wrote. Some of his colleagues suggested that the country seemed on the brink of committing political hara-kiri.

For the first half-century after the Turkish Republic was founded in 1923, its democracy was a façade behind which a vanguard of secular militants, led by the officer corps, the bureaucracy and the judiciary, held true power. Business was controlled by conglomerates based in Istanbul. Government helped these conglomerates make money, and in exchange, their wealthy owners supported the system of military-guided democracy.

Beginning in the 1980s, though, a new class of Turks began emerging from the long-somnolent cities of Anatolia. Educated in newly built universities, and often with experience as "guest workers" in Europe, thousands of entrepreneurs sprung up and prospered in this hinterland. Gradually they rose to challenge the "white Turks" of Istanbul for control of the national economy.

Most members of this new class are pious Muslims who reject the secularist passion of the old elite. Once they achieved social and economic power, they sought a political vehicle. They found one in Erdogan's party. It is their vessel. That is why the old establishment fears it so deeply.

Twice in the last year, the elite has tried and failed to strike a blow against this government. First it used a series of manoeuvres to prevent parliament from electing Gul president. The government responded by calling new elections, and emerged from them with an even bigger parliamentary majority than before.

Then the elite tried to prevent passage of a constitutional amendment allowing future presidents to be

popularly elected, rather than chosen by parliament in a process where generals hold important power. That also failed.

This month's case aimed at outlawing Erdogan's party places him once more in the role of a victim who is persecuted for daring to represent democracy. He has always thrived in that role. By his own recent actions, however, he seems ill suited to it.

Erdogan and his party deserve credit for bringing Turks more democracy than they have ever known. Their government represents the people's will far more fully than any in recent decades. Yet after an early burst of promise, it has failed to pursue the liberating agenda some once said it embodied.

Turkey's efforts to join the European Union have slowed. Part of the reason is that Erdogan refuses to lead his country toward full democracy. He has not used his parliamentary majority to wipe away curbs on minority rights, repeal restrictions on free speech or offer a new approach to the nagging Kurdish problem.

Part of this may be because Erdogan senses that steps like these might anger nationalists, who have become more vocal in Turkey lately and constitute a growing source of votes. Rather than govern in their thrall, he should reinvigorate his stalled reform programme.

Turkey's government is under attack from powerful internal forces that seek to destabilise and topple it. It should fight back with a sweeping declaration embracing the cause of full democratisation. Turks are eager for it. So is the rest of the world.

TIME

Apr. 01, 2008

A Face-off Over Turkish Democracy

By Pelin Turgut/Istanbul

Turkey is in a turmoil that has all the drama of a Hollywood epic. There is a new venue for the ongoing power struggle that pits the old-guard elite — led by a military used to calling the shots since the country's founding in 1923 — against a powerful, newly moneyed class rooted in political Islam. The political vehicle of this class, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), was reelected last summer with an over-

whelming 47% of the vote. The old guard, having failed to beat the newcomers at the ballot box, has now asked the country's top court to ban the AKP and its leaders for undermining secularist principles they say are enshrined in Turkey's constitution.

Heading the all-male cast in this drama is the solitary, hawkish and staunchly secularist chief prosecutor, Abdurrahman Yalçinkaya, who has

become an Islamist hate target for his 162-page indictment accusing the AKP of seeking to overthrow secularism. Arrayed against him is Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a tall, moody former football player who grew up a hard-line Islamist and was once jailed for reciting a poem deemed to incite religious hatred. His ally, President Abdullah Gul, a moderate, must now balance his party loyalties against the require-

ment that he be neutral. And lurking in the wings is the army chief of staff, Yasar Buyukanit, who sees himself as protector of the republic as conceived by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Turkey's Westernizing founder. The lanky military man views his task as upholding Turkey's hard line against Kurdish separatists and in divided Cyprus (where Turkey retains a military presence) and in keeping pro-Islam forces in check. Both sides are equally fervent; one has the Book (the Qu'ran), the other, Kemalism, a homegrown ideology named after Ataturk. Neither has any empathy for the other, and there is no hero on the horizon to save the day.

The fate of Turkish democracy currently rests in the hands of the 11 becloaked members of the constitutional court. In past rulings, the court has banned several other political parties on similar grounds of violating the Turkish constitution. But this is different: the AKP enjoys more popular support than any of its predecessors, and it has formed the first single-party government in decades. The AKP under Erdogan has also distanced itself from traditional Islamist rhetoric, particularly in the impious fervor with which it has embraced liberal capitalism: foreign capital inflows and economic growth have been at a record high.

Parallel to the AKP case, Turkey has been gripped by the arrests of an alleged cabal of nationalist ex-army officers, military and civilian militants accused of killings and extortion to uphold what they saw as Turkey's interests. Their views are deeply isolationist and anti-

Europe, and they oppose rights for minorities. Turks have long harbored suspicions about the existence of a "deep state," as this network is popularly called. But Feride Cetin, a lawyer for the Turkish Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, who was shot dead last year, considers this the first time specific linkages to elements in the security forces have emerged. "This is a very important opportunity," she says.

On all levels then, Turkey's democracy is at a turning point; an age-old political shell is cracking, and it is unclear what will emerge from the debris.

The AKP now has a month to submit its initial defense, and court proceedings could take up to six months. Meanwhile Erdogan has taken to the war path, reciting Quranic verse in heavily emotional public speeches, with repeated references to "us" and "them." That polarization could ultimately be the most dangerous aspect of this debacle. Responding to calls by international organizations to take a step back, he bristled, and essentially said never. "The AKP say they want democracy and the European Union, but they don't have much to show for this," says Hakan Altınay, director of Istanbul's Open Society Institute. "In the next six months, the right thing to do would be to launch a hearts-and-minds campaign to win over society as a whole, to truly prove to everyone that they are democrats. That they are genuinely as much for the rights of Kurdish nationalists, gays or Christian missionaries, as they are for their own." If they do this convincingly, Altınay says, it could affect

the trial outcome.

There are no signs of that so far. In an gesture of defiance, the AKP is considering passing a constitutional amendment that could render the case moot, making it harder to ban parties and reducing the penalty for the charges applied. But the court could argue that such a change, enacted while the case is pending, is not admissible. In that event, Erdogan — who faces a five-year ban from politics should the AKP lose — could call early elections, or even urge his supporters to take to the streets. "The man is a fighter," said one leading businessman. "He won't give up. If necessary, he'll take it to the bitter end."

Hollywood epics tend to paint their antagonists in comfortably black-and-white terms; Turkey's dispute has many more gray tones. The conservative Muslims appear as new democrats, though only when it suits them; some cast the social democrats in the role of new hard-line nationalists; and Ataturk, whose biggest aspiration was for Turkey to join the "civilized West," would no doubt be stunned to hear that his military is skeptical of entry into the European Union. Meanwhile, investors are spooked, leading Turkish unions are on strike over a proposed social security reform law, unemployment is over 10%, and the Kurdish conflict is brewing. "This is a struggle in the palace," says political scientist Hakan Yılmaz. "It has nothing to do with the people." But if Turkey's polarization increases further, it could have profound consequences both inside and outside Turkey.

TIME

Apr. 01, 2008

Rehn's warnings sound alarm bells for Turkey's EU bid

EMİNE KART, Today's Zaman Ankara

European Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn voiced renewed concern on Monday after the Constitutional Court agreed to hear a case to shut down the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) for alleged Islamist activities.

Rehn said he would report to the European Commission on the case on Wednesday, saying it showed a "systemic error" in Turkey's constitutional framework. "The prohibition or dissolution of political parties is a far-reaching measure which should be used with the utmost restraint," Rehn said in a statement, adding: "I do not see any such justification for this case."

On Saturday, Rehn made similar remarks, saying attempts to close the AK Party could jeopardize Ankara's EU entry talks. Experts say his remarks are a serious warning over the near future of Turkey's EU bid.

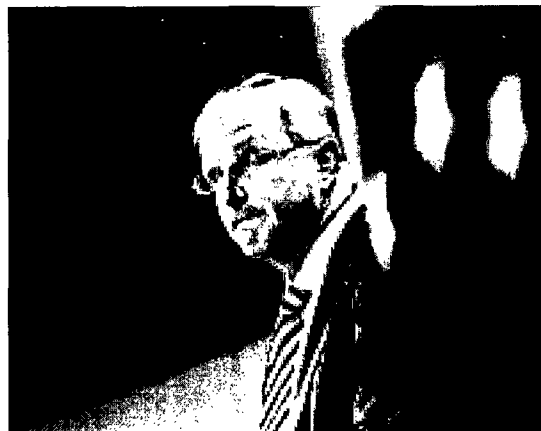
Rehn, speaking at a news conference on Saturday after EU foreign ministers met with Turkish Foreign Minister Ali Babacan in Brdo, Slovenia, had said a great deal would be at stake for Turkey's EU aspirations when members of its Constitutional Court met to consider whether the case, accusing the AK Party of subverting the secular order, was admissible. The 11-member Constitutional Court said yesterday it had discussed the arguments and decided to hear the full case for dissolving the AK Party on grounds that it is trying to scrap secular principles enshrined in the country's Constitution.

The assertion by analysts who define Rehn's remarks as "serious" is to a large extent based on facts documented in papers signed by Turkey and the EU as well as international principles

and rule of law to which both Turkey and the EU are party.

"In the case of a serious and persistent breach in Turkey of the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law on which the union is founded, the commission will, on its own initiative or on the request of one third of the member states, recommend the suspension of negotiations and propose the conditions for eventual resumption. The council will decide by qualified majority on such a recommendation, after having heard Turkey, whether to suspend the negotiations and on the conditions for their resumption. The member states will act in the Intergovernmental Conference in accordance with the council decision, without prejudice to the general requirement for unanimity in the Intergovernmental Conference. The European Parliament will be informed," reads the negotiating agreement signed by Turkey and the European Commission in October 2005.

Turkey began EU membership talks in 2005 but has made slow progress, partly because of the unresolved conflict over the divided Mediterranean island of Cyprus, but also due to deep misgivings in some EU member states, notably France and Austria. The irony is that the counterpart for the EU's warning of suspending talks



is a political party that has long declared the EU membership process to be an "external anchor" for itself.

"There is an external anchor that we take as a basis, and we constantly update our knowledge of this anchor. Thus we have set EU standards as the criteria we want to reach for upgrading the quality of life of our people," Babacan had said ahead of the July 22 parliamentary elections last year, when his party was resoundingly re-elected.

Associate Professor Mensur Akgün, director of the foreign policy program at the İstanbul-based Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), summarized the kind of a picture he foresees if the AK Party is closed as "not so glittering."

"France, Austria and to a certain extent the Netherlands are already keeping a distance to the idea of Turkey's full entry into the bloc. If a common decision of the bloc concerning suspension of talks with Turkey is added to this situation, this will spell a serious blow to democratization efforts in Turkey. Making reforms in this case will definitely be more than difficult," Akgün told Today's Zaman on Monday.

"If the EU's intention is to make a contribution to a candidate country's democratization, then suspension of negotiations is not the right way to do so. Suspension of talks will unfortunately have the opposite effect," Akgün added.

According to an Ankara-based Western analyst, Rehn's remarks should not be interpreted as a "threat."

"The commission displayed that it is not blind to the ongoing political crisis in Turkey and indicated that it considers this crisis 'grave,'" another analyst, who wished to remain anonymous, told Today's Zaman. "Rehn's remarks also

indicated the need for pursuit of a way out of this crisis," the analyst added.

Foreign policy expert Semih İdiz, for his part, noted that those who support the AK Party's closure have suggested that political parties could also be banned in EU countries. İdiz, in his column in the daily Milliyet, added, however, that there are strict principles concerning prohibition of political parties. These principles are mostly ignored by those who favor the AK Party's closure, he said, referring to guidelines adopted in 2000 by the Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters.

"Prohibition or enforced dissolution of political parties may only be justified in the case of parties which advocate the use of violence or use violence as a political means to overthrow the democratic constitutional order, thereby undermining the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the constitution. The fact alone that a party advocates a peaceful change of the constitution should not be sufficient for its prohibition or dissolution. A political party as a whole can not be held responsible for the individual behavior of its members not authorized by the party within the framework of political/public and party activities," read the guidelines on the prohibition of political parties and analogous measures adopted by the European Commission

for Democracy through Law, better known as the Venice Commission.

Wiersma: European Union process will be affected

Meanwhile, in a statement released after the Constitutional Court agreed to go ahead with the closure case against the AK Party, Jan Marinus Wiersma, vice president of the Socialist group in the European Parliament, expressed grave concern over the decision. He said the court's move "gives the impression of being politically motivated."

"We don't consider the new headscarf legislation to be proof that the AK Party is undermining the country's secular character, which is what the prosecutor is building his case on. That is a political issue that has to be debated in the Parliament and should not be taken out of the political arena," he said. Wiersma stressed that the AK Party has done more than any other party in Turkey's history to bring the country closer to Europe.

"These judges are not doing their country much of a service. This decision will have a paralyzing effect on the Turkish political scene, endangering the reform agenda and relations with the European Union," he said.

Guardian

April 2, 2008

Kemalism loses its grip

The ideology of Ataturk is fading and Turkey's Justice and Development party is building a more multi-ethnic country

Nicholas Blincoe

News that the supreme court of Turkey is to consider outlawing the ruling party sounds worrying, but in reality, this is the last act of a fatally wounded animal: the old guard of Turkey, who lay claim to being the heirs of the Kemalist revolution. In an article for Cif yesterday, Stephen Kinzer wondered if the Justice and Development party - known as the AKP - is up for this new fight, but he should be in no doubt. The AKP has learned that aggression pays when confronted by this self-perpetuating elite of soldiers, secret policemen, bureaucrats and heads of industries.

Kemalism, the political doctrine associated with Kemal Ataturk, prides itself on being resolutely modern and western. Modern and western-looking, that is, as long as this is 1923, when Mussolini ruled Italy, Stalin was rising to power in Russia and Turkey's Republican People's party was formed.

There is no longer anything modern about Kemalism. As a doctrine, it is broadly socialist, with a strong emphasis on Turkish- and state-owned industries, and big state projects like the south-east Anatolian project.

It is also militaristic. The constitution guarantees power to the army, while absolving it from effective oversight, resulting in an industrial military complex almost as sclerotic as the one that has brought Pakistan to its knees. The other feature of Kemalism is an aggressive secularism that justifies attacks on religion by claiming that Turkish-ness

transcends and embraces all other identities. This idea has never been accepted by the Assyrians, Arabs, Armenians, Greeks, Jews and Kurds that form the ethnic minorities of Turkey.

Kemalism finally lost its grip in Turkey in 2002 with the ascent to power of the AKP. But it has been a long slow death. The AKP has lived under constant threat of coups and judicial manoeuvres. However, leaders like Recep Tayyip Erdogan have served time in prison and this seems to have cured them of all fear. Erdogan, an ex-mayor of Istanbul, was imprisoned as recently as 1998 when his Welfare Party was outlawed. The modernisers of the Welfare party left the Islamist rump behind and formed the current AKP in 2001, winning the subsequent election. Since then, the party has scored impressive successes in the municipal elections of 2004 and the general election of 2007, called because of the refusal of the old elite to accept the AKP's nomination for president, Abdullah Gül.

The case of Gül's presidency is as good an illustration of the AKP's fighting instincts as any. Far from running from confrontation, the party has looked for fights. It has used EU rulings as a stick to beat the Kemalists. The headscarf issue, for instance, has shown the party to be more in step with contemporary values such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion than its rivals.

We should note, too, that the AKP has succeeded where Kemalism failed in building a far more multi-ethnic Turkey. The municipi-

pal elections of 2004 reduced the Republican People's party to eight cities in the pleasure grounds of Istanbul and Izmir. The AKP won 58 districts out of 81 and all of the big Arab and Kurdish cities (Diyarbakir, aside) of the south and south-east. The results show that the AKP is becoming the first choice with Turkey's large Kurdish and Arab minorities.

The AKP's most daring piece of politics was to ban the state security courts, which it did at the behest of the European Union. The courts were key to the army's power in Turkey. Soldiers sat alongside judges; prosecutors were often serving officers; defence lawyers were not permitted to directly question witnesses; and the proceedings took place in private. The abolition of the courts in 2004 evidently caught the military and secret police by surprise, as they were just about to try dozens of suspects in the attack on the British consulate of the previous year. The trials were actually under way when the courts discovered they no longer existed.

The AKP has a talent for picking fights, and these fights have given it political momentum. The old guard staked their identity on a modern Turkey, even if they had to outlaw or imprison everyone in the country to achieve it. The AKP is smart enough to win this latest fight with the judiciary, and I suspect the fight will strengthen its hand as it builds a genuinely modern, multi-ethnic Turkey.

Shiite on Shiite ■ Anthony H. Cordesman

A civil war Iraq can't win

WASHINGTON

Even if American and Iraqi forces are able to eliminate Al Qaeda in Iraq, there are still three worrisome possibilities of new forms of fighting that could divide Iraq and deny the United States any form of "victory."

One is that the Sunni tribes and militias that have been cooperating with the Americans could turn against the central government and the United States. The second is that the struggle among Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen and other ethnic groups to control territory in the north could lead to fighting in Kirkuk, Mosul or other areas.

The third risk — and one that is now all too real — is that the political struggle between the dominant Shiite parties could become an armed conflict, and one that Iran could easily take advantage of.

It is far from clear that the fighting is over in southern Iraq and parts of Baghdad between the Mahdi Army, which is under the control of the populist cleric Moktada al-Sadr, and a coalition of forces led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's Dawa Party and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, a powerful party led by a Maliki ally, Abdul Aziz al-Hakim.

The Mahdi Army has stood down as a result of a cease-fire that seems to have been brokered by Iran, but the Mahdi Army remains largely intact despite the fact that Dawa and the Islamic Supreme Council had de facto control of much of the Iraqi security forces, and that Hakim's group has its own militia, called the Badr Organization.

Much of the reporting on the power struggle in Basra and Baghdad — which was initiated by the Iraqi government — assumes that Sadr and his militia are the bad guys who are out to spoil the peace, and that the government forces are the legitimate side trying to bring order. This is a dangerous oversimplification, and one that the United States needs to be far more careful about endorsing.

There is no question that many elements of the Mahdi Army have been guilty of sectarian cleansing; that the Sadr movement is hostile to the United States; that some of its extremists have continued acts of violence in spite of the cease-fire Sadr declared last summer, and that some of these rogue elements have ties to Iran. No one should romanticize the Sadr movement, understate the risks it presents or ignore the violent radicals in the Mahdi Army.

But it is equally important not to romanticize Maliki, the Dawa Party or the Islamic Supreme Council. They are far from popular in many Shiite areas and have limited legitimacy.



CB
CWS/INTS

By Hajaj In Al-Ghad (Amman). CWS / CartoonArts International

The current fighting, which the government portrayed as a crackdown on criminality and insurgents, is better seen as a power grab — an effort by Maliki and the most powerful Shiite political parties to establish their authority over Basra and the parts of Baghdad that have eluded their grasp.

Moreover, Maliki's gamble dragged American forces part-way into the fight, including air strikes in Basra, in ways that have made Sadr and the Mahdi Army far more hostile and which have made Iran a potential power broker.

Striking at violent, rogue elements in the Mahdi Army is one thing, but engaging the entire Sadr movement is quite another. The official cease-fire that has kept the mainstream Mahdi Army from engaging government and U.S. forces may well be rescinded, and the new cease-fire between the Sadr faction, and Dawa and the Islamic Supreme Council, is tenuous at best.

This looming power struggle was all too clear when I was in Iraq last month. The Supreme Council was the power behind the Shiite governorates in the

south and was steadily expanding its influence over the Iraqi police. It was clearly positioning itself to counter Sadr's popular support and preparing for the provincial elections scheduled for Oct. 1.

American military and civilian officials were candid in telling me that the governors and other local officials installed by the central government in Basra and elsewhere in southern Iraq had no popular base. If open local and provincial elections were held, they said, Dawa and the Islamic Supreme Council were likely to be routed because they were seen as having failed to bring development and government services.

There was no real debate over how bad the overall governance of the south was at the provincial level, how little money the region was getting from Baghdad, and how poor government-related services were, even in Shiite areas.

Incompetence and corruption are not sectarian. An ABC News poll released this month showed that only two-thirds of the Shiite population in Basra had a favorable opinion of the central government, down from three-quarters last summer, and that only 14 percent of all residents felt they could move about safely.

The American officials I met with differed in their views of the size of Sadr's base around Basra, but most felt that Sadr still had a broad base of support in the rest of the south and in Baghdad — something indicated by the huge rallies on his behalf in the capital last week and the government forces inability to win any real victory over the Mahdi Army,

Many Iraqis that I have spoken to are

**The current fighting,
portrayed as a crackdown
on insurgents, is better seen
as a power grab.**

worried about how the October elections would play out.

The first problem is that there are no real indigenous political parties operating with local leaders. The second is the framework, which is still undecided. If the election follows the model of the 2005 vote, Iraqis will vote for long lists of candidates from the main parties (confronting many unfamiliar names) and there will be no allowance for the direct election of members of the Parliament who would represent a given area or district.

Optimists hope that local leaders and parties will emerge before the election; realists foresee an uncertain mess.

There are also differences of opinion over Sadr's cease-fire. Before Maliki launched his offensive, Iraqis asked whether he was simply waiting out the American-Iraqi effort to defeat Al Qaeda before allowing his army to become active again.

Now they ask whether the new cease-fire between Sadr's forces and those of Maliki and Hakim will last, whether there will be elections or more fighting, and why Iran seems to have been the key negotiating partner and neither side kept the United States informed.

In any event, it is clear that Basra has become a special case. Since the American-led invasion, it had been under the protection of the British, who opted for a strategy of not-so-benign neglect. Thus the power struggle in the city — Iraq's main port — differs sharply from that in the other Shiite areas.

Basra was essentially divided up among Shiite party mafias, each of which had its own form of extortion and corruption. They sometimes fight and feud, and there are reasons to call them criminal gangs, but they have established a crude *modus vivendi*.

Basra also feels the influence of Iran far more than the other Shiite governorates. Iran's religious paramilitary force, Al Quds, has been an equal-opportunity supplier of weapons and money to all the Shiite militias, effectively ensuring that it will support the winner, whoever that turns out to be.

There were good reasons for the central government to try to reassert control of Basra. It is not peaceful. It is the key to Iraq's oil exports. Gang rule is no substitute for legitimate government.

But given the timing and tactics, it is far from clear that the Maliki offensive was meant to serve the nation's interest, as opposed to those of the Islamic Supreme Council and Dawa. It is also unclear that the end result will strengthen any side other than Iran.

How will this intra-Shiite fighting affect America? If the fighting sets off a broad and violent power struggle between Shiite factions, most of the security gains of the last year could be lost.

A snub for Syria

When delegations deplaned in Damascus last weekend for an Arab League summit meeting, half of the league's 22 heads of states expressed their displeasure with President Bashar Assad of Syria by staying home. Lebanon, whose political crisis was to lead the summit's agenda, snubbed the event entirely.

This rare gesture of discord among the Arab states is a sign of growing exasperation — most of all over Assad's ties with Iran.

The most immediate source of discontent is with Assad's role in preventing the Lebanese government

from voting for a new president to replace the outgoing Syrian puppet Emile Lahoud. As the price of permitting a presidential vote, Syria's Lebanese allies, led by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah movement, are demanding enough cabinet seats to give them veto power in the government.

Such veto power could be used to protect Assad's ruling group from a UN tribunal looking into the 2005 assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. A preliminary UN investigation of Hariri's murder incriminated Syria's security services.

For Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other states, Syria's spoiler role in Lebanon is a sideshow. The ulti-

mate cause of their rancor is Assad's alliance with Iran, the ascendant regional power that stands outside the Arab League.

This alliance facilitates Iranian penetration into Arab countries and Arab politics. Sunni Arab leaders unhappy with Assad resent him for allowing Arab Lebanon to fall under the influence of non-Arab Iran. Assad's hosting in Damascus of leaders from the Iranian-armed Palestinian groups Hamas and Is-

lamic Jihad has enabled Tehran to wrest control of the Palestinian card from Arab states that have long used it as a unifying cause. President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt reportedly

told a European diplomat this month that recent events in Gaza — for example, Hamas's importing of Iranian weapons — have brought Iran to Egypt's border.

If there is a remedy for the Arab angst over Syria, it lies in American and Israeli engagement with Assad's regime, however distasteful that may be. The aim would be to pry Syria from the clutches of Iran.

Assad wants the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights returned to Syria and an end to Washington's hostility. This would be a price worth paying for Lebanon's emancipation and a diplomatic rollback of Iran's destabilizing encroachment on the Arab world and Israel.

— The Boston Globe

Arab states are becoming increasingly irate over Syria's ties to Iran.

The fighting that took place last week has already threatened stability and security in Shiite areas. It has made political accommodation even more difficult, and it may be a warning that the Islamic Supreme Council and Dawa will not permit fair elections and the creation of legitimate local and provincial governments.

If anything, it may indicate that they and Iran are far more interested in a Shiite-dominated "Iraqracy" than in democracy.

Anthony H. Cordesman is a fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

April 2, 2008



Iraq: In Al-Basrah Aftermath, Iran's And Al-Sadr's Gain Is Al-Maliki's Loss

The Iraqi government's operation in Al-Basrah was billed as a decisive battle to regain control of the southern city from what it called armed gangs and criminals. But the real focus of the operation seems to have been radical Shi'ite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's militia, the Imam Al-Mahdi Army.

By Sumedha Senanayake Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty

The intense response by al-Sadr's followers across southern Iraq and Baghdad seemed to catch the government off-guard. As the violence and instability spread, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government faced what appeared to be a widespread insurrection. At that point, a military option did not seem feasible.

On March 30, after nearly a week of fighting, al-Sadr issued a nine-point statement calling on his followers not to attack government forces. He urged the government to stop its random raids on Sadrists, called for an amnesty for fighters in the Al-Mahdi Army, and the release of all imprisoned members of the Sadrist movement who have not been convicted of any crimes.

Iran Plays Both Sides

Several days after al-Sadr's cease-fire call, it emerged that Iran helped broker the truce that ended the bloodshed that left nearly 500 dead and 900 wounded. In the aftermath of the Al-Basrah conflict, Iran clearly emerged as the big winner.

Several sources indicated as early as March 28 that a representative of al-Maliki's Al-Da'wah Party, Ali Adib, and Hadi al-Amiri, the head of the Badr Organization, the military wing of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), traveled to the Iranian city of Qom to meet with Iranian officials.

According to McClatchy Newspapers, the aim of the trip was twofold: to press al-Sadr to restrain his militia and to call on Iran's Qods Force to stop supplying weapons to Shi'ite fighters in Iraq. It was also revealed that the two men went to Iran without consulting with the prime minister.

Haidar al-Abadi, a member of Al-Da'wah, said that the delegation was from the Shi'ite-led United Iraqi Alliance, which is dominated by Al-Da'wah and the ISCI, "and the prime minister was only informed. It was a political maneuver by us."

The role of Iran in brokering the truce clearly demonstrates the Islamic republic's influence in Iraq, particularly in the Shi'ite community. Based on what was discussed in Qom, Iran was playing both sides of the fence, as peace brokers and instigators of the violence.

Al-Sadr Remains Strong

While the military confrontation ended essentially in a stalemate, al-Sadr came away with a political victory. His militia remains intact and he has demonstrated that it can withstand a major assault by the Iraqi military.

The aftermath of the clashes also showed that al-Sadr still has control over his militia. There had been much speculation that al-Sadr had lost control of the Al-Mahdi Army and that some breakaway factions were not heeding his authority. The Al-Basrah clashes and subsequent cease-fire demonstrated that he was still in charge.

While his militia were clearly not a passive actor in the Al-Basrah violence, their armed struggle was framed in the context of self-defense. The Iraqi security forces were seen as the aggressors in launching the military campaign, which many Sadrists described as politically motivated.

As it became clear during the Al-Basrah operation that the Al-Mahdi Army was the main target, al-Sadr continued to adhere to the truce he declared for the militia. The truce was instituted in August 2007 after his forces clashed with police in the holy city of Al-Najaf. There were concerns recently that the increased pressure on the Al-Mahdi Army might push al-Sadr to end the truce.

Maintaining the truce gave the appearance that al-Sadr was willing to place Iraq's benefits above his own political ambitions, which he stressed in the nine-point statement that led to the current cease-fire. In it, he supported Iraq's unity by calling for an "end to armed appearances in Al-Basrah and all other provinces."

Considering his bravado when his militia took on the U.S. military twice in 2004, al-Sadr's actions during the latest confrontation suggested his growing maturity as a political leader.

Huge Blow To Al-Maliki

For al-Maliki, the results of the "Battle for Al-Basrah" were certainly humiliating, given that he personally oversaw the military campaign. Al-Maliki hoped to erase the perception that he is a weak and ineffectual leader, particularly in dealing with al-Sadr and his militia. However, soon after the operation began, it was apparent that al-Maliki greatly overesti-



mated the abilities of his forces and underestimated the tenacity of al-Sadr's militia.

Al-Maliki had vowed to crush the Shi'ite militias, armed gangs, and criminals that effectively controlled the city for three years. He initially gave all armed elements in Al-Basrah 72 hours to disarm, but after this was ignored, the deadline was extended to 10 days, coupled with an offer of cash in exchange for weapons.

In an operation that was planned to be completed quickly, Iraqi security forces were met with strong resistance from al-Sadr's militia, despite U.S. air support. Defense Minister Abd al-Qadir Jasim admitted on March 28 that the government had been "surprised" by the militia's resistance and the government's battle plan and tactics had to be altered.

More troubling for al-Maliki, "Al-Azzam" reported on March 31 that several thousand police officers had refused to fight the militia and two Iraqi Army regiments reportedly defected to the Sadrists. If numerous acts of insubordination and desertion indeed took place during the operation, this would indicate the low level of morale among the security forces.

In the end, al-Maliki declared the operation a "success." However, his words may ring hollow since he failed to disarm and crush al-Sadr's militia, and this may have weakened him politically in the eyes of his ruling Shi'ite alliance.

The revelation that members of his own Shi'ite alliance, including from his own Al-Da'wah Party, went to Iran against his wishes to broker a truce further undercuts his authority and ultimately his credibility.

Thorn In Washington's Side

U.S. support for the Al-Basrah operation has become considerably more muted since it was first launched. On March 30, CIA Director Michael Hayden told NBC News that he had no prior knowledge that the Iraqi government planned to launch such a campaign. In fact, he even indicated that U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and U.S. commander in Iraq General David Petraeus were also left in the dark about the operation.

This could be a sign of tacit disapproval of al-Maliki's handling of the operation as well as the administration distancing itself from it in order to offset any potential embarrassment before Crocker and Petraeus testify before Congress next week.

The failure of the operation also makes clear that the Iraqi military is far from prepared to take over responsibility for security. This does not bode well for the United States, since it is an indication that troop reductions may be further delayed.

Al-Sadr's performance again shows that the young cleric is a major political force in Iraq who cannot be ignored. Many saw the Al-Basrah campaign as a means of weakening al-Sadr before the provincial elections now set for the fall. Now it seems that he may be a long-term political player and the United States may have to work with him, whether it likes it or not.

Finally, in terms of Iran, the United States can't be too pleased that Tehran was where Iraqi Shi'ite leaders turned to in a crisis -- yet another stark indication of the growing Iranian influence in Iraq.

United Press International

Garner advocated federalized Iraq

ERBIL, Iraq, April 3, 2008 (UPI) —

Jay Garner, the first U.S. administrator in Iraq following the ouster of Saddam Hussein, likened the Kurdish region to a potential federalized Iraq.

Garner said in an interview with The Kurdish Globe that his assessment of the political situation in Iraq led him to believe an Iraq with a "soft" central government with stronger provincial districts would thrive.

"I thought over time one of two things would happen if we did that; either the federal districts would grow together into one unified federation with the stronger central government, or they would go on their own way. Both ways are democratic," Garner said.

Garner, who Washington replaced with L. Paul Bremer as the civilian administrator of post-war Iraq, said he proposed in 2003 a federal system in Iraq to national security adviser Condoleezza Rice, but was told it was premature to hold such discussions.

Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and the head of the Kurdish Democratic Party, Massoud Barzani, met with Garner in 2003 to discuss the political future of Iraq.

Garner said in the Globe Talabani urged him to meet with Shiite cleric Abdul Aziz al-Hakim, noting, "It is better to have (Hakim) with you inside the tent than outside the tent."

Telegraph April 5, 2008

TREADING LIGHTLY IN IRAQ

By Vicki Woods

What the hell are you doing in Iraq, love? asked a man in a Chelsea shirt on the airport shuttle bus. Touring, I said. Looking forward to lovely mountain views. And what was he doing so far from Manchester, come to that?

Read more from Vicki Woods

And wearing a Chelsea shirt? I was only about 10 yards into Iraq at that point, waiting on the Tarmac at Erbil International Airport at five in the morning.

It took an hour to pass through security at immigration (under signs saying "ALL WEAPONS MUST BE DECLARED"), but I finally got an Iraqi stamp in my passport.

I've wanted to get into Iraq since Lt-Col Tim Collins (as he then was) made that ringing, romantic speech to his paddies in the Royal Irish Regiment.

"Iraq is steeped in history. It is the site of the Garden of Eden, of the Great Flood, and the birth of Abraham. Tread lightly there. You will see things no man could pay to see and you will have to go a long way to find a more decent, generous and upright people than the Iraqis," etc, etc.

Ooh, thrilling. And for about 10 seconds, I thought the mad Bush-Blair plan might actually work.

Maybe they would tread lightly there. Maybe the coalition forces would simply secure Baghdad, depose the dictator, hand the country over "to the Iraqi people" and make a thousand democratic flowers bloom with their merry plans for the reconstruction of Iraq.

For another 10 seconds, I thought Baghdad might turn into an Iraqi Dubai, with luxury resort hotels offering day trips up the Tigris. Perhaps Mosul, with the ruins of ancient Ninevah close by, could imitate Amman, with its air-conditioned buses running tours to Petra?

But once I saw that the 101st Airborne was rather heavy-footedly turning the ruins of ancient Ninevah into hard-standing for tanks and troop transporters, I realised that the "reconstruction of Iraq" was a bigger fable than the weapons of mass destruction.

Anyway, I still wanted to go. Not as a war correspondent, for which I'm far too wimpy, but as a tourist-traveller.

I spent the month before Christmas 2005 trying to get into the north of Iraq, via Erbil, which was promising to get an international airport up and running in weeks, according to a nice man working for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

It took another two years before scheduled flights started running regularly, and now you can go non-stop from Amman via Royal Jordanian or from Vienna via Austrian Airlines.

My son, who spent three years in Iraq from June 2003 onwards, idly offered me a birthday trip last year (when it was my birthday) and I held him to it.

We stayed safely inside the Kurdish region, which is a bit like saying you've visited Britain by only going to the Highlands of Scotland. But it was a bit like Scotland, actually (Braveheart is the Kurds' favourite movie); it's a favoured holiday place for Iraqis because it is green in summer.

Erbil, with the 7,000-year-old citadel rising over it, is in the middle of a flat, agricultural plain, but the mountains are only 10 miles away. "Kurds have no friends but the mountains," is a Braveheartish Kurdish saying.

We stayed at the "Sheraton" (it's not a Sheraton), which is an unhandsome businessman's hotel inside the city, and at the Khanzad Hotel, which is perched on a small hill five miles outside Erbil. Both these hotels have prominent signs in the lobby saying, "We take Visa, Mastercard, Maestro". This turns out not to be true: what they take is American dollars, in large bundles. Or Iraqi dinars, obviously, but you'd need much bigger bundles.

Still, the Khanzad is a handsome enough hotel (and would be quite Dubai-like if it wasn't for the wads of cash).

The back is entirely glass and gives a stunning horizon-to-horizon view of the ridge of mountains in the near distance. It's like being on a ship at sea, approaching Dover. On the top of the ridge is President Massoud Barzani's headquarters. And an awful lot of peshmerga.

A local journalist told me that the Khanzad (which is so super-secure it could act as a regional seat of government) was the favoured hotel for world statesmen doing their I've-been-on-the-ground-in-Iraq tours.

"See the helipad to the right? That's where Jack Straw landed, and Dick Cheney." They fly

into Erbil International, which is 20 minutes away by road, but there is a fleet of Black Hawks to get them here in five minutes. Then a limo carries them 500 yards to the hotel door.

Then straight into the lobby, here, while we're penned up in the bar, there, and then we're let out to watch them shaking Kak Massoud's hand and listen to the speeches. Then the Black Hawks rise up again like wasps and they go back to America saying they've been on the ground in Iraq.

Kak means "brother" in Kurdish. It's a respectful designation. It was the only Kurdish I learnt in five days, apart from the phrase "Nawruz piroz be". But it was enough. For Kurds, Nawruz is New Year (which falls around Easter), so it means Happy New Year and every time I trotted it out, it was exuberantly received.

Kurds hold their Nawruz festivities on the mountains, and we were invited to join some. Each child in the family would be lined up to chime: "Thank you!" and "Welcome!" (in English) and proffer cheeks not once or twice but four times for seasonal kisses.

Erbil is booming to an extent that Dick Cheney must have loved as he whizzed over it in his Black Hawk.

Brand new car showrooms (Toyota was the first, then Volkswagen), new shopping malls rising up. The first one, briskly called Nawa Mall (nawa = new), isn't exactly a mall, but a massive great store, packed with Chinese-made clothing.

But proper, American-style malls are half-built. Also banks, though the cash-only problem seems to affect the banks as well as the hotels.

The suburb of Ainkawa was the city's Christian quarter; it still is, though diluted by rapid expansion and gentrification: entire brand-new terraces of five-bed, two-bath housing is being built.

The Christian church at Ainkawa's heart is as fiercely guarded as the Khanzad Hotel, and, as we strolled through the green gardens my son nudged me.

"Listen to those people talking," he said. "Aramaic." If the rest of Iraq could even begin to work like the Kurdish region, I'd forgive Bush and Blair.

As Iraq's 'defining moment' unravels, U.S. cites poor planning

By Michael R. Gordon, Eric Schmitt and Stephen Farrell

BAGHDAD: The U.S. ambassador, Ryan Crocker, first learned of the Iraqi plan on March 21: Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki would be heading to Basra with Iraqi troops to bring order to the city.

But the Iraqi operation was not what the United States expected.

Instead of methodically building up their combat power and gradually stepping up operations against renegade militias, Maliki's forces lunged into the city, attacking before all the Iraqi reinforcements had even arrived. By March 25, a major fight was on.

"The sense we had was that this would be a long-term effort: increased pressure gradually squeezing the Special Groups," Crocker said in an interview, using the U.S. term for Iranian-backed militias. "That is not what kind of emerged."

"Nothing was in place from our side," he added. "It all had to be put together."

The Bush administration has portrayed the Iraqi offensive in Basra as a "defining moment" — a compelling demonstration that an Iraqi govern-

ment that has long been criticized for inaction has both the will and means to take on renegade militias.

The operation indicates that the Iraqi military can quickly organize and deploy forces over considerable distances. Two Iraqi C-130 Hercules and several Iraqi helicopters were involved in the operation, an important step for a military struggling to develop air combat capability.

But interviews with a wide variety of U.S. and military officials also suggest that Maliki overestimated his military's abilities and underestimated the scale of the resistance. The Iraqi prime minister also displayed an impulsive leadership style that did not give his forces or those of his most powerful allies, the U.S. and British militaries, time to prepare.

"He went in with a stick and he poked a hornet's nest, and the resistance he got was a little bit more than he bargained for," said one coalition official in Baghdad who requested anonymity. "They went in with 70 percent of a plan. Sometimes that's enough. This time it wasn't."

As the casualties grew and the Iraqi planning appeared to be little more

than an improvisation, the United States mounted an intensive military and political effort to try to turn around the situation, according to accounts by Crocker and several U.S. military officials in Baghdad and Washington who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Two senior U.S. military officers were sent to Basra to help coordinate the Iraqi planning, the military officials said. Soldiers from the Army 82nd Airborne Division were pressed into service as combat advisers while air controllers were positioned to call in airstrikes on behalf of beleaguered Iraqi units. U.S. transport planes joined the Iraqis in ferrying supplies to Iraqi troops.

Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, lies atop vast oil reserves and is a strategically located port on the Shatt al Arab waterway controlling Iraq's access to the Gulf. Predominantly Shiite, it has suffered from infighting between numerous Shiite militias, tribal forces and criminal gangs struggling for control of its smuggling and oil revenues. Even some of the Iraqi police are believed to be under the influence of militia groups.

British troops, who provided the main allied military presence in the province after the 2003 invasion, withdrew from the city center last September and formally handed Basra over to Iraqi control on Dec. 16, moving to an "overwatch" position at the airport outside the city center.

There has been growing concern with the Iraqi government about the disorder in the city. In recent weeks, Lieutenant General Mohan al-Fireji, a senior Iraqi commander in Basra, proposed that additional forces be sent.

Prompted by this suggestion, a detailed plan was being developed by U.S. and Iraqi officials, which involved the establishment of combat outposts in the city and the deployment of Iraqi SWAT teams, Iraqi Special Forces, and Interior Ministry units, as well as Iraqi brigades.

That plan was the subject of a March 21 evening meeting that General David Petraeus, the top U.S. commander in Iraq, convened with Mowaffak al-Rubaie, Maliki's national security adviser. At the end of that session Petraeus was asked to meet with Maliki the next

morning. The prime minister, it seemed, had his own ideas on how to deal with Basra and planned to travel to the city to oversee the implementation of his plan.

"Effectively, much of the city was under militia control and had been for some time," Crocker said. "Maliki kept hearing this along with some pretty graphic descriptions of militia excesses and just decided, 'I am going to go down there and take care of this.' I think for him it was a Karbala moment."

Last August, Maliki rushed to Karbala after an outbreak of Shiite-on-Shiite violence, fired the police commander and oversaw the successful effort to restore order to the city.

One U.S. intelligence officer in Washington, however, had a somewhat different interpretation of the prime minister's motivations. While restoring order was his stated goal, he asserted, the Iraqi leader was also eager to weaken the Mahdi army and the affiliated political party of the cleric Moktada al-Sadr before provincial elections in the south that are expected to be held later this year. The Islamic Supreme Council of

Iraq — a Shiite political party and militia that is a rival to Sadr, his party and his militia — forms a crucial part of Maliki's political coalition.

When Maliki met with Petraeus on March 22, he indicated that his goal was to take on the "criminals and gang leaders" in Basra, according to an account of the meeting by a U.S. official. Maliki explained that the operation would be an Iraqi affair but that he might need air support from the Americans.

He said that he was going to meet with local leaders, taking advantage of the additional leverage he hoped to gain by sending in troops, fostering economic development programs and bringing along teams of judges to try and punish corrupt and violent behavior.

"It was a unilateral decision by Maliki," said a U.S. official who was familiar to the session. "It was a fait accompli."

This article was reported by Michael R. Gordon, Eric Schmitt and Stephen Farrell and written by Gordon. Gordon and Farrell reported from Baghdad, and Schmitt from Washington. Thom Shanker contributed from Washington.

A BATTLE FOR LAND IN NORTHERN IRAQ

A struggle between Sunni Arabs and Kurds has torn apart the city of Mosul and could play a crucial role in drawing the region's boundaries.

By Ned Parker Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

MOSUL, IRAQ — Far from the volatile Shiite rivalries that have shaken Baghdad and Basra, this city has been devastated by an epic struggle for land and power between Sunni Arabs and Kurds that has shattered the social fabric and could very well shape the future boundaries of northern Iraq.

Kurds say that they have been driven out of the city by Sunni Arab militants and criminal gangs, who have set off car bombs and kidnapped and killed members of their ethnic group. In turn, Kurdish forces have been accused of carrying out assassinations in Mosul and torturing Arab detainees elsewhere in the campaign to annex territory to the semiautonomous Kurdistan region.

The Iraqi government and U.S. military spokesmen blame the chaos on Al Qaeda in Iraq, a loosely organized Sunni Arab insurgent group, which desires to create a new base in the north. But the problems date to 2003, when the Kurds first sent fighters into Mosul, and the status of the city's Arab elite was diminished.

"Mosul became a real battlefield between Sunni Arab insurgents and *peshmerga* [Kurdish fighters] before Al Qaeda in Iraq really became much of a factor up there," said Wayne White, head of the U.S. State Department's Iraq intelligence team from 2003 to 2005.

"The Sunni Arab population up there knows the Kurds have designs on areas well beyond their current area of control in Nineveh [province], and are doubtless determined to push back," he said.

The Kurds believe Mosul's northern and eastern suburbs were wrongfully appropriated by Saddam Hussein's Sunni Arab regime. They also contend that they are the rightful owners of the Sinjar region in the western part of the province. The sought-after territories are believed to contain oil reserves.

Since late 2004, Kurdish security forces have seized de facto control of the disputed lands. The Kurdistan regional government's flag, a tricolor with a yellow starburst, flutters across northern Nineveh, and soldiers from neighboring Kurdistan are posted at dozens of sentry posts on roads.

Arabs rarely venture into northern Nineveh these days, even if they have Kurdish friends who fled Mosul, the provincial capital.

"It's easier for Arabs to go to Syria and Jordan," said Juneid Fakhr, a retired archaeologist.

The Kurds want a referendum, called for under Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, to formally annex the disputed areas to Kurdistan. The referendum, postponed last year after the Iraqi government failed to conduct a census in the contested north, would also determine the status of the city of Kirkuk and other areas along the border of Kurdistan. A vote could prove to be the trigger for greater Arab-Kurdish bloodshed or a bridge to conciliation and prosperity.

"If it is a good solution that is packaged properly and people understand the ramifications of their voting, it could all be much to do about little," said Brig. Gen. Tony Thomas, the No. 2 U.S. commander in northern Iraq. "If it's poorly packaged and there is a run on the bank in any regard and there are loopholes, Article 140 could



IN MOSUL: A Kurdish security forces veteran serves in the military in Mosul. Secret Kurdish units are accused of killing Arabs. Kurds say Sunni militants commit killings and kidnappings.

cause more friction and aggression than had existed here before."

The Kurds argue that the referendum would be the remedy to the competition in Nineveh and throughout the north.

"After Article 140, there will be no Arab-Kurdish problem," said Nineveh's deputy governor, Khasro Goran, a Kurd who is viewed as the most powerful political leader in the province.

Both sides portray themselves as the sufferer. Goran, who has survived seven assassination attempts, charges that the Kurdish ambitions have provoked a systematic campaign against his people.

"The Kurds have been the victim. More than 3,000 Kurds have been killed since November 2004 in Mosul, and 60,000 have fled Mosul," he said. "These attacks are to scare people not to support the Kurdistan regional government in case of a referendum."

In turn, Sunni Arabs argue that the Kurds' domination of the provincial government and military has played into the hands of radical Sunni militant groups.

"The majority of people in Mosul believe that the Kurds want to take over Mosul," said Sunni provincial council member Hassan Thanoun Alaf, who is with the Iraqi Islamic Party. "When Arabs and Kurds are on good terms, then Al Qaeda will not find support [in Nineveh] -- especially among the tribes."

Alaf hopes that provincial elections, tentatively scheduled for Oct. 1, will give the Arabs real power in the government. Kurds dominate the province's government because of a Sunni Arab boycott of Iraq's first post-Hussein elections in January 2005.

Although the Americans downplay the chances of civil war in Nineveh, they recognize that the Kurds are on a mission to expand Kurdistan's borders after centuries at the mercy of various Arab, Turkish and Iranian regimes.

"They never had any geographic boundaries, so right now it's still going to play out," Brig. Gen. Thomas said. "They are one of these irrepresible forces," going after what they think is their God-given right. "We should stay out of the

middle because we will be played one way or the other."

Despite such wishes, U.S. officials recognize that their dependence on the Kurds may have tipped the balance of power in favor of their longtime ally. The Americans relied on Kurdish forces to stop Sunni fighters from seizing Mosul in November 2004, and the influx of Kurdish fighters allowed Kurdistan to cement its grip on Mosul's northern and eastern outer rings. Veterans of the Kurdish security forces also form the backbone of the main Iraqi army division in Mosul.

"The hard part for us and what we are trying to sort through is the battle space of '05 and '06, when Mosul fell the first time," Thomas said. "The Kurds came down in a big way. We pretty much supported that because there wasn't anyone else to go to."

Such tactics helped push Sunni Arab's who had been Iraqi military officers to join insurgent groups. Senior security officers in Nineveh acknowledge that their former army colleagues, dismissed by the Americans in 2003, are the ones fighting them. Even the Arab-dominated police force has struggled with infiltration.

"These things happen in Iraq," said Wathiq Hamdani, until recently the acting provincial police chief. "My friend is now my enemy."

The U.S. Army has led a new drive to recruit former Arab officers to join the post-Hussein Iraqi army, but the city's bloodshed has not abated.

The friction between Kurds and Arabs is on full display in Mosul's police jail. Abdullah, a balding man dressed in a black shirt and pants, spent more than two years at Akre prison in Kurdistan before being transferred back to Mosul last summer. Kurdish security forces raided his house in January 2005 in the Mosul suburb of Zamur, one of the contested territories that the Kurds hope to annex.

At Akre, he says, he was shocked with electricity and sodomized with a broken bottle. Abdullah is unsure what he will do if he is freed. He doesn't believe he can return to Zamur. "Where I live now, Kurds control everything," he

said.

His brother, who still lives in the town, agreed that the Kurds dominate life there, particularly the Kurdistan Democratic Party, or KDP.

"The KDP controls security and government offices. Anyone who wants to get employed needs a recommendation from the party," Abdullah's brother, who asked that his name not be used for fear of harassment, said by phone. "Yes, they prefer Kurds over Arabs."

Publicly, the Americans say they are not aware of any abuses committed by the Kurds against Arabs, but one U.S. official who formerly worked in Iraq acknowledged that the Kurds carried out targeted killings in Mosul against

suspected fighters terrorizing their community.

The official, speaking on condition of anonymity, pointed to the assassinations as proof of the Kurds' military discipline, comparing Kurdish fighters favorably to Shiite security forces in Baghdad who have been accused of indiscriminately killing and arresting Sunni Arabs.

"When Kurds get killed in Mosul, Kurdish special operations/intelligence units surgically go after that person" who did the killing, the former official said. "It's not collective punishment, but they will go and kill that individual. . . . The Kurds are very responsible about it."

If actions of the Kurdish security force provoke Arabs, they make Kurds feel safe.

Ibrahim Faris Aziz fled Mosul for the suburb of Bashiqa in mid-2004 after his son was killed by a car bomb and a gunman shot a fellow mechanic. He keeps in touch with a few favorite Arab customers through friends who still venture into Mosul, but mainly his feelings are negative. "Three-quarters of Arabs are bad," he said.

He hopes Kurdistan annexes Bashiqa.

"They are protecting democracy. The terrorists won't come here as long as the *peshmerga* are here," he said. "Security is the most important thing."

Newsweek

April 5, 2008 |

ATTACK OF THE JUDGES

In the battle for the heart and soul of Turkey, the lines are now being drawn by the judiciary.

Owen Matthews and Sami Kohen

Abdurrahman Yalcinkaya doesn't look like a revolutionary. With his sober black suits and neatly clipped white moustache, he looks the archetypal fifty-something Turkish bureaucrat. Yet Yalcinkaya—the chief prosecutor of Ankara's Court of Appeals—has set into motion a series of events that effectively puts the Turkish government on trial. Last month he filed an indictment with Turkey's constitutional court that seeks to shut down Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for the crime of "undermining Turkey's secular Constitution" and ban from politics more than 70 AKP members, including most of the cabinet, the prime minister and the president, for years. The court has agreed to hear the case, and if Yalcinkaya wins, it would amount to nothing less than "a preemptive coup by the judiciary," says veteran Turkish commentator Cengiz Candar.

But unlike Turkey's previous coups—which have included three tanks-on-the-street military putsches and one constitutional "soft" coup since 1960—the Army, the historic defender of Turkish secularism, has remained scrupulously silent. This time it's the judiciary, which, by its own account, is defending Turkey's staunchly secularist state against what it sees as the AKP's encroaching Islamism.

At base, this is a conflict over who runs Turkey. Is it the old Republican elite, fanatically loyal to the principles of Turkey's founder, Kemal Ataturk? Or is it the new, democratically elected AKP, which wants to take Turkey into Europe yet also, undoubtedly, intends to bring Islam closer to the political mainstream? Yet the roots of this conflict go far deeper than the endless debate over secularism versus religion. This is also a conflict over whether the Turkish people can be trusted to choose their own rulers and policies—or whether their democratic choice is to be managed by a class of self-appointed guardians. Clearly, the old Republican elite believes it is its mission to save the people from themselves, and the elite seem willing to go to almost any length to preserve its decades-old supremacy, including destabilizing Turkey's fragile economic stability with prolonged legal wrangling and alienating Turkey's allies in the West.

Optimists hope the upshot of this battle will be a more equitable, more democratic political system, of the sort the EU has been lobbying for years. But that outcome is far from certain—and will only come after months of political wrestling. Yalcinkaya's indictment doesn't leave Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan any room for

compromise. If the Constitutional Court agrees with Yalcinkaya, the AKP and its leaders will be effectively wiped off the political map. Yet Erdogan's only defense is to use the AKP's popular support and its parliamentary majority to change the Constitution to limit the court's powers before they get a chance to shut it down. Such changes will permanently limit the powers of the judiciary, and profoundly change Turkey's political landscape.

So far, Erdogan has publicly played down the crisis. He ordered aides and parliamentarians to maintain a strict silence about the coming trial. "The judiciary will do its duty, and the government will continue to go about its business," Erdogan said last week. While his aides prepare the government's court defense, Erdogan is also working full tilt to select a slew of constitutional reforms that could save the party's life. The parliamentary arithmetic is tricky. The AKP controls more than 60 percent of the votes in Parliament, as well as the presidency. That's not quite enough to change the Constitution without the support of other parties. But there's a crucial loophole. The AKP has enough votes to call a national referendum to force through its proposed constitutional amendments.

To that end, the government is preparing a kind of "à la carte" reform package that bundles measures to remove the Constitutional Court's powers to ban political parties with a bunch of reforms long demanded by the European Union. Among them: scrapping Article 301 of the penal code, which criminalizes "insulting Turkishness" and has been used to prosecute a series of writers and journalists, most notably Nobel Prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk. Another would allow state TV and radio to broadcast more programs in the Kurdish language—a key demand of the EU and of moderate Kurdish parliamentarians.

The fact that the judiciary could threaten to oust a popularly elected government exposes deep flaws in the present Constitution, which was penned by the military in the wake of a 1980 coup. It is powerfully Kemalist, and shot through with a deep distrust of politicians and Parliament, and accordingly grants the judiciary sweeping powers to supervise and overrule elected governments. Prof. Ergun Ozbudun, a leading constitutional expert at Ankara's Bilkent University who has worked on suggested revisions to Turkey's basic law, calls the present system a "supervised democracy"—one that is "very far from the democratic standards which exist in the West, and which Turkey aspires to adopt."

Even if the struggles between the government

and the courts eventually create a more stable political system, and that's a big if, the economic cost will have been enormous. In the wake of Yalcinkaya's indictment, the Turkish lira lost nearly 13 percent of its value, and even staunchly secularist institutions like the union of Turkish industrialists called the court's attack on the AKP "unacceptable." Yet many ultrasecularists are prepared to sacrifice Turkey's newfound prosperity to preserve their privileges, argues Ihsan Dagı, professor of international relations at Middle East Technical University in Ankara. "Bureaucrats see the market economy as a threat since it erodes their power by enabling people to make their own fortunes . . . without relying on the state and its bureaucratic patronage," says Dagı.

The wild card in this clash is Turkey's most powerful ultrasecularists: the military. So far, top generals have maintained an absolute silence, but if their past tendencies are a guide, they likely support Yalcinkaya's indictment. Yet the military is also careful to safeguard its own popularity, and in the past has intervened only against unpopular governments, or to stave off political anarchy. The AKP is demonstrably popular, and the last time the military intervened in politics it got into serious trouble. Last summer when the AKP was trying to get its founding member, Abdullah Gul, elected to the presidency, the military posted a note on its Web site casting doubts about the constitutionality of the parliamentary vote. Turkey's Constitutional Court, perhaps following the military's lead, duly declared the process invalid. The AKP immediately called a new general election and won an even larger share of the vote, putting the military squarely on the wrong side of popular opinion.

So barring the highly unlikely prospect of a military intervention, the government's democratic mandate will, in all probability, eventually trump the court's waning authority, based as it is on an undemocratic Constitution. But such an outcome presents a different set of problems. For all its faults, the judiciary is the only "safety valve" that Turkey has against "a violation of the fundamental principles of the Republic," says law professor Mumtaz Soysal, a prominent secularist. With the judiciary's constitutional powers reduced, even moderate secularists who oppose Yalcinkaya's indictment fear there will be nothing to stop the AKP from pushing an Islamist program. That's the kind of revolution the Turkish judiciary definitely did not envision.

April 5, 2008 |

Newsweek

Turkey's Judicial Coup D'etat

This battle could last for months longer, and whether the AKP wins or loses, the consequences are bad.

Morton Abramowitz and Henri I. Barkey

Turkey is at war with itself again, over religion and politics in Turkish life, and the consequences for both itself and its friends could be devastating. Last month, the nation's chief prosecutor prepared an indictment of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for allegedly violating the Constitution's principle of secularism. The indictment, triggered by the AKP's decision to remove constitutional provisions prohibiting wearing headscarves in universities, seeks literally to abolish the party. It also demands that 71 AKP officials, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul, be banned from politics for five years.

Erdogan clearly erred by suddenly ramming the headscarf liberalization through Parliament. But the banning of a ruling party—one that has been in power for over five years, and quite successfully at that—is unprecedented in the modern West. The AKP won overwhelmingly in parliamentary elections last July, and this kind of politics makes a mockery of the democratic process. Though it is legal to pursue such a case, it is, to many Turks, quite simply a judicial coup. Yet last week Turkey's Constitutional Court agreed to hear the case, jeopardizing the country's political and economic stability, already suffering from world market pressures. This battle could last for months, its outcome is uncertain and its consequences, whether the AKP wins or loses, would be bad. So Turkey's principal international partners, the United States and the European Union, are watching with consternation—and their fingers crossed. At the most fundamental level, the case renders the stability of Turkey uncertain. More immediately, Washington needs

Turkey's cooperation for its plans for Iraq and particularly for keeping Iraqi Kurdistan stable. Political instability is likely to prevent the Turkish government from making progress on its other major domestic headache, the Kurdish question, and on knotty foreign-policy priorities important to the United States and the EU, such as cooperation on Iran and resolving the longstanding Cyprus problem. Moreover, a ban of the AKP will undermine Turkey's chances for EU accession.

So far, EU leaders have shown no reluctance to make this clear to Turkey. The United States is in a tougher position. In the past, Washington has shown only tepid disapproval of extraconstitutional attempts to bring down the AKP government. This time it has publicly criticized the court, but Washington's words carry little weight with tough-minded secularists in the judiciary, media and military on this issue. Nor, to the surprise of Turks, does the United States like to muck around in their domestic politics. U.S. action is further complicated by the tricky legal nature of the dispute, as well as the pressing interest in maintaining good relations with Turkey. Moreover, the fact remains that if secularists are truly prepared to bring down the house, nothing the EU or the United States says will make any difference.

Still, the United States cannot stand on the sidelines. The threat to Turkey's stability is sufficiently grave, and the potential damage to U.S. interests so great that at some point a more forceful U.S. intervention is warranted. The United States must make clear privately, and if necessary publicly, that attempting to remove the AKP in this manner endangers bilateral cooperation and makes U.S.

support of Turkish positions politically difficult. The hope is that Turkey recognizes it is far too tied to the West economically and politically to ignore such warnings altogether.

The ideal scenario now would be for all parties somehow to pull back from the abyss and adopt more conciliatory stances. In response to the suit, AKP leaders have signaled that they will robustly defend the party and possibly seek constitutional amendments that would diminish the powers of the chief prosecutor's office and set the evidentiary bar higher for dissolving political parties than just providing a long list of statements by AKP leaders, often out of context. Right now the bar is where the court wants it to be. The AKP may also throw down the gauntlet by finding some way to call early elections that the popular party is likely to win, possibly with a greater majority.

In either case, passions would be inflamed. A showdown with the judiciary and military would become nearly unavoidable. So the judiciary must find a way to end its case, and Erdogan ought to begin a national dialogue on reforming the Constitution—a relic from the days when generals ruled the country. Issues relating to restrictions on freedom of speech and the headscarf could be dealt with in this manner. Unfortunately, such a de-escalation is unlikely in the current atmosphere. This court case is a setback for democracy in a key Western ally in a strategically important region. It indicates a deep and widening chasm in Turkish society. Sustained efforts by Turks—of all stripes—and their friends abroad are needed to help prevent Turkey from tearing itself apart. That would be bad for everybody.

April 5, 2008

StarTribune

Iraq's al-Maliki wins rare Kurdish, Sunni support in militia crackdown

By HAMZA HENDAWI, Associated Press

BAGHDAD - Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's faltering crackdown on Shiite militants has won the backing of Sunni Arab and Kurdish parties that fear both the powerful sectarian militias and the effects of failure on Iraq's fragile government.

The emergence of a common cause could help bridge Iraq's political rifts.

The head of the Kurdish self-ruled region, Massoud Barzani, has offered Kurdish troops to help fight anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army militia.

More significantly, Sunni Arab Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi signed off on a statement by President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, and the Shiite vice president, Adil Abdul-Mahdi, expressing support for the crackdown in the oil-rich southern city of Basra.

Al-Hashemi is one of al-Maliki's most bitter critics and the two have been locked in an acrimonious public quarrel for a year. Al-Hashemi has accused the prime minister of sectarian favoritism and al-Maliki has complained that the Sunni vice president is blocking key legislation.

On Thursday, however, al-Maliki paid al-Hashemi a rare visit. A statement by al-

Hashemi's office said the vice president told al-Maliki that "we can bite the bullet and put aside our political differences."

"The main aim at this critical juncture is to ensure that our political choices are made in Iraq's interest," al-Hashemi said.

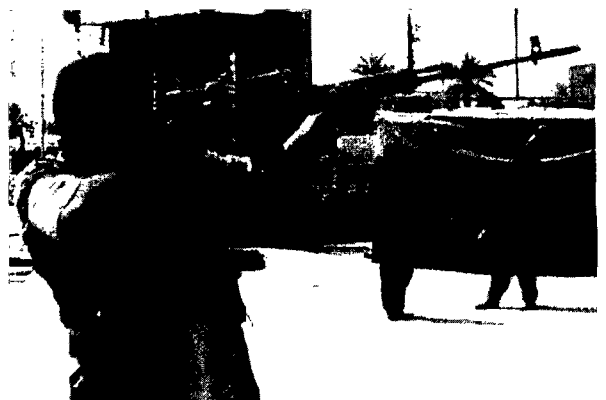
Shiite militias were responsible for the deaths of thousands of Sunni Arabs in the sectarian bloodletting of 2006 and 2007. The Mahdi Army is blamed for much of the killing.

A top leadership council made up of Talabani, al-Maliki and leaders of major political blocs called Saturday on Iraqi parties to disband their militias or risk being barred from contesting elections and participating in political life.

The council also affirmed its support for al-Maliki's campaign against militias and "outlaws."

"I think the government is now enjoying the support of most political groups because it has adopted a correct approach to the militia prob-

lem," said Hussein al-Falluji, a lawmaker from



parliament's largest Sunni Arab bloc, the three-party Iraqi Accordance Front. Al-Hashemi heads one of the three, the Iraqi Islamic Party.

The Accordance Front pulled out of al-Maliki's Cabinet in August to protest his policies. The newfound support over militias could help al-Maliki persuade the five Sunni ministers who



The Basra crackdown, ostensibly waged against "outlaws" and "criminal gangs," bogged down in the face of fierce resistance and discontent in the ranks of government forces. Major combat eased after al-Sadr asked his militia to stop fighting last Sunday.

But al-Maliki continued his tough rhetoric, threatening to take his crackdown to the Mahdi Army's strongholds in Baghdad. Al-Sadr hinted at retaliation, and the prime minister backed down, freezing raids and arrests targeting the young cleric's supporters.

Barzani, the Kurdish leader, has been at sharp odds with al-Maliki's government over what he sees as its lackluster reaction to Turkish military moves against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq. The Kurds are also angry over the national government's op-

position to Kurdish deals with foreign oil companies.

But the Kurds, for years Washington's most reliable allies in Iraq, also see the Sadrists' anti-U.S. fervor as a threat to the country's political process and its stability.

Al-Sadr is openly opposed to a federal system, arguing that carving up the country into self-rule regions similar to that in Kurdistan would lead to Iraq's breakup. Another source of tension with the Kurds is the Sadrists' vehement opposition to Kurdish claims to the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, which they want to annex to their region over the opposition of its Arab and Turkomen residents.

"I think the events in Basra will help bridge the gap between the central government and Kurdistan authorities," said Fouad Massoum, a senior Kurdish lawmaker.

Al-Maliki has sought to cast himself as a national leader who is above the country's sectarian divide, saying that he was going after "outlaws" and "criminal gangs" regardless of their sect, ethnicity or party links.

But other motives may have played a role in the crackdown.

Provincial elections are scheduled to be held before Oct. 1 and Shiite parties are gearing up for a tough contest in the Shiite heartland of southern Iraq, where oil-rich Basra and the wealthy religious centers of Najaf and Karbala are prizes.

A successful crackdown in Basra would have boosted the election chances of al-Maliki's Dawa party and his Shiite allies in the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, whose Badr Brigade militia is the Mahdi Army's sworn enemy.

The Supreme Council hopes to win the fall vote so it can form a self-ruled region similar to the Kurdish one in the north — something the Sadrists oppose. Key council figures also want the crackdown to continue — even at the risk of a new round of fighting.

"He must impose the law on everyone, and he (al-Maliki) told us this is his intention," said Jalal Eddin al-Sagheer, a hardline cleric associated with the Supreme Council, a close ally of Iraq's Kurds. "We reject any deals or negotiations."

quit their posts to return.

If he succeeds, that would constitute a big step toward national reconciliation, something the U.S. has long demanded.

Still, the Sunnis are looking for concessions from al-Maliki, whom they accuse of monopolizing power.

"The mission ahead is clear," al-Hashemi's office said in an April 2 statement. "There must be a national program that obliges everyone to reconsider, show flexibility, accept the others and ... work in the spirit of one team."

Whether that happens depends largely on how the government deals with the issue of Shiite militias.

New law would recreate Iraqi oil company

AP Associated Press

Apr 05, 2008 BY SINAN SALAHEDDIN, Associated Press Writer

BAGHDAD — A parliamentary committee is working on a pair of oil-related draft bills, one to re-establish the state-run oil company and another to fight oil smuggling, a senior lawmaker said Saturday.

Abdul-Hadi al-Hassani, deputy chairman of the committee on oil, gas and natural resources, said legislation to re-establish the Iraqi National Oil Co., was likely to be presented to parliament on Tuesday.

The measure is part of a package which also includes legislation to regulate the country's oil sector, reorganize the Oil Ministry and distribute revenues among Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish regions.

Al-Hassani said he was uncertain when the other bills in the package would be ready for parliament to discuss.

The bill to regulate the oil industry has been bogged down since February 2007 because of opposition from the Kurds, who fear losing control over the oil riches in their semiautonomous northern region.

Al-Hassani said parliament also began discussing a separate anti-

smuggling bill this week.

The law would call for tight penalties against oil smugglers ranging from fines to years in prison and confiscation to boats that are used for smuggling.

He said that there is no accurate study on how much Iraq loses due to oil smuggling but his committee estimates the figure at nearly 10 percent of total revenue — or about \$5 billion a year.

The Iraqi oil sector has been hampered by decades of neglect and lack of investment during Saddam Hussein's rule. Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, attacks on oil infrastructure have held back production, which recovered prewar levels only at the end of last year.

Iraq sits on the world's third-largest oil reserves, totaling more than 115 billion barrels. Its average production for February was 2.4 million barrels per day and exports averaged 1.93 million barrels per day.

United Press International

April 7, 2008 BAGHDAD (UPI)

-- An Iraqi parliamentarian representing Iraq's Kurds says his party will not approve a draft oil law that has been altered from the February 2007 version.

Bayazid Hasan, part of the Kurdistan Alliance bloc in Iraq's Parliament, said the version agreed to by the Kurdistan Regional Government in February had been altered in the political process.

"The draft that was presented to the Iraqi Parliament is not the same as the one the KRG and the Iraqi premier politically agreed on in February 2007," he told the Aso newspaper, which is politically aligned with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the two leading Kurdish parties in Iraq. "Hence, passing the law has become a problem."

Iraqi Kurd MP wary of oil law

Last week Abdul-Hadi al-Hasani, the deputy chair of Parliament's Oil and Gas Committee, told United Press International there were renewed negotiations over a draft law governing development and investment in Iraq's oil sector.

Four different versions of the law have been stuck in the committee since last July. The dispute is mainly over differing opinions of foreign investment in the oil sector and the level of central versus decentralized government control over the oil strategy.

"Shortly, we'll see a new draft which there is more common ground," said Hasani. The latest draft is based on "good dialogue" between the central and Kurdistan region governments, he said, and the Council of Ministers will soon approve it and send it to his committee.

Herald INTERNATIONAL **Tribune**
 April 5-6, 2008

Sons of Iraq ■ Matt Sherman

A Sunni time bomb

WASHINGTON While the fighting in Basra and Baghdad has alerted many people to the danger that Shiite-on-Shiite violence poses to America's goals in Iraq, it should not divert the focus from another looming threat: that the Sunni tribesmen who have sided with the American-led coalition may turn against us.

Perhaps the biggest reason for the drop in violence during the second half of 2007 was the coalition's hiring of some 90,000 men, mostly Sunnis, to protect critical government properties like pipelines and to take part in neighborhood-watch systems. The decision to support these so-called Sons of Iraq — armed, many times, with the same AK-47's that had been pointed at our troops just months earlier — was always viewed as risky, but few options were available to us at the time to reduce violence. So far, the gamble has paid off.

The Sons of Iraq program was at the heart of what the United States military called its "bottom-up reconciliation movement," intended to get Iraqis to stop fighting the government and one another at the local neighborhood and village level. But use of the term "reconciliation" may be misleading. The word conjures images of forgiveness and repentance. That's not what the Sons of Iraq idea was about — the coalition set out simply to neutralize a large swath of rogue fighters, often with money, with the hope of finding ways to reconcile in the future.

This is not to say that reconciliation is not possible; I believe it is. And by this I don't mean reconciling Sunni and Shiite Islam — 1,300 years of history are unlikely to be resolved in a relative instant. What we can do is help shift the debate inside Iraq so that it doesn't rest on how one sect relates to another but how individual Iraqis relate to their government.

While the Sons of Iraq movement has been a leading contributor toward the reduction of violence against American troops, it remains highly fragile. Some of its groupings are nationalist, some are Islamist, many are tribally rooted and some may, unfortunately, be composed of hard-line Sunnis intent on restoring their sect's domination over Shiites. Thus, unsurprisingly, the group is viewed with great skepticism by many Shiites in the Baghdad government.

With each passing day, the amount of influence American officials have with the Iraqi government dwindles, while the list of objectives we wish to achieve grows. We need to pick our priorities now — and at the top of that list must be finding a productive future role for the Sons of Iraq.

First, we must take a look at who the Sons of Iraq are and what motivates them. They are not a monolith; members come from more than 125 political and tribal groups holding differing aspirations and influenced by numerous entities, some of which have goals contrary to those of the Americans and the

government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. Thus there is no single solution to all 90,000 potential problems.



Mohammed Faisal/Reuters

A Sunni fighter standing guard at an "Awakening Conference" in Falluja.

The leading idea so far is to fold a fraction of them, about 20,000, into the Iraqi security forces. The remainder would be accommodated in civilian job-placement and training programs. But this will be far harder than it looks.

For political and sectarian reasons, the (mostly Shiite) ministers and officials who oversee the security forces are unenthusiastic about bringing in Sunnis. In addition, the government doesn't have the bureaucratic efficiency to handle such a large influx of people easily. Aside from those problems, we'd need to come up with a way of deciding which men are qualified for security duty — a screening method to marginalize hard-liners and co-opt less ideologically driven members.

But the American leadership must press the Iraqis to overcome those obstacles. As we look to transform the Sons of Iraq, we are talking about more than just a venue to redirect insurgents from violence.

This is also an opportunity to encourage engagement by Sunnis, many hailing from oft-ignored western Iraq and who have no real voice in the political system, in the new nation.

As for the American stake in this, the future drawing down of forces will be largely deter-

mined by the commitment of Iraqi factions to reach local political and security compromises. If we can't help find a way to integrate the Sunnis into the state, many Sons of Iraq could revert to the insurgency. (This is another reason that it's prudent to put a pause on further American troop reductions.)

By better understanding the objectives of this diverse group we can more efficiently create postwar employment, promote acceptance within the government, foster local security solutions and improve the chances of sus-

tained success against the insurgents. Failure to find a new role for the Sons of Iraq, however, will result in the deterioration of government authority, an inability to draw down our own forces, and a return to militia rule for much of Iraq.

Matt Sherman has spent more than three years as a civilian official in postwar Iraq, most recently in 2007 as the political adviser to the First Cavalry Division in Baghdad. He is a principal with SCI Consulting, a senior adviser with the Scowcroft Group and an adjunct with the RAND Corporation.

Shiite cleric cancels Baghdad protest against U.S.

By Stephen Farrell

BAGHDAD: Moktada al-Sadr, the Shiite cleric whose Mahdi army militia has been engaged in fierce clashes with Iraqi and American troops in Baghdad over the past week, on Tuesday called off a huge demonstration in the capital less than 24 hours before it was to take place.

The march was called for the fifth anniversary of American troops' capture of the capital, on April 9, 2003, to protest the continuing U.S. military presence. But Sadr's Baghdad strongholds have been encircled by Iraqi government and American troops since heavy fighting last month in Basra and clashes in Baghdad, and dozens of Iraqis have been killed in recent days.

Iraqi and American armed forces have been tightening a cordon around Sadr City, the vast Shiite district of Baghdad that is Sadr's base of support and that is named after the cleric's revered ancestors.

At a hastily convened news conference in Paradise Square, where the statue of Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003, Salah al-Obaidi, a spokesman for Sadr, said the movement feared for the safety of its supporters if they confronted armed government forces.

Acting on the orders of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, Iraqi security squads have been stopping young male Shiites from entering Baghdad at checkpoints around the city's perimeter, Iraqi witnesses said Tuesday. They said sentries had been singling out men 15 to 35 years old and sometimes detaining them.

Obaidi said his movement had to take account of "the size of the security deployment made by the government of Maliki."

"That is why I call on our beloved Iraqi people who wanted to demonstrate against the occupation to postpone it," he said, "because I fear for their lives and blood and because, by God, I fear for Iraqi hands being raised against you."

But he warned that Sadr could at any time terminate the cease-fire he declared in August, which has contributed to a decline in violence and casualties in Iraq.



ROCKETS HIT SHIITE STRONGHOLD — Men in Sadr City in Baghdad signaling for help Tuesday after a U.S. strike. The cleric Moktada al-Sadr, whose militia has clashed with Iraqi and U.S. troops, called off a demonstration scheduled for Wednesday. *Ahmad al-Rubaye/Agence France-Presse*

"If we need to lift the freeze in order to carry out our goals, objectives, doctrines and religious principles and patriotism, we will do that later," he said.

At least three American soldiers were killed Monday in separate attacks in Baghdad, the U.S. military announced, without specifying where they had been killed or who might have been responsible. At least 10 American soldiers have been killed in Iraq since Sunday.

The tension between the Sadrist and government forces escalated in late March, when Maliki ordered the Iraqi military to occupy the southern port city of Basra, where Sadr's militia had taken control.

Maliki has warned Sadr's organization that it must disarm the Mahdi army militia, the largest Shiite militia in Iraq, or his representatives would not be allowed to participate in future elections. The ultimatum reflects the growing political tension between Maliki and Sadr, who represent rival political factions among Iraq's majority Shiites.

The crackdown on the Madhi army has created potentially destabilizing

political and military tensions, pitting a stronger government alliance against the Sadr force that has won past show-downs.

Maliki's military operations against the Mahdi army have at least temporarily pacified Sunni political leaders who had long called on Maliki to fight Shiite forces with the same vigor that his forces use against Sunni insurgents. And both the Kurds and some of Maliki's Shiite political rivals, who also fear or resent Sadr's rising power, have been driven closer to the prime minister by his military action. This may give Maliki more traction to pass laws and broker deals.

But the badly coordinated push into Basra unleashed a new barrage of attacks on U.S. and Iraqi forces and led to open fighting between Shiite militias. New figures compiled by the U.S. military showed a sharp rise in attacks on civilians and military targets in March, reflecting numerous indications that violence across Iraq has begun to rise again after months of gains in the aftermath of a U.S. troop increase.

The statistics threaten to reignite

April 9, 2008

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune

public concern about the cost of the war, just as the highest-ranking U.S. military commander, General David Petraeus, and the senior U.S. diplomat in Iraq, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, were to testify before Congress on Tuesday.

The assault on the Mahdi army has also eroded Maliki's credibility with a large segment of the public that fears the militia that Sadr leads but also sees him as a legitimate champion of their interests. In Iraq, where perceived power is a key to real authority, the Mahdi army is seen to have stopped Maliki's Basra assault cold then melted away when Sadr ordered them to lay down their arms.

Against what seemed to be long odds as Maliki's assault in Basra foundered against Mahdi resistance and Bagh-

dad's Green Zone was pounded with rockets fired from the Shiite stronghold of Sadr City, the prime minister has been freshly embraced by several Shiite, Kurdish and even Sunni blocs who at times mainly seemed to support him because there was no obvious alternative.

But while some senior Iraqi officials see those developments as a help in efforts to promote political reconciliation, many Iraqis take a less nuanced view. In those terms, in the past few weeks, Maliki has cemented his reputation among his enemies as a tool of the Americans.

And indeed the strong political support for Maliki follows extensive U.S. lobbying with Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish politicians. In fact, after Maliki became mired in Basra, Crocker said, he emerged

from talks with Iraqi politicians with the sense that they had to back him "whatever they may have thought about the way the government got into this."

But some senior members of the Iraqi government see an extraordinary opportunity in the strengthened ties between Maliki and some of the ethnic, political and sectarian groups that have long viewed him with suspicion.

"My view is that what happened could well be a turning point in the political alignments of Iraq," said Barham Salih, Iraq's Kurdish deputy prime minister, speaking of Maliki's efforts to take on the Mahdi. "What he did in taking on his own constituents can give him the credentials to be a national leader rather than the leader of a Shia sect."

U.S. general wary of Iraq drawdown

By Thom Shanker
and Steven Lee Myers

WASHINGTON: The top commander of multinational forces in Iraq warned Congress on Tuesday against removing "too many troops too quickly" and declined under stiff questioning to offer even an estimate of U.S. force levels by the end of 2008.

The comments from General David Petraeus were met by sharp criticism from a senior Democrat, Senator Carl Levin of Michigan, who said that the Bush administration had adopted "a war plan with no exit strategy."

As hearings to define the course of U.S. strategy in Iraq opened Tuesday morning, Petraeus and Ryan Crocker, the U.S. ambassador to Baghdad, described an Iraq that is scene to significant if still fragile progress in security

and politics. But they made that case without reference to the formal political benchmarks that defined their testimony last September.

Petraeus said that security progress has been "significant but uneven." Under questioning, he declined to estimate American troop levels beyond the withdrawal by July of five combat brigades sent to Iraq last year. And he acknowledged that the government's offensive in Basra was not well planned.

The security situation remained in flux, Petraeus said, in part because of the "destructive role Iran has played," and he asserted that "special groups" of Shiite radicals supported from Tehran posed the greatest immediate threat to security.

Crocker added: "Iran has a choice to make."

The general told senators that he was recommending a 45-day pause — which he defined as a period of "consolidation and evaluation" — before reviewing once again whether there should be a further reduction of troops.

"This process will be continuous, with recommendations for further reductions made as conditions permit,"

Bush is said to have 'no exit strategy'

Petraeus said. "This approach does not allow establishment of a set withdrawal timetable. However, it does provide the flexibility those of us on the ground need to preserve the still fragile security gains our troopers have fought so hard and sacrificed so much to achieve."

The lethality of terrorists within Iraq who say they are aligned with Al Qaeda has been "reduced significantly," Petraeus said, but they continue to pose a worrisome threat.

Only "relentless pressure" will guarantee that terrorists cannot regroup, he added.

In stating the Democratic Party's case against administration war policy, Levin, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said that President George W. Bush's goal of creating "breathing room" for political progress by sending five additional combat brigades last year "has not been achieved."

"That reality leads many of us to once again challenge President Bush's policies," Levin said as the general and the ambassador sat motionless at the witness table.

Levin said the Shiite-led government in Baghdad has shown "incompetence" and "excessive sectarian" policies.

Senator John McCain of Arizona, poised to become the Republican Party's presidential nominee, argued against what he described as "reckless and irresponsible" calls for rapid withdrawal from Iraq, and said a premature departure of U.S. troops would be "a failure of moral and political leadership."

As he spoke, a protester stood up with a banner saying, "There's no military solution." The group of female protesters arrived wearing traditional Muslim clothing, with ghostly makeup. Some held bloodied dolls and some had red-stained hands. Their signs read, "Surge



Doug Mills/NYT

Petraeus said that security progress in Iraq has been "significant but uneven."

of Sorrow" and "Endless War."

McCain criticized early American efforts after the invasion of 2003, saying that "four years of mismanaged war had brought us almost to the point of no return." But he said that with the addition of five extra combat brigades last year, "this improved security environment has led to a new opportunity."

Today, McCain said, "it is possible to talk with real hope and optimism about the future of Iraq and the outcome of our efforts there."

Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, who is competing for her party's presidential nomination, brought applause from some in the audience when she declared, "I think it's time to begin an orderly process of withdrawing our troops."

Clinton said the large, continued U.S. deployments have meant lost opportunities in Afghanistan, as well as in the broader fight against terrorist networks elsewhere — and also have come at a

great "cost to our men and women in uniform."

Crocker, meanwhile, said he viewed the recent government offensive against Shiite militias in the southern Iraqi oil center of Basra as a success.

"One conclusion I draw from these signs of progress is that the strategy that began with the surge is working," the ambassador said. "This does not mean, however, that U.S. support should be open-ended or that the level and nature of our engagement should not diminish over time."

But under sharp questioning from Levin, Petraeus acknowledged that the Basra operation "could have been much better planned. It was not adequately planned or prepared."

On that point, Crocker warned that "Iraq's political progress will not be linear," and said he remained "convinced that a major departure from our current engagement would bring failure, and we have to be clear with ourselves about what failure would mean."

Both sides in the morning debate appeared to have come armed for the issues of American financial assistance and the need for Iraq to start footing the bill.

"The era of U.S.-funded major infrastructure projects is over," Crocker said. He also discussed the status of U.S.-Iraqi talks on a new "strategic framework" to cement official ties between the two nations.

The agreement will define "basic authorizations and protections" for American forces in Iraq, but it will not establish either permanent U.S. bases there or long-term troop levels, he said.

The agreement will not tie the hands of the future administrations, but will provide "a stable foundation" for the next president. He stressed that Congress would be kept informed on the talks.

For weeks, Petraeus, as well as senior administration and Pentagon officials, have been dropping clues about their plans.

It has been widely anticipated that U.S. troop levels in Iraq would be held steady for some weeks after the departure by July of five extra brigades ordered to Iraq last year by Bush. There would be 15 combat brigades and close to 140,000 troops remaining in Iraq.

Given the time required to remove troops from Iraq or to halt departures of heavy equipment from the United States, senior officials have said that even under the best of circumstances no more than two or three more brigades could be brought home before Bush leaves office in January.

Even if all goes well, more than 100,000 troops would probably remain in Iraq into next year, leaving any decision on major reductions to the next president.

Barroso sees benefit of Turkey tied to EU

The Associated Press

ANKARA: Turkey's integration into Europe would offer "a powerful alternative" to radical Islam throughout the world, the European Commission president, José Manuel Barroso, said Thursday.

Barroso — on the first day of a three-day visit to this country campaigning for membership in the European Union — said the country must strengthen democracy and carry out more reforms to join the 27-member group.

"Turkey demonstrates that a secular democratic republic, with a predominantly Muslim population, well integrated in Europe, offers a powerful alternative to fundamentalist temptations throughout the world," he said in an address to Parliament.

But Barroso warned: "There is no shortcut to accession" for Turkey.

He praised reforms such as the abolition of the death penalty and the introduction of broadcasting and private courses in the Kurdish language. But the EU chief said progress was needed in other areas, including expanding freedom of expression and curbing the military's influence on politics.

The reforms "are part of our common values, they are central to progress and modernity and, indeed, they are also the keys to accession," Barroso said.

Earlier, in a news conference with Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Barroso said a government proposal to ease laws curbing free speech "represents a step in the right direction."

"For us the most important thing is to assure freedom of expression," Barroso said.

Turkish lawmakers will vote and pass the reform next week, Erdogan has said. The change would soften a law that restricts freedom of speech and has been used to prosecute a Nobel prize winner, Orhan Pamuk, and other intellectuals. The government has a com-

fortable majority to approve the amendment.

Erdogan for his part, assured Barroso and the news media that Turkey was determined to maintain the reform process but reiterated that it would not agree to anything short of full membership in the EU. The French president, Nicolas Sarkozy, has said he preferred an EU partnership with Turkey rather than full membership.

The day before, Barroso had warned that attempts to ban Erdogan's Islamic-rooted governing party could harm Turkey's relationship with the EU.

Barroso reiterated that warning Thursday. "Since Turkey is a candidate country, we cannot be indifferent to this kind of development," he said. "We were surprised, because it is not common for this kind of case in a stable, democratic country."

But he made no reference to the court case in his address to the Parliament.

The leader of Turkey's main opposition party had threatened to walk out of Barroso's speech if he commented on attempts to ban the Islamic-rooted party during his address to Parliament, a Turkish TV station reported.

The opposition reacts harshly to any European interference in Turkey's domestic affairs.

In his speech Barroso instead said the EU was "following the latest developments with utmost attention."

"Turkey needs to devote all its energies to pursuing long-awaited reforms and should not be distracted from this goal," he said.

Barroso on Wednesday said the case against Erdogan's Justice and Development Party "could have a major impact also in the way Turkey is seen" by EU nations and whether it should continue its bid to join the bloc.

The EU opened entry talks with Turkey in 2005, but there has been little progress amid disagreements over Cyprus and opposition from France and other EU countries.

The Washington Post April 8, 2008

Gen. Petraeus's Opening Remarks on Iraq

Addresses the Senate Armed Services Committee Hearing,

GEN. DAVID H. PETRAEUS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the security situation in Iraq and to discuss the recommendations I recently provided to my chain of command.

Since Ambassador Crocker and I appeared before you seven months ago there has been significant but uneven security progress in Iraq.

Since September, levels of violence and civilian deaths have been reduced substantially, Al Qaida-Iraq and a number of other extremist elements have been dealt serious blows, the capabilities of Iraqi security force elements have grown, and there has been noteworthy involvement of local Iraqis in local security.

Nonetheless, the situation in certain areas is still unsatisfactory and innumerable challenges remain. Moreover, as events in the past two weeks have reminded us and as I have repeatedly cautioned, the progress made since last spring is fragile and reversible.

Still, security in Iraq is better than it was when Ambassador Crocker and I reported to you last September, and it is significantly better than it was 15 months ago when Iraq was on the brink of civil war and the decision was made to deploy additional forces to Iraq.

A number of factors have contributed to the progress that has been made.

First, of course, has been the impact of increased numbers of coalition and Iraqi forces. You're well aware of the U.S. surge. Less recognized is that Iraq has also conducted a surge, adding well over 100,000 additional soldiers and police to the ranks of its security forces in 2007 and slowly increasing its capability to deploy and employ these forces.

A second factor has been the employment of coalition and Iraqi forces in the conduct of counter-insurgency operations across the country, deployed together to safeguard the Iraqi people, to pursue Al Qaida-Iraq, and to combat criminal elements and militia extremists, to foster local reconciliation, and to enable political and economic progress.

Another important factor has been the attitudinal shift among certain elements of the Iraqi population. Since the first Sunni Awakening in late 2006, Sunni communities in Iraq increasingly have rejected Al Qaida-Iraq's indiscriminate violence and extremist ideology. These communities also recognize that they could not share in Iraq's bounty if they didn't participate in the political arena. Over time, Awakenings have prompted tens of thousands of Iraqis, some former insurgents, to contribute to local security as so-called Sons of Iraq.

With their assistance and with relentless pursuit of Al Qaida-Iraq, the threat posed by AQI, while still lethal and substantial, has been reduced significantly.

The recent flare-up in Basra, southern Iraq, and Baghdad underscored the importance of the ceasefire declared by Muqtada al-Sadr last fall, another factor in the overall reduction in violence.

Recently, of course, some militia elements became active again. Though a Sadr stand-down resolved the situation to a degree, the flare-up also highlighted the destructive role Iran has played in funding, training, arming and directing the so-called special groups, and generated renewed concern about Iran in the minds of many Iraqi leaders. Unchecked, the special groups pose the greatest long-term threat to the viability of a democratic Iraq.

As we look to the future, our task, together with our Iraqi partners, will be to build on the progress achieved and to deal with the many challenges that remain.

I do believe that we can do this while continuing the ongoing drawdown of the surge forces.

In September, I described the fundamental nature of the conflict in Iraq as a competition among ethnic and sectarian communities for power and resources.



This completion continues, influenced heavily by outside actors. And its resolution remains the key to producing long-term stability in Iraq.

Various elements push Iraq's ethno-sectarian competition toward violence. Terrorists, insurgents, militia extremists and criminal gangs pose significant threats.

Al Qaida's senior leaders, who still view Iraq as the central front in their global strategy, send funding, direction and foreign fighters to Iraq.

Actions by neighboring states compound Iraq's challenges. Syria has taken some steps to reduce the flow of foreign fighters through its territory, but not enough to shut down the key network that supports Al Qaida-Iraq. And Iran has fueled the violence, as I noted, in a particularly damaging way through its lethal support to the special groups.

Finally, insufficient Iraqi government capacity, lingering sectarian mistrust and corruption add to Iraq's problems.

These challenges and recent weeks' violence notwithstanding, Iraq's ethno-sectarian competitions in many areas is now taking place more through debate and less through violence.

In fact, the recent escalation of violence in Baghdad and southern Iraq was dealt with, temporary (sic) at least, by most parties acknowledging that the rational way ahead is through political dialogue rather than street fighting.

As I stated at the outset, though Iraq remains a violent country, we do see progress in the security arena.

As this chart illustrates, for nearly six months, security incidents have been at a level not seen since early to mid 2005, though the level did spike in recent weeks as a result of the fighting in Basra and Baghdad. The level of incidents has, however, begun to turn down again, though the period ahead will be a sensitive one.

As our primary mission is to help protect the population, we closely monitor the number of Iraqi civilians killed due to violence.

As this chart reflects, civilian deaths have decreased over the past year to a level not seen since the February 2006 Samarra mosque bombing that set off the cycle of sectarian violence that tore the very fabric of Iraqi society in 2006 and early 2007.

This chart also reflects our increasing use of Iraqi-provided reports, with the top line reflecting coalition and Iraqi data, and the bottom line reflecting coalition-confirmed data only.

No matter which data is used, civilian deaths due to violence have been reduced significantly, though more work clearly needs to be done.

Ethno-sectarian violence is a particular concern in Iraq, as it is a cancer that continues to spread if left unchecked. As the box in the bottom left of this chart shows, the number of deaths due to ethno-sectarian violence has fallen since we testified last September.

A big factor has been the reduction of ethno-sectarian violence in Baghdad, density plots for which are shown in the boxes depicting Iraq's capital over time.

Some of this decrease is, to be sure, due to sectarian hardening of certain Baghdad neighborhoods. However, that is only a partial explanation, as countless sectarian fault lines in numerous mixed neighborhoods still exist in Baghdad and elsewhere.

In fact, coalition and Iraqi forces have focused along the fault lines to reduce the violence and enable Sunni and Shia leaders to begin the long process of healing in their local communities.

As this next chart shows, even though the number of high-profile attacks increased in March as Al Qaida lashed out, the current level of attacks like this remains far below its height a year ago.

Moreover, as we have helped improve security and focused on enemy networks, we have seen a decrease in the effectiveness of such attacks. The number of deaths due to ethno-sectarian violence, in particular, has remained relatively low, illustrating the enemy's inability to date to reignite the cycle of ethno-sectarian violence.

The emergence of Iraqi volunteers to help secure their local communities has been an important development. As this chart depicts, there are now over 91,000 Sons of Iraq, Shia as well as Sunni, under contract to help coalition and Iraqi forces protect their neighborhoods and secure infrastructure and roads.

These volunteers have contributed significantly in various areas, and the savings and vehicles not lost because of reduced violence, not to mention the priceless lives saved have far outweighed the costs of their monthly contracts.

Sons of Iraq have also have contributed to the discovery of improvised explosive devices and weapons and explosive caches. As this next chart shows, in fact we have already found more caches in 2008 than we found in all of 2006.

Given the importance of the Sons of Iraq, we're working closely with the Iraqi government to transition them into the Iraqi security forces or other forms of employment. And over 21,000 have already been accepted into the police or army or other government jobs.

This process has been slow but it is taking place, and we will continue to monitor it carefully.

Al Qaida also recognizes the significance of the Sons of Iraq, and AQI elements have targeted them repeatedly. However, these attacks, in addition to AQI's use of women, children and the handicapped as suicide bombers, have further alienated Al Qaida-Iraq from the Iraqi people.

And the tenacious pursuit of AQI, together with AQI's loss of local support in many areas, has substantially reduced its capabilities, numbers, and freedom of movement.

This chart displays the cumulative effect of the effort against Al Qaida-Iraq and its insurgent allies. As you can see, we've reduced considerably the areas in which Al Qaida enjoys support and sanctuary, though clearly there is more to be done.

Having noted that progress, Al Qaida is still capable of lethal attacks. And we must maintain relentless pressure on the organization, on the networks outside of Iraq that support it and on the resource flows that sustain it.

This chart lays out the comprehensive strategy that we, the Iraqis, and our interagency and international partners are employing to reduce what Al Qaida-Iraq needs.

As you can see, defeating Al Qaida in Iraq requires not just actions by our elite counterterrorist forces, but also major operations by coalition and Iraqi conventional forces, a sophisticated intelligence effort, political reconciliation, economic and social programs, information operations initiatives,

diplomatic activity, the employment of counterinsurgency principles and detainee operations, and many other actions.

Related to this effort, I applaud Congress' support for additional intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets in the upcoming supplemental, as ISR is vital to the success of our operations in Iraq and elsewhere.

As we combat AQI we must remember that doing so not only reduces a major source of instability in Iraq, it also weakens an organization that Al Qaida's senior leaders view as a tool to spread its influence and foment regional instability. Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri have consistently advocated exploiting the situation in Iraq, and we have also seen Al Qaida-Iraq involved in destabilizing activities in the wider Mideast region.

Together with the Iraqi security forces we have also focused on the special groups. These elements are funded, trained, armed and directed by Iran's Quds Force with help from Lebanese Hezbollah. It was these groups that launched Iranian rockets and mortar rounds at Iraq's seat of government two weeks ago, causing loss of innocent life and fear in the capital, and requiring Iraqi and coalition actions in response.

Iraqi and coalition leaders have repeatedly noted their desire that Iran live up to the promises made by President Ahmadinejad and other senior Iranian leaders to stop their support for the special groups.

However, nefarious activities by the Quds Force have continued and Iraqi leaders now clearly recognize the threat they pose to Iraq. We should all watch Iranian actions closely in the weeks and months ahead as they will show the kind of relationship Iran wishes to have with its neighbor and the character of future Iranian involvement in Iraq.

The Iraqi security forces have continued to develop since September, and we have transferred responsibilities to Iraqi forces as their capabilities and the conditions on the ground have permitted. Currently, as this chart shows, half of Iraq's 18 provinces are under provincial Iraqi control. Many of these provinces, not just the successful ones in the Kurdish regional government area but also a number of southern provinces, have done well.

Challenges have emerged in some other, including of course Basra. Nonetheless, this process will continue and we expect Anbar and Qadisiyah provinces to transition in the months ahead.

Iraqi forces have grown significantly since September, and over 540,000 individuals now serve in the Iraqi security forces.

The number of combat battalions capable of taking the lead in operations, albeit with some coalition support, has grown to well over 100. These units are bearing an increasing share of the burden, as evidenced by the fact that Iraqi security losses have recently been three times our own.

We will, of course, conduct careful after-action reviews with our Iraqi partners in the wake of recent operations, as there were units and leaders found wanting in some cases, and some of our assessments may be downgraded as a result.

Nonetheless, the performance of many units was solid, especially once they get their footing and gained a degree of confluence. And certain Iraqi elements proved quite capable.

Underpinning the advances of the past year has been improvements in Iraq's security institutions.

An increasingly robust Iraqi-run training base enabled the Iraqi security forces to grow by over 133,000 soldiers and police over the past 16 months. And the still-expanding training base is expected to generate an additional 50,000 Iraqi soldiers and 16 army and special operations battalions through the rest of 2008, along with 23,000 police and eight national police battalions.

Additionally, Iraq's security ministries are steadily improving their ability to execute their budgets. As this chart shows, in 2007, as in 2006, Iraq's security ministries spent more on their forces than the United States provided through the Iraqi Security Forces Fund.

We anticipate that Iraq will spend over \$8 billion

on security this year and \$11 billion next year. And this projection enabled us recently to reduce significantly our Iraqi Security Forces Fund request for fiscal year 2009 from \$5.1 billion to \$2.8 billion.

While improved Iraqi security forces are not yet ready to defend Iraq or maintain security throughout the country on their own, recent operations in Basra highlight improvements in the ability of the Iraqi security forces to deploy substantial numbers of units, supplies and replacements on very short notice. They certainly could not have deployed a division's worth of army and police units on such short notice a year ago. On the other hand, the recent operations also underscored the considerable work still to be done in the area of logistics, force enablers, staff development, and command and control.

We also continue to help Iraq through the U.S. Foreign Military Sales program. As of March 2008, the Iraqi government has purchased over \$2 billion worth of equipment and services of American origin through FMS.

Since September, and with your encouragement of the organizations and the FMS progress -- process delivery has improved, as the FMS system has strived to support urgent war-time requirements.

On a related note, I would ask that Congress consider restoring funding for the International Military Education and Training program which supports education for mid- and senior-level Iraqi military and civilian leaders and is an important component of the development of the leaders Iraq will need in the future.

While security has improved in many areas, and the Iraqi security forces are shouldering more of the load, the situation in Iraq remains exceedingly complex and challenging.

Iraq could face a resurgence of Al Qaida-Iraq, or additional Shia groups could violate Muqtada al-Sadr's cease-fire order and return to violence. External actors, like Iran, could stoke violence within Iraq and actions by other neighbors could undermine the security situation as well.

Other challenges result, paradoxically, from improved security, which has provided opportunities for political and economic progress and improved services at the local, provincial and national levels.

But the improvements have also created expectations that progress will continue.

In the coming months, Iraq leaders must strengthen governmental capacity, execute budgets, pass additional legislation, conduct provincial elections, carry out a census, determine the status of disputed territories, and resettle internally displaced persons and refugees. These tasks would challenge any government, much less a still-developing government tested by war.

The Commander's Emergency Response Program, the State Department's Quick Response Fund, and USAID programs enable us to help Iraq deal with its challenges. To that end, I respectfully ask that you provide us by June the additional CERP funds requested in the supplemental. These funds have an enormous impact. As I noted earlier, the salaries paid to the Sons of Iraq alone cost far less than the cost savings in vehicles not lost due to the enhanced security in local communities.

Encouragingly, the Iraqi government recently allocated \$300 million for us to manage as Iraqi CERP to perform projects for their people, while building their own capacity to do so. The Iraqi government has also committed \$163 million to gradually assume Sons of Iraq contracts, \$510 million for small-business loans, and \$196 million for a joint training and reintegration program.

The Iraqi government pledges to provide more as they execute the budget passed two months ago. Nonetheless, it is hugely important to have our resources continue even as Iraqi funding begins to outstrip ours.

Last month I provided my chain of command recommendations for the way ahead in Iraq. During that process, I noted the objective of retaining and building on our hard-fought security gains, while we

draw down to the pre-surge level of 15 brigade combat teams. I emphasized the need to continue work with our Iraqi partners to secure the population and to transition responsibilities to the Iraqis as quickly as conditions permit but without jeopardizing the security gains that have been made.

As in September, my recommendations are informed by operational and strategic considerations. The operational considerations include recognition that: the military surge has achieved progress, but that that progress is reversible; Iraqi security forces have strengthened their capabilities, but still must grow further; the provincial elections in the fall, refugee returns, detainee releases, and efforts to resolve provincial boundaries disputes and Article 140 issues will be very challenging; the transition of Sons of Iraq into the Iraqi security forces or other pursuits will require time and careful monitoring; withdrawing too many forces too quickly could jeopardize the progress of the past year; and performing the necessary tasks in Iraq will require sizable conventional forces, as well as special operation forces and adviser teams.

The strategic considerations include recognition that: the strain on the U.S. military, especially on its ground forces, has been considerable; a number of the security challenges inside Iraq are also related to significant regional and global threats; a failed state in Iraq would pose serious consequences for the greater fight against Al Qaida, for regional stability, for the already existing humanitarian crisis in Iraq, and for the efforts to counter malign Iranian influence.

After weighing these factors, I recommended to my chain of command that we continue the drawdown in the surge to the combat forces and that upon the withdrawal of the last surge brigade combat team in July, we undertake a 45-day period of consolidation and evaluation. At the end of that period, we will commence a process of assessment to examine the conditions on the ground and over time determine when we can make recommendations for further reductions. This process will be continuous, with recommendations for further reductions made as conditions permit.

This approach does not allow establishment of a set withdrawal timetable, however it does provide the flexibility those of us on the ground need to preserve the still-fragile security gains our troopers have fought so far and sacrifice so much to achieve.

With this approach, the security achievements of 2007 and early 2008 can form a foundation for the gradual establishment of sustainable security in Iraq. This is not only important to the 27 million citizens of Iraq, it is also vitally important to those in the Gulf region, to the citizens of the United States, and to the global community.

It clearly is in our national interests to help Iraq prevent the resurgence of Al Qaida in the heart of the Arab world, to help Iraq resist Iranian encroachment on its sovereignty, to avoid renewed ethno-sectarian violence that could spill over Iraq's borders and make the existing refugee crisis even worse, and to enable Iraq to expand its role in the regional and global economies.

In closing, I want to comment briefly on those serving our nation in Iraq. We have asked a great deal of them and of their families, and they have made enormous sacrifices.

My keen personal awareness of the strain on them and on the force as a whole has been an important factor in my recommendations.

The Congress, the executive branch and our fellow citizens have done an enormous amount to support our troopers and their loved ones. And all of us are grateful for that.

Nothing means more to those in harm's way than the knowledge that their country appreciates their sacrifices and those of their families. Indeed, all Americans should take great pride in the men and women serving our nation in Iraq and in the courage, determination, resilience and initiative they demonstrate each and every day. It remains the greatest of honors to soldier with them.

Thank you very much.

Reidar Visser Author, "Basra, the Failed Gulf State"

Readers joined Reidar Visser, research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and author of "Basra, the Failed Gulf State," on Tuesday, April 8 at noon ET to discuss the latest developments in Southern Iraq, and the debate in Washington among government, military and intelligence officials about what course to follow in Iraq -- including Tuesday's hearings on Capitol Hill.

Reidar Visser: Hi, I'm Reidar Visser of the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs in Oslo. I work on the history and politics of southern Iraq. I look forward to taking your questions on developments in Iraq south of Baghdad, especially on issues related to Basra and the federalism question. You can get an idea of what sort of topics I'm covering at my Iraq website, www.historiae.org

Bow, N.H.: How much is Sadr controlling the strategic initiative? It appears his army is capable of holding its own or even defeating the Iraqi army (such as it is), but Sadr knows he can't beat the U.S. Army in open battle, so he declined engagement throughout 2007 and disengaged in Basra once the Americans came to rescue Maliki. This looks disturbingly like how the Viet Cong (who famously never defeated the U.S. in battle) waited us out in Vietnam (with the bonus for Sadr that we did some of his dirty work for him by crippling the Sunni forces in Iraq).

Reidar Visser: I do not think the Sadrist leadership prefers the battlefield to the political arena. The Sadrists were a key force in pushing through a timetable for local elections in the Iraqi parliament recently, whereas the allies of the United States, such as the Kurds and ISCI, tried to resist it. The Sadrists hope to do well in the local elections as long as they are not met with obstructionism.

Washington: The US "surge" was sold as a change in military tactics that would give the Iraqi government time to accomplish a number of "benchmarks." What is your sense on how those benchmarks are coming along, and how are we doing on political reconciliation in Iraq generally?

Reidar Visser: The main problem is that there is no progress on perhaps the most significant benchmark, revision of the constitution. This is an area where there is real potential for national reconciliation, but there appears to be little initiative here right now, and not much pressure from the US either.

Munich, Germany: Do you think that the current strife in Basra has more to do with current issues (law on the powers of governors not organized in a region) or with the inherent tribal mentality in the region, which has degenerated into Mafia-style conditions? Also, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, who once advocated peacefulness and supported

democracy, isn't in the news anymore. Is he still an important player in Iraqi power politics?

Reidar Visser: I certainly don't think this has anything to do with a particular mentality. Basra has been peaceful through long periods of its history. Many of its current problems are connected with the fact that political elites from other parts of Iraq are interested in obtaining control of its oil resources, which account for almost all of Iraq's energy resources south of Baghdad.

Peaks Island, Maine: Do you agree with the debunking of the "bottom-up" reconciliation, such as that put forth in statements last week at the Senate Foreign Relations Committee? Lt. Gen. (ret.) William Odom said: "The surge is prolonging instability, not creating the conditions for unity as the president claims. ... The decline in violence reflects a dispersion of power to dozens of local strong men who distrust the government and occasionally fight among themselves. Thus the basic military situation is far worse because of the proliferation of armed groups under local military chiefs who follow a proliferating number of political bosses..."

"We are being asked by the president to believe that this shift of so much power and finance to so many local chieftains is the road to political centralization. He describes the process as building the state from the bottom up. I challenge you to press the administration's witnesses this week to explain this absurdity. Ask them to name a single historical case where power has been aggregated successfully from local strong men to a central government except through bloody violence leading to a single winner, most often a dictator."

At the hearing Nir Rosen said things similar to these comments he made on Democracy Now: "There is no government in Iraq. It's a collection of different militias, who, as we see, even fight among themselves. And we see in the recent Shia-on-Shia fighting, it's not the government against the Mahdi Army; it's one Shia militia, the Badr Organization that belongs to the Iraqi Islamic Supreme Council -- sorry, Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council, it has different names -- and Dawa, so basically the pro-American Shia militias backed by the Americans fighting the largest Shia movement in Iraq, the Sadrist movement, for control over turf, over resources, and of course over the control of the population in the upcoming elections, which may or may not happen."

Reidar Visser: Unless the surge is accompanied by real progress in the area of political reconciliation at the top level, it will fail to achieve its aims and at worst could deepen the conflict. The problem seems to be that there is no willingness to put pressure on Maliki to make some real sacrifices in national reconciliation. However, what gives ground for optimism in Iraq and makes the country different from for example the Balkans in the 1990s, is that the ideal of a unified state is still supported by the population at large (except the Kurds). Thus the real problem is not at the grassroots level but among the Green Zone politicians who pursue sectarian pet projects.

Rockville, Md.: What are the chances that Sadr and the U.S. have reached an agreement? Or that Iran wanted the attacks in Basra to start? They had just visited Baghdad.

Reidar Visser: The Iranian role on BOTH sides in the Basra fighting is certainly something that is often overlooked. Crocker mentioned various "pro-Iranian" groups that had been targeted in the recent operations such as Tharallah, but failed to mention that these groups are also the loyal allies of ISCI, which is Washington's favourite partner in Iraq. Another ISCI ally, the Sayyid al-Shuhada movement, participated in the anti-police demonstrations in Basra in early March which may have prompted Maliki to escalate his operations against the Sadrists. In other words, there are Iranian influences on either side of Maliki, and certainly not only from the Sadrist "special groups".

Princeton, N.J.: Please correct any statements I get wrong. It is my understanding that the National Police is one of the prime contributors to the corruption and lawlessness in Basra, yet it appears that Maliki used them in his botched invasion attempt. What is their current role? Again, it is my understanding that Fadhila lost a lot of its power when it lost control of the Oil Ministry, yet they still appear to be a major player in Basra. What is their role and objectives? Finally, it is clear that Maliki lied when he said he was going to Basra to restore law and order, because he only attacked one of the three militias there, and he used the National Police. It does not appear that his goals were political, as both he and Sadr favor a strong central government while Maliki's allies favor a weak federation. Hakim favors a strong autonomous state in the South and Fadhila favors a city-state for Basra. Was

Mailki's objective solely for power, and to protect the billions of dollars he has squirreled away?

Reidar Visser: A partial answer to this one: Fadila remains influential in the oil facilities protection services, and also has some allies in the Southern Oil Company and the local trade unions. Maliki may be aiming for what he believes is the centre of Shiite politics, but I think he overestimates the degree of political space available between the Sadrists and ISCI. He may be hoping to emerge as a strong leader for the Daawa factions, independents, and those ISCI members who are opposed to Hakim's federalism ideas, but he probably underestimates the strength of the Sadrist movement among the masses.

Springfield, Va.: Mr. Visser, what is your explanation for the recent events in Basra -- what motivated the Iraqi government to attack the Sadrist forces, why did Sadr agree to a cease-fire, what role did Iran play, and who -- if anyone -- is the ultimate "winner" in all of this?

Reidar Visser: I think this was primarily the result of Maliki's own attempt to build a power base for himself as a strong premier, and that ISCI is a convenient partner. The degree of harmony between Maliki and Hakim is often overestimated. They have completely different views on federalism for example, but both probably hope to benefit from a weakening of the Sadrists prior to the local elections.

Roger: The question of who won or lost the battle of Basra seems to me to put the terms of the fight much too narrowly. The advantage depends on conditions going forward. If conditions going forward for Sadr were, for instance, that his militia physically had been driven out of Basra, or that his prestige was damaged with his constituency or the political elite, then Maliki could have claimed a gain of some sort. That this didn't happen was Maliki's worst case scenario.

Maliki sought to meld together an image of himself and the most popular Iraqi institution, the army. In this, he failed spectacularly -- just as Allawi failed spectacularly when he let the Americans raze Falluja in the hopes that this would send a soothing message to the Shiites before the election.

On the other hand, Sadr needs Maliki -- he needs him to block the power of SCIRI. Here, Sadr seems to have lost -- Maliki seems to have briefly united the Sunni parties and SCIRI against the Sadr Trend. Which is why it is interesting that Jafari is, at the moment, consulting with Sadr in Qoms. Do you think there is a chance that the Daawa will dump Maliki?

Reidar Visser: The Jaafari breakaway initiative within the Daawa (or "back to the original Daawa" if you will) is very interesting and

goes back at least half a year. It is possible that Jaafari realises what Maliki refuses to accept: that any successful centrist solution in Iraq would involve at least the moderates among the Sadrists, and that ISCI's nine-governorate federal scheme would have to be taken off the table. The Tanzim al-Iraq branch is probably closer to Iran than Jaafari is and may seek to prevent any re-emergence of Jaafari as a Daawa leader.

Philadelphia: What are the ingredients required in ever getting the vast majority of the citizens of Basra to support a national Iraq government, and approximately what timeframe might that require?

Reidar Visser: Even though the people of Basra have some regionalist ideas they are also quite fierce in their attachment to Iraqi nationalism. What they object to is discrimination by outsiders, whether from Baghdad or Najaf, Shiite or Sunni. They are increasingly conscious about the fact that most of Iraq's oil is in their area and they want to see some real improvement in living standards in return. But the "Basra question" is certainly something that can be solved within the framework of a unified Iraq, as long as Basra representatives are taken seriously in key processes, such as the drafting of the oil law.

Arlington, Va.: As a former military officer, I'm somewhat disappointed in the press for their deferential treatment of Gen. Petraeus. In the military, we called what he is doing a "dog-and-pony show." Contrary to the media's portrayal, what he says is not the gospel truth, but rather his effort to put the best spin on his own performance. It's akin to asking a high school kid to grade his own homework. Do you think he's going to give himself anything other than a B?

So the next time President Bush says "I listen to my commanders on the ground" (which plainly is not true), the next question should be "are not <i>you</i> the commander in chief?" Only the president (theoretically) is capable of balancing the puffery that goes with these reports with the overarching assessment of whether it's working on a broader scale.

Reidar Visser: It is worrying not only that Bush defers so much to Petraeus, but also that he sometimes forgets to mention Crocker, who supposedly represents the equally important political dimension of "the surge".

Prescott, Ariz.: Republican presidential candidate John McCain claims that it was al-Sadr who asked for the Basra cease-fire, not Maliki. Is he right? If not, why doesn't he get any heat for saying incorrect stuff? Also, wasn't this cease-fire brokered in Iran? I think that would be a big deal for some reason I probably don't understand, but the press seemed to wipe that small detail out of exist-

ence.

Reidar Visser: It is indeed significant that the cease-fire was brokered in Iran. Traditionally, the Sadrists were Iran's number one enemy in Iraq, and after 2003 Tehran's main challenge was to neutralise them. They have succeeded fairly well with this through the "special groups" tactics, gradually coopting Sadrist splinter groups. Muqtada's relocation to Iran in 2007, possibly a result of the surge, means that Iranian control of his actions may have increased. Also, his recent declaration of loyalty to Kazim al-Haeri, a Khomeinist scholar of Iraqi origin residing in Qum, is significant. They two were allies back in 2003, but the relationship came to an end shortly afterwards. The fact that they are now once more in contact with each other probably means that Iran has given its approval.

Anonymous: How can the U.S. "win" in Iraq? As an invading and occupying force, how can the U.S. "stand-up" one tribe or sect against other tribes or sects within the same country and honestly declare victory? Or at this point are we after nothing more than a face-saving withdrawal plan?

Reidar Visser: I think one of the most promising options is to reunite the Iraqis on a nationalist basis through separating the Kurdish track. Political scientist Liam Anderson has proposed multi-lateral negotiations to give the Kurdistan Regional Government an internationally guaranteed special status, on model of the Aland Islands, a Swedish-speaking archipelago within Finland. Anderson's ideas could be taken further. The logical corollary would be that the Kurds, having achieved international guarantees, abandoned any pretensions to influence the political process in Iraq south of Kurdistan, and Iraq could have a new constitutional revision committee based on the non-Kurdish areas only. That would almost automatically recalibrate Iraqi politics and probably solve the federalism question, because the advocates of radical decentralization along ethno-sectarian lines would now be a small minority. Instead, Sunnis and centralist Shiites would be able to agree on a revised constitution.

Reidar Visser: That's all for now, thanks for lots of interesting questions. For additional analysis and discussion of southern Iraq developments feel free to visit my website www.historiae.org

Editor's Note: washingtonpost.com moderators retain editorial control over Discussions and choose the most relevant questions for guests and hosts; guests and hosts can decline to answer questions. washingtonpost.com is not responsible for any content posted by third parties.

BBC NEWS 7 April 2008

EU court annuls PKK terror ruling

A ruling to blacklist Kurdish rebel group the PKK as a terrorist organisation and freeze its assets has been overturned by an EU court.

The European Court of First Instance in Luxembourg said the 2002 decision was illegal under EU law.

The court said the EU had failed to tell the PKK in advance of the decision, as it was required to do.

The PKK, or Kurdistan Workers' Party, has been fighting Turkish troops in its campaign for greater autonomy.

Turkey has recently launched a series of cross-border attacks on Kurdish rebels who it says have used bases in northern Iraq to launch raids into Turkey.

'Procedural grounds'

A court spokesman said the ruling had been made "on procedural grounds" because the council of the EU had "failed to give the PKK an adequate statement of reason as to why they are on the list, which they are required to do".

A number of groups are listed by the EU as terrorist organisations, including the Basque separatists, Eta, the Tamil Tigers and Hamas.

Similar technical rulings have been made regarding other groups whose funds had been frozen: the People's Mujahedin of Iran, a Philippines' Communist Party official and Dutch group Stichting Al Aqsa.

The spokesman added that in the case of the People's Mujahedin, the council of the EU had responded to the ruling by keeping the group



on its list but giving the group its reasoning for doing so.

That decision is currently being considered by the court.

The EU said the ruling on the PKK related to a 2002 list which had since been updated and now complied with the requirement for justifying the group's inclusion.

The list is due to be reviewed again in June.

BBC NEWS 10 April 2008

Turkey 'kills 11 Kurdish rebels'

Turkey says its troops have killed 11 members of the Kurdish separatist guerrilla group, the PKK, in clashes in the south-eastern province of Tunceli.

About 3,000 Turkish troops took part in the operation on Thursday, backed by attack helicopters, officials said.

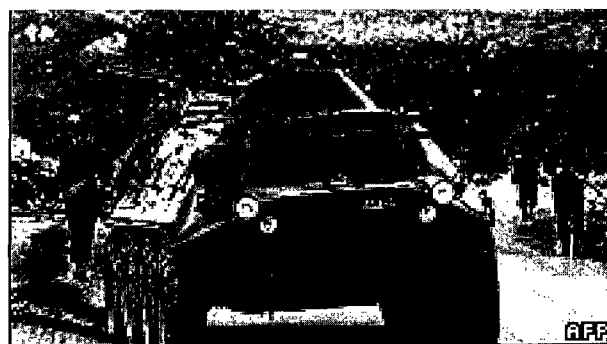
Turkey has intensified its operations against the PKK in recent months, launching air strikes and a ground offensive in northern Iraq.

A court on Thursday jailed a Kurdish politician, Leyla Zana, for two years.

Mrs Zana, 47, was sentenced in Diyarbakir for praising the jailed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan. She has previously spent 10 years in jail.

More than 30,000 people have been killed since the PKK began fighting for self-rule in the mainly Kurdish area of south-east Turkey in 1984.

Turkey, the EU and US consider the PKK to be a terrorist organisation.



REUTERS

U.N. to propose template in May for Iraq's Kirkuk

April 11 2008 By Paul Taylor

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - The United Nations will suggest a formula next month to resolve conflicts on several disputed areas in Iraq that could serve as a template for the future of Kirkuk, a senior U.N. official said on Friday.

Staffan de Mistura, the U.N. special representative in Iraq, said he would propose options by May 15 for deciding under which authority to put four disputed locations, not including Kirkuk. He declined to identify them but said they would set an example.

"This could show how Kirkuk could be handled. It is certainly a template for similar and other bigger problems," he told reporters after talks with NATO and European Union officials.

He urged NATO to step up its training of Iraqi police officers to help stabilise the country, doubling the number of recruits under training from the current 1,500.

He urged the EU to continue to support U.N. operations in Iraq financially and to use its political influence to urge the Baghdad government to pass a crucial oil law and use the improved security situation to restore public services.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki will visit Brussels next week for talks with EU officials. Kirkuk, an oil-rich northern city which lies just outside the Kurdish region but is claimed by the Kurds, is one of the most sensitive flashpoints in Iraq.

Former President Saddam Hussein, overthrown in a U.S.-led invasion in 2003, forced many of its Kurdish inhabitants out of Kirkuk and replaced them with Sunni Arabs in a systematic policy of ethnic cleansing.

BETTER IN PACKAGE

But Turkey, which once ruled the area under the Ottoman Empire and is concerned about the fate of the Turkmen minority there, has made clear it does not want to see the city and its oil resources come under the Kurdish regional government.

De Mistura said Iraq and Kurdish leaders had acted wisely in agreeing to postpone a referendum on Kirkuk's status due to have been held by the end of December, which he said could have triggered a conflict.

"What I am doing is trying to avoid a crisis," he said. An ill-prepared referendum that was not linked to a political solution could start a conflict.

Any formula for Kirkuk would be based on three criteria -- the election results of December 2005, undoing the decrees imposed by Saddam, and respecting minority rights and sharing resources.

Asked whether the promised Kirkuk referendum was off the agenda, he said: "Nothing excludes (the possibility) that one day there will be a confirmatory referendum about the formula for the various disputed localities based on concessions."

"It is easier to put it in a package where you also put it with the oil law," he said.

De Mistura said he was also urging Iraqi leaders to reach agreement with their key neighbours -- Turkey and Iran -- "in this critical period" while the United States and other international forces remain in the country.

A recent Turkish military incursion into northern Iraq to attack Kurdish PKK separatist guerrillas had forged greater unity between the Kurdish regional government and the Baghdad authorities on the need to preserve territorial integrity, he said.

États-Unis

McCain, Clinton et Obama s'affrontent sur l'Irak

AP Associated Press

4 avril 2008 Steven Hurst Associated Press

Avec l'audition au Congrès aujourd'hui du commandant des forces américaines en Irak, le dossier revient en force dans la campagne présidentielle. Le républicain John McCain et les démocrates Barack Obama et Hillary Clinton tentent chacun de démontrer que la partie adverse est irresponsable et ne peut mener le pays qu'à l'échec.

Les trois candidats à l'investiture de leurs partis respectifs pour l'élection du 4 novembre ne peuvent en tout cas échapper au sujet puisqu'ils siègent tous dans des commissions du Sénat devant lesquelles le général David Petraeus devrait recommander le maintien des troupes à un niveau de 140 000 hommes au moins jusqu'à la fin de l'année: M. McCain et Mme Clinton dans la commission des forces armées et M. Obama dans celle des relations extérieures. Les amabilités échangées hier ont donné un avant-goût des interventions.

«Personne ne devrait faire en tant que candidat à la présidence des promesses qu'il ne pourra pas tenir s'il est élu», a lancé John McCain à un public de nombreux anciens combattants. «Promettre le retrait de nos forces d'Irak, quelles que soient les conséquences calamiteuses pour le peuple irakien, nos intérêts les plus vitaux et l'avenir du Moyen-Orient, est le comble de l'irresponsabilité. C'est une faillite du politique.»

Le sénateur de l'Arizona reste un fervent partisan de l'intervention américaine en Irak et défend la stratégie du général Petraeus et du président républicain George W. Bush, seule garantie de succès à terme selon lui. Et d'évoquer à l'appui de ses convictions le recul de 90% de la violence entre juin 2007 et mars 2008, pour asséner qu'«il ne s'agit pas du passé pour ce qui est du prochain président mais de l'avenir et des moyens de le protéger». «Globalement, (la politique irakienne de Washington) est un succès remarquable», estimait-il récemment, reconnaissant toutefois l'existence de «défis importants à venir».

À quoi Barack Obama et Hillary Rodham Clinton opposent un tout autre bilan: le regain de violences de ces dernières semaines en Irak, les plus de 4000 militaires américains tombés dans ce pays et les près de 500 milliards de dollars américains engloutis dans cette guerre depuis cinq ans. Tous deux promettent de retirer l'armée américaine d'Irak dans un délai d'un an ou deux.

Et M. Obama de reprendre les mots de M. McCain pour les retourner contre lui hier. «C'est une faillite du politique que de soutenir une occupation sans date-limite de l'Irak qui n'a pas réussi à inciter les dirigeants irakiens à se réconcilier, a fortement



éprouvé notre armée, fait peser un poids sur les familles de nos militaires, amoindri notre capacité à conduire le monde et réduit la sécurité du peuple américain», a asséné le sénateur noir de l'Illinois.

Pour Hillary Clinton, la stratégie irakienne du candidat républicain se traduira par «quatre ans de plus de politique Bush-Cheney-McCain à intervenir dans une guerre civile pendant que progressent les menaces contre notre sécurité nationale, notre économie et notre place dans le monde». «Nous ne pouvons tout simplement pas signer un chèque en blanc *ad vitam aeternam* au gouvernement irakien», a-t-elle ajouté, «il est temps de finir cette guerre aussi rapidement, avec autant de responsabilité et aussi sûrement que possible».

L'Irak joue un rôle d'autant plus important dans cette campagne électorale que John McCain lui-même a largement lié son destin au succès de la guerre. Il devait plaider aujourd'hui pour une rallonge de temps et d'argent afin de stabiliser le pays.

AP Associated Press

Un soldat tué dans un accrochage avec les rebelles kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie

7 avril 2008

Un soldat turc a été tué dans la nuit de mercredi à jeudi dans un accrochage avec les rebelles kurdes à proximité de la frontière sud-est avec l'Irak.

Les services du gouverneur de la province de Sirnak ont précisé que cet accrochage s'était produit dans le secteur montagneux de Kupeli.

Mercredi, l'armée turque a annoncé que son aviation avait mené des frappes sur des rebelles kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak. L'armée avait précisé qu'un groupe rebelle avait été repéré alors qu'il tentait de s'infiltrer en Turquie mardi depuis des bases en Irak. Les avions turcs ont visé la zone où se trouvaient les rebelles dans la région d'Avasin-Basyan dans le nord de l'Irak près de la ville frontalière turque de Cukurca. Par ailleurs, un rebelle avait été tué dans des accrochages en territoire turc dans les provinces de Diyarbakir et Sirnak. AP

Belgique: des proches du PKK libérées en raison d'une panne informatique

AFP

BRUXELLES, 9 avr 2008 (AFP) - Vingt-six des 29 femmes soupçonnées d'être des proches du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) interpellées le 4 avril par la police belge ont été remises en liberté "en raison d'un problème informatique", a rapporté mercredi soir la télévision belge RTBF.

Ces 29 femmes, de différentes nationalités, avaient été interpellées à Verriers et Gemmenich (est de la Belgique) et à Bruxelles sur ordre d'un juge antiterroriste.

Selon les médias, elles sont suspectées d'avoir participé dans des camps en Belgique à des entraînements du PKK, une organisation considérée comme terroriste par l'UE.

A la suite de leur interpellation, trois d'entre elles ont été placées en détention préventive, selon la police fédérale citée mercredi par la RTBF.

Les 26 autres auraient dû être prises en charge par l'Office des étrangers, un organisme dépendant du ministère de l'Intérieur, qui devait les maintenir à la disposition de la police.

Mais, en raison d'un "problème informatique à l'Office des étrangers", elles ont dû être relâchées très rapidement, a indiqué la chaîne publique belge, sans donner de détails sur la nature du problème rencontré.

Seuls les documents et le matériel informatique saisis lors des perquisitions restent à la disposition des enquêteurs chargés du dossier. Les membres de la police fédérale n'ont pas apprécié la libération prématurée de ces 26 suspects, a assuré la RTBF.

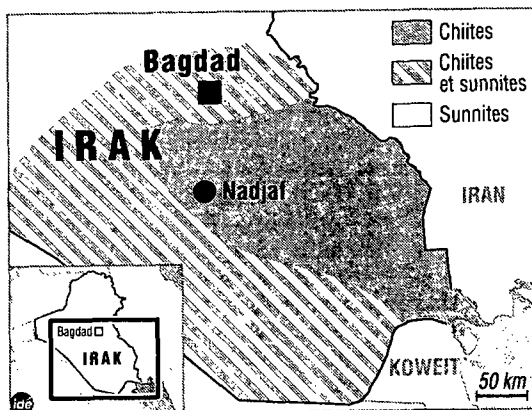
LE FIGARO

8 avril 2008

Les chiites d'Irak en guerre pour le pouvoir

MOYEN-ORIENT

Cinq ans après la chute de Saddam Hussein, renversé par l'armée américaine, les factions chiites se déchirent autour du contrôle des revenus pétroliers.



De notre envoyé spécial à Nadjaf et Bagdad

DES GRILLES de fer et des gardes armés défendent l'accès au mausolée de l'imam Ali. Le dôme d'or du sanctuaire de Nadjaf, où est enterré le gendre du Prophète, est sous haute surveillance alors que la communauté chiite irakienne se déchire. Car le premier lieu saint du chiïsme est aussi un puissant symbole



Un combattant de l'Armée du Mahdi, la puissante milice de Moqtada al-Sadr, près de Bassora. Le principal port irakien est un site stratégique pour le transit des marchandises et du pétrole. Atef Hassan/Reuter

temporel : celui du contrôle d'une communauté devenue la clef du pouvoir dans le nouvel Irak, premier État arabe moderne dominé par les chiites, grâce à l'invasion américaine.

Les combats qui opposent le gouvernement irakien de Nouri al-Maliki à l'Armée du Mahdi, la puissante milice de Moqtada al-Sadr, ont débuté il y a quinze jours à Bassora. Ils ont enflammé la plupart des villes du sud de l'Irak, jusqu'à Bagdad. Après un match nul sur le terrain, et un calme relatif, les combats ont repris ces deux derniers jours autour de Sadr City. Ce vaste faubourg chiite, collé à Bagdad, est assiégé par l'armée irakienne, soutenue par les Américains. Aux portes de ce bastion de l'Armée du Mahdi, plusieurs dizaines de combattants des deux camps et des civils sont morts dans des tirs de mortiers et d'armes automatiques dans le secteur de Jamila, un marché de gros situé à la lisière de Sadr City.

Le premier ministre, Maliki, issu de la coalition des deux grands partis chiites au pouvoir, l'Assemblée suprême islamique en Irak et le Dawa, a exigé hier le désarmement de la milice de Moqtada. « *Il n'y a pas d'autre solution que de dissoudre l'Armée du Mahdi* », a-t-il dit sur CNN. Menaçant d'interdire les activités politiques du mouvement de Moqtada al-Sadr si la milice n'était pas démantelée, il a affirmé que la « *confrontation avec ces gangs* » ne cesserait que lorsque le gouvernement contrôlerait de nouveau les zones qu'ils occupent.

Moqtada al-Sadr a répondu qu'il enverrait des délégations auprès du grand ayatollah Ali al-Sistani à Nadjaf et d'autres autorités religieuses chiites à Qom, en Iran. « *S'ils ordonnent le démantèlement de l'Armée du Mahdi, Moqtada al-Sadr obéira aux ordres des chefs religieux* », a annoncé un de ses adjoints, Hassan Zagrani.

L'arbitrage de cette guerre interchiite se trouve donc une nouvelle fois à Nadjaf, où vit en reclus, au fond d'une ruelle étroite, la plus haute autorité du chiïsme, l'ayatollah Sistani. Âgé de 77 ans, le vieil homme ne reçoit que de rares visiteurs, jamais d'étrangers et encore moins de journalistes. Il ne s'exprime que par l'intermédiaire de rares fatwas répondant à des demandes des fidèles.

« *L'objectif de l'ayatollah Sistani est la sécurité en Irak* », dit le gouverneur de Nadjaf, Asaad Abou Gilel. « *Ses fatwas s'opposent aux violences contre les gens ou les institutions. C'est lui la clef de la stabilité en Irak.* » Sistani a été l'artisan de l'accession au pouvoir des chiites. En recommandant dès les premiers jours de l'invasion américaine de 2003 à sa communauté de ne pas s'opposer aux envahisseurs, et de les laisser renverser Saddam Hussein pour parvenir au pouvoir légalement, il a réussi à obtenir des Américains l'organisation d'élections, remportées fin 2005 par les chiites, majoritaires dans le pays. Il est aussi parvenu à arrêter les combats de 2004, quand l'armée américaine, déployée dans l'immense cimetière de Wadi al-Salaam qui entoure le mausolée d'Ali, assiégeait les insurgés de l'Armée du Mahdi retranchés à l'intérieur.

Mais, depuis, son influence s'est érodée, en même temps que les résultats de sa politique déplaçaient de plus en plus. Les masses chiites les plus pauvres n'ont

jamais vraiment compris la politique de collaboration avec l'occupant américain, et n'ont guère bénéficié des aides du nouveau pouvoir. Se nourrissant de ce ressentiment, Moqtada al-Sadr a vu croître son influence.

Muni à ses débuts de son seul charisme et de l'autorité attachée au nom de son père, grand ayatollah assassiné par Saddam Hussein sur la route de Nadjaf en 1999, Moqtada est devenu un héros populaire. Ce jeune homme rondouillard, à la piété ostentatoire et aux discours rageurs, sorte de Robin des bois au physique de Frère Tuck, a bâti une milice puissante, l'Armée du Mahdi, baptisée du surnom de l'imam caché qui, selon la tradition chiite, doit revenir à la fin des temps pour rétablir la justice. Après avoir échappé à plusieurs tentatives d'arrestation, il n'apparaît plus que rarement en public. Il aurait séjourné à Qom pendant l'année écoulée, pour y obtenir les qualifications religieuses qui lui manquent encore pour prétendre au titre d'ayatollah, et le droit d'édicter des fatwas.

« Ce gouvernement ne remplit pas son rôle. C'est un pouvoir faible, qui laisse l'Irak se désagréger »

Politiquement, Sadi est devenu un rival dangereux pour Maliki et les partis au pouvoir. Les ministres de Sadr ont démissionné du gouvernement en avril 2007, après que Maliki a refusé leur demande d'établir un calendrier de retrait des troupes américaines. Ses députés ont aussi quitté la coalition des partis religieux chiïtes au Parlement.

Dans les bureaux de Nadjaf du parti de Moqtada, décorés de guirlandes et de fleurs en plastique, et des portraits des Sadr père et fils, le docteur Luiaa Smessim, chef de la branche locale du mouvement, rejette

la responsabilité des récents affrontements sur le gouvernement. « Les déclarations de Moqtada sont très claires, explique-t-il, Nous sommes contre la guerre civile, qu'elle soit entre chiïtes et sunnites, ou les Arabes et les Kurdes. Mais des centaines de nos partisans ont

été arrêtés et nous demandons des garanties. » Il accuse à demi-mot Maliki de faire le jeu des Américains, qui pressent depuis longtemps le gouvernement irakien de désarmer la milice de Moqtada. « Ce gouvernement ne remplit pas son rôle. Nous l'avons quitté parce que la présence de l'armée d'occupation (américaine) le rend impuissant. Il n'exerce même pas son rôle au Kurdistan, qui est devenu un pays indépendant. C'est un pouvoir faible, qui laisse l'Irak se désagréger », dit Smessim.

L'opération lancée contre Moqtada a toutes les apparences de la légalité. Mais les vrais enjeux sont politiques. La bataille se livre pour le pouvoir, et le pétrole, qui n'en est jamais bien loin en Irak. « Maliki veut désarmer l'Armée du Mahdi parce qu'al-Sadr est devenu trop puissant, explique un journaliste irakien indépendant. Il est l'homme du peuple, le seul à s'opposer à l'occupation américaine. Ses partisans sont partout, et s'organisent. Il est allé reprendre ses études religieuses à Qom pour y obtenir les qualifications qui lui manquent pour devenir ayatollah. »

Les combats qui se livrent à Bassora entre les factions chiïtes depuis le retrait de l'armée britannique en dehors de la ville ont pour enjeu le contrôle du principal port du pays, par où transitent marchandises et pétrole. La nouvelle Constitution irakienne donnant une large autonomie aux provinces rend aussi dangereux un éventuel succès du parti de Moqtada aux élections provinciales, en octobre prochain. « Son parti ne s'est pas présenté au précédent scrutin, dit le journaliste irakien. S'il le fait aux provinciales, il risque de l'emporter dans tout le sud de l'Irak. Là où se trouve le pétrole, et le gros de la population chiïte. Et qui gouverne les chiïtes, gouverne l'Irak. »

ADRIEN JAULMES

AFP

TURQUIE: LEYLA ZANA CONDAMNÉE À DEUX ANS DE PRISON POUR APOLOGIE D'ÖCALAN

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 10 avr 2008 (AFP) - Une cour de Diyarbakir, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a condamné jeudi l'activiste et ex-députée kurde Leyla Zana à deux ans de prison pour avoir fait l'apologie du chef rebelle kurde emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan. La Cour a basé son jugement sur un article du code pénal qui sanctionne "la propagande en faveur d'une organisation terroriste".

Mme Zana, 47 ans, a déjà purgé dix ans de prison (1994-2004) avec trois autres anciens parlementaires kurdes pour collusion avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) que la Turquie considère être une organisation terroriste, tout comme les Etats-Unis et l'UE.

Ses avocats doivent faire appel.

Mme Zana a été condamnée pour un discours qu'elle a prononcé en mars 2007 lors d'un festival kurde à Diyarbakir, chef-lieu du sud-est anatolien peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes.

Elle avait cité Öcalan parmi les leaders kurdes, avec le président irakien Jalal Talabani et Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

"Ils ont tous une place dans les cœurs et les esprits des Kurdes", avait-elle notamment dit selon l'acte d'accusation.

Mme Zana a reçu en 1995 le prix Sakharov des droits de l'Homme.

Le conflit kurde a fait plus de 37.000 morts depuis 1984, date du début du soulèvement armé du PKK.

AFP

TURQUIE: 13 REBELLES KURDES TUÉS DANS DES HEURTS DANS L'EST

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 10 avr 2008 (AFP) - Treize rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués jeudi lors d'accrochages avec l'armée dans l'est de la Turquie, ont indiqué des sources de sécurité.

Onze rebelles ont été tués lors de combats dans une zone située entre les villes de Pülümür et de Nazimiye, dans la province de Tunceli (est), où l'armée turque effectuait depuis deux jours des opérations de ratissage, selon des sources locales de sécurité.

L'état-major de l'armée turque a confirmé l'information dans un communiqué diffusé sur son site internet et a ajouté que deux autres rebelles

avaient été abattus dans une zone rurale de la province de Diyarbakir (sud-est).

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, lutte depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde. Le conflit a déjà fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Aidée par les services de renseignement américains, la Turquie a mené depuis le 16 décembre plusieurs frappes aériennes contre des bases du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, où l'armée a effectué une incursion terrestre d'une semaine en février.

LE FIGARO

9 avril 2008

Cinq ans après, Bagdad commence à respirer

MOYEN-ORIENT

Les violences qui ont ravagé la capitale irakienne depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein connaissent une accalmie. Une atmosphère de détente est perceptible. Reportage.

De notre envoyé spécial à Bagdad

SUR LA place Firdous, au centre de Bagdad, où la statue de Saddam Hussein fut renversée devant les caméras du monde entier par un char des marines le 9 avril 2003, se dresse une nouvelle sculpture. C'est un curieux monument, à la forme imprécise, taillé dans un gypse verdâtre. Dédié à la liberté, il est censé représenter pêle-mêle l'espoir, le Tigre, l'Euphrate, les Sumériens et la civilisation islamique. Le résultat ressemble plus à une sorte de monstre cornu, symbolique du chaos dans lequel est plongé l'Irak depuis sa libération.

L'atmosphère de Bagdad est, cette année, un peu moins tendue qu'au printemps 2007. Un an après le début du « Surge », l'envoi de renforts américains décidé par George W. Bush, la sanglante guerre confessionnelle entre escadrons de la mort

chiïtes et assassins sunnites a été en grande partie enrayée. Ce « sursaut » militaire, planifié par le général David Petraeus, a consisté à envoyer cinq brigades de combat supplémentaires, soit plusieurs dizaines de milliers de soldats, dans la capitale. L'opération a réussi à faire baisser le niveau de violence dans la ville.

La circulation est toujours entravée par de nombreux points de contrôle. Les hauts murs de béton alignés contre les voitures piégées protègent toujours les postes de police et les hôtels. Mais les policiers se montrent à présent à visage ouvert dans la rue, au lieu de protéger leur anonymat avec une cagoule. Dans plusieurs quartiers du centre-ville, les magasins sont ouverts, les marchés animés. Quelques femmes osent sortir en cheveux, et une sorte de soulagement général est perceptible.

Mis à part quelques convois militaires, les Américains ont presque disparu des rues de Bagdad. Retranchés dans leurs bases opérationnelles, dans tous les districts de la ville, ils ne sortent plus qu'en cas d'urgence. La police et l'armée irakienne sont, en revanche, déployées un peu partout dans les rues principales.

Malgré ces améliorations, la vie est loin d'être redevenue normale. On évite de sortir longtemps de chez soi, de s'éloigner de sa rue, de son quartier ; on ne fait confiance qu'à ses proches, à ses parents ; et dès la fin de l'après-midi, les voitures disparaissent des rues, les commerces ferment. À la nuit tombée, Bagdad se transforme en ville morte, éclairée au loin par les torchères de la centrale électrique de Dora, ou par les projecteurs du chantier de la nouvelle ambassade américaine, ce bunker géant en construction sur les bords du Tigre.

La plupart des quartiers de la ville n'ont que quelques heures d'électricité chaque jour. Le grondement permanent des générateurs géants fait partie du fond sonore, et des enchevêtrements de câbles sont tendus n'importe comment en grosses pelotes en travers des rues.

Moqtada al-Sadr peut remettre le feu

Plus préoccupant, les chiffres des violences augmentent de nouveau à Bagdad depuis deux mois. Mais les combats n'opposent plus les Américains à l'insurrection sunnite, ni les assassins sunnites

aux tueurs chiïtes au centre de la ville. Par une singulière ironie, ce sont désormais les chiïtes, les grands bénéficiaires de la chute de Saddam Hussein, qui se déchirent entre factions rivales.

Leur affrontement se livre surtout à la périphérie de Bagdad. Hier, le siège de Sadr-City par l'armée irakienne appuyée par des unités américaines se poursuivait. Les accès à l'immense ville jumelle de Bagdad, damier interminable de rues jonchées d'ordures où s'entassaient entre deux et trois millions de chiïtes, étaient presque tous bloqués.

Retranchés au milieu d'une population civile qui leur est largement acquise, les combattants de l'Armée du Mahdi, la puissante milice de Moqtada al-Sadr, sont désignés par les Américains et le gouvernement irakien comme la principale menace pour la stabilité du pays.

Moqtada al-Sadr dirige la dernière force structurée s'opposant ouvertement à la présence des forces américaines. Il a accepté hier de reporter la grande manifestation de protestation qu'il voulait organiser cinq ans après la chute de Bagdad. Mais il a aussi menacé, via une déclaration mise en ligne sur son site Internet, de lever la consigne de « gel » des combats qu'il avait ordonné à ses troupes. Bénéficiant du soutien d'une grande partie des chiïtes, Moqtada al-Sadr a les moyens de remettre le feu à l'Irak. Pour parer à toute éventualité, le gouvernement a décrété hier soir un couvre-feu dans la capitale, pour éviter que l'anniversaire de l'éviction de Saddam Hussein soit l'occasion de nouveaux troubles.

ADRIEN JAULMES



Dans les rues de Bagdad, la police et l'armée irakienne ont remplacé les troupes américaines, qui ne sortent plus qu'en cas d'urgence. Ali Yussef/AFP

Le Monde
9 avril 2008

La suppression des référendums d'adhésion inquiète les adversaires de la Turquie

De nombreux députés de la majorité refusent la levée du verrou constitutionnel à l'adhésion de ce pays à l'Union européenne

C'est un engagement de Jacques Chirac, inscrit dans la Constitution en 2005 – avant le référendum sur le traité constitutionnel européen –, sur lequel Nicolas Sarkozy s'apprête à revenir : tout élargissement futur de l'Union européenne doit être soumis à référendum par le président de la République.

L'avant-projet de loi constitutionnelle sur la réforme des institu-

tions françaises, actuellement soumis au Conseil d'Etat, prévoit, dans son article 33, de laisser le choix au chef de l'Etat, pour la ratification d'un traité d'adhésion, entre la voie référendaire et le vote par le Parlement (*Le Monde* du 8 avril).

« Ce serait un contre-message. Il faut maintenir l'obligation de référendum », s'insurge Richard Mallié, député (UMP) des Bouches-du-Rhône et président du comité parlementaire de vigilance sur l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Europe. *Revenir sur le choix de 2005, c'est revenir sur les précautions que nous avions prises vis-à-vis de la Turquie. C'est comme cela, en tout cas, que ce sera interprété par nos concitoyens.* » Le comité de vigilance devrait pren-

dre position très prochainement et s'adresser au président de la République.

Les parlementaires de la majorité ont été pris par surprise par cette proposition. C'est le secrétaire d'Etat aux affaires européennes, Jean-Pierre Jouyet qui, le premier, en avait émis l'idée lors de son audition, le 11 septembre 2007, par le comité Balladur sur la réforme des institutions. Celui-ci en avait ensuite fait sa recommandation n° 50. Mais le chef de l'Etat n'avait, jusqu'à présent, jamais fait part de son intention de la retenir.

Alors que les sénateurs UMP se sont réunis début avril sur la réforme des institutions, ce point n'a même pas été évoqué. « Il faut considérer que cela participe de la

revalorisation du Parlement. Et puis cela donne de la souplesse par rapport aux pays candidats, justifie le président du groupe, Henri de Raincourt. *Etant entendu que les remarques formulées en 2005, à savoir que l'Europe a atteint sa taille critique, sont toujours d'actualité. Mais il y a suffisamment de verrous pour empêcher que l'Union européenne ne s'ouvre à tous les vents.* »

Comprendre « à la Turquie », qui reste un épouvantail pour une grande partie de la majorité. « Pour moi, c'est inacceptable. Je trouve particulièrement choquant qu'on modifie tous les trois ans la Constitution au gré des circonstances. A l'époque, cette disposition a été introduite pour faire accepter le traité européen », fulmine Jean-Christophe Lagarde, député (Nouveau Centre) de Seine-Saint-Denis. « La Constitution n'a pas à graver dans le marbre des dispositions de circonstance et la procédure référendaire doit être réservée à des questions qui concernent directement les Français », rétorque le président de l'Assemblée, Bernard Accoyer.

Pays des Balkans

« Je ne m'abriterai pas derrière le référendum pour refuser l'entrée de la Turquie », déclarait en septembre 2007 M. Sarkozy au *Monde*. Le chef de l'Etat s'est souvent prononcé contre l'adhésion de la Turquie. « Le raisonnement de Sarkozy est que personne ne peut avoir de doutes sur sa position mais qu'il n'est pas possible d'organiser un référendum pour chaque pays des Balkans qui, eux, doivent pouvoir rejoindre l'Europe », estime Pierre Lequiller, président (UMP) de la délégation de l'Assemblée nationale pour l'UE. « Je ne pense pas que cela doive soulever de fortes objections au sein de l'UMP », ajoute le député des Yvelines. A voir. ■

PATRICK ROGER

Les négociations continuent avec Ankara

BRUXELLES

BUREAU EUROPEEN

Les négociations avec la Turquie vont se poursuivre pendant la présidence française de l'Union européenne, en dépit de l'opposition de Paris à l'adhésion d'Ankara.

« Nous devons maintenir un certain rythme », indique-t-on côté français, où l'on projette l'ouverture de deux ou trois chapitres supplémentaires au second semestre, sur des questions comme la libre circulation des capitaux, l'éducation et la culture ou l'énergie.

« Les Français ont pour souci de ne pas faire de vagues supplémentaires », confirme un diplomate européen. Pour Paris, les pourparlers ne peuvent cependant porter que sur les chapitres qui laissent ouverte la possibilité d'offrir à la Turquie une coopération renforcée avec l'Union, plutôt qu'une adhé-

sion pleine et entière. « Les discussions se poursuivront sous présidence française tant que les chapitres ouverts sont compatibles avec les deux options possibles : l'adhésion ou le partenariat privilégié », a confirmé lundi à Bruxelles le secrétaire d'Etat français aux affaires européennes, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, qui se rend en Turquie la semaine du 14 avril.

Politique régionale

Paris continue ainsi de refuser l'ouverture de discussions sur cinq sujets qui présupposeraient une adhésion à l'Union : l'euro, la politique régionale, le budget, les institutions et l'agriculture.

Du côté turc, on considère comme « un développement positif » la proposition de M. Sarkozy de renoncer à l'obligation d'un référendum sur les adhésions futures,

même si l'on estime qu'il s'agit surtout d'éviter de bloquer l'entrée des pays des Balkans.

Soucieux de dynamiser les pourparlers, le président de la Commission européenne, José Manuel Barroso, est attendu en Turquie du 10 au 12 avril, à l'invitation du premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. La Turquie « va devoir convaincre l'Europe qu'il est de son intérêt de l'intégrer en son sein », a-t-il déclaré lundi à Lisbonne.

Le même jour, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) de M. Erdogan a déposé au Parlement un projet de loi pour modifier l'article 301 du code pénal qui réprime le « dénigrement de l'identité turque », un article dénoncé en Europe comme contraire à la liberté d'expression. ■

THOMAS FERENCZI
ET PHILIPPE RICARD

AGENDA

En dehors de la Turquie, le processus d'intégration européenne concerne aujourd'hui en premier lieu les pays des Balkans. **Croatie.** Les négociations d'adhésion ont été ouvertes fin 2005, en même temps que la Turquie. L'objectif est de les clore fin 2009 pour une adhésion en 2010-2011. La Croatie n'est pas concernée par l'obligation de référendum en France.

Macédoine. Elle dispose du statut de candidat.

Albanie et Monténégro. Des accords de stabilisation et d'association, première étape vers une candidature à l'adhésion, ont été signés. Cela n'a pas encore été possible avec la Bosnie-Herzégovine et la Serbie. Cette dernière s'est vu proposer une accélération du processus en échange de sa compréhension pour l'indépendance du Kosovo.



Une manifestation à Vienne (Autriche) contre la ratification du traité de Lisbonne, le 9 avril. SAMUEL KUBANI/AFP

Auditions au Sénat du commandant et de l'ambassadeur américains à Bagdad

Le Monde
10 avril 2008

Le général Petraeus défend la stratégie américaine en Irak et accuse l'Iran

NEW YORK
CORRESPONDANT

Le sénateur George Voinovich martèle que ce n'est pas d'un renfort militaire (le « *surge* » décidé en janvier 2007 par le président George Bush) dont l'Amérique a besoin en Irak, mais d'un renfort « *diplomatique* ». « *Il faut réunir les Syriens, les Égyptiens, les Saoudiens et les autres, et leur dire : vous avez vu dans quelle situation économique nous nous trouvons ? Alors vous devriez prendre vos responsabilités, parce que bientôt on ne sera plus en Irak.* »

Le sénateur de l'Ohio s'adresse à l'ambassadeur américain à Bagdad, Ryan Crocker, et au commandant en chef des forces alliées en Irak, le général David Petraeus, venus faire, mardi 8 avril, leur rapport au Sénat. De 9 heures à 19 heures, les deux représentants américains en Irak se sont soumis à un feu nourri de questions et de remarques des membres des commissions des forces armées et des affaires étrangères.

M. Voinovich est républicain, élu d'un Ohio très touché par la crise économique. Son coup d'éclat montre combien celle-ci pèse dans le débat sur la présence américaine en Irak. Son homologue démocrate, le sénateur Joseph Biden (Delaware), regardant Ryan Crocker et David Petraeus dans les yeux, a, plus tard, ainsi conclu leur audition : une guerre qui coûte « *trois milliards de dollars par semaine, on ne peut plus continuer comme ça ; c'est une question d'argent, vous comprenez ?* ».

Dans leur rapport, les deux hommes ont noté que la stratégie américaine engagée en 2007 en Irak a obtenu des « *résultats significatifs* » – réduction des « *violences ethniques sectaires* », meilleur fonctionnement des autorités irakiennes –, tout en soulignant que la situation reste « *fragile et réversible* ».

Leurs « *recommandations* » se résument en trois points :

– Al-Qaida a reculé mais n'est pas « *défait* » en Irak, a dit le général Petraeus. « *Les conséquences d'un retrait prématuré* » pourraient être désastreuses. La stratégie actuelle nécessite « *du temps* », « *Quinze mois encore ? Plus ?* », ont demandé plusieurs sénateurs. Les deux hom-

Le rôle de Téhéran, qui arme et entraîne les « groupes spéciaux » ennemis, est « destructeur »



Des soldats américains du 3^e régiment de cavalerie dans les rues de Mossoul, au nord-ouest de Bagdad, le 31 mars. MAYA ALLERUZZO/AP

mes ont refusé de le préciser. La « *lenteur des progrès est frustrante* », a admis M. Crocker ; – Une fois les forces américaines ramenées en juillet à ce qu'elles étaient avant le « *renfort* » (140 000 hommes), le

général Petraeus souhaite une « *pause* » de 45 jours avant de procéder à une « *réévaluation* ». Il a récusé tout « *calendrier* » de retrait supplémentaire. Combien de temps prendra cette évaluation : « *Un mois, trois mois ?* » Réponse : « *Ça pourrait être moins, ou plus* » ;

– Washington et Bagdad signeront avant le 31 décembre un accord de coopération qui « *fournira un cadre légal* » à la présence militaire des Etats-Unis, mais « *ne liera pas les mains* » de son futur président. Le Congrès sera « *largement informé* », a spécifié M. Crocker. « *Il vous faudra bien plus, il vous faudra son accord* », l'a tancé M. Biden.

Le général Petraeus a admis que la récente et « *décevante* » offensive militaire de Bagdad contre les milices chiites à Bassora, lors de laquelle, a-t-il reconnu, « *mille* » militaires irakiens ont déserté, avait été « *mal planifiée* ». L'ambassadeur Crocker l'a pourtant jugée politiquement positive, le gouvernement irakien, majoritairement chiite, décidant d'affronter des adversaires de la même obédience.

Bien plus qu'Al-Qaida, l'ombre de l'Iran a plané sur les débats. Le rôle de Téhéran, qui arme et entraîne les « *groupes spéciaux* » ennemis, est « *destructeur* », a jugé le général Petraeus. Sa stratégie, a ajouté l'ambassadeur Crocker, consiste à « *libaniser* » l'Irak. Pourquoi, alors, le président Ahmadinejad y a-t-il été récemment reçu « *avec tous les honneurs* » ?, ont demandé divers sénateurs. Les deux hommes ont expliqué que la relation avec Téhéran était « *complexe* », ce pays, comme la Syrie, pouvant aussi jouer un rôle « *responsable* ».

CHIFFRES

Coût humain. A la date du 13 mars, selon le magazine *Army Times*, 3 967 soldats américains étaient morts au combat en Irak (plus de 4 020 morts aujourd'hui), ainsi que 308 soldats de la coalition ; 29 395 soldats avaient été blessés et plus de 30 000 souffraient de troubles psychologiques. Quelque 8 000 policiers et militaires irakiens sont morts, et 89 360 civils irakiens.

Coût financier. Depuis le début du conflit, les dépenses mensuelles s'élèvent à 10 milliards de dollars, soit 333 millions de dollars par jour.

Opérations. En chiffres cumulés, 2 967 848 soldats américains ont été envoyés en Irak (certains cinq fois), 250 navires ont été déployés et 158 532 missions aériennes ont eu lieu.

Résumant l'opinion des démocrates comme de plusieurs républicains, le sénateur Carl Levin (Michigan) a récusé un rapport se résumant, selon lui, à la poursuite d'une guerre « *sans stratégie de sortie* » d'Irak.

Une guerre dont le premier bénéficiaire politique, ont estimé des sénateurs, est Téhéran, et qui mine la lutte contre Al-Qaida au Pakistan et en Afghanistan. ■

SYLVAIN CYPEL

LE FIGARO

11 avril 2008

À Sadr-City, les forces américano-irakiennes assiègent la milice radicale chiite

La milice de Moqtada al-Sadr est retranchée dans l'immense banlieue chiite de Bagdad. Notre reporter s'est rendu sur place.

De notre envoyé spécial à Sadr-City

LE BLOCUS de Sadr-City est presque total. Depuis plusieurs jours, l'armée irakienne et les forces américaines ont pris position devant les principales entrées de l'immense faubourg chiite, à l'est de Bagdad. De temps en temps claquent des rafales sèches d'armes automatiques. Des tirs de mortiers résonnent. Les affrontements entre les forces gouvernementales et l'Armée du Mahdi, la milice de Moqtada al-Sadr retranchée dans cette banlieue, ont déjà fait plusieurs dizaines de morts et de nombreux blessés civils et combattants. Hier, six personnes ont encore été tuées dans deux frappes aériennes américaines.

Le gouvernement de Nouri al-Maliki a promis d'en finir avec la puissante milice dont il réclame le désarmement, sous peine de bannir le parti de Sadr des prochaines élections provinciales. Les dirigeants américains, qui espéraient pouvoir réduire leur engagement après avoir déployé l'an dernier cinq brigades en renfort pour réduire les violences dans Bagdad, le pressent d'agir.

À la périphérie de Sadr-City, à travers les tas d'ordures balayés par des bourrasques de poussière, des véhicules continuent de braver le siège par des chemins détournés. Leur gymkhana au milieu des océans de poubelles tourne parfois à la panique, lorsque les rafales retentissent à proximité.

Dans Sadr-City, l'atmosphère est celle d'une ville assiégée. Les larges avenues qui parcourent à angle droit cette immense agglomération, où s'entassent dans des conditions insalubres entre deux et trois millions de chiïtes, sont presque désertes. Parfois, des passants téméraires se risquent au pas de course dans ces boulevards balayés par des tirs sporadiques. Des drones américains vrombis-



Le blocus et les bombardements rendent le quotidien de plus en plus précaire pour les civils vivant à Sadr-City. Al-Rubaye/AFP

sent avec un bruit agaçant dans le ciel chargé de sable en suspension.

Le reste de Sadr-City est un dédale de ruelles étroites, jonchées de débris et parcourues de ruisseaux nauséabonds. Les maisons à un étage sont décorées des portraits de l'imam Hussein, le martyr chiïte tué à la bataille de Karbala en l'an 680. Sur d'autres posters, le visage à la grosse barbe blanche de l'ayatollah Baqr al-Sadr, assassiné par Saddam Hussein en 1980, avant de donner son nom à cette cité-dortoir après la chute du dictateur. Mais les plus nombreux sont les portraits de son fils, Moqtada, l'air sombre sous un turban noir.

Dans une ruelle, une foule s'est rassemblée devant un incendie qui dégage de grosses volutes de fumée noire. « C'est un générateur ! Les Américains viennent de le bombarder ! », hurlent des jeunes gens, avant de reculer précipitamment quand des flammes jaillissent du brasier.

À l'entrée d'un hôpital, des miliciens de l'Armée du Mahdi, barbe noire et pantalon de treillis de camouflage, transportent à l'arrière d'un break un blessé enroulé dans une couverture. Ses jambes sanglantes et criblées d'éclats dépassent du coffre. « Nous avons souffert sous Sad-

dam, nous continuons de souffrir ! », dit Abou Haider, un membre du parti de Sadr.

Au quartier général du mouvement, tout le monde s'affaire, l'air tendu. Des jeunes gens rentrent et

sortent en permanence, ou s'arrêtent pour piocher rapidement une poignée de riz dans un plat posé à même le sol. Dans des petites pièces au seuil encombré de chaussures, des mollahs en turban et des chefs en keffieh tiennent des réunions fiévreuses. Des imprimantes crachent des tracts. Des téléphones portables sonnent sans cesse.

« C'est un désastre »

Dans la cour où gronde un générateur, des sacs de riz en provenance d'Iran sont empilés en attendant d'être chargés dans des camionnettes. « Les gens sont bloqués sans nourriture, sans eau, sans électricité. On a voté pour ce gouvernement, mais maintenant il se retourne contre nous », dit Abou Ibrahim, un cadre du mouvement de Sadr qui organise l'aide alimentaire. « Les Américains attaquent les générateurs. L'eau a été coupée. Les gens les plus riches achètent au prix fort des bouteilles d'eau minérale, mais elles commencent aussi à manquer. C'est un

désastre. C'est chaque jour est plus difficile », explique-t-il.

Dans une petite pièce, Cheikh Salman Furayji dénonce la collusion entre le premier ministre Maliki et les responsables américains. « La situation aujourd'hui est pire que sous Saddam », dit le représentant de Moqtada al-Sadr pour les quartiers est de Bagdad. « L'élève est parti il y a cinq ans, mais nous avons maintenant son maître : les Américains ne sont jamais venus pour libérer l'Irak. Ils veulent occuper le cœur des Irakiens, et nous imposer leur mentalité. Maliki fait ce que lui demandent les Américains. Nous réclamons qu'ils s'en aillent, mais le gouvernement veut qu'ils restent ! », dit-il. « Maliki dit que nous sommes des hors-la-loi. Alors, il y a trois millions de hors-la-loi à Sadr-City ! »

ADRIEN JAULMES

ÉTATS-UNIS ALLOCATION DU PRÉSIDENT À LA MAISON BLANCHE

M. Bush justifie le maintien de la présence militaire américaine en Irak par la menace iranienne

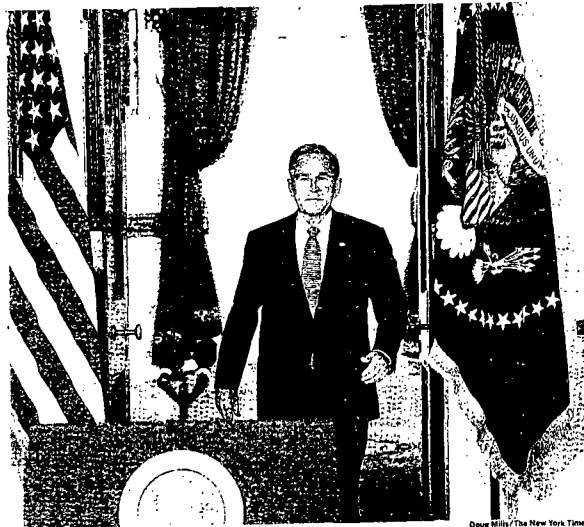
NEW YORK
CORRESPONDANT

Dans une allocution prononcée à la Maison Blanche, jeudi 10 avril, le président George Bush a validé les « recommandations » présentées, mardi et mercredi, au Sénat et à la Chambre des représentants par l'ambassadeur américain à Bagdad, Ryan Crocker, et le commandant en chef des forces alliées en Irak, le général David Petraeus.

M. Bush a annoncé une diminution des troupes (de 158 000 hommes à 140 000) d'ici à la fin juillet et la réduction du service qu'y effectuent les soldats américains de quinze mois à un an. Et il a confirmé le gel, au 1^{er} août, de tout retrait militaire supplémentaire.

Fixer un « calendrier » de retrait, a-t-il dit, mènerait les États-Unis à « perdre » la guerre, auquel cas Al-Qaïda « criera victoire » et l'Iran « remplira le vacuum ».

Reçu la veille par M. Bush, William Kristol, éditeur du magazine néoconservateur *Weekly Standard*, a raconté l'état d'esprit dans lequel il avait trouvé son interlocuteur : « Sommes-nous



assez bons pour passer de 20 à 15 brigades en Irak ? Ma réponse est oui. Peut-on aller au-delà ?

Non. Mais je ne vais pas le dire. Je vais dire que je suis d'accord avec David [le général Petraeus] », lui a expliqué le président.

Jeudi soir, la plupart des commentateurs jugeaient que celui-ci entend maintenir le niveau des troupes en Irak jusqu'à la fin de son mandat (février 2009), léguant la gestion d'un éventuel retrait à son successeur. Il a menacé d'opposer son veto à toute velléité du Congrès de réduire la rallonge financière qu'il lui a demandée pour maintenir la présence américaine en Irak.

Mais, plus que la bataille contre Al-Qaïda, le président américain a insisté sur le rôle en Irak de l'Iran – l'autre « plus grande menace pour l'Amérique dans le nouveau siècle ». Il venait de prendre connaissance d'un rapport du Mossad israélien soutenant que Téhéran aurait avancé dans son programme nucléaire militaire et amélioré la capacité de ses missiles.

Coût contre bénéfiques

Téhéran, a dit M. Bush, peut faire « le bon choix », et Washington « favorisera les relations » avec l'Iran, ou bien « armer, entraîner et financer des milices qui terrorisent le peuple irakien ». Auquel

cas, l'Amérique « agira pour défendre ses intérêts ». Une phrase qui a relancé les spéculations sur son éventuelle volonté d'attaquer l'Iran avant la fin de son mandat.

Plus généralement, l'insistance du président sur l'Iran a été perçue comme le motif premier désormais invoqué pour justifier la poursuite de l'occupation de l'Irak. Auparavant, MM. Crocker et Petraeus s'étaient montrés prudents vis-à-vis des formations chiites irakiennes soutenues par Téhéran. Concernant la plus importante, celle du chef radical Moqtada Al-Sadr, réfugié en Iran, le premier a déclaré : « Je ne le

considérerais pas comme un ennemi. » Et le second a proposé une approche « très, très sensible » à l'égard de ses partisans.

Enfin, rejetant tout argument financier visant à récuser le maintien des forces en Irak, M. Bush a rappelé que les dépenses militaires américaines restent éloignées de ce qu'elles étaient durant la guerre froide. Aura-t-il convaincu ? Elu républicain du Texas, Mac Thornberry a résumé le débat en ces termes : « C'est coût contre bénéfiques. »

Le coût de l'occupation de l'Irak – 12 milliards de dollars par mois – est-il supportable pour un pays qui s'enfonce dans la crise économique ? L'est-il politiquement ? L'armée se plaint de ne pas avoir les moyens de faire face aux autres dangers qui pourraient menacer le pays.

« S'il fallait désigner le lieu où la lutte contre Al-Qaïda est prioritaire aujourd'hui, choisiriez-vous l'Irak, ou le Pakistan et l'Afghanistan ? » a demandé, mardi, le sénateur démocrate Joseph Biden à M. Crocker. Celui-ci a admis qu'il opérerait pour l'Afghanistan. M. Biden lui a fait remarquer que Washington n'y avait dépensé en cinq ans que « l'équivalent de trois semaines de guerre en Irak ».

L'opinion américaine a de plus en plus le sentiment que, financièrement, son pays ne peut plus se battre sur tous les fronts à la fois. ■

SYLVAIN CYPEL

Téhéran annonce l'installation de 6 000 centrifugeuses

Le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a annoncé, mardi 8 avril, l'installation prochaine de 6 000 nouvelles centrifugeuses (destinées à enrichir l'uranium) à l'usine d'enrichissement de Natanz. Visitant ce site à l'occasion du deuxième anniversaire du lancement de ce processus nucléaire, le 9 avril 2006, M. Ahmadinejad a fait référence à une « nouvelle génération de centrifugeuses ». Il s'agirait du modèle IR-2, plus performant que les quelque 3 000 centrifugeuses de type P-1 en activité à Natanz. Les experts restent prudents, l'expérience montrant que Téhéran a l'habitude d'exagérer les performances de son programme nucléaire. Les États-Unis, la France et la Grande-Bretagne ont dénoncé cette annonce. Le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Bernard Kouchner, l'a jugée « dangereuse » et a estimé qu'il faudrait peut-être « renforcer » les sanctions contre l'Iran. – (AFP, AP.)

Le Monde
12 avril 2008

M. Barroso soutient les dirigeants turcs mais exige une reprise des réformes



Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan (à g.), et le président de la Commission européenne, José Manuel Barroso, à Ankara, jeudi 10 avril. UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

La visite du président de la Commission européenne à Ankara est vécue comme un soutien à l'équipe au pouvoir, alors que l'AKP fait l'objet de poursuites pour « activités antilaïques »

ISTANBUL
CORRESPONDANCE

La Turquie doit « avancer dans le processus de réformes » à mener si elle veut espérer, un jour, faire partie de l'Union européenne (UE). Dès son arrivée à Ankara, jeudi 10 avril, pour une visite de deux jours, le président de la Commission européenne, José Manuel Barroso, a insisté auprès du président de la République, Abdullah Gül, et du premier

L'ÉTAT DES NÉGOCIATIONS

Les négociations d'adhésion à l'Union européenne ont été officiellement ouvertes avec la Turquie en octobre 2005.

Six chapitres ont été ouverts : Science et recherche, entreprise et industrie, statistiques, contrôle financier, réseaux transeuropéens et santé.

Un gel partiel des négociations a été décidé en décembre 2006, car la Turquie n'acceptait pas d'ouvrir ses ports et aéroports au trafic en provenance de Chypre. En raison de ce contentieux, aucun chapitre ne peut être refermé.

Partisan d'un partenariat, le gouvernement français ne s'oppose pas à l'ouverture de nouveaux chapitres, sauf ceux qui présupposent une adhésion : l'euro, l'agriculture, le budget, les institutions et la politique régionale.

ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, sur la nécessité de mettre en œuvre les mesures indispensables à l'ouverture de négociations d'adhésion.

Cette première venue en Turquie de M. Barroso – accompagné du commissaire à l'élargissement, Olli Rehn – intervient à un moment sensible. Les dirigeants européens sont accusés par l'opposition turque de soutenir l'AKP au pouvoir, depuis que le parti de M. Erdogan est la cible d'une procédure d'interdiction, lancée le 31 mars par les juges de la Cour constitutionnelle.

« Activités antilaïques »

L'AKP et soixante et onze de ses dirigeants sont poursuivis pour « activités antilaïques », notamment pour avoir engagé la réforme du port du voile à l'université. La procédure est jugée par l'UE peu compatible avec les critères démocratiques européens. M. Rehn a réagi lors de son lancement en soulignant que « dans une démocratie normale, ces problèmes politiques doivent se régler dans les urnes, pas devant les tribunaux ». Il avait laissé planer la menace d'une suspension des négociations d'adhésion en cas de fermeture du parti. Le parti kémaliste CHP a à son tour menacé de boycotter le discours de M. Barroso devant le Parlement, jeudi, s'il y évoquait l'affaire.

Pour l'AKP, la visite tombe bien. Mis en difficulté par cette action en justice, le parti a ressorti juste à temps sa carte européenne et promis une série de mesures fortes, au cours d'une année 2008 qui sera celle « de l'Europe », selon le ministre des affaires étrangères, Ali Babacan. Le président Gül a appelé à rattraper le retard. M. Erdogan a réaffirmé, jeudi, que l'article 301 du code pénal, qui res-

treint la liberté d'expression, serait amendé par le Parlement la semaine du 14 avril, malgré l'opposition des partis « laïques ». « C'est un pas dans la bonne direction », s'est félicité le chef de la Commission européenne.

Concernant sa procédure d'adhésion, « la Turquie doit y consacrer toute son énergie et ne pas se laisser distraire de cet objectif », a déclaré M. Barroso, précisant qu'il restait « beaucoup de travail à faire ». Depuis trois ans, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) de M. Erdogan a suscité l'impatience de Bruxelles en tardant à mettre en œuvre les réformes attendues, alimentant l'hostilité de ceux qui ne veulent pas de la Turquie dans l'Union européenne, la France notamment. Mercredi 9 avril, M. Barroso avait déjà affirmé que « la Turquie [devrait] démontrer à l'Europe l'intérêt de son adhésion ».

Les négociations d'adhésion, lancées en 2005, piétinent : six chapitres sur trente-cinq ont été ouverts. Deux autres pourraient l'être d'ici à l'été. Mais un seul a été clos, celui consacré à la recherche, et huit sont gelés depuis décembre 2006 en raison du différend sur la question de Chypre. L'Union exige des avancées démocratiques : M. Barroso a mentionné, jeudi, devant les responsables turcs, le système judiciaire, l'influence du pouvoir militaire sur la scène politique, ou la liberté d'expression, « essentielle pour le fonctionnement des démocraties ». Or, au même moment, à Diyarbakir (sud-est), la responsable politique kurde Leyla Zana était condamnée une nouvelle fois à deux ans de prison pour avoir qualifié de « dirigeant kurde » Abdullah Öcalan, le leader emprisonné du PKK. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

IRAK: SUR LA ROUTE DE LA MORT

Par Karen LAJON, envoyée spéciale à Bagdad (Irak)

Kirkouk-Bagdad. Plus de 200 km en plein désert irakien. Check points innombrables, soldats américains prêts à dégainer, milices d'Al-Qaïda... Ce voyage au bout de l'angoisse, le docteur Ala, le fait régulièrement. Notre reporter l'a accompagné. Récit.

Il n'aime pas ce voyage. Bagdad, Kirkouk et vice versa. Non, décidément, il déteste cette route de 225 km qui va du nord de l'Irak, le Kurdistan jusqu'à la capitale irakienne. Trop de voitures, trop de temps perdu, trop de souvenirs, de peur, trop de démons qui le poussent à fumer jusqu'à l'asphyxie. Cette route l'encombre,

D'ordinaire, le trajet de Kirkouk à Bagdad dure entre quatre et cinq heures. Mais on peut mettre jusqu'à neuf heures pour achever ce voyage ou passer six à sept heures à un check point, sans trop savoir pourquoi. Entre ces deux villes, il y a un bon nombre de fortins et de casemates et au total une dizaine de check points, tenus

Saddam, un soldat en alerte. Tout au long du trajet, on verra des carcasses calcinées. Difficile de savoir à quoi elles correspondent. Ce camion-citerne, en revanche qui gît sur le bas-côté gauche, a une histoire. Le chauffeur reconnaît le véhicule d'un collègue. "Il s'appelait Hassan Hadi. Il était de Bassora et avait trois enfants. Le camion est là depuis quelques semaines." De quoi est-il mort? "Dieu seul le sait, souffle le chauffeur. Ici on roule et on meurt." Pendant ce temps, le paysage défile, plat, rocailleux et aride comme les âmes. Le docteur marmonne, les environs ne lui plaisent pas. "S'il y a la moindre attaque, nous sommes trop à découvert, pas moyen de se cacher." Et il fume.

Un convoi roule devant nous. Il y a un panneau suspendu à un grand bâton et sur lequel on peut lire "Danger stay back" (danger, ne pas s'approcher). Le convoi transporte des "T Wall", des murs de protection. Il y en a partout à Bagdad. Le pire, ce sont les convois américains. Ils roulent à deux à l'heure, on ne peut ni les approcher, ni les dépasser. Ils sont la terreur des Irakiens. "Soit ils vous tirent dessus, explique le docteur, soit ils sont attaqués. Mais ils sont toujours synonymes de mort." Nous en sommes au cinquième check point et nous roulons depuis une heure.

Nous approchons Odham, un village réputé pour sa dangerosité. Le docteur Ala quadrille du regard les alentours. Sur la droite, un groupe de maisons, en torchis. En face, de l'autre côté de la route, un seul habitat. Les réflexes de l'ancien baasiste reviennent à vitesse grand V. "C'est une sorte de check point qui avertit le village en face, explique le docteur Ala. Avant, on savait toujours où les terroristes (kurdes) allaient se cacher. Aujourd'hui, la tactique et les cachettes sont les mêmes. Seuls les terroristes changent de casquettes!" Pas dupe, le docteur poursuit. "Les sunnites volent, les chiïtes aussi et en prime ils vous tuent. Al-Qaïda, eux, ils font ce qu'ils veulent, mais ils vous tuent toujours."

Le danger appelle les souvenirs. Août 1990, Saddam Hussein envahit le Koweït. "L'armée n'était pas d'accord mais on pliait devant Saddam, s'excuse-t-il. J'ai un rêve: revenir en 2003, battre les Américains et marcher de nouveau la tête haute. Le peuple irakien est dans sa grande moitié stupide et ignorant mais il se réveillera bientôt." Justifie-t-il ainsi sa lâcheté, sa fuite et son courage à emprunter cette route malgré tout?

La terre se montre plus généreuse. Il y a quelques cultures. Des tomates pour la plupart mais à usage personnel. Sa femme vient de lui envoyer un SMS: "Sois prudent". Nous venons d'atteindre Heb Heb, totalement contrôlé par Al-Qaïda. Sa femme a-t-elle senti le danger? A quelques kilomètres, il y a un très gros check point tenu par les forces irakiennes. L'année dernière, des hommes d'Al-Qaïda sont arrivés sur le coup des cinq heures du matin, armés de silencieux. Ils ont tué tous

les gardes à bout portant puis sont entrés dans la casemate et ont décapité tous ceux qui s'y trouvaient. Lui aussi a été arrêté une fois par Al-Qaïda. "Une erreur, j'étais parti de Bagdad à cinq heures du soir, la pire des heures." Il n'a dû la vie sauve qu'à un concours de circonstances qu'il n'a toujours pas compris aujourd'hui.

Un rêve, de fuite et d'amour. Une belle étrangère qui viendrait le sauver

Khales. Très dangereux. Les maisons en bord de route portent toutes des traces de combats violents. Le docteur peut dire quelle part est chiïte, quelle autre est sunnite. A l'entrée du village, une curiosité qui entraîne un sourire sur le visage de ce vieux fauve fatigué: un monument en pierre avec le portrait de Saddam, en Bédouin, keffieh blanc. "Il est criblé de balles mais il n'a pas été démolit, allez savoir." "Les sunnites et les chiïtes ici, ils ne se tuent pas entre eux, souligne le docteur Ala, ils ne visent que les Américains." Ce n'est pas comme à Hussaineyna. Là, nous sommes en territoire chiïte. Le ciel est bas, l'atmosphère lugubre et macabre. Des drapeaux noirs et verts ont été plantés de chaque côté de la route, à espace régulier. Trois voitures ordinaires surgissent. Ce sont les hommes de l'armée du Mahdi, la branche militaire de la milice de Moqtada Al-Sadr, le mollah qui défie l'Amérique. Le docteur se crispe. Le téléphone sonne, c'est sa femme, encore. Comme si elle savait à quel moment précisément, son mari traverse des zones dangereuses.

Il reste une trentaine de kilomètres avant Bagdad. Et la voilà, à gauche, son ancienne base militaire de Khaled. Il la regarde s'éloigner, visiblement ému. Et c'est comme un déclic. Il se souvient de ses frères d'armes, des chiïtes, qu'il a aidés et dont il n'a plus de nouvelles. De cet autre ami, qu'il a caché plusieurs jours dans sa clinique et qui, lui, a refait sa vie, à l'étranger. Le docteur sort son Palm: "Vous voulez voir des photos, ceux de mes deux filles, ma clinique, ma maison à Bagdad, mon cabinet médical?" Elles défilent ces images d'un homme en perdition, Lumière, 5 ans, et Paradis, 7 ans, ses deux amours, son repas qu'il prépare seul à Bagdad, sa vie, celle d'un homme brisé. Et de cet autre rêve, de fuite et d'amour. Une belle étrangère qui viendrait le sauver. "J'ai le droit, je suis musulman, je peux prendre une autre femme", souffle-t-il. Cette étrangère inaccessible et à laquelle cet homme de sciences s'accroche de manière quasi pathologique, on sent qu'elle le fait tenir debout dans ce chaos et cette tragédie irakienne. Elle est ce qui le relie à la réalité et ce qui l'en éloigne. Elle est tour à tour sa folie et sa survie.

Le voyage s'achève. Encore une fois. Sain et sauf. Une prière discrète pour remercier Allah. Et voilà le docteur sur le bord du trottoir, en attente d'un taxi qui l'emmènera à l'abri, chez lui, enterré entre quatre murs, dans une solitude vacharde. Vivant, vraiment?



la torture, le grandit et le diminue. Il n'en tire aucune gloire, ne mesure pas quelle dimension elle lui donne à chaque trajet. Au contraire, pour lui, elle n'est que le reflet de son existence misérable, le miroir d'un destin qui a pris un sale tournant, il y a cinq ans, le symbole d'un itinéraire sur lequel il n'a, depuis longtemps, plus aucune prise.

Il y a deux ans, la femme du docteur Ala-Fahiem-Al-Ubaiday, terrifiée par les combats et la violence qui règnent à Bagdad, exige d'aller, avec leurs trois enfants, se réfugier chez sa mère, au Kurdistan. Le docteur sunnite finit par céder. Ainsi commence son calvaire. Et depuis deux ans, ce héros ordinaire partage son temps entre son cabinet médical à Bagdad et Kirkouk. Un axe routier vital et mortel que les Occidentaux ont cessé d'emprunter depuis longtemps et que les Irakiens utilisent par obligation économique, militaire ou familiale.

A notre première rencontre, il arrive, fier dans son costume bleu nuit et rasé de près. Il a revêtu ses habits de séducteur. Il a rasé sa moustache deux mois après la chute de Saddam, sur les conseils d'une dame, dit-il. D'ordinaire, le docteur, 38 ans, voyage seul, au volant de sa voiture. Le jour où nous partons, il fait une exception et prend un chauffeur et un garde. Le départ est prévu à 7 heures du matin. Lorsqu'il arrive, il a laissé tomber le costume des grands jours et enfilé une chemise, bleue, encore, qui fait ressortir ses yeux de la même couleur. Ce voyageur du hasard emporte deux sacs en plastique dans lesquels on devine des affaires pas trop propres et un départ rapide et contraint. Il a aussi deux téléphones portables et un ordinateur. Et ses cigarettes, qu'il fume sans interruption.

"Ici on roule et on meurt"

d'abord par les Kurdes, puis par les forces irakiennes. Certains ne sont que des points de passage, comme celui à la sortie de Kirkouk; d'autres portent la marque de cette guerre vieille de cinq ans. Le docteur a enlevé ses deux bagues. La turquoise qu'il porte à l'annulaire droit, ce qui signifie qu'il est chiïte et l'autre à l'annulaire gauche et qui indique qu'il est sunnite. Il a également, en cas de malheur, trois cartes d'identité: chiïte, sunnite et chrétienne et trois emplois.

Nous partons le lendemain de l'anniversaire de la chute de Saddam Hussein. Ce jour-là, le 9 avril 2003, le docteur affichait son identité originelle. Il était le docteur Ala, spécialiste en chirurgie cardiovasculaire, à l'hôpital d'Al-Khadhimya, et commandant de la garde républicaine de Saddam. Et l'heure était à la fuite pour ce baasiste. Lorsqu'il quitta l'hôpital, il portait des vêtements civils et accompagnait un malade qui devait être transporté dans un autre établissement. Les Américains venaient d'entrer dans la ville, la statue de Saddam était déboulonnée. "A ce stade-là, on n'en était pas aux violences sectaires mais aux pillages. J'étais un des derniers dans le bâtiment quand on est venu me dire qu'une bande de voleurs avait investi les lieux. Je suis monté avec le malade dans l'ambulance, en me faisant passer pour quelqu'un de sa famille". Sirènes hurlantes, le véhicule sort en trombe et lâche le docteur, en plein centre-ville, dans la rue Palestine. "J'ai su tout de suite que ce n'était que le début de la fin, la fin de mon pays, la fin de l'homme irakien."

Dooze, un village kurde sans histoire. Pourtant, le docteur est à l'affût du moindre incident. Ses yeux balayaient le paysage. Il n'est plus le docteur Ala, il est redevenu le commandant de la garde républicaine de

ENTRETIEN AVEC STAFFAN DE MISTURA, CHEF DE LA MISSION DES NATIONS UNIES

L'ONU estime qu'il faut « aider Nouri Al-Maliki à passer des compromis politiques » en Irak

DIPLOMATE suédois, Staffan de Mistura dirige, depuis septembre 2007, la Mission d'assistance des Nations unies pour l'Irak (Manui), impliquée dans la réconciliation nationale, les processus électoraux et le règlement des contentieux territoriaux.

Les responsables américains viennent de dresser devant le Congrès un bilan contrasté et prudent du renforcement de leur présence militaire en Irak. Quel est le vôtre ?

L'amélioration de la sécurité est évidente, on est passé en un an de 322 attaques par jour à 80, avant les derniers affrontements [interchiïtes entre le mouvement de Moqtada Al-Sadr et les forces armées irakiennes]. Les facteurs de cette amélioration sont multiples : les renforts américains, le cessez-le-feu observé par les sadristes, l'action des sunnites de la Sahwa [l'Eveil, les supplétifs sunnites de l'armée américaine], mais aussi la lassitude des Irakiens et le constat que les affrontements fratricides n'ont apporté que la désolation.

Mais la situation reste fragile et c'est pour cela qu'il faut avancer d'un point de vue politique. Il faut aider l'Irak à trouver une solution à propos des territoires contestés [la ville de Kirkouk], faire en sorte que les élections provinciales aient lieu. Ces élections peuvent permettre aux sadristes et à la Sahwa de s'intégrer. Il faut enfin que tous les Irakiens profitent des rentrées d'argent procurées par le pétrole.

Les affrontements entre chiïtes ne font-ils pas redouter une nouvelle guerre fratricide ?

Je n'ai pas constaté à cette occasion un risque de guerre civile comparable à ce qu'on a vu entre chiïtes et sunnites après l'attentat contre le mausolée [chiïte] de Samarra en 2006. Au contraire, ce conflit est resté contrôlé, on a vu le rôle des autorités religieuses, de l'Iran...

Le premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki ne semble pas avoir gagné son pari dans l'offensive contre les sadristes. Son gouvernement est accusé d'inefficacité et de gabegie. Quelle est votre appréciation ?

Premier ministre irakien est une fonction que je ne souhaite à personne. M. Maliki a fait preuve de sa capacité de survie et de son sens de l'intérêt national. Maintenant, il faut l'aider à passer des compromis politiques. Il faut réintégrer les sunnites. Le gouvernement doit voter des lois toujours en souffrance, à commencer par la plus importante, celle sur la répartition des revenus du pétrole. La corruption est aussi un problème mais les autorités le reconnaissent, c'est un premier pas.

Les sadristes et la Sahwa sont des milices. Vous étiez en poste au Liban et vous savez qu'on peut entrer en politique tout en conservant les armes qui permettent de défier les autorités...

Il faut profiter des élections provinciales pour donner une chance

à des groupes qui revendiquent les responsabilités. S'ils l'emportent, ils devront s'occuper du ramassage des ordures, de l'approvisionnement en eau, de la gestion des écoles... C'est mieux que de les laisser pratiquer la seule chose qu'ils savent faire pour l'instant : utiliser leurs armes.

Que faut-il faire pour Kirkouk [« arabisée » par Saddam Hussein et revendiquée par les Kurdes] et ses champs pétroliers ? Le référendum prévu en 2007 n'a pas pu être organisé.

Le report du référendum a été une excellente chose. Un référendum à chaud présentait un vrai risque de guerre civile. Il faut donner du temps au temps, permettre à l'ONU de faire des propositions. Un référendum est souhaitable s'il valide un projet négocié, pas s'il sanctionne un fait accompli.

La récente offensive de l'armée turque contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui trouve refuge en Irak, présente-t-elle un risque de déstabilisation régionale ?

Ce qui m'a frappé pendant cette crise, c'est la maturité dont on a fait preuve en Irak, dans les provinces kurdes, comme en Turquie. Chacun semble avoir compris l'importance de ménager l'autre. C'est fondamental parce que les Etats-Unis, l'ONU partiront un jour d'Irak alors que les voisins des Irakiens, eux, seront toujours là. ■

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR
GILLES PARIS

Combats à Bagdad, assassinat d'un dirigeant sadriste

Les combats qui opposent les armées américaine et irakienne à la milice de l'imam chiïte Moqtada Al-Sadr, l'« Armée du Mahdi », continuent dans le quartier de Sadr City à Bagdad. Depuis la reprise des affrontements le 6 avril, au moins 75 personnes ont été tuées, dont près d'un tiers par des tirs de snipers, selon une source médicale. Près de la ligne de front située dans le sud-ouest de Sadr City, de nombreux civils ont été tués par les snipers

américains, selon les témoignages d'habitants. Sadr City est également la cible quotidienne de raids aériens américains. Le mouvement sadriste a par ailleurs perdu, vendredi 11 avril, l'un de ses principaux dirigeants, Riyad Al-Nouri, assassiné dans la ville sainte chiïte de Nadjaf. Il a été tué en rentrant à son domicile après la prière. Immédiatement après ce meurtre, un couvre-feu total et illimité a été imposé à Nadjaf. - (AFP.)

In Northern Iraq, the Kurds Find Success Amid Struggle

The script for Iraq was supposed to go like this: The dictator topples; the oppressed masses celebrate; democracy takes root; and the United States, showered

WILLIAM GRIMES

with gratitude, embraces a new, pro-Western ally in the hostile Middle East.

BOOKS OF THE TIMES

That's exactly what happened, Quil Lawrence argues in "Invisible Nation," but you have to look north to see it, in the three Kurdish provinces of Iraq. "Americans now sit transfixed by their entanglement in the horrible civil war unfolding in Arab Iraq, but they scarcely notice that Iraqi Kurdistan is slowly realizing all of America's stated goals for the region," he writes.

The Kurds, protected by an American-sponsored no-fly zone during Saddam Hussein's last years in power, got a head start on the nation-building process that has convulsed the rest of Iraq. Quietly, and happy to be left alone, they have developed a semi-autonomous enclave that is pro-democracy, pro-American and even pro-Israel. It is Muslim but not theocratic. There is no insurgency, and no American soldiers have been killed there. Almost by accident, Mr. Lawrence writes, Iraqi Kurdistan has turned out to be "one of the most successful nation-building projects in American history."

How this happened is Mr. Lawrence's subject, as he sifts through events taking place in northern Iraq at a time when the attention of the world was focused on calamitous events farther south. It is a story well worth telling, although Mr. Lawrence, who has been reporting on Kurdistan for the last seven years for National Public Radio, The Los Angeles Times and The Christian Science Monitor, offers more of a chronology than a narrative.

He begins, sensibly enough, with a brief overview of Kurdish history and an answer to the irritating question inevitably put to every Kurdish spokesman: What exactly is a Kurd? Much hinges on the reply. For years the Turkish government simply denied the existence of its millions of Kurds, calling them "mountain Turks who have forgotten their language."

In fact, the Kurds are a distinct,



CHANG W. LEE/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Members of the pesh merga, a Kurdish militia, in northern Iraq near the border with Iran.

Invisible Nation

How the Kurds' Quest for Statehood Is Shaping Iraq and the Middle East

By Quil Lawrence

Illustrated. Walker & Company. 367 pages. \$25.95.

ancient ethnic group with their own non-Arabic language who inhabit parts of Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq. Like the Palestinians, they are a people without a homeland and are much less likely than the Palestinians to get one. This is the discordant note in Mr. Lawrence's otherwise upbeat account, a little-engine-that-could story in which courageous, determined Kurds, overcoming repeated betrayals by the Western powers, manage to create from the ruins of Iraq a virtual state that cannot become actual without throwing the entire Middle East into chaos.

Mr. Lawrence spends most of his time describing the rise of Kurdistan's two great, clan-based parties and their incessant jockeying for position in the post-Hussein era. The Kurdistan Democratic Party, led since 1975 by Massoud Barzani, competes with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan,



AYUB NURI

Quil Lawrence, left, with a water taxi driver on the Tigris River. Mr. Lawrence has reported on Kurdistan for the last seven years.

led by its founder, the exuberant and charismatic Jalal Talabani. Even experts can discern no difference in their programs.

The intrigues and bickering between the two parties defy comprehension, but Mr. Lawrence dutifully notes every twist and turn of events. This quickly becomes tedious. In the end the parties wind up running separate domains within Kurdistan —

right down to the region's two incompatible cellphone networks — with Mr. Barzani as head of the Kurdistan Regional Government, and Mr. Talabani serving as president of Iraq.

On the debit side, both parties operate by cronyism and tolerate levels of corruption that are standard in the Middle East but appalling to Western nations. On

the plus side, both have cracked down hard on Islamic extremists. Mr. Lawrence gives a rousing account of the Patriotic Union's campaign against Ansar al-Islam, a Kurdish Islamist group, with members of the pesh merga, the redoubtable Kurdish militia, fighting together with American special operations troops.

The Americans and the pesh merga worked together well, despite starkly different tactical styles. The Americans liked to move forward deliberately, secure their ground and then call in air strikes for the next assault.

The pesh merga, rather than moving the ball down the field 10 yards at a time, preferred to strike suddenly, seize momentum and chase the enemy at high speed, accepting heavy casualties as the price of victory. At the same time, they rarely showed up before 7 a.m. for battle and routinely broke for lunch. Still, the collaboration succeeded.

Mr. Lawrence describes "soft partition" as the Kurds' best bet. Only 2 percent of Kurds wish to remain part of Iraq, but a declaration of nationhood would bring armed intervention from adja-

cent powers. By lying low and taking advantage of continuing strife between Sunnis and Shiites, Mr. Lawrence writes, they can continue to develop separately and, with a little luck, persuade the United States to build a permanent military base in Kurdistan.

"The key was to keep American patronage, and to do that, they would need to stay a tiny bit invisible," Mr. Lawrence writes, reading the mind of the Kurdish leadership. "The Kurds could have a country in everything but name, and that way none of the

neighbors could accuse them of trying to redraw the map."

For the first time in nearly a century the Kurds hold a winning hand — from which they need to discard the trump card of nationhood. Mr. Lawrence, a sympathetic but not uncritical observer, makes it easy to root for a people whose struggle has long seemed, to quote Neville Chamberlain on Czechoslovakia, "a quarrel in a faraway country between people of whom we know nothing." For a change, the Kurds now have a chance at something.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune April 14, 2008

U.S. steps up its rhetoric against Iran

By Helene Cooper

WASHINGTON: Iran is engaging in a proxy war with the United States in Iraq, adopting tactics similar to those it has used to support fighters in Lebanon, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq says.

The remarks by Ryan Crocker reflected the sharper criticism of Iran by President George W. Bush and his top deputies over the past week, as administration officials have sought to trace many of their troubles in Iraq to Iran.

Crocker said in an interview Friday that there had been no substantive change in Iranian behavior in Iraq, despite more than a year of talks between the Bush administration and Iran over how to calm Shiite-Sunni tensions. He said that the paramilitary branch of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps was continuing to direct attacks by Shiite militias against U.S. and Iraqi targets, although he offered no direct evidence.

Asked if the United States and Iran were engaged in a proxy war in Iraq, Crocker said, "I don't think a proxy war is being waged from an American point of view." But he added, "When you look at what the Iranians are doing and how they're doing it, it could well be that."

While Bush administration officials have long denounced what they have described as Iran's meddling in Iraq, Crocker's language was unusually strong, reflecting new concern about what he described in congressional testimony last week as Iran's role in supplying militias with training and weapons, including rockets used in attacks on Baghdad's Green Zone.

The Bush administration is trying to exploit any crack it can find between the largely Shiite, pro-Iranian government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki

and Iran's Shiite government. On Friday, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said that Iran's role in supporting radical Shiite militias in recent clashes with Iraqi security forces had been an "eye-opener" for the central government in Baghdad.

"I think that there is some sense of an increased level of supply of weapons and support to these groups," Gates said. "I would say one of the salutary effects of what Prime Minister Maliki did in Basra is that I think the Iraqi government now has a clearer view of the malign impact of Iran's activities inside Iraq."

From the president down, administration officials this week have been turning up the volume on Iran. Administration officials asserted that Iranian support for Shiite militias became increasingly evident in late March during the indecisive Iraqi operation to wrest control of Basra from Shiite militias, in addition to the Green Zone rocket attacks.

U.S. officials have long accused Iran of supporting Shiite militias in attacks on U.S. forces in Iraq. The difference now is that the administration officials are trying to convince the Iraqi government that Tehran may not be the ally it thinks and is behind attacks on its forces. That is a harder sell, given that Iran has supported Iraq's government.

Bush accused Iran last week of arming and training what he called "illegal militant groups." He said that Iran had a choice, and hinted that the United States would try to sow distrust between the governments of Iran and Iraq, if Iran did not stop backing the attacks. "If Iran makes the right choice, America will encourage a peaceful relationship between Iran and Iraq," he said Thursday. "If Iran makes the wrong choice, America will act to protect our interests and our troops and our Iraqi partners."

Speaking at the Pentagon, Gates said that Iraqi officials were starting to pay heed. "They have had what I would call a growing understanding of that negative Iranian role," he said, "but I think what they encountered in Basra was a real eye-opener for them."

Admiral Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, echoed the assessment that Basra offered evidence to counter statements that Iran was decreasing its efforts in Iraq. "As far as I'm concerned, this action in Basra was very convincing that indeed they haven't," the admiral said.

In addition, General David Petraeus, the top commander in Iraq, said Friday that while Iraqi police officers and army troops had established security through most of Basra, "several significant neighborhoods are not under control of the Iraqi security forces." Combating the Shiite militias in those enclaves of Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, will be "a months-long operation," Petraeus said.

Iran remains one of the Bush administration's stickiest foreign policy issues, and Washington is battling Iran on multiple fronts, as administration officials struggle to find a carrot-and-stick approach for influencing Iranian behavior.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice said that the United States would consider new incentives or sanctions as part of its battle to get Iran to rein in its nuclear ambitions. She said that she did not anticipate a new push just yet, but that "we will always continue to consider refreshing both tracks," referring to the administration's two-track approach of sanctions if Iran continues to enrich uranium and incentives if it stops.

Thom Shanker and Eric Schmitt contributed reporting.

AP Associated Press

Status of Peshmerga remains unchanged

14 April 2008

Al-Maliki and Barzani agreed that Peshmerga forces in Kurdistan will remain organized within two Iraqi army divisions.

Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and the head of the Kurdistan regional authority agreed Saturday to retain the current

semiautonomous status of the Peshmerga - the military force responsible for security in Iraqi Kurdistan region - despite a government crackdown on militias elsewhere in Iraq.

"The guards of the province have the cover of legitimacy inside Kurdistan because they form organized forces," al-Maliki said after a meeting with Nechirvan Barzani, prime minister of the Kurdistan government in 'northern Iraq'.

The decision on the peshmerga comes after al-Maliki demanded that anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr disband his Mahdi Army or quit politics.

Iraqi forces supported by U.S. and British troops have mounted a series of attacks on the militants in Baghdad's sprawling Sadr City district and in the southern port city of Basra, both strongholds of the Mahdi Army.

Hundreds have died in a series of clashes which started with an offensive by government troops in Basra on March 25.



Al-Maliki and the political parties supporting his government - which includes the Kurds - insist on the disbanding of all militias groups.

The Washington Times

April 12, 2008

KURDS AND THE FUTURE

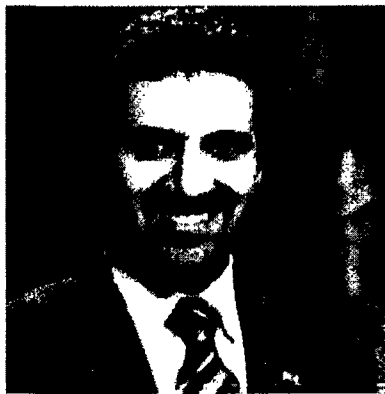
By Qubad Talabani

Since Iraq's liberation, almost five years ago, the Kurds of Iraq have constantly mediated between Iraq's various political factions, while also making difficult compromises of their own. At the same time, Kurdish soldiers have been helping their American allies to restore order in Iraq's non-Kurdish areas, such as Baghdad.

Yet while all Iraqis struggle to pass outstanding pieces of legislation, including the elusive hydrocarbons law, some American policy analysts consider the Kurds the problem. A few liberal and conservative writers, in a rare moment of misguided unity, claim that we Kurds are self-absorbed, that America owes us nothing, and that our holding out on certain policies is bad for Iraq and bad for the U.S. efforts in the region.

It appears that when things stall, it is all too convenient to blame America's friends the Kurds. Perhaps we are lectured and blamed because we actually listen to American advice. Perhaps, for all the admonitions that we Kurds are overly motivated by the past, these analysts want to play upon Kurdish fears of another catastrophic American betrayal.

Such reactions are particularly troubling in the month of March, which is bittersweet for many Iraqi Kurds. Not only does this March mark the fifth anniversary of the liberation of all Iraqis from Saddam's reign of terror but it is also the anniversary of the genocide against the Kurdish residents of Halabja, and elsewhere. As part of Saddam's Anfal campaign 20 years ago, chemical and biological weapons were used against the citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan and close to 200,000 innocent men, women and children were killed or were never seen again - until they were exhumed from mass graves after Iraq's liberation Halabja, once a vibrant center



of Kurdish culture was, in a day, turned into a symbol of our tragedy. It is our ground zero. Nobody in Kurdistan can also forget the disaster of 1991 when we rose up, with American encouragement, against Saddam only to be abandoned to the Iraqi dictator's vengeance. Tens of thousands died, as millions fled to neighboring countries before help and protection belatedly arrived.

That is why we are determined to set a different tone in Iraqi politics. That is why we seek a decentralized state that no future dictator can control. That is why we seek a transparent and equitable management and sharing of Iraq's natural resources.

Sadly, instead of being supported in our efforts we are vilified and told by some that we are inflexible. When we agree to have revenues earned from oil exploration in our region be shared with all Iraqis, we are attacked for wanting too much. When we deferred the Kirkuk referendum for six months, so as to deprive extremists of an excuse for violence, and give the UN time to provide the much needed tech-

nical assistance to ensure a transparent process, we are called maximalists. Indeed, the Washington analysts' rap sheet on the Kurds boils down to the accusation that we are bad Iraqis.

So if to be a bad Iraqi means to defend the principles of democracy and the separation of mosque and state while abiding by Iraq's democratically ratified constitution - we plead guilty. If fighting al-Qaeda in Iraq and associated Islamic radicals with your daring forces while promoting tolerance within our country and with our neighbors is bad, we stand guilty. If accepting and providing services in our region to Iraqi Christian families fleeing for their life from other parts of the country simply because they are Christian, while being proud that not one of your men or women, civilian or military, have been killed in our region, we again plead guilty.

The wars, ethnic cleansing and genocide of the past 20 years may seem like mere data points to some. To the citizens of Iraqi Kurdistan, who lived through, and in many cases barely survived, these events have created in us a burning desire to build a new future by strenuously avoiding a repeat of the past.

The "inconvenient truth" is that Iraq's Kurds have every right to pursue their national self interests and to defend their hard earned gains. Moreover, unlike some Washington-based policy analysts, we face far greater challenges than a potential shortage of paper clips.

It is a sad day in American intellectual life when some American policy analysts tell us that they want the Iraq that was, rather than Iraq that can be.

Qubad

Talabani is the representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government to the United States.

SPIEGEL April 12, 2008

NEW KURDISH TERROR GROUP?

Germany Concerned About PJAK Activities

A new Kurdish party, the PJAK, is causing Germany's intelligence agencies concern. Public prosecutors are investigating whether the group, whose leader lives in Cologne, is a terrorist organization.

By Stefan Buchen, John Goetz and Sven Röbel

No one knows exactly when Umut C., an inconspicuous building cleaner from the southern German state of Baden-Württemberg, became a fanatic Kurdish fighter. It must have some time in 2006 when the hip hop posters disappeared from his bedroom, followed by his dumb bells, and then finally himself. The last that Umut's grandmother heard from him were a few brief words over the telephone: "I have to go away now."

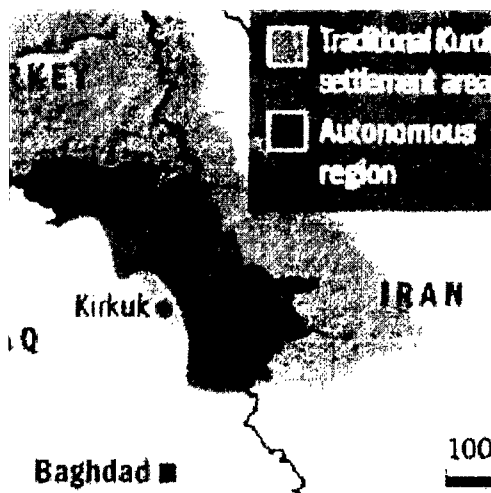
It seems very likely that the 21-year-old German-born Turk is now in the inhospitable mountains along Iraq's border with Iran. The young man from Göppingen is thought to be training as a guerrilla to fight against the Iranian army -- sent by the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK).

The group, which was only founded in 2004, has close ties with the successor organization to the banned Kurdish separatist group, the PKK, and now operates a militia in northern Iraq. PJAK troops have repeatedly launched operations inside Iranian territory and, according to the Kurdish group, more than 100 Iranian soldiers have been killed in clashes.

In Germany, the previously unknown group is now causing a considerable amount of disquiet -- amongst politicians and intelligence agencies. Last July, Tehran sent a verbal note to the German ambassador to protest about the alleged indifference on the part of the German government to the PJAK's "terrorist activities."

The Iranians are particularly annoyed by the fact that the political leader of the PJAK is a man with a German passport: Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi, who was born in Iran in 1941 and now lives in Cologne. When Ahmadi, an agricultural engineer by training, is not inspecting the troops in Kurdistan, he lives in an inconspicuous apartment in Germany whose walls are covered with images of Kurdish martyrs. It is from here that he coordinates what he calls the "freedom campaign" of the Kurdish people for "political and cultural human rights."

German security experts hold very different views of the PJAK. While the domestic



intelligence agency, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, says the PJAK's activities in Germany are barely worth mentioning, the Federal Prosecutor's Office has already launched an investigation -- although not against any specific individual. The prosecutor's office is investigating whether Ahmadi's PJAK is a "terrorist group," as defined by German law, and is taking a close look at its structure and members.

Ahmadi, however, rejects any terrorism allegations. He told SPIEGEL the clashes with the Iranian military were merely intended to aid the "self-defence of Kurds", who were "constantly being attacked" by Iran. He added that he hoped "democracy would be introduced in Iran."

Ahmadi also admitted there were "dead on both sides" and that it was "normal" for his followers to be armed with pistols and Kalashnikovs. Asked about an Iranian helicopter which is believed to have been shot down by the PJAK, Ahmadi explained: "That could also be done with a single shot." A uniformed guerrilla from Germany told the German TV show "Monitor" in detail about his Russian sniper-rifle and remote-controlled booby-trap training.

The actions of the so-called freedom fighters could have wider consequences for German politics than the mere exchange of diplomatic notes. A German security expert warned about the "nightmare scenario" of a PJAK partisan with a German passport being locked up in Iran. He says the German government would

then have to offer consular support for its imprisoned citizen -- and would end up being dragged inadvertently into the Iranian crisis.

The German government's position is already complicated enough, as militias are of strategic use -- especially now -- to the United States. On the one hand they secure America's influence in northern Iraq, while on the other hand they destabilize the arch-enemy Iran and tie down its troops in impassable border areas.

Robert Baer, a former CIA operative who worked for many years in northern Iraq and who retains strong ties to the Kurdish political scene, told SPIEGEL: "I understand that the US provides intelligence to PJAK so that they are better able to protect themselves in any conflict with the Iranians. This force protection intelligence is given to them through the Delta Forces."

The German foreign intelligence agency, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), is also interested in the PJAK: one of its agents has already visited Ahmadi.

But these kinds of associations are not much good for the party's public reputation. Instead, the party's members prefer to dream suitably propagandistic dreams about "the sun of freedom" in Persia. But when it comes to the fate of Umut C., the young Kurd from Göppingen, they are keeping quiet.

The Boston Globe

April 13, 2008

The Iraq wars

Confused by the war in Iraq? No wonder. There isn't just one, there are three.

By Juan Cole

AT LAST WEEK'S Iraq hearings on Capitol Hill, amid the talk of progress, withdrawal timetables, and casualty numbers, one crucial question was largely ignored: How much of Iraq can American troops really expect to fix?

American leaders and media tend to focus on the insurgency in Baghdad and its environs, but that's only a small part of the total picture. When the United States toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, it engendered a series of power struggles around the country.

Today Iraq is embroiled in three separate civil wars, only one of which has involved US troops in a significant way. These three conflicts have generated most of the country's violence, and are intensively reported on in the Iraqi press, which I follow closely.

The next president will inherit these ongoing Iraqi and regional conflicts - and the vexing question of how, and whether, America can address them. Amid the high-level generalizations about the Iraq war, these are the conflicts the candidates - and the country - really need to be considering.

Basra

The chief news of the past two weeks has come from Basra, where Iraq's central government mounted a major military push against the supporters of cleric Muqtada al-Sadr. The sudden campaign surprised many observers, but shouldn't have: Even before the recent fighting, Basra was divided by an armed power struggle among al-Sadr and two other fundamentalist Shia parties.

Basra, which abuts Iran, is crucial to Iraq's economy. Not only does it produce 80 percent of Iraq's oil, but most of the country's imports and exports travel through the ports of this Persian Gulf province. The region is largely Shi'ite, and its elected provincial council is divided almost evenly between the fundamentalist Islamic Virtue Party and the fundamentalist Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, led by pro-Iranian cleric Abdul Aziz al-Hakim. Both organizations have their own militias. So does al-Sadr, the nationalist cleric who lives in Najaf but has been growing in power and popularity here, especially in the slums.

The various factions have engaged in repeated turf wars, seeking rights to gasoline and kerosene smuggling, which is worth billions of dollars a year. The lawlessness is compounded by tribal mafias formed by clans displaced from the marshes by Saddam Hussein, which also compete for oil smuggling rights and protection rackets.

There are only about 500 US troops in the Basra area. Britain, the chief Western power here, has drawn down to only 4,700 troops, stationed out at the airport.

On March 24, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki came down to Basra to oversee an Iraqi military push to disarm al-Sadr's militia, the Mahdi Army. US fighter-bombers gave the division close air support and some special operations forces joined the fighting. But the Mahdi Army militiamen fought back successfully with rocket propelled grenades and intensive sniper fire, stopping the Iraqi 14th Division in its tracks. At least a thousand, and perhaps a few thousand, government officers and troops deserted their posts. Some of them, along with members of local police, defected to the Mahdi Army.

The government needs the receipts from Basra's petroleum and other exports to function, so if security here cannot be restored, the survival of the central government in Baghdad could be endangered.

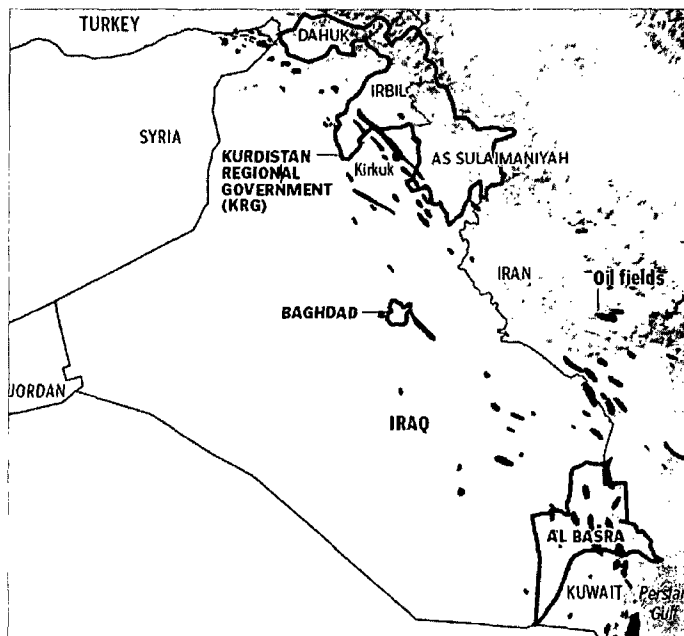
Northern Iraq

The Kurds of northern Iraq have long resisted being governed by Baghdad at all. Sunni Muslims for the most part, they speak an Indo-European language related to English, and they feel a stronger kinship with Kurdish speakers in nearby Iran, Syria, and Turkey than they do with the Iraqi government. They were ruthlessly oppressed by Saddam Hussein, and after the first Gulf War the United States established a no-fly zone to protect them. The Iraqi Kurds established their own autonomous government, the Kurdistan Regional Government.

Kurdish leaders want to annex the oil-rich Kirkuk Province, which neighbors the zone they control. An Iraqi Kurdistan that owned the Kirkuk oil fields could emerge as a regional powerhouse. This would threaten not only Iraq's government, but also its neighbors - especially Turkey, which has a restless Kurdish minority of its own.

Worried about a more powerful Kurdistan, Turkish officials have warned that they would go to war rather than let the Iraqi Kurdish government have Kirkuk. Moreover, Kirkuk is a mixed province inhabited by many Arabs and Turkmen, who are violently opposed to being annexed by the Kurds. In addition, the Kurdish zone within Iraq appears to be giving safe harbor to guerrillas of the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), which had waged an ugly campaign of terrorism in eastern Turkey in the 1980s and 1990s, and which met with an equally brutal response from the Turkish military. In the past seven months, the border with Turkey has heated up: PKK guerrillas have slipped from Iraq into Turkey to kill dozens of Turkish troops; Turkey has responded by bombing border villages in Iraq where the guerrillas hole up, and even crossing the Iraqi border to attack the PKK in Iraq.

The Kirkuk and PKK issues make northern Iraq one of the world's most dangerous powder kegs. And the US



finds itself caught between two allies, the Kurds who resisted Saddam and the Turks who represent America's closest ally in the Muslim world. There are almost no US troops in the far north of Iraq, limiting the ability to intervene.

The best-case scenario is that the Kurds back off their expansionist goals. At worst, a Kurdish conflict with other Iraqis could break out at the same time Turkey invaded, destabilizing the entire eastern Mediterranean.

Baghdad

When Americans think of the war in Iraq, they're mostly thinking about the fight for control of the capital. This is where most US troops are stationed. Baghdad also sits on the country's cultural and religious fault line: It is where the Shi'ite south meets the largely Sunni west and center.

Saddam Hussein made Baghdad his power base and an axis of Arab nationalism, capitalizing on its reputation as an ancient hub of Islamic civilization. Today, whoever controls the capital can hope to control the whole country.

After the fall of Saddam, the formerly elite Sunni Arabs who disproportionately populated his Baath Party were pushed out of government jobs and lost their positions in the officer corps. The majority Shi'ites, traditionally disadvantaged, won control of the government in elections - which is especially important here because the government now provides most of the employment in Baghdad. The current Iraqi government, and thus much of Baghdad, is run by Shi'ites for Shi'ites.

Groups of disadvantaged Sunnis are waging an armed insurgency against this government and the US troops supporting it. They are also engaged in a subterranean war with

the Mahdi Army and the Badr Corps, the two most powerful Shi'ite militias, which now dominate the capital.

In 2006, Sunni Arabs bombed an important Shia shrine, the Golden Dome in Samarra, setting off a sectarian civil war in Baghdad and surrounding provinces in which as many as 2,500 were killed each month. This massive bloodletting triggered the 2007 US surge.

The Shi'ites were winning the sectarian war even in 2006. Under the cover of the surge, in which the United States began by disarming Sunni Arab insurgents, leaving those neighborhoods defenseless, the Shi'ite militias swept in at night and ethnically cleansed the Sunnis. When the United States took Baghdad in 2003, it was about half Sunni and half Shi'ite. In January 2007, Baghdad was 65 percent Shi'ite. By summer of 2007 it was 75 percent Shi'ite. Hundreds of thousands of Sunni Arabs were displaced to Syria.

By now, Baghdad is very largely a Shi'ite city, a humiliating blow to Sunni Arab nationalism. This creates a deeply unstable situation: Sunni Iraqis are highly unlikely to accept this defeat, and they have wealthy backers and many have military experience. When the displaced Sunnis run out of money and come back from Syria - or are expelled by Syria as an insupportable financial burden - the fragile capital could see a second round of civil war, threatening any stability the country of Iraq has managed to achieve.

Juan Cole is Richard P. Mitchell Professor of History at the University of Michigan and author, most recently, of "Napoleon's Egypt: Invading the Middle East."



April 14, 2008

TURKEY AND IRAN EXPECTED TO BOOST SECURITY COOPERATION

By Gareth Jenkins The JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION

Turkey and Iran will look to boost security cooperation during the 12th meeting of the Turkey-Iran High Security Commission in Ankara on April 14-18. The agenda is expected to be dominated by discussions about cooperation against violent rebel Kurdish groups: the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which targets Turkey, and the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), which is active in Iran.

The eight-member Iranian delegation is headed by Deputy Interior Minister Ali Akbar Mohtaj (Mehr News Agency, April 13). The Turkish delegation will be led by Interior Minister Undersecretary Osman Gunes and is expected to include senior officials from the Turkish National Police, National Intelligence Organization (MIT), the Gendarmerie and the Turkish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Today's Zaman, April 12). The previous meeting of the commission was held in Tehran in February 2006.

The commission was first established in 1988 but for the first decade of its existence was essentially moribund. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, elements from Iranian intelligence were in close contact with violent Turkish Islamists, providing them with arms and training in camps outside Tehran and using them to conduct surveillance and carry out attacks inside Turkey. The primary targets for Iranian intelligence were exiled Iranian dissidents. However, the Turkish Islamists trained in Iran also assassinated foreign diplomats stationed in Turkey, sometimes at their Iranian handlers' behest, as well as and prominent Turkish secularists. Although Tehran provided little support to the PKK, it tolerated the organization's activities inside Iran and

offered a safe haven for PKK militants being pursued by the Turkish security forces.

"Many times, I watched the PKK terrorists flee across the border into Iran," the late Gen. Dogan Beyazit once told Jamestown. "Whenever we protested, they would prevaricate and then send a car to the border and tell us to go and look for ourselves. But when we accepted the car would travel at 20 kilometers an hour, and then have a puncture or break down or something. By the time we arrived anywhere the terrorists had already gone. And then the Iranians would deny that they had ever been there. It was a lie, of course."

It is now more than a decade, however, since violent Islamists with links to Iranian intelligence carried out attacks inside Turkey. Since the election of the moderate Islamist Justice and Development Party (AKP) in November 2002 and particularly since the establishment of PJAK in 2004, security cooperation has improved dramatically.

PJAK held its inaugural congress in April 2004, one month before a PKK Party Congress voted to return to violence after a five-year ceasefire. Although the two are organizationally distinct, both have their main training camps in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq and profess allegiance to the teachings of PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan, who has been imprisoned in Turkey since February 1999. There is no evidence that the PJAK and the PKK have ever staged joint operations although some militants have moved from one organization to the other and there have been indications of logistical cooperation.

Similarly, although Iran and

Turkey have not staged any joint military operations against the PJAK/PKK, there has been intelligence cooperation. In recent years, each country has also arrested militants from the organization targeting the other. Iran, in particular, has detained and extradited several PKK militants to Turkey. In March the Turkish security forces in the southeastern province of Van arrested Memichir Eminzade, an alleged PJAK regional commander, after he had crossed into Turkey from northern Iraq (CNNTurk, March 19). Both Turkey and Iran have also struck at Kurdish rebel bases in northern Iraq. In December 2007, Turkey launched the first of a series of air raids against PKK positions in northern Iraq based on intelligence provided by the United States. In February, Turkish commandos staged a cross border raid against PKK camps in the Zap valley (see Terrorism Monitor, March 7). Iranian artillery has frequently shelled PJAK positions in the Qandil mountains, most recently last month.

On April 13 an explosion killed 12 people and injured 160 more in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz. The reason for the blast, which was initially blamed on a bomb, currently remains unclear. However, on April 13 Ronahi Ahmed, a member of the PJAK's political wing, issued a warning that the organization had the ability to "carry out bombings against Iranian forces" inside Iran.

"We can't stand handcuffed when Iran is chasing us on a daily basis," she said. "Iran should be aware that we have a long arm that can strike at significant places inside Iran." (AFP, April 13)

The PKK is also expected to

step up its bombing campaign inside Turkey in the months ahead (see Terrorism Monitor, April 4).

The PJAK has long presented the United States with a dilemma. Allegations, particularly by Tehran, that the organization is backed by Washington have been publicly denied. PJAK leader Haji Ahmadi was, however, allowed to visit Washington in the summer of 2007, when he met with some low-level U.S. officials.

Nevertheless, since the United States began supplying Turkey with intelligence against the PKK, there has been a noticeable hardening in attitudes towards Washington in PJAK propaganda. On April 13 Ahmed denied that the PJAK was receiving support from the US. "We have no relations with the Americans, and Iran's claim that we have an alliance with America is not true," she said (AFP, April 13).

The precise agenda of the Turkey-Iran High Security Commission in Ankara is currently unclear. However, there is no doubt that both countries have sufficient reason to want to boost security cooperation against the PKK/PJAK. Yet Turkey will be eager to avoid jeopardizing its access to U.S. intelligence on PKK movements in northern Iraq by being seen to be cooperating too closely with Iran. For the United States, the dilemma is probably even more acute. It has no desire to encourage Turkey to cooperate more closely with Iran, least of all on an issue with possible repercussions for stability inside Iraq. Yet, while the PKK continues to pose a threat to Turkey's security, it is probably also unrealistic to expect Ankara's full cooperation in any future international isolation of the regime in Tehran.

TURKISH DAILY NEWS

April 14, 2008

Iran and Turkey to discuss PKK, PJAK

ISTANBUL - Turkish Daily News

An eight-member Iranian delegation, led by Deputy Interior Minister Abbas Mohtaj, is expected to arrive in Ankara today to attend the 12th Turkey-Iran High Security Commission meetings, the Tehran Times reported.

During the meetings, active bilateral cooperation in the fight against terrorism will be discussed and the two countries will seek to establish joint measures to deal with the

threats posed by the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan (PJAK), a PKK offshoot operating in Iran that analysts say has bases in northeastern Iraq from where they operate against Iran.

The last meeting of the commission was held in the Iranian capital Tehran in February 2006. During the 11th round of Turkey-Iran High Security Commission meetings, the two countries had signed a memorandum of understanding in which they agreed to cooperate for "the region to become a peaceful

land which is purified of all kinds of terror."

The Turkish military had launched an eight-day ground incursion against PKK bases in northern Iraq in February. The upcoming meetings constitute the first senior-level gathering in the security field between Iranian and Turkish officials following the military operation.

The PKK is considered a terrorist organization by a majority of the international community, including the European Union and the United States. Ankara's concerns are similar to Tehran's with regard to mutual

neighbor Iraq and the threat posed by members of the PKK who are carrying out attacks on Turkish soil. The group is also believed to be behind ongoing ethnic unrest in Iran's northwest.

Kurdish areas in Iran have occasionally witnessed protests against the ruling Islamic establishment. Last year, unrest rocked several Kurdish towns in northwestern Iran. Clashes with the police and arrests led to more protests.

PJAK threatens to attack Iran

Meanwhile PJAK yesterday threatened to launch bomb attacks inside Iran if Tehran fails to halt anti-Kurdish policies in the Islamic country.

PJAK warned it has the ability to "carry out

bombings against Iranian forces" inside Iran. Ronahi Ahmed, a member of PJAK's political bureau, told AFP from the group's hideout in the Kandil Mountains in northern Iraq that they were ready for a long fight with Tehran.

"We can't stand handcuffed when Iran is chasing us on a daily basis. We have the ability to confront Tehran inside Iran. We are not accepting any threat from anybody," she said. "We don't accept the religious suppression that is being carried out by the Iranians. We totally reject it."

Ahmed said the group had recently attacked Iranian forces across the border. "Last month our people were able to infiltrate the town of Mahkook in Northwest Iran. They killed dozens of Iranian soldiers. In another incident in Iran's Miryuwan town our guerril-

las killed six soldiers," she said.

The Iranian military often shells Iraqi border villages in attempts to flush out Kurdish terrorists, sending residents fleeing from their homes.

"If they [Iran] continue to follow the policy of [Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad, then the battle will be more severe and the region where we are staying will be hit by war," Ahmed said.

Ahmed's statement comes as mystery still surrounds an explosion in a mosque in Iran's southern city of Shiraz Saturday that killed 11 people and wounded at least 191. Some officials insist the blast was accidental, but others said it could have been caused by a bomb.

TODAYS ZAMAN

April 14, 2008

Başbuğ rules out any ethnic rights in political field

Today's Zaman with wires Ankara

Nobody should accept Turkey granting political rights to a certain ethnic group, a top Turkish commander said yesterday, a day after European Commission President José Manuel Barroso urged Ankara to ensure both cultural and political rights for the Kurdish people of Turkey.

Gen. İlker Başbuğ, commander of the Turkish Land Forces, yesterday wrapped up a visit to the northern part of the divided island of Cyprus by holding a press conference at the headquarters of the Turkish Cypriot Peace Forces Command (KTBK) in Lefkoşa.

The Turkish Republic is respectful of cultural differences and takes the necessary measures to maintain cultural diversity, provided that those measures are not harmful to the nation-state structure, Başbuğ stated. "Beyond that, nobody can demand or expect Turkey to make collective arrangements for a

certain ethnic group in the political arena, outside of the cultural arena, which would endanger the nation-state structure as well as the unitary state structure," Başbuğ was quoted as saying by the Anatolia news agency.

Barroso, currently on an official visit to Turkey, had touched upon the same issue while addressing the Turkish Parliament on Thursday. "The problems of the Southeast [Anatolia] need to be addressed through a comprehensive strategy. It should combine efforts for the socio-economic development of the region, and ensure cultural and political rights for Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin. I know that the government is working on a plan in this direction, and I look forward to hearing the details of it as soon as possible," Barroso told deputies in Ankara.

Başbuğ also warned that carrying measures from the cultural field to the political field



would pose the danger of "polarization and decomposition."

"This is possibly the greatest evil that can be done to Turkish society," he added, noting that it was his duty to give this warning as a commander responsible for the fight against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has waged a separatist fight against the Turkish military since 1984.

AP Associated Press

15 April 2008

BARZANI SAYS RELATIONS WITH TURKEY IMPROVING

President Barzani foresees good relations between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey.

Massoud Barzani, President of the autonomous Kurdistan region in 'northern Iraq', told in his party meeting stated that he foresees good relations between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey in the near future, reported on Sunday.

Barzani said they have developed positive relations with Turkey following a negative period, adding he thought the relations would develop more in the future.

Barzani's remarks came on Saturday in the resort town of Salahaddin in Erbil, where he gathered with members and executives from his Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP),

"Our relations with neighboring countries are good. We presume that our relations with Turkey will also be good. I will visit some European countries in a short time," Barzani was quoted as saying by Peyamner news agency, when he touched upon his leadership's relations with countries in the region.

This was the latest in a series of positive messages from Barzani concerning relations with Turkey over the last month. Also earlier this month, Barzani delivered remarks expressing his administration's commitment to Iraq's unity.

Turkey rejects direct talks with the official Iraqi Kurdistan government on the crisis over the Turkey's separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) rebels. Officially, Turkey does not recognise the re-



gional government of Kurdistan led by president Massoud Barzani. Turkey has never, and still does not, recognize the 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.

Thousands of Turkish troops, backed by tanks, attack helicopters and warplanes, crossed into Kurdistan region in northern Iraq on February 21 in an operation which Ankara said was aimed at Turkey's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas and their bases.

Kurdish forces withdrew from semi-autonomous Kurdistan region in 'northern Iraq' on February 29, only a day after US President George W. Bush urged Ankara to quickly wrap up the incursion and Defense Secretary Robert Gates personally put pressure on Turkish leaders during a visit to Ankara. 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 Ankara, U.S., the PKK continues to be on the blacklist list in EU despite court ruling which overturned a decision to place the Kurdish rebel group PKK and its political wing on the European Union's terror list.

United Press International

April 15, 2008 - UPI

Iraqi media reports say Baghdad has agreed to the Kurdish region's oil deals and stance on a draft oil law in exchange for a delayed vote on oil-rich Kirkuk.

Meetings in Baghdad between a delegation from the Kurdistan Regional Government and the central government have been taking place, and although there is no official confirmation, Azzaman, Sotal Iraq and the Voices of Iraq news agency have reported the agreement.

An agreement on funding for the Peshmerga, the Kurdish security forces, has reportedly also been reached.

The KRG and central government have squared off over the oil law for more than a year. The Kurds favor a decentralized oil sector, allowing producing provinces and regions some autonomy in signing deals with foreign companies.

The central government, however, claims the sole right to negotiate and sign deals in the oil and gas sectors. This issue, and the extent foreign firms should be allowed into Iraq's nationalized oil sector, are both blocking the oil law.

The KRG has passed its own regional oil law and signed more than 20 deals. Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani and other members of the government have called the deals illegal and have thus far blocked any companies that signed with the Kurds from entering the oil sector in the rest of Iraq.

A dispute over the oil-rich city of Kirkuk, as well as other territories outside the KRG area, plays into the talks as the Kurds push for a

vote to allow residents to decide whether to join the KRG. A referendum was called for in the constitution, to take place by the end of 2007. It's a controversial item, however, since the area's Arabs and Turkomen populations, among others, disagree on whether Kirkuk should join.

The United Nations negotiated in December a six-month moratorium in order to resolve the issue. This week's talks in Baghdad, however, may see another six-month extension in exchange for Baghdad recognizing the KRG oil deals, according to media reports.

This would be a major coup for the Kurds and a strong hit on Shahristani, who has been championing the pushback against the KRG deals while both negotiating oil deals with major oil firms and readying for Iraq's first round of oil and gas field tenders.

Rochdi Younsi, Middle East analyst for the business risk firm Eurasia Group, said if such a deal is realized it will harm the credibility of Shahristani and only delay a row over Kirkuk.

And it could be a move by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to shore up needed political support. "If a deal with Kurdish leaders is indeed in the making, Prime Minister al-Maliki cannot secure the support of all Iraqi factions for it," Younsi said. "But in the context of Iraqi politics, competing political leaders will continue their efforts to avoid the worst by seeking short-term solutions to a multitude of complex sectarian, political and economic disputes."

Deal Made On Kurd Oil, Peshmerga And Kirkuk

VOA 16 April 2008
Voice of America

Turkish Air Raid Targets Kurds in Northern Iraq

By VOA News

The Turkish military says its warplanes attacked a group of Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq as they tried to sneak across the border into Turkey.

A military statement issued Wednesday said the rebels were "rendered ineffective" by the raid on Tuesday. The military did not provide casualty figures.

A spokesman for the rebel Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK), said Turkish air-planes bombed some areas of the Zagros Mountains bordering Turkey and Iraq, but he added there were no reports of any casualties.

The Turkish military statement also said troops killed at least one militant Tuesday in clashes with PKK rebels in two areas of southeast Turkey. Various weapons and bomb-making equipment were seized from the rebels.

Turkey accuses the PKK of using strongholds in northern Iraq to launch attacks. The military has conducted several airstrikes and at least one ground incursion into Iraq against the rebels this year. The PKK has been fighting for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast for nearly 25 years. The violence has killed more than 30,000 people.

Turkey, the United States and other nations have designated the PKK a terrorist group.



Turkish aircraft attacked a group of Kurdish guerrillas in northern Iraq yesterday as they tried to sneak across the border into Turkey, the military said today. The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)

COMBIEN DE RÉFUGIÉS JUIFS ?

Courrier
INTERNATIONAL

DU 10 AU 16 AVRIL 2008

Le mythe des Schindler turcs

A Istanbul, il est de bon ton d'affirmer que la Turquie a sauvé de nombreux Juifs du nazisme. Une historienne turque balaie ce mythe.

TARAF
Istanbul

Un des mythes nationaux les plus populaires, chez nous, en Turquie, repose sur la croyance selon laquelle des diplomates turcs auraient sauvé des milliers de Juifs condamnés à une mort certaine pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale. Ce qui permet à bon nombre de Turcs de s'enorgueillir de la leçon d'humanité que leur pays aurait ainsi donnée au monde. Mais cela s'est-il vraiment passé ainsi ?

Il faut d'abord savoir que les premières manifestations de sympathie à l'égard du nazisme apparaissent en Turquie dès 1933, c'est-à-dire dès que les nazis arrivent au pouvoir en Allemagne. Mais c'est véritablement à partir de 1937 que la propagande allemande prend son essor, avec l'ouverture d'un "office allemand d'information" à Istanbul, dans le quartier de Cagaloglu. Les articles et les caricatures visant les minorités – et en particuliers les Juifs – se multiplient alors dans la presse turque. C'est aussi cette année-là que le gouvernement turc demande à ses représentations à l'étranger de ne pas octroyer de visas à des Juifs, sans que cette directive ait d'ailleurs un caractère contraignant. En août 1938, le décret n° 2/9498 stipule : "Les Juifs qui, quelle que soit aujourd'hui leur religion, sont soumis à des pressions concernant leurs droits de résidence et de voyage dans les pays dont ils sont ressortissants seront désormais interdits d'entrée et de résidence en Turquie."

Cette politique s'est illustrée concrètement le 8 août 1939, lorsque le *Parita* – un navire emmenant en Palestine un groupe de 860 réfugiés juifs venus de plusieurs régions d'Europe – fut obligé, après diverses avaries, d'accoster dans le port d'Izmir. Bien que les réfugiés aient hurlé : "Tuez-nous si vous voulez, mais ne nous renvoyez pas d'où nous venons", le *Parita* fut chassé sans ménagement du port d'Izmir par deux bateaux de la police maritime turque. Le lendemain, le quotidien turc *Ulus* titrait en une : "Ces bons à rien de Juifs ont quitté Izmir".

Il faut aussi rappeler que la signature du traité d'amitié turco-allemand, le 18 juin 1941, fut accueillie très favorablement dans le pays. Quand l'armée allemande attaqua l'Union soviétique, le quotidien officiel *Cumhuriyet* célébra l'événement quatre jours plus tard en titrant : "La nouvelle croisade !" Le rédacteur en chef du journal, Yunus Nadi, montra si franchement sa sym-

pathie pour le régime hitlérien que certains le surnommèrent "Yunus Nazi". Faik Ahmet Barutçu, député de Trabzon, rend bien compte dans ses Mémoires de l'ambiance qui régnait alors en Turquie : "La guerre germano-soviétique suscita dans le pays une véritable ambiance de fête. Tout le monde se congratulait. Les députés de l'As-

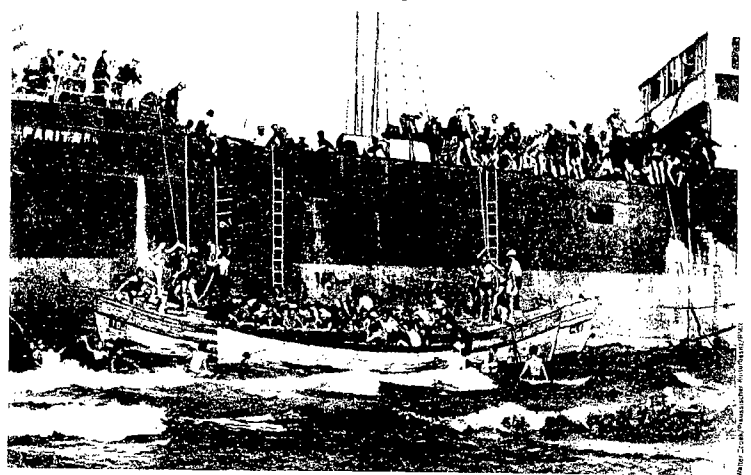


"Tuez-nous si vous voulez, mais ne nous renvoyez pas"

semblée nationale turque se félicitaient de cette situation."

Pendant toutes les années de guerre, la Turquie – qui est restée neutre jusqu'à fin février 1945 – a constitué l'un des rares territoires européens, avec l'Espagne, où les Juifs pouvaient espérer échapper au nazisme. Mais il est rapidement apparu que cette porte de sortie n'était pas la plus sûre. L'épisode du *Salvador* l'a très vite démontré. Cette embarcation, qui avait été conçue pour transporter un maximum de 40 passagers mais qui transportait 342 Juifs fuyant une Roumanie marquée par d'effroyables massacres, arriva à Istanbul le 12 décembre 1940. Il était clair que ce cercueil flottant n'était pas en mesure d'aller beaucoup plus loin.

Il n'en fut pas moins forcé par les autorités turques de poursuivre sa route. Les conséquences d'une telle décision ne se sont pas fait attendre : pas moins de



219 corps furent repêchés le lendemain au large de Silivri [à une soixantaine de kilomètres à l'ouest d'Istanbul], où le bateau avait été pris dans une violente tempête. Les morts furent enterrés au cimetière juif de Silivri. Et 63 des 123 rescapés furent expulsés vers la Bulgarie, tandis que les autres furent embarqués à bord du *Darien II* pour rejoindre la Palestine.

Après cette tragédie, la Turquie adopta, le 12 février 1941, un décret autorisant et organisant le passage de réfugiés par son territoire. Mais le texte limitait le

nombre de réfugiés en provenance de Hongrie, de Roumanie et de Bulgarie à 4 500 personnes, au rythme maximal de 60 par semaine. Il fallait en outre satisfaire à toute une série de conditions pour pouvoir prétendre au statut de réfugié : avoir au préalable obtenu un "visa d'entrée pour la Palestine datant d'avant le début du conflit", détenir un "visa de transit pour la Syrie", ou "avoir suffisamment d'argent". Il faut enfin préciser que ces "facilités" n'ont été ouvertes que pour une seule année.

Dans le droit fil de cette politique, les citoyens turcs juifs adultes furent forcés de faire leur service militaire dans des unités particulières, où "par précaution" on ne leur confiait pas d'arme et où ils devaient effectuer des travaux pénibles, selon le modèle qui fut appliqué aux Japonais des Etats-Unis internés à la même époque parce que considérés comme une "cinquième colonne". Ces mêmes Turcs juifs furent ensuite soumis, à partir de 1942, à un "impôt sur la fortune". Ceux qui refusèrent de payer cet impôt furent envoyés dans des camps de travail à Askale [nord-est de l'Anatolie].

Un nouvel incident marquant eut lieu le 12 décembre 1941 : le *Struma*, un navire usé et en fin de vie, tomba en panne dans le Bosphore, à proximité d'Istanbul. Il était parti du port roumain de Constanza, sur la mer Noire, avec 769 réfugiés juifs à son bord. Répondant à ses appels de détresse, des bateaux turcs remorquèrent trois jours plus tard le vieux navire jusqu'à Sarayburnu, au cœur d'Istanbul. Le moteur fut enlevé pour être réparé, mais, hormis des officiels turcs, personne ne fut autorisé à monter à bord. Les réfugiés du *Struma* furent confinés à bord, car les autorités turques étaient persuadées que leur véritable intention n'était pas de se rendre en Palestine mais de s'installer à Istanbul.

Simon Brod et Rifat Karako, qui comptaient parmi les personnalités les plus en vue de la communauté juive d'Istanbul, durent attendre dix jours pour être autorisés à accéder au *Struma*. Ce n'est qu'à partir de ce

moment que fut distribuée aux passagers de la nourriture chaude offerte grâce aux 10 000 dollars que le Comité juif américain avait envoyés à cet effet au grand rabbinat d'Istanbul. La situation était bloquée : le capitaine du navire souhaitait débarquer tous les passagers et repartir en Bulgarie, tandis que les autorités turques voulaient surtout se débarrasser de ces réfugiés juifs.

Après soixante-trois jours d'une terrible attente, les autorités britanniques consentirent finalement à octroyer un titre de voyage à 28 enfants âgés de 11 à 16 ans. La Turquie, quant à elle, n'infléchit pas sa position et rejeta la proposition britannique. Une semaine plus tard, le navire reçut l'ordre de lever l'ancre et de partir en direction de la mer Noire. Mis au courant de cette décision, les passagers du *Struma* pendirent des deux côtés du bateau de grands draps où étaient écrits (en grandes lettres et en français) "Immigrants juifs". Ils hissèrent également un drapeau blanc sur lequel était écrit : "Sauvez-nous". Environ 200 policiers turcs prirent alors d'assaut le *Struma* et obligèrent – à coups de pied et à coups de poing – les réfugiés à rester dans les cales. L'ancre fut levée et le *Struma* remorqué vers la mer Noire. Le navire fut abandonné à son triste sort, sans moteur, sans carburant, sans nourriture et sans eau potable.

Le 24 février 1942, à 2 heures du matin, il fut coulé par un sous-marin soviétique. Lorsque des canots de

sauvetage arrivèrent sur le lieu du naufrage, il ne restait plus des passagers que quatre corps qui flottaient. David Stoliar, un jeune homme âgé alors de 19 ans, fut le seul survivant de cette tragédie. Après avoir reçu des soins dans un hôpital militaire turc, Stoliar fut emprisonné dans une cellule de la direction de la police turque à Istanbul et interrogé pendant deux semaines. Lorsqu'il demanda ce qu'on lui reprochait, on lui répondit qu'il était "entré en Turquie sans visa". Il fut finalement remis en liberté et Simon Brod, qui l'avait accueilli, lui expliqua que c'était un miracle d'avoir survécu à ce naufrage, mais qu'en réalité le véritable miracle, c'était qu'il soit ressorti vivant des griffes des autorités officielles turques alors qu'il était l'unique témoin de ce drame...

Le gouvernement turc ne s'exprima qu'une seule fois sur la tragédie du *Struma* et ce fut pour dire que la Turquie n'avait "aucune responsabilité dans cette catastrophe" et que la seule chose qu'elle avait faite avait été d'"empêcher des individus de pénétrer illégalement sur son territoire"! La police turque fit alors savoir à la communauté juive d'Istanbul qu'elle souhaitait que "cette question ne soit plus abordée". Ce qui fut fait. C'est ainsi que se clôtura l'épisode dramatique du *Struma*.

La Turquie maintint par la suite une politique très sévère à l'égard des réfugiés. En mai 1943, 20 000 Juifs de Bulgarie qui demandaient à pouvoir transiter par la Turquie pour se rendre en Palestine se virent opposer un refus de la part du gouvernement turc, qui déclara "ne pas pouvoir faire face aux problèmes qu'une



► Le rescapé juif Simon Brod, qui a aidé les passagers du *Struma* en décembre 1941.

telle situation pourrait engendrer". Lorsqu'une demande identique émana de Juifs grecs, la Grande-Bretagne proposa la création d'un centre d'accueil pour ces réfugiés en Turquie, mais les autorités turques refusèrent.

Dans le contexte de cette politique, les diplomates turcs de l'époque n'avaient guère de latitude pour faire preuve d'héroïsme humanitaire. S'il est vrai que certains d'entre eux – et notamment Selahattin Ülkümen [consul de Turquie à Rhodes, qui en 1944 a sauvé des Juifs de la déportation et a par la suite été élevé au rang de "juste"] – ont commis des actes de bravoure, des doutes importants demeurent concernant l'héroïsme d'autres diplomates turcs, tels que Behiç Erkin et Necdet Kent [père de Muhtar Kent, le nouveau directeur mon-

Mémorial de la Shoah/SDC



▲ Après deux mois de stationnement dans le Bosphore, le Struma est remorqué vers la mer Noire où il sera coulé par un sous-marin soviétique en février 1942.

dial de Coca-Cola]. L'historienne et turcologue allemande Corrina Guttstadt a eu l'occasion d'aborder ce sujet dans un article récemment publié dans la revue d'histoire sociale *Tophumsal Tarih*.

Plaçant les Juifs apatrides et les Juifs polonais au plus bas de leur échelle de valeur, les nazis les ont envoyés en priorité dans les camps de concentration. Les Juifs citoyens de pays neutres tels que la Turquie ont par contre, en général, pu échapper aux arrestations et à la déportation. Au moins jusqu'en 1943, un document attestant de la citoyenneté turque pouvait ainsi constituer une sorte de bouée de sauvetage. Pour autant, la version selon laquelle Behiç Erkin, en poste à Paris et ensuite à Vichy, aurait sauvé 20 000 Juifs en distribuant des documents d'identité turque relève de la fable. Ces documents de routine étaient distribués par les consulats turcs, en échange du passeport, aux citoyens turcs résidant à l'étranger dans le but de

les contrôler. Les Juifs, qui avaient beaucoup de mal à les obtenir, étaient en fait obligés de se les procurer au marché noir.

Entre 1941 et 1944, la Turquie, plutôt que d'accueillir de nouveaux citoyens, a surtout procédé à des annulations de citoyenneté pour 3 500 citoyens turcs vivant à l'étranger au prétexte qu'«ils [n'avaient] pas participé à la guerre d'indépendance» [1919-1922] ou qu'«ils [n'avaient] plus pris contact avec un consulat turc depuis cinq ans». Or il apparaît que l'écrasante majorité des personnes concernées étaient juives. Le 17 juin 1942, c'est-à-dire lorsque le diplomate Behiç Erkin était en poste en France, la police française chargée des rafles de Juifs s'adressa aux responsables nazis pour savoir comment elle devait traiter les 150 Juifs turcs internés

dans le camp de Drancy, «qui [attendaient] toujours de se voir reconnaître la citoyenneté turque par le consulat de Turquie». Les autorités consulaires turques répondirent que «ces individus [n'étaient] pas des citoyens turcs», ce qui les condamna à être déportés vers les camps d'ex-

termination ! En février 1943, les autorités consulaires turques en France n'ont reconnu la citoyenneté turque qu'à 631 Juifs turcs sur une liste de 3 036 noms fournie par les autorités allemandes et n'ont octroyé in fine un visa d'entrée pour la Turquie qu'à 114 d'entre eux. Même les Allemands furent surpris par une telle attitude. Bref, Behiç Erkin n'a pas sauvé, comme on le prétend, 20 000 Juifs, mais seulement 114.

Quant au deuxième Schindler turc, Necdet Kent, qui a prétendu avoir sauvé 80 Juifs turcs sur le point d'être embarqués dans des trains par la Gestapo à la gare Saint-Charles de Marseille, son récit suscite bon nombre d'interrogations. Necdet Kent ne donne ni noms ni dates. Il prétend avoir reçu du courrier de Juifs qu'il aurait réussi à sauver, mais il n'a jamais été en mesure de citer leurs noms, au motif qu'il aurait égaré les lettres. Quant à Sidi Isçan, qui aurait également participé à ce sauvetage en tant qu'adjoint de Kent, il n'a jamais confirmé la réalité des faits. [Il est aujourd'hui décédé.]

Serge Klarsfeld a prouvé par ses travaux qu'aucune déportation de Juifs n'avait été organisée depuis la gare Saint-Charles de Marseille. Les responsables de Yad Vashem, le musée de l'Holocauste de Jérusalem, ont expliqué à l'historienne Corrina Guttstadt que cela faisait des années que le ministère des Affaires étrangères turc faisait des démarches pour que la médaille de «juste parmi les nations» soit donnée à Necdet Kent [décédé en 2002], mais que cela n'était pas possible dès lors qu'il n'y avait aucun document qui témoigne des faits d'héroïsme qui lui sont attribués.

On le voit, la politique de «neutralité active» de la Turquie fut indéniablement entachée par la sympathie affichée par Ankara à l'égard du nazisme. Contrairement à ce que l'on a souvent prétendu, la Turquie n'a pas sauvé des milliers de Juifs, mais a contribué, par sa politique très restrictive à l'égard des réfugiés, à ce que des milliers de Juifs périssent. Dans la mesure où bon nombre de pays européens ont fait preuve de la même attitude à cette époque, il n'y a sans doute pas de raison d'en éprouver plus de honte qu'eux. Mais tirons les leçons de l'Histoire. Et, surtout, n'inventons pas de faux héros et de fausses histoires pour nier notre responsabilité dans les souffrances des victimes.

Ayse Hür*

* Historienne spécialisée dans l'étude des politiques turques à l'égard des minorités au XX^e siècle.



13 avril 2008

Iran : UN ATTENTAT CONTRE UNE MOSQUEE FAIT 9 MORTS ET 105 BLESSES

Neuf personnes ont été tuées et 105 autres blessées, samedi soir, dans l'explosion d'une bombe contre une mosquée de Chiraz, dans le sud du pays. Le bilan pourrait encore s'alourdir. Ce genre d'attentat est devenu rare en Iran.

Avec notre correspondant à Téhéran, Siavosh Ghazi

Selon les médias officiels, l'attentat a eu lieu alors qu'un religieux prononçait un discours sur les wahhabites, musulmans sunnites extrémistes majoritaires en Arabie Saoudite, et les bahais, une minorité religieuse considérée comme des infidèles en Iran.

Signe de la gravité de l'attentat, les hôpitaux de la ville ont lancé un appel à la population pour donner leur sang et toute les infirmières de la ville ont été rap- pelées à leurs postes.

Chiraz est l'une des villes les plus célèbres d'Iran et l'une des destinations tou- ristiques les plus prisées, en raison de la proximité des vestiges de la Persépo- lis. Ce genre d'attentat est très rare en Iran.

Cet attentat est d'autant plus surprenant que la ville de Chiraz ne compte pas de minorité ethnique ou religieuse importante, contrairement à des provinces frontalières qui comptent des minorités sunnites ou ethniques, comme les Ara- bes au Khouzistan et les Kurdes au Kurdistan.

Le dernier attentat d'envergure remonte à février 2007 où 13 gardiens de la révolution ont été tués à Zahedan, dans le sud-est du pays, par des rebelles sunnites.



DES SÉPARATISTES KURDES D'IRAK MENACENT DE LANCER DES ATTAQUES CONTRE L'IRAN

MONTS QANDIL (Irak), 13 avr 2008 (AFP) - Un groupe sépara- tiste kurde basé dans le nord de l'Irak a menacé dimanche d'intensifier ses actions et de lancer des attaques à la bombe en Iran si Téhéran ne mettait pas un terme à sa politique antikurde, a indiqué un de ses respon- sables à l'AFP.

Ronahi Ahmed, membre de la direction du Pêjak, a mis en garde l'Iran sur sa capacité "à mener des attaques à la bombe contre les forces ira- niennes". "Nous n'acceptons aucune menace de personne. L'Iran devrait être conscient que nous avons le bras long et pouvons frapper des lieux importants en Iran", a-t-elle indiqué à l'AFP depuis la cache du groupe dans les monts Qandil.

"Nous ne pouvons pas restés menottés quand l'Iran nous pourchasse. Nous n'acceptons pas la répression religieuse menée par les Iraniens", a poursuivi Ronahi Ahmed qui affirme que le groupe autonomiste kurde a récemment mené des attaques contre des forces iraniennes.

"Le mois dernier nos hommes ont pu s'infiltrer dans la ville de Mahkuk dans le nord-ouest de l'Iran. Ils y ont tués des dizaines de soldats. Un autre incident a eu lieu en Iran à Miryuwan où nos guérilleros ont abattu six soldats", a-t-elle dit.

Des villages du Kurdistan irakien, frontaliers de l'Iran, dans le nord de l'Irak, sont les cibles régulières de tirs d'artillerie de l'armée iranienne qui tente d'éradiquer la rébellion kurde.

En février l'armée turque avait lancé dans le nord irakien une vaste offen- sive contre les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) qui mènent depuis 1984 une lutte armée contre l'Etat turc qui a fait quelque 37.000 morts.

Le groupe séparatiste du Pêjak, lié au PKK, est accusé par Téhéran de mener des opérations armées dans l'ouest de l'Iran et d'être soutenu par Washington, des allégations rejetées par Mme Ahmed.

"Nous n'avons aucune relation avec les Etats-Unis. Les Américains ne nous soutiennent pas, ne nous financent pas. Nos ressources proviennent de notre peuple", a-t-elle assuré.

Cette déclaration survient au lendemain d'une mystérieuse explosion dans une mosquée de la ville de Shiraz, dans le sud de l'Iran, qui a fait 11 morts et près de 200 blessés. L'explosion a été qualifiée d'attentat par certains responsables iraniens et d'accident dû à des munitions par d'au- tres.



12 PESHMERGAS TUÉS DANS UN ATTENTAT DANS LE NORD DE L'IRAK

MOSSOUL (Irak), 14 avr 2008 (AFP) - Douze membres des pesh- mergas, les forces militaires du Kurdistan irakien, ont été tués lundi dans un attentat à la voiture piégée dans le nord de l'Irak, a indiqué la police locale.

Un kamikaze a lancé sa voiture remplie d'explosifs sur un véhicule militaire qui circulait près de Rabiya, à 120 km au nord-ouest de la ville de Mossoul, à proximité de la frontière syrienne, a précisé un responsable de la police, sous couvert de l'anonymat.

L'attentat a également fait deux blessés, selon cette source.

Les peshmergas, combattants kurdes qui constituent les forces militaires du Kurdistan autonome, dans le nord-est de l'Irak, sont sous la responsabilité du gouvernement provincial.



TURQUIE: 53 MAIRES KURDES CONDAMNÉS POUR AVOIR ÉCRIT AU PM DANOIS

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 15 avr 2008 (AFP) - Une cour de Diyar- bakir (sud-est) a condamné mardi 53 maires kurdes à deux mois et demi de prison pour avoir écrit au Premier ministre danois en 2005, l'exhortant à résister aux demandes d'Ankara de fermer une chaîne de télévision kurde.

La cour a décidé de commuer la peine en amendes de 1.875 livres (900 euros) pour chaque maire, jugeant que les accusés ont fait preuve de bonne conduite lors de leur procès.

Les maires, jugés depuis septembre 2006, ont été déclarés coupable de "sou-

«...déliéré» au parti -interdit- des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) à cause de cette lettre écrite en anglais et adressée à Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

Le Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP), la principale formation pro-kurde légale de Turquie dont sont membres les maires, est menacé d'interdiction par la justice pour ses liens avec le PKK.

Parmi eux figure Osman Baydemir, le très populaire maire de Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est peuplé majoritairement de kurdes.

Trois autres maires qui ont affirmé que leur noms avaient été rajoutés sur la lettre à leur insu, ont été acquittés.

Les maires avaient, à l'ouverture du procès, rejeté les accusations du parquet, affirmant avoir agi pour défendre la liberté de la presse en exprimant leur soutien à la chaîne Roj TV, captée dans les zones kurdes de Turquie grâce aux antennes paraboliques.

Ankara avait demandé aux autorités danoises d'abroger la licence de diffusion accordée à Roj TV, basée au Danemark d'où elle émet depuis 2004, au motif que la chaîne a des liens avec le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union Européenne et les Etats-Unis.

Les autorités turques considèrent que la chaîne incite à la haine en soutenant ouvertement le PKK, en conflit avec Ankara depuis 1984.



L'AVIATION TURQUE A PILONNÉ DES POSITIONS DU PKK EN IRAK

ANKARA, 16 avr 2008 (AFP) -- L'aviation turque a pilonné de nouveau mardi des positions de rebelles kurdes de Turquie dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé mercredi l'armée turque dans un communiqué publié sur son site internet.

Un nombre indéterminé de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) qui voulaient s'infiltrer d'Irak en Turquie ont été "neutralisés", c'est-à-dire tués, lors de l'opération qui a eu lieu dans la zone de Havasin-Basyan, souligne le document.

Selon la chaîne d'information NTV l'offensive des avions turcs s'est produite pendant la nuit.

Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara, par les Etats-Unis et par l'Union européenne. Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de

37.000 morts depuis l'insurrection armée du PKK en 1984.

Selon Ankara, plus de 2.000 rebelles se sont retranchés dans la montagne irakienne et profitent de la fonte des neiges pour entrer en territoire turc afin d'y attaquer les forces de sécurité.

Depuis décembre dernier l'armée turque a déjà mené, avec l'aide des services de renseignement américains, plusieurs raids aériens dans la région ainsi qu'une opération terrestre, en février.

Par ailleurs, l'armée turque a indiqué qu'un rebelle a été abattu mardi dans des hauteurs dans une zone montagneuse de la province de Sirnak, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, proche de la frontière irakienne.

Des opérations sont en cours dans cette zone, ajoute l'armée.



TURQUIE: UN MAIRE KURDE CONDAMNÉ POUR SES REMARQUES LORS D'ÉMEUTES

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 17 avr 2008 (AFP) - Le maire de Diyarbakir, la principale ville du sud-est anatolien à la population majoritairement kurde, a été condamné jeudi par un tribunal local pour son attitude lors d'émeutes meurtrières survenues il y a deux ans dans sa ville.

Osman Baydemir a d'abord été condamné à 50 jours de prison aux termes d'un article du code pénal qui sanctionne l'"apologie du crime et du criminel" puis sa peine a été commuée en une amende de 1.500 livres turques (714 euros).

L'édile avait salué le "courage" des jeunes émeutiers kurdes alors qu'il s'efforçait de les ramener à la raison et de mettre un terme aux violences survenues après les obsèques de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) tués par l'armée.

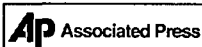
M. Baydemir avait également affirmé partager la

douleur des manifestants après la mort des rebelles.

Les autorités turques ont accusé le PKK d'avoir orchestré les émeutes, qui ont débuté à Diyarbakir en mars 2006 avant de s'étendre à d'autres villes de la région et à Istanbul, faisant au total 16 morts.

M. Baydemir est membre du Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP) la principale formation pro-kurde du pays, régulièrement suspectée de soutenir le PKK.

Ce même maire a été condamné mardi dans une autre affaire judiciaire à une peine de prison, commuée également en amende. Il a été jugé coupable, à l'instar de 52 autres maires de la région d'avoir écrit au Premier ministre danois en 2005, l'exhortant à résister aux demandes d'Ankara de fermer une chaîne de télévision kurde, Roj TV.



Au moins 50 morts dans un attentat-suicide près de Kirkouk

17 avril 2008

Un attentat-suicide au milieu d'une veillée funèbre a fait au moins 50 morts et des dizaines de blessés près de Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak, selon la police irakienne. La foule participait aux funérailles de deux sunnites appartenant au conseil tribal local de lutte contre Al-Qaïda.

Le regain de violence constaté cette semaine dans les zones sunnites où le calme était revenu depuis quelques mois fait craindre que l'insurrection sunnite ne soit en train de se réorganiser. La situation s'était améliorée avec le déploiement de renforts américains et la montée en puissance des «conseils d'éveil» rassemblant des membres des tribus sunnites et d'anciens in-

surgés.

L'attentat d'aujourd'hui a frappé la ville d'Albu Mohammed, située à environ 150km au nord de Bagdad, pendant les funérailles de deux frères tués dans un attentat la veille, selon la police. Le kamikaze est entré dans la tente funèbre et a fait sauter les explosifs dont il s'était ceint.

Le responsable du Conseil d'éveil, Sheik Omar al-Azawi, a déclaré que le kamikaze était âgé d'une grosse cinquantaine d'années. L'attentat est le plus meurtrier depuis celui du 6 mars dans le centre de Bagdad qui a tué 68 personnes. Mardi, 60 personnes ont été tuées dans des attentats-suicide dans quatre grandes villes du centre et du nord de l'Irak.

LE FIGARO

15 avril 2008

Irak : l'irrésistible ascension de Moqtada al-Sadr

PROCHE-ORIENT

Le chef de milice chiite est devenu l'un des plus puissants adversaires des Américains. Il menace de rallumer une nouvelle guerre civile, cette fois entre chiïtes.

De notre envoyé spécial à Bagdad

SON NOM a été l'un des derniers mots que Saddam Hussein ait entendu, quelques instants avant sa pendaison en décembre 2006. La corde au cou, le dictateur avait eu un mouvement de surprise en entendant l'assistance scander « Moqtada ! Moqtada ! » Si ce prénom lui était inconnu, Saddam connaissait en revanche le nom de la famille al-Sadr.

En 1980, il avait envoyé au gibet Mohammed Baqr al-Sadr, beau-père et cousin de Moqtada, fondateur du parti chiite clandestin al-Dawa, ainsi que l'une de ses tantes. En 1999, le père de Moqtada, le grand ayatollah Mohammed Sadr, avait été tué avec deux de ses frères dans leur voiture criblée de balles sur la route de Nadjaf, vraisemblablement sur ordre de Saddam.

Leur notoriété est à présent éclipsée par celle de leur héritier. Cinq ans après l'invasion de l'Irak et la chute de Saddam, Moqtada al-Sadr est devenu l'un des plus puissants adversaires des Américains. Alors que Washington est enfin parvenu à calmer l'insurrection sunnite à grands coups de dollars, à enrayer la guerre interconfessionnelle et à mettre sur pied un semblant d'État irakien, Moqtada menace à présent de

rallumer une nouvelle guerre civile, cette fois entre les chiïtes. Peu de gens auraient pourtant misé sur ce jeune clerc rondouillard à ses débuts. À part son nom, Moqtada ne possède pas grand-chose au moment de la chute de Saddam, en avril 2003.

Né autour de 1974, il n'est pas l'un de ces grands ayatollahs



Le refus obstiné de la présence étrangère en Irak a fait la force de Moqtada al-Sadr. EPA

chiïtes, qui après des années d'arides études religieuses dans les sanctuaires de Qom ou de Nadjaf, deviennent les guides spirituels de millions de fidèles.

Il n'a pas non plus alors de milice entraînée et organisée, comme les partis de l'Assemblée suprême islamique d'Irak (ASII), ou le Dawa, rentrés en Irak dans le sillage de l'armée américaine, après des années d'exil en Iran.

Mais pour ses partisans, qui hurlent son nom pendant le grand pillage de Bagdad d'avril 2003, ou au cours de l'immense pèlerinage qui les jette pieds nus vers Nadjaf dans les semaines qui suivent, Moqtada est déjà un héros.

Sa base, ce sont les millions de chiïtes misérables qui n'ont pas quitté l'Irak pendant la dictature de Saddam Hussein. Son bastion, c'est Sadr City, cette immense ville jumelle de Bagdad, presque aussi peuplée que la capitale, et

qui porte le nom de son père depuis la chute du régime de Saddam. Son armée est baptisée du surnom du douzième imam, le Mahdi, ou l'imam caché, qui doit revenir à la fin des temps pour faire régner la justice. La formation militaire de ces miliciens laisse à désirer, mais leur courage presque inconscient et leur motivation quasi mystique en tient lieu.

Chiïsme nationaliste

Moqtada n'a pas non plus beaucoup de soutien à l'étranger. Les Américains ont beau l'accuser d'être l'agent des secrètes menées de l'Iran, Téhéran est beaucoup plus engagé derrière les deux partis religieux chiïtes de l'ASII et du Dawa, aujourd'hui au gouvernement.

La force de Moqtada est surtout d'avoir su tirer parti des circonstances. Dans un pays qui bascule rapidement dans le chaos, et à la culture politique plutôt brutale, ce jeune clerc à l'air farouche apprend vite, et sait tirer parti de ses erreurs.

Portant, comme son père, le châle blanc des martyrs sur les épaules et le turban noir des sayyeds, les descendants du prophète Mahomet, Moqtada a survécu à toutes les tentatives pour lui barrer la route.

Sa force principale est d'incarner un chiïsme nationaliste, opposé à l'occupation américaine. Alors que les autres partis chiïtes coopèrent avec l'occupant, suivant les injonctions de Sistani, le grand ayatollah qui a succédé à son père, Moqtada refuse d'accepter la présence américaine en Irak.

Paul Bremer, le proconsul de Bush en Irak, fait pendant l'été 2004 une première tentative pour briser la puissance montante de Moqtada. Battue sur le terrain, l'armée du Mahdi se retranche dans le mausolée de l'imam Ali, à Nadjaf, obligeant les Américains à négocier une trêve par l'intermédiaire de Sistani.

En 2005, Moqtada semble pourtant rentrer dans le jeu politique et se rapprocher des autres partis religieux chiïtes. Son mouvement participe aux élections législatives et ses députés rejoignent l'alliance irakienne unie, aux côtés du Dawa et de l'ASII.

Mais l'armée du Mahdi ne désarme pas pour autant. Ses membres profitent de la formation des nouvelles forces de sécurité irakiennes pour s'engager massivement dans les rangs de la police et de l'armée. Ils participeront aux vagues de meurtres confessionnels pendant la guerre qui fait rage entre sunnites et chiïtes à Bagdad en 2006 et 2007.

Moqtada finit cependant par rompre avec ses alliés, toujours à propos de la présence américaine. Ses ministres quittent le gouvernement en avril 2007 quand le premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki refuse d'établir un calendrier de retrait des troupes américaines.

Sur le terrain, l'influence des sadristes ne cesse de croître parmi une population déçue par le nouveau gouvernement. Maliki, pressé d'agir par les Américains avant les élections provinciales d'octobre prochain, finit par décider le désarmement de force de l'armée du Mahdi. Trois semaines plus tard, il n'y est toujours pas parvenu. Moqtada al-Sadr vient, par défaut, d'enregistrer un nouveau succès.

ADRIEN JAULMES

Secret deal shows Iraq's military woes

By Solomon Moore

BAGHDAD: An \$833 million Iraqi arms deal secretly negotiated with Serbia has underscored Iraq's continuing problems equipping its armed forces, a process that has long been plagued by corruption and inefficiency.

The deal was struck in September without competitive bidding, and it sidestepped anti-corruption safeguards, including the approval of senior uniformed Iraqi Army officers and an Iraqi contract approval committee. Instead, it was negotiated by a delegation of 22 high-ranking Iraqi officials, without the knowledge of U.S. commanders or many senior Iraqi leaders.

The deal drew enough criticism that Iraqi officials later limited the purchase to \$236 million. And much of that equipment, U.S. commanders said, turned out to be either shoddy or inappropriate for the military's mission.

An anatomy of the purchase highlights how the Iraqi Army's administrative abilities — already hampered by sectarian rifts and corruption — are woefully underdeveloped, hindering it in procuring weapons and other essentials in a systematic way. It also shows how a U.S. procurement process set up to help foreign countries navigate the complexity of buying weapons was too slow and unwieldy for wartime needs like Iraq's, prompting the Iraqis to strike out on their own.

Such weaknesses mean that five years after the U.S.-led invasion, the 170,000-strong Iraqi military remains under-equipped, spottily supplied and largely reliant on the United States for basics like communications equipment, weapons and ammunition, raising fresh questions about the Iraqi military's ability to stand on its own.

The Iraqi defense minister, Abdul Qadir, defended the arms deal, saying he had followed proper contracting protocols and had informed Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki every step of the way.

Nonetheless, U.S. commanders and some Iraqi officials criticized the Serbian arms purchase. Closer monitoring of weapons deals has been a sensitive subject since a series of tainted arms purchases totaling \$1.3 billion in Iraqi government funds in 2004 and 2005. Lacking electronic banking systems at the time, Iraqi officials paid for second-rate or nonexistent weapons and equipment in cash, using middlemen to ferry duffel bags stuffed with bricks of \$100 bills.

That episode brought down the previous defense minister, Hazam Shalan, now a fugitive, and tarnished the reputation of the interim prime minister,

Ayad Allawi. U.S. and Iraqi officials said the loss of so much money and time caused critical delays in the development of the Iraqi Army.

The Serbian deal called for the purchase of a large number of helicopters, planes, armored personnel carriers, mortar systems, machine guns, body armor, military uniforms and other equipment. It was largely negotiated by Qadir and the planning minister, Ali Glahil Baban. In response to the criticism, Qadir said he "froze" purchases of the personnel carriers and some aircraft, reducing the final contract price to \$236 million. The deal was signed in March, U.S. military officials said.

"We just want to have a mix of procedures for contracts so we can expedite our acquisition," Qadir said. "American timelines for delivery were too far away."

Despite the criticism, some U.S. advisers said the deal was an essential part of the Iraqi military's learning curve and a test of the American military's capacity to balance guidance and restraint.

"We can be very overbearing as a nation, and part of this task is a feel for this task," said Lieutenant General James Dubik, the commander of the Multinational Security Transition Command and the head of the U.S. security advisory mission in Iraq. "How do I impose myself enough to keep things going but back off enough to let development occur? There is an art to this."

In an interview in February in his office, Qadir, a Sunni Arab native of Ramadi, confirmed that the original Serbian deal "exceeded \$800 million." "The thing is, we did not limit ourselves to any fixed number or fixed price," he said.

But critics say the deal circumvented fragile anti-corruption safeguards. Indeed, at Qadir's urging, Maliki abolished the National Contracts Committee, a mandatory review agency for all government purchases of more than \$50 million.

"It struck me as bizarre," said a Western official with knowledge of the security ministries, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he did not want to be seen as criticizing people he was advising. "You can only explain it in two ways: a desire to avoid oversight and a desire to offer opportunities for graft and corruption."

A high-ranking Iraqi government official who spoke on condition of anonymity, for fear of reprisals against him and others in his office, said, "I heard about it out of the blue, that the minister of defense took a delegation to Serbia and came back and said he had signed deals with the Serbian prime minister. Why Serbia? Why not Ukraine? Why not Russia? We just don't know."

Iran calls explosion in mosque an accident

From news reports

TEHRAN: A blast in a mosque in Iran that killed at least 10 people was an accident and not an attack, a senior Interior Ministry official said Sunday.

Iranian media had reported that a bomb had gone off in a crowded mosque in the southern city of Shiraz on Saturday evening, leaving more than 160 people wounded in addition to the 10 killed.

"Last night's explosion in Shiraz was as a consequence of an accident and not the planting of a bomb," IRNA, the official news agency, quoted Abbas Mohtaj, the deputy interior minister in charge of national security, as saying.

He did not give details, but state Press TV television said the blast may have been "caused by explosives left behind from an earlier exhibition commemorating" the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war.

Fars News Agency, a semi-official Iranian group, carried a similar report.

"The cause of the incident was probably laxness since a defense fair was held at this place some time ago," it quoted Ali Moayed, the commander of the security forces in Fars Province, as saying. "There is a possibility that the remaining ammunition at this place was the factor behind this explosion."

The blast occurred Saturday at 9 p.m. at the Shohada mosque, where the secretary to the city's Friday prayer leader preached every week about the Wahhabi faith, an austere version of Sunni Islam, and Bahatism, a religion the Iranian government condemns, Fars reported.

Bombings are rare in Iran, and the government has punished those involved in such attacks severely. Iranian Sunni militants have been involved in several blasts in the past few years. A Shiite cleric known for his stance against Wahhabism was killed in the southern city of Ahwaz last June.

Late Saturday, Fars quoted a police official as saying that a "handmade" device had been planted in the Shohada mosque.

A spokesman for the Foreign Ministry said Sunday that the investigation was continuing.

State television urged people in Shiraz, a city of more than one million people and a popular tourist destination, to donate blood for the wounded and said all nurses in the city had been called to report for work.

(Reuters, NYT)



Apr 15, 2008
Baghdad - Voices of Iraq

Kurdish PM says Kurdistan considers applying Amnesty law

Baghdad, (VOI) - Kurdish Prime Minister Negervan Barazani on Tuesday said that his government is considering the implementation of the General Amnesty Law, approved by the Iraqi Parliament last February.

This came during his meeting with Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi in Baghdad, according to the statement released by al-Hashemi's office and received by Aswat al-Iraq - Voices of Iraq - (VOI).

"The meeting dwelt on several important points, including the current political and security developments after the military operations in Basra as well as the General Amnesty Law, recently issued in Kurdistan," the

statement added.

"The Kurdish government has not rejected the law, but plans to seriously study it and will announce its position in the coming two days," it said.

In February 2008, the Iraqi Parliament enacted the General Amnesty bill that allows the release of Iraqi detainees, according to certain terms and conditions, exclusively from Iraqi detention centers. The Iraqi Presidential Council ratified the Law on March 27, 2008, and it was implemented on the same month.

SH/SR

Los Angeles Times

April 15, 2008

IRAN SAYS U.S. AIDS REBELS AT ITS BORDERS

The violence may be driving Tehran's efforts to back its own allies in Iraq.

By Borzou Daragahi Los Angeles Times Staff Writer

BAGHDAD — A series of conflicts with insurgent groups along Iran's borders may be impelling Tehran to back its own allies in Iraq in what it regards as a proxy war with the U.S., according to security experts and officials in the U.S., Iran and Iraq.

Dozens of Iranian officials, members of the security forces and insurgents belonging to Kurdish, Arab Iranian and Baluch groups have died in the fighting in recent years. It now appears to be heating up once again after an unusually cold and snowy winter.

In recent weeks, Iranians have begun the now-routine bombardment of suspected rebel Iranian Kurd positions in northern Iraq, and guerrillas have claimed incursions into northwestern Iran.

Some Iranians blamed Sunni Arab radicals for an explosion Saturday that killed 12 and injured 202 at a gathering where a preacher criticized the Wahhabi form of Islam that inspires Osama bin Laden.

None of the groups appear to pose a serious threat to Iran, but Tehran regards them as Washington's allies in an effort to pressure it to scale back its nuclear program and withhold support for militant groups fighting Israel. American and Iraqi officials in turn accuse Iran of supporting Shiite Muslim militias and other militant groups in Iraq to keep the U.S. preoccupied and the Baghdad government weak.

Analysts say the anti-Iranian groups are tempting assets for the U.S. They say it would be a surprise if the groups were not receiving U.S. funding, but that the strategy would probably not work.

"It will give more encouragement to Iran's hard-liners to step up their own efforts to assist anti-American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan," said Bruce Riedel, a former CIA analyst now at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think tank.

Among the most active groups is the Party for Free Life in Kurdistan, known by its Kurdish acronym, PEJAK. It has hundreds of well-trained fighters along with camps in northern Iraq.

Iranian soldiers guarding the border are sometimes ambushed by PEJAK fighters. Iran responds with artillery attacks that send Iraqi villagers scurrying for cover. Border skirmishes last summer and fall between Iranian security forces and PEJAK left dozens dead on both sides.

PEJAK emerged this decade as an Iranian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, an armed group formed to fight a separatist war against the Turkish government.

Former members say PEJAK was meant to circumvent Western restrictions on contacts with the PKK, which has been labeled a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department and the European Union.

"The PKK wanted to have a relationship with America, so it formed and used PEJAK," said Mamand Rozhe, a former commander who defected from the group four years ago.

U.S. military officials visited PEJAK's camps in northern Iraq just after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, said Osman Ocalan, a brother of the PKK's imprisoned leader and a founder of PEJAK.

"Since the beginning, we thought we would get the American help," said Ocalan, who left the group two years ago. "And it's a good relationship now. . . . They are in talks with each other, and there is some military assistance."

Ocalan and others say U.S. help has included food-stuffs, economic assistance, medical supplies and Russian military equipment, some of it funneled through nonprofit groups. Every two or three months, U.S. military vehicles can be seen entering PKK and PEJAK strongholds, Ocalan said.

"There's no systematic relationship, no number to call," he said. "Americans do not intend to have an official relationship. Whenever there's any kind of

question by the Turks, they can say we don't have a relationship."

A PEJAK leader, Abdul Rahman Haji-Ahmadi, was publicly given a cold shoulder when he went to Washington last summer.

PEJAK's activities may have created obstacles for those working inside Iran for peaceful change. Dozens of Kurdish activists in Iran have been thrown in jail on charges of supporting the rebel group.

"I think that on balance PEJAK does more harm than good," said Aso Saleh, an Iranian journalist and ethnic Kurd who fled his country after being charged with state security crimes that carry a possible death sentence.

"PEJAK's actions give the government the excuse to militarize the region," Saleh said. "It gives the Islamic Republic the excuse to crack down on civil opposition."

Elsewhere, Iranian authorities blamed U.S.-backed elements for a series of bomb attacks in the oil-rich southwestern province of Khuzestan that killed dozens of people from 2005 to 2007. Baluch militants have killed dozens of members of Iran's security forces, including 11 elite Revolutionary Guards in a car bomb attack last year in Zahedan, a town near the border with Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Last fall, a young Kurdish woman killed several officers and soldiers in a suicide attack along Iran's northwestern border.

Other groups can provide precious intelligence to the U.S. The decades-old Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, or KDPI, whose members have been the victims of scores of assassinations in Iraq and Europe, allegedly at the hands of Iranian intelligence operatives, has relations with Washington that stretch back decades.

"It's a very warm relationship," said Rostam Jahangiri, leader of the group's Irbil, Iraq, office. "We interact here and in Washington. . . . Sometimes it's once a month. Sometimes it's after three or four months."

The secretive Mujahedin Khalq, also regarded by the U.S. and EU as a terrorist organization, may have little support among Iranians, but its networks extend deep into Iranian territory, and it is credited with exposing Iran's nuclear program in 2002.

Other groups include Jundollah, which operates out of the southwestern Pakistani province of Baluchistan, and Arab groups in Iran's southwest.

The leftist Komala Party of Iran hasn't staged any military operations inside Iran since 1992, but several



Although a U.S. intelligence estimate in December undercut claims that Iran has a secret nuclear weapons program and appeared to lower the possibility of a direct military conflict over Iran's uranium enrichment operations, tensions over Iraq have increased. U.S. officials accuse Iran of backing Shiite militias close to cleric Muqtada Sadr that fought Iraqi government forces to a standstill in Basra and Baghdad two weeks ago.

Tempting assets

hundred or so fighters continue to train at their base camp in Zergwe in the autonomous Kurdish northern region of Iraq.

Abdullah Mohtadi, a leader of one of two Komala factions, said he met with White House and State Department officials in 2005 and 2006 to discuss Iran.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice asked Congress in early 2006 for \$75 million to promote democracy in Iran, of which \$66 million was approved -- most of it for Persian-language broadcasting. But about \$20 million was set aside for unidentified groups the State Department described as "nongovernmental organizations, businesses and universities," for Internet development and "cultural affairs." Congress set aside an additional \$60 million for the effort in the current fiscal year.

U.S. officials did not respond to a request for comment on claims that PEJAK or other groups receive funding.

No group officially acknowledges receiving U.S. aid. But many say they would welcome it.

"If you're a political movement that is part of an opposition, you need help from abroad," Mohtadi said. "We're not ashamed to admit it."

A push for rebel aid

Many in Washington have advocated such aid. The rebels fight the same Revolutionary Guard that oversees at least part of Iran's nuclear program and probably funnels support to militant groups in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

"It would be a scandal if the U.S. was not funding these groups," said John Pike, director of globalsecurity.org, a website about intelligence and military issues. "The support would be covert and might be done in ways that the groups themselves remain unaware of the ultimate source of their funding."

Still, most of the groups suffer severe weaknesses. KDPI and Komala have endured tumultuous splits in recent years, KDPI in part over whether to align itself with the U.S.

Both PEJAK and the Mujahedin Khalq operate like cults, barring members from having sexual relations and discouraging personal lives. Each touts a strict Marxist ideology.

Iranian diplomats and politicians say they have intelligence to back up their claims that the U.S. aids these groups, but have never publicly provided proof.

"We know the MKO and PEJAK both have relations with the U.S.," said Hamidreza Taraghi, an official of the Islamic Coalition Party, which is close to Iran's conservative religious leadership.

"The Americans have given the MKO a lot of technology to monitor Iranian phone traffic," he said in an interview. "Where is the Baluchistan separatist money coming from?"

Iraqi Kurds say perceived U.S. support for PEJAK and other anti-Iranian groups prompted Iranians to reactivate Ansar al Islam, a Sunni Muslim group with ties to Al Qaeda that has been launching attacks against Kurdish officials.

The Ansar al Islam fighters have been used as a "pressure card" by the Iranians, said Jafar Barzinji, the minister of affairs for peshmerga, or Kurdish security forces, who oversees military issues in Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region.

Iraqi Kurds say they have asked Iranian authorities to rein in Ansar. "They never deny that they're supporting them," Barzinji said. "They always promise a solution in the near future." Sometimes, he said, they bring up PEJAK.

Fareed Asasard, head of the Kurdish Strategic Studies Center, a think tank in the Iraqi Kurdish city of Sulaymaniya, recently visited Tehran to meet with analysts at a research institution close to supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

"The reason for their support of Ansar is PEJAK," he said. "They're 100% worried about PEJAK's actions."

The Washington Times

April 17, 2008

KURDISH LEADERS REACH OIL-LAW DEAL WITH BAGHDAD

By Ben Lando - UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

Iraq's central government and the Kurdish region have reached a deal on an oil law, including a method for weighing the validity of the oil deals the Kurds have signed with foreign firms, the top government spokesman said yesterday.

Ali al-Dabbagh said an agreement also has been reached on the classification and funding for the Kurds' security forces, the Peshmerga, which will become a battalion within the Iraqi Ministry of Defense. And he said the sides agreed to allow the U.N. process for determining the future of oil-rich Kirkuk and other disputed territories to play out.

"There is an understanding between the central government and the regional government for the oil law," Mr. al-Dabbagh said in a telephone interview from Brussels, where Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki is meeting with EU officials.

Mr. al-Maliki's governing coalition has seen defections and opposition growing over the past year. Mr. al-Dabbagh said political parties have recently pledged support, and meetings in Baghdad with top Kurdistan Regional Government officials have led to "a new atmosphere."

The oil law and oil deals have been a source of contention in Iraq's political and civil society. Opponents of the Kurdish deals are led by national Oil Minister Hussein al-Shahristani. The oil law has

seen many versions and incarnations, each with steadfast supporters and opponents.

This has led to fits and starts in moving forward a law establishing the post-Saddam Hussein rules for governance of Iraq's oil and gas sector — including four versions stalled in parliament's Energy Committee — that will decide the flashpoint issues of central or decentralized control over the oil strategy and to what extent foreign oil companies will be allowed a role in the nationalized oil sector.

Mr. al-Dabbagh said the agreement is on the version of the oil law approved by key Kurdish and central government leaders in February 2007. But the deal was foiled by an Oil Ministry decision to classify Iraq's discovered oil fields and exploration blocks, detailing authority for development between the central government and producing provinces and regions in a manner with which the Kurds disagreed.

It was further altered by the Shura Council, a legislative review body, which led to increased tension and multiple versions.

Meanwhile, the Kurds made unilateral moves in the prospective oil sector in their three-province region.

The Kurdish government has been ahead of the rest of Iraq in political, economic and security evolution because of the no-fly zone created following the 1991 Persian Gulf war. Since 2004 the Kurdish government has signed more than 20 deals to explore for and

develop oil and gas.



Most were signed last year, as was a regional oil law, prompting Mr. al-Shahristani to increase his criticism to outright condemnation. He called the deals illegal and has so far made good on a threat to blacklist any firms that sign Kurd oil deals from gaining contracts for the rest of Iraq.



April 17, 2008

KURDS PROVIDE SAFE HAVEN FOR CHRISTIANS

By: **Kenneth R. Timmerman** -
NewsMax

The Kurdish regional government in Northern Iraq is providing a safe haven to several thousand Iraqi Christians who have fled persecution in other parts of the country, government officials and local pastors told Newsmax.

Unlike refugee camps set up for some 100,000 Shia Muslims fleeing attacks from Sunnis, which are closely monitored by Kurdish security forces, Christians have been encouraged to live anywhere.

"Christians in Iraq need special attention, because they've been suffering because they are Christians," Deputy Prime Minister Omar Fattah told Newsmax in an exclusive interview in Erbil. "Maybe we give some instructions to others where they can go, but to Christians, never, because we are not afraid they will be terrorists."

Some have been given government land and building materials to construct a house. Others have rented homes from friends, or are being put up in temporary shelters thanks to local churches and international donors.

"Those people are our citizens, and when they are coming to Kurdistan they are most welcome, and we will provide them with all possible assistance," the Kurdish deputy premier said.

Since U.S.-led forces toppled Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003, around 2,000 Christian families have moved into Ainkawa, a historic Christian town on the outskirts of the Kurdish capital, Erbil.

"Most people came when the terrorists told them they must pay the jizya or they will be killed," Ainkawa mayor, Fahmi Mehti Soltaqi, told Newsmax, referring to a "protection tax" levied on non-Muslims according to Shari'a law. Scores of refugees interviewed by

Newsmax here and in Amman, Jordan, told harrowing stories of receiving death threats from al-Qaida thugs delivered to their homes in Baghdad.

The terrorists told them that as Christians, they had no right to remain in a Muslim land without submitting to Muslim rule. To escape the jizya, some Christian refugees said they were told they must marry one of their daughters to a Muslim. Instead, when they could, they fled.

Tragedy lurks just beneath the surface, even in this peaceful part of Iraq.

Mayor Soltaqi's new office assistant, Eghraa Ramzi, is an example. She fled with her daughter from her home in the Karrada district of Baghdad in June 2007, after Islamic terrorists said they would kill them if they didn't pay the jizya. Now she handles computer services for the municipality.

Rita Yuel is another. If you met her on the street, you would think she was just an attractive 23-year-old university student. But when you talk to her and learn her story, unmistakable sadness emerges.

Rita used to live in Daura, a Christian neighborhood of Baghdad, until the Muslim terrorists drove her and her sisters and others to flee in August 2006. "The terrorists were torturing people in the house next door," she said.

Her father stayed behind to work and guard the house. Last April, he promised to join his family in the north for the Easter holidays, but he never arrived.

Rita and her mother learned later that he and two other Christians had been abducted at gunpoint by masked men at a roadside tea-house on the outskirts of Baiji, midway between Baghdad and the north. "He was kidnapped one year and eight days ago, and we don't know where he is or if he is still alive. We hope that he will return," she said.

The governor of Irbil Province, Nawzad Hadi Mawlood, recalls the heady days just after the liberation of Iraq in 2003, when Iraqis from all ethnic backgrounds were suddenly free from decades of darkness.

"The terrorists destroyed the dream of the Iraqi people," Governor Mawlood told Newsmax. "Christians had no militia to protect themselves. They were easy targets," he explained. "Today, for them, Kurdistan is an option."

His government has opened special schools to meet the needs of Christian refugees who speak Arabic and not Kurdish, the official language here. "We have done everything we can to integrate Christians into Kurdish society," he said.

"We are not going to refuse them. They are Iraqi. We know what they are running from."

On Sundays, the many Christian churches in Ainkawa — some of them dating from the 9th century — are packed with worshippers. Families walk the streets without fear. Restaurants and shops are open. Even more importantly, it is the only place in Iraq where Muslims can adopt the Christian faith without fear, pastors and government officials tell Newsmax.

"All Iraq should be like Ainkawa," said William Warda, the president of the Hammurabi Organization for Human Rights, an Iraqi group advocating for Christian political rights. But even in this safe haven, once darkness falls, metal barriers block the streets, guards with AK-47s emerge to protect the churches, and Kurdish security police control traffic trying to enter the area.

Asked about this, Deputy Prime Minister Fattah was resigned. "We are afraid of the terrorists, too."

Terrorist groups are constantly probing the layered security of the Kurdish region to find weak points, he explained. "If they see a church in a Christian area, they see that it

is a peaceful area and perhaps they will attack."

One former Royal Marine, Dan F., who manages a local security company that caters to expatriates visiting or working in the area, lives in a heavily guarded compound in Ainkawa.

Jersey barriers, gates, barbed wire, and armed guards posted at regular intervals impede access to his compound. And yet, despite the precautions, Dan wears a Glock 9 millimeter at all times and refuses to walk the streets. "If you want to walk around, wait a few weeks then go home, and you'll have a 100 percent chance of nothing happening to you," he says.

For all the problems and the tenuous security situation, no one here in the Kurdish north has any regrets about the U.S.-led invasion. "I've never been to paradise," said Fattah, "but the difference between today and Saddam's time is heaven and hell."

Fattah's only fear is that American troops will leave too early, before the work is done. "Mr. Bush has not only helped Iraq, he has helped the American people as well," he said. "He took the fight against terrorism from inside America, to outside the country. If he hadn't done that, terrorist attacks would have continued inside America."

U.S. troops must stay in Iraq until they reach the goal of helping Iraqis achieve a democratic federal state. "We believe Iraq can become a base for democracy in the region," he said.

In Washington and in much of the U.S. media, such dreams are derided as the fantasies of neo-conservatives.

But here on the ground in Kurdistan, which even today commemorates the 21st anniversary of a chemical weapons attack by Saddam Hussein that massacred thousands of Kurds, this hope remains alive.

A Kurdish conundrum

Can the United Nations help solve a perennially bitter territorial dispute?

KIRKUK

AFTER Saddam Hussein's fall five years ago, there were high hopes for the northern city of Kirkuk. It is surrounded by some of Iraq's most fertile land—and lies above a huge underground lake of oil. Its ethnic and religious mélange of Sunni and Shia Arabs, Christians, Kurds and Turkomans seemed fairly harmonious. Yet the future status of both the city and the province around it remains hotly and sometimes violently disputed. In the past two years, the level of violence in the city has sometimes been higher even than in Baghdad. Reconstruction has stalled. Now, however, there is a glimmer—if only a glimmer—of hope that the United Nations may persuade enough of its inhabitants to forge a compromise.

Broadly speaking, there are four choices. If a promised referendum is held at the end of June and the majority of voters so wish, the province of Kirkuk could join the self-ruling block of three northern provinces already run by the Kurdistan Regional Government. Or it could become a self-ruling entity of its own, as some Turkoman groups propose. Or it could remain under the administration of the central government in Baghdad, as many Arabs prefer. Or the province could be divided, so that those districts voting to stay under Baghdad's control would be able to do so, while those that want to be run by Kurds join the Kurdish region.

But if the various groups refuse to compromise, Kirkuk is a powder-keg that could blow up. If wholesale violence broke out between the main groups (Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans), then Iraq's neighbours, in particular Turkey, could be drawn in.

Article 140 of Iraq's constitution provides a clear road map for settling the issue of Kirkuk and other disputed territories in the north, all of which were affected by a ruthless campaign of gerrymandering and ethnic cleansing under Mr Hussein and his Baathists, in order to Arabise the region. Kurds want to right what they see as historic wrongs—and take Kirkuk into their region. Arabs and Turkomans vehemently disagree, fearing they would be marginalised under Kurdish rule. So far, nobody has found a workable compromise—and the problem has festered. "The trouble is," says a Western diplomat, "doing nothing in Kirkuk is almost as bad as doing something."

So the UN is having a go. At the end of last year its special representative in Iraq, Staffan de Mistura, helped persuade the Kurds to accept a six-month delay in holding a controversial referendum on whether people in Kirkuk and other areas wanted to join the Kurdistan region. Now he is trying to find a formula to settle boundary disputes in other slightly less tricky areas in the north, in the hope of creating a model for a future deal for Kirkuk itself—without having a referendum that many analysts think would certainly cause bloodshed. Mr de Mistura admits that Kirkuk is "the mother of all issues".



The city is just one of the disputed areas addressed by Article 140 that form an arc running about 450km (280 miles) from Sinjar in Iraq's north-west corner to the province of Diyala in the east. So far, the officially demarcated Kurdish region covers only the three northern provinces: Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. But the de facto Kurdish region, which the Kurdish government claims and currently controls, spills over into parts of the provinces of Nineveh, Saladin, Kirkuk (also called Tamim by the Arabs) and Diyala.

Mr de Mistura says he will table a clutch of suggestions by May 15th for Iraqi leaders to decide under which authority to put four or five disputed areas as the first of three phases for settling the status of areas on the edge of the officially recognised Kurdish region. He has not publicly identified these areas but Kurdish officials say they may include Makhmour, south-west of Erbil; Qaraqosh, east of Mosul; an area near Akre populated largely by members of the Yazidi sect; and Barderash, north-west of Erbil. These all have mainly Kurdish populations that could join the Kurdish region immediately without too much fuss. A second phase could include territorial adjustments near Sinjar in the north-west; Altun Kupri, south-east of Erbil on the road to Kirkuk; and Khanaqin and even Mandali, near the border with Iran. Some areas could peel away from de facto Kurdish control. For instance, the Sunni stronghold of Hawija, where al-Qaeda has been active, could be taken out of Kirkuk province and transferred to Saladin.

The stage would then be set for dealing with Kirkuk itself, though nobody has suggested a timetable. The idea, says Mr de Mistura, is to consider "objective criteria", such as the results of the elections in December 2005, the gerrymandering of provincial boundaries under Mr Hussein, and how well minority rights and the sharing of resources in the disputed areas are respected. A referendum could perhaps eventually be held at the end of the process, with luck merely confirming territorial deals previously struck.

Last week the UN man took his proposals, which are still being honed, to EU and NATO leaders in Brussels. Before he left Iraq he stopped off to talk to Kurdish leaders in Erbil, who have angrily accused Nuri al-Maliki's government in Baghdad of dithering over Article 140. But the Kurds have themselves so far failed to persuade Arabs and Turkomans in the disputed areas that they would be better off in a Kurdish-ruled region. The Turkomans would, for instance, have a much larger proportion of seats in a Kurdish regional assembly than they now do in the federal parliament in Baghdad.

Publicly, the Kurdish leaders still insist on a referendum by the end of June, as promised by the Iraqi government. Privately, however, they have given Mr de Mistura's ideas a cautious welcome. Apart from a referendum, he says, his is "the only plan on the table". If it worked, it would be a huge breakthrough towards a stable, federal Iraq. But it is a long shot.

Fate of Iraq's Kirkuk needs political solution: U.N.

REUTERS

April 21, 2008 By Dean Yates

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - The status of the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk must be solved through a political formula and not a hastily organized referendum that could trigger violence, the U.N. special representative to Iraq said.

Staffan de Mistura said a peaceful settlement of multi-ethnic Kirkuk's fate -- which he called the "mother of all issues" in Iraq -- would be vital to long-term stability.

Iraq's minority Kurds, who control the northern Kurdistan region, see Kirkuk as their ancient capital. Arabs encouraged to move there under Saddam Hussein want it to stay under Baghdad.

A referendum had been due by the end of 2007 to decide Kirkuk's status but was delayed for six months, partly to give the United Nations time to come up with proposals for settling the issue. Analysts say a vote on Kirkuk, which sits on one of the world's largest oil fields, could spark a bloodbath.

"Kirkuk needs to be solved through a political formula in which everybody, majorities and minorities, feel comfortable," De Mistura told Reuters in an interview late last week.

"Otherwise, no referendum will be able to solve it and there will only be ongoing conflict and the last thing Iraq needs is a conflict about Kirkuk."

After talks in Brussels last week with NATO and EU officials, De Mistura said the United Nations would suggest a formula by May 15 to resolve conflicts on several disputed areas in Iraq that could serve as a template for Kirkuk.

He said he would propose options so Iraq could decide under which authority to put four disputed locations, which he did not identify. These locations would not include Kirkuk.

Speaking to Reuters in Baghdad, De Mistura said these locations could be greater than four and were near Kirkuk.

He said suggestions for determining administrative responsibility for these disputed areas would hopefully serve as an example for Kirkuk, 250 km (155 miles) north of Baghdad.

As part of any solution, minorities would have to be protected, he said. And a referendum was not the answer until there was a political solution, he added.

The disputed areas have mixed Kurdish and Arab populations.

"Nobody doubts that Kirkuk is a crucial area for Iraq and for the region. It's become also a symbol of what could be national reconciliation or possibly major conflict, even with regional involvement," he said.

Neighboring Turkey fears Iraq's Kurds will wrest control of Kirkuk and turn it into the capital of a new state, possibly reigniting separatism among its own sizable Kurdish population.

De Mistura declined to answer a question on whether the ethnic makeup of Kirkuk was changing, but said the United Nations was trying to get an accurate picture of the population.

The Iraqi government has offered Arab families compensation to return to their original towns. But Arabs and Turkmen accuse Kurds of trying to drive them out of the city.

Turkey under fire over laws banning

AP Associated Press

insults to 'Turkishness'

Apr 21, 2008 By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA Associated Press Writer

ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP) -- "Happy is he who says: 'I am a Turk.'"

Turkey's motto is on display in schools, hospitals and military barracks. Schoolchildren recite it like the Pledge of Allegiance. It covers hillsides in southeast Turkey, where the military is fighting Kurdish separatists.

This relentlessly patriotic message, coined by Kemal Ataturk, founder of modern Turkey, is backed up by law: a ban on insulting "Turkishness." But it has become a serious drag on Turkey's efforts to get its democracy into shape for joining the European Union. The EU says it's a restriction on free speech that disqualifies Turkey for membership.

On Friday, Parliament's justice panel began debating a government proposal to soften Article 301 of Turkey's penal code, which has been used to prosecute Nobel literature laureate Orhan Pamuk and other intellectuals.

Parliament is expected to approve the amendment as early as this month. But critics say it's a half-measure by a government caught between liberal opponents of the law and nationalists who see it as a cave-in to European interference.

Cengiz Aktar, an EU expert at Bahcesehir University in Istanbul, doubts it will work, because at least 20 other articles in Turkey's penal code have "the same mentality of killing freedom of speech."

But many Turks believe even a token softening of the law rewards EU pressure, and even threatens Turkish security.

Faruk Bal, deputy chairman of the opposition Nationalist Action Party, says it will allow Kurdish rebels to insult the Turkish state with impunity. His party has launched a TV ad campaign against changing Article 301. It includes the refrain: "Wake up Turkey! It is time for unity."

The change would cut the maximum sentence for denigrating Turkish identity or institutions from three years in prison to two, suspended for first-time offenders. The justice minister would have to approve prosecutions, and Article 301 would refer to the crime of denigrating the "Turkish nation," rather than the vague term "Turkishness."

"The government's proposal merely tinkers with the wording of the law, while maintaining its most problematic features," New York-based Human Rights Watch said.

Ataturk designed his nationalist motto, "Ne mutlu Turkum diyene," as he sought to build a strong, secular Turkey from the ashes of the Ottoman

Empire, which united territories in Europe, Africa and the Middle East under the banner of Islam. He largely succeeded, amid war, slaughter and pressure from Western powers.

Nearly a century later, many Turks believe their nationhood faces the same threats, chiefly from the Kurdish separatists, but also from governments

and pressure groups that claim the mass killings of Armenians by Turks in the early 20th century were "genocide."

It was the genocide claim that landed Pamuk as well as fellow novelist Elif Safak in court, and later motivated the assassination in 2007 of Hrant Dink, a Turkish Armenian.

The Turkish Justice Ministry says 1,533 people faced prosecution under Article 301 in 2006. Some cases, including Pamuk's, are dismissed. Many end in acquittals. Those convicted included Dink, the murdered journalist, and lawyer Eren Keskin, prosecuted for insulting the armed forces.

Often, it's not the government but nationalist individuals who start the prosecutions, as well as the Turkish military, according to Emma Sinclair-Webb of Human Rights Watch.

Supporters of Article 301 say some European countries, including Germany, Italy and the Netherlands, have similar laws. But these are hardly ever acted upon.

Another section of the penal code makes it a crime to insult state institutions or even officials. Last year a punk rock group was prosecuted for a song attacking Turkey's equivalent of the high school SAT. It was acquitted.

Even Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan isn't immune. His Islamic-oriented party faces a prosecutor's efforts to ban it for allegedly violating the secular principles crafted by Ataturk.



THE DAILY STAR

April 22, 2008

Northern Iraq is fragile, so Turkey should be careful

By Steven A. Cook

With all the attention in Iraq over the last five years focused on the fate of Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, the role of Iran, the security of Anbar Province, the "surge" and, most recently, the further deterioration of Basra, the situation in northern Iraq has only received sporadic attention.

The conventional view has been that the predominantly Kurdish north has been the one relatively stable part of Iraq since the beginning of "Operation Iraqi Freedom" and thus was a good story. Unlike other parts of the country, the invasion left the north relatively unscathed and what became known as the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) enjoyed a 12-year head start in building government institutions. In the immediate post-Saddam period, the KRG was able to deliver services and, importantly, security to the area.

Yet, northern Iraq is a flash-point that has the potential to trip Iraq into another round of civil war. It is also the one area of the country that, if engulfed in violence, could result in the intervention of some of Iraq's neighbors. The issues bound up in the Kurdish region - from the status of Kirkuk and the related issues of Kurdish nationalism to the Kurdistan Workers Party's (PKK) struggle with Turkey and the Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan's (PEJAK) confrontation with Iran to the long-awaited oil law - are fraught with risk for Turkey, Iraq, the Kurds of both countries and the United States.

The often contradictory policies of Turks, Kurds and Iraqis reflect the fragility of northern Iraq and how the region could unravel. For example, despite

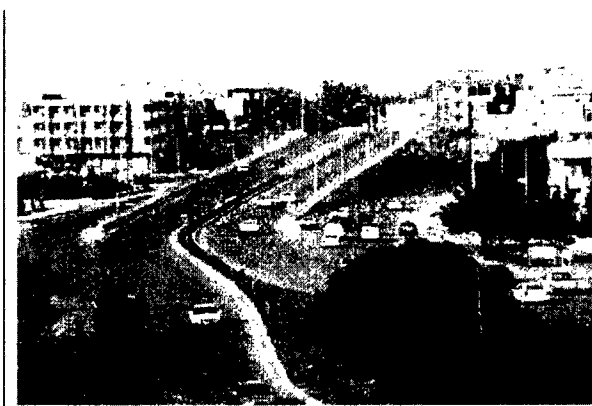
Turkish complaints to the contrary, there is no real evidence that the Iraqi Kurdish leadership has provided material support to the PKK. The policy was essentially to turn a blind eye to PKK activities in the hope that the issue would not interfere with the broad goals of Iraq's Kurdish population - independence or something close to it. While the downside of heeding Turkish

mission, which was supposed to coordinate the anti-PKK activities of all three countries, failed. Although Turkey has worked with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, its resistance to engage in dialogue combined with cross-border operations has fueled Iraqi Kurdish support for the PKK and given additional impetus to Kurdish nationalism - developments detrimental to

tary operations result in similar large-scale Iranian actions against PEJAK and the fighting (on either border) draws in Iraq's Arab population, the Turks will lose their newfound status and prestige in the Middle East - a region that Turkey's current leaders deem strategically and commercially important. For its part, Washington would not look favorably on any Turkish actions in the north that would precipitate further Iranian meddling in Iraq.

Kurds are also undeniably a new player in regional politics whether as part of a unified Iraq or an independent state. This new status could have far-reaching effects beyond the immediate concentration of Kurds in Turkey, Syria and Iran. The fact that Kurds serve in the post of president of Iraq, but also that of foreign minister, deputy prime minister, and in other important positions, shatters myths and long-held beliefs about the Arab world. The Iraqi Kurdish precedent, whether it is independence or the accumulation of political power within a unified Iraq, will encourage other sizable minority groups in the region to seek ways to alter their own status. As is the case with Iraq's Kurds, these types of changes will not likely be met with acquiescence.

Steven A. Cook is the Douglas Dillon fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and the author of "Ruling But Not Governing: The Military and Political Development in Egypt, Algeria, and Turkey" (Johns Hopkins University Press). This commentary first appeared at bitterlemons-international.org, an online newsletter.



demands that the PKK be brought to heel was abundantly clear - Kurds have a rich history of fighting each other - the KRG's inaction ultimately led to Turkey's recent military incursions, which, if they continue, have the potential to undermine the stability of the north.

Similarly, Ankara's northern Iraq policies reflect a certain amount of cognitive dissonance. While the Turks never believed that Baghdad had any control over developments in the north, they were consistent in their refusal to deal directly with representatives of the KRG. This was a primary reason why the Turkish-Iraqi-American dialogue that was launched in July 2006 as well as General Joe Ralston's

The regional implications of both the changes that the United States has wrought through its invasion as well as the complex relations among Turks, Kurds and the Iraqi central government are clear. Not since the Ottoman Empire have the Turks played as prominent and potentially problematic a role in the Middle East. Given the November 2007 shift in US policy green lighting Turkish pursuit of the PKK into Iraq, the risks for Turkey of continuing cross-border incursions are manageable, but serious enough to warrant extreme caution. There is some sympathy for the plight of Kurds in the Arab world, but only so far as it does not undermine Iraqi unity. Alternatively, if Turkish mili-

Turkish court convicts Kurdish politician; 5 soldiers killed in rebel violence

AP Associated Press

April 22, 2008

ANKARA, Turkey: A Turkish court on Tuesday convicted a Kurdish politician of inciting hatred and sentenced him to 15 months in prison for suggesting that Kurds would fight Turkey if it ever attacked Kurds in Iraq.

Hilmi Aydogdu was found guilty of threatening public safety after he warned Turkey against taking any action in the oil-rich Iraqi city of Kirkuk.

Aydogdu, leader of a local branch of a pro-Kurdish party, made the comments last year amid suggestions that Turkey could take military action to prevent Iraqi Kurdish groups from seizing control of Kirkuk.

The court in Diyarbakir, southeast Turkey, also barred Aydogdu from holding public office. Aydogdu was expected to appeal the verdict.

A land mine exploded in Turkey's southeast on Tuesday, killing three

soldiers and wounding two others near the town of Semdinli in Hakkari province, the Dogan news agency reported. The attack increased to five the number of Turkish soldiers killed in similar bomb explosions over the past two days, Dogan said.

Rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, also known by its Kurdish acronym, PKK, have been fighting for self-rule in Turkey's southeast since 1984. Tens of thousands have been killed in the fighting.

In February, the Turkish military staged a ground incursion to hit rebel bases in Iraq, and it has periodically bombed and shelled suspected rebel positions across the border in past months.

The U.S. lists the PKK as a terrorist group and is sharing military intelligence about the rebels with Turkey.

The Revival of Arbil

By Maad Fayad

London, Asharq Al-Awsat and Agencies - The population of Arbil and the rest of the Kurds who live in Iraqi Kurdistan prefer to use the historical name 'Lir' in reference to the Kurdish region's capital, Arbil, as an homage to the history of the region, which predates back to over 6,000 years. This history bears testimony to the fact that the Kurds, as a nation, settled in northern Mesopotamia thousands of years ago and that they are not foreigners to this region.

Arbil, or Hewler, [in the Kurdish language] boasts natural beauty as it is home to evergreen valleys and mountains with snow-capped peaks, in addition to spectacular waterfalls that gush out of mountain rocks. The Zab River runs close to the center of the city descending between mountainous passageways, creating an unforgettable landscape.

Arbil International Airport receives guests from all over of the world. Upon arrival to the airport, one can clearly see that Arbil international, which is considered one of the largest airports in the region, is a new construction. One would also notice the colorful flag of Kurdistan with the golden sun in the center heralding a bright future, and the friendly Kurdish women at the airport who welcome visitors to their city.

Despite being one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world, Arbil is witnessing a lot of construction work; modern buildings, luxurious palaces and glass-front offices, in addition to trade centers. AFP reports that in central Arbil, high-rise buildings are under construction on the site of what was once a cemetery. A tall concrete tower rises near Arbil's international airport. A 22-storey luxury hotel will be the tallest in the whole of northern Iraq's Kurdistan region. Dozens of other hotels are also under construction, with some promising five-star "dream rooms" to clients.

Large billboards announcing new housing projects such as Dream City, British Village and Royal City have sprung up across the city. The project to build a race track is also underway.

These complexes that resemble buildings one would imagine in California are being constructed on land that was once used as a base and headquarters for the [Iraqi] V Corps that killed a large number of Kurds under the former regime. A large area has been transformed into a park named after the martyr Sami Abdul Rahman.

From the ancient citadel in the center of Erbil, the view is eclectic as old minarets share a skyline with a jumble of unfinished concrete towers, tall cranes and relay towers belonging to cellular phone companies.

The citadel is situated in the center of the city, or rather the new city of Arbil has been built around the citadel that has been here for over 6,000 years. The word 'Arbil' used to refer to the citadel alone, which stands on a high plateau and is surrounded by a wall that protects it from invaders.

But what makes this citadel unique is the fact that it is still inhabited. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recently announced the beginning of the restoration process of the Arbil citadel. Boasting one of the most ancient histories in the world; the citadel has been ruled by Sumerian, Babylonian, Assyrian and Islamic civilizations. During the Ottoman era, the citadel was divided into three areas: Atakaya, Tubkhana and Sarai.

UNESCO's director in Iraq Mohamed Jaleed said, "UNESCO is acting to protect the existing monuments in the Kurdistan region by taking on a number of projects, preparing cadres and launching an educational television channel."

During a joint press conference with the Kurdistan Region's Minister of Tourism Nimrud Baito Yokhana, Minister of Culture Falakaddin Kakeyi and the governor of Arbil Nawzad Hadi, Jaleed stated that UNESCO has decided to open an office in the region and that its first project will be Arbil's citadel, restoring water to its aqueducts, training cadres to protect industries and providing assistance to museums.

Mohammed Jaleed stressed that

Kurdistan would be included in every project undertaken by UNESCO in Iraq, especially with respect to the field of education.

The inhabitants of the citadel used to obtain water supplies through the watercourse at Bastura (about five kilometers north of Arbil), traces of which are still present in many areas.

Jaleed stated that UNESCO and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have made a number of decisions regarding the monuments that are present in Kurdistan, "there are over 300 sites. We work in cooperation with the concerned ministries to protect them."

Furthermore, he highlighted "the importance of renovating the Arbil citadel, the first stage of which is to take rapid and necessary action and to look into the current problems and the level of finance that we require. This stage will continue for six to eight months."

"Kurdish cadres will be trained in the preservation of monuments. We have begun working and have signed an agreement with the KRG to restore the citadel," added Jaleed.

For his part, the Minister of Tourism Nimrud Baito Yokhana said, "The Kurdistan Regional Government took the initiative and asked UNESCO to help in restoring the Arbil citadel and to classify archeological sites in Kurdistan as part of international and human heritage," indicating that the Arbil citadel as well as the history of the region are tourist attractions.

The Kurdish Minister of Culture, Falakaddin Kakeyi highlighted that "Cooperation with UNESCO will take place on various levels, most notably the recognition of the entity of Kurdish culture." He added, "We have discussed the idea of launching a television channel in Kurdistan."

The KRG has allocated residential land and financial grants to be distributed amongst the citadel's residents



as compensation in return for leaving the citadel so that it could become a historical and tourist attraction. Besides, the majority of houses within the citadel are old and unsuitable for living.

The KRG welcomes local, Arab and Western investors, including Turks, Lebanese and mostly Saudis by encouraging the private sector to transform Kurdistan into a "gateway to Iraq for businessmen."

The region of Kurdistan in reality, if not officially, is independent as part of a country in which chaos is prevailing. In light of the remarkable boom, officials are awaiting the profits of oil production that has witnessed an expansion, in addition to aiming to produce approximately 100,000 barrels per day.

Those in charge of regional affairs seek to portray the region as "an oasis of safety and stability" where approximately four million people live.

The Kurdish Peshmerga forces, along with other security forces, uphold the mission of protecting the region.

The authorities say they have formed a dynamic parliamentary democracy where fundamental rights are guaranteed, including those of minorities, such as Christians who have sought refuge there after fleeing the more volatile areas of Iraq.

Other tourist attractions near Arbil that have yet to obtain investments include the Gali Ali Bag and Bekhal waterfalls. The city is also surrounded by picturesque Kurdish villages built on mountain peaks.

United Press International

Kurdish officials secure aid grants

ERBIL, Iraq, April 24, 2008 (UPI) -- Kurdish officials closed a meeting with U.N. officials regarding cost-sharing initiatives that allow the region to move forward on reconstruction issues.

Kurdish officials along with delegates from several other countries convened in Erbil to adopt a "collaborative and cost-sharing initiative" with the U.N. Development Program, The Kurdish Globe said Wednesday.

Paulo Lembo, the UNDP director for Iraq, said U.N. and Kurdish officials "are acting in a close and open partnership to achieve development" that

will serve as a "model" for Iraq.

Members of the delegation addressed rebuilding the infrastructure in the region to improve the availability of electricity and clean drinking water.

Japanese officials offered several grants to boost the health sector and general infrastructure.

In addition, South Korean officials pledged \$100 million in aid over the next four years.



ASILE: PAS DE PRIVILÈGE POUR LES CHRÉTIENS D'IRAK (PRÉSIDENCE DE L'UE)

LUXEMBOURG, 18 avr 2008 (AFP) - La présidence slovène de l'Union européenne a rejeté vendredi une proposition de l'Allemagne d'accorder un traitement préférentiel aux demandes d'asiles des chrétiens d'Irak.

"Je pense que le droit d'asile doit être accordé sans considération de religion ou de race", a déclaré le ministre slovène de l'Intérieur Dragutin Mate, à son arrivée à Luxembourg, où il devait présider une réunion de ses homologues de l'Union européenne. "Il me semble difficile de travailler dans ce sens" d'un traitement préférentiel, a-t-il ajouté. Le ministre allemand de l'Intérieur Wolfgang Schäuble avait annoncé son intention de demander l'aval des Etats membres pour une facilitation de l'acceptation des demandes d'asile présentées par les chrétiens d'Irak, qu'il juge menacés par les violences confessionnelles dans leur

pays. L'archevêque chaldéen de Mossoul, Mgr Faraj Rahou, a été enlevé et assassiné le 29 mars.

Les chaldéens, des catholiques de rite oriental, constituent la principale communauté chrétienne d'Irak, et l'une des plus anciennes églises chrétiennes. Avant l'invasion américaine de 2003, la communauté chrétienne du pays totalisait quelque 800.000 membres, soit 3% environ de la population en très grande majorité musulmane. Une grande partie d'entre eux ont fui le pays ou se sont installés au Kurdistan irakien. Plus de 4.000 demandes d'asile ont été introduites en Allemagne par des réfugiés irakiens en 2007, selon le ministère de l'Intérieur qui ne précise pas leur confession.

LE DEVOIR

21 avril 2008

Nouveaux fronts en Irak

FRANCOIS BROUSSEAU

Alors que les attentat suicide à la bombe recommencent à se multiplier, de nouveaux fronts se profilent dans un Irak faussement apaisé. Ils tendent aujourd'hui à confirmer -- après une petite année de semi-acalmie -- que cette guerre catastrophique n'a pas fini de libérer tout son potentiel de violence et de souffrance humaine.

L'envoi il y a un an, par les États-Unis, de troupes supplémentaires (opération baptisée The Surge, «le Sursaut») s'est doublé d'une tactique de «paix séparée» avec certains groupes arabes sunnites proprement nationaux... groupes que l'on a, ce faisant, éloignés des djihadistes internationaux de style al-Qaïda.

En plus de déployer 30 000 soldats supplémentaires sous la direction de David Petraeus, un officier présenté comme un brillant stratège, les Américains ont délié les cordons de la bourse pour littéralement «acheter» des alliés conjoncturels dans le fameux Triangle sunnite, épicerie de la violence en 2004-2007.

Localement, et pour un certain temps, la stratégie a donné quelques résultats. D'où la baisse relative des violences de juin 2007 à janvier 2008. Mais en faisant ainsi copain-copain avec ceux que -- l'année d'avant -- l'on vilipendait encore comme d'horribles terroristes, les autorités américaines ont semé l'inquiétude parmi ceux qui se croyaient les gagnants du

grand rebrassage de cartes irakien : les chiites et les Kurdes.

Petraeus et ses amis «découvrent» aujourd'hui un nouveau front de guerre, chiite celui-là, avec la remobilisation de l'Armée du Mehdi de Moqtada al-Sadr à Bagdad, et les combats chiites-chiites dans le sud. En attendant que la situation ne se gâte au nord également, chez des Kurdes inquiets de ces nouvelles alliances américaines, des Kurdes avides de reconquérir Kirkouk (la «Jérusalem kurde», aujourd'hui hors de la province officielle du Kurdistan) et qui regardent avec inquiétude par-dessus leur épaule, du côté de la Turquie où une nouvelle rage antikurde s'est faite jour en 2007.

Les Américains, qui n'ont jamais vraiment contrôlé la situation sur le terrain, ont suivi le premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki dans sa récente offensive militaire anti-Moqtada à Sadr City et à Bassora. Mais avec un succès officiel relatif, d'autant plus douteux que le diagnostic de Washington sur les chiites paraît erroné.

Aveuglés par leur obsession de faire flèche de tout bois contre l'Irak, les Américains désignent aujourd'hui Moqtada comme l'ennemi principal... et le présentent comme un jouet de la stratégie interventionniste iranienne en Irak. Ce qui est faux! Car, dans la constellation politique chiite en Irak, Moqtada est historiquement le plus «nationaliste irakien» des

leaders chiites... et le plus éloigné, en réalité, des intérêts iraniens!

À l'inverse, des gens comme Al-Maliki, ou encore Abdoul Aziz al-Hakim, du Conseil islamique suprême de l'Irak (parti dominant à Bagdad), qui représentent en principe les «bons chiites» dans cette histoire, sont en fait très proches des ayatollah iraniens... tout en étant officiellement alliés des États-Unis! En plus, il est connu que, parmi les amis d'al-Hakim, beaucoup ne croient pas à un Irak uni, et préparent l'avènement d'un «Chiïstan» pro-Irak dans le sud... idée contre laquelle se bat, lui, Moqtada al-Sadr!

Voilà pourquoi, malgré la supposée habileté du général Petraeus (plus tactique que stratégique), les Américains restent pantois devant le chaos irakien, et n'ont aucune idée de la façon de s'en sortir.

Nouvelles révélations du New York Times, hier, sur la manipulation des médias par le Pentagone au cours des six dernières années. Épisode supplémentaire d'un feuilleton dont les grandes lignes sont connues et anciennes.

On se souvient par exemple d'une certaine Judith Miller qui recrachait en «une» de ce même journal, il y a cinq ou six ans, les faussetés du lobby proguerre des émigrés irakiens et du Pentagone. Le plus grand journal des États-Unis s'est ressaisi depuis cette

grave éclipse de 2002-2003. Mais cela ne signifie pas que toute la presse américaine ait recouvré son honneur, ni même qu'elle soit toujours désireuse de rechercher la vérité. Cela est particulièrement vrai du côté de la télévision.

Grassement payés par Fox News et CNN, des militaires à la retraite, eux-mêmes toujours actifs comme conseillers ou dirigeants de sociétés d'honneur, ont été «cultivés» par le Pentagone pour fournir au bon peuple des analyses prétendument indépendantes, mais où la «ligne» de Washington était systématiquement défendue. Ces prétendus «analystes» ont régulièrement couru à la télévision pour dénoncer les adversaires du Pentagone, pour dire que non, ce n'est pas si terrible à Guantanamo, ou que, contrairement à ce que vous croyez, ça va de mieux en mieux en Irak...

Aujourd'hui, la guerre des États-Unis en Irak est perdue. Une majorité d'Américains estime qu'elle fut une erreur dès sa conception. Avec le recul, les victoires conjoncturelles de la propagande seront balayées par l'histoire. Mais la preuve est faite que, dans le bon contexte (patriotisme de l'après-11-Septembre), et si l'on y met les moyens, on peut pendant un certain temps «mener en bateau» les trois quarts des citoyens d'un grand pays démocratique.



CONTRATS PÉTROLIERS SIGNÉS PAR LES KURDES D'IRAK: DISCUSSIONS AVEC BAGDAD

ROME, 21 avr 2008 (AFP) - Le gouvernement irakien a entamé des discussions avec le gouvernement régional kurde d'Irak sur des contrats signés par cette région avec des compagnies pétrolières étrangères, dont Bagdad nie la validité.

"Une délégation conduite par le Premier ministre du KRG (Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan) a commencé des discussions. Nous continuons à discuter", a déclaré lundi le ministre irakien du pétrole Hussein al-Chahristani, en marge d'une réunion sur l'énergie à Rome.

Les autorités régionales kurdes doivent "remplir les conditions posées par la loi sur les hydrocarbures de février 2007" sur les appels d'offres, a estimé le ministre irakien.

Début mars, M. Chahristani avait affirmé que le gouvernement irakien empêcherait l'application de ces contrats.

Ces contrats sont l'objet d'une controverse entre le gouvernement central irakien et les autorités de cette région autonome kurde du nord de l'Irak.

En novembre, le ministre Chahristani a affirmé avoir annulé une quinzaine de contrats pétroliers signés récemment par les autorités du Kurdistan irakien. En réaction, le Premier ministre kurde Nechirvan Barzani a affirmé que les contrats seraient mis en oeuvre. Le même mois, les autorités du Kurdistan irakien ont approuvé la signature de sept nouveaux contrats pétroliers.

Au total, quinze blocs ont été attribués à ce jour par le gouvernement kurde depuis l'adoption en août 2007 par la région d'une loi sur le pétrole et le gaz. Une vingtaine de compagnies étrangères opèrent désormais au Kurdistan.

du 23 au 29 avril 2008



Iraq : JEUX D'INFLUENCE

Alors que Moqtada Sadr menace d'intensifier sa lutte contre la présence américaine, les Etats-Unis tentent de gagner à leur cause les pays arabes et d'accroître leur influence pour limiter celle de l'Iran voisin.

« Des progrès vers l'unité réalisés par le pouvoir iraquien ». Ce sont les termes utilisés par la secrétaire d'Etat américaine, Condoleezza Rice, lors de sa visite-surprise dimanche dernier à Bagdad. Des mots qui ne semblent pourtant pas témoigner de la réalité politique et sécuritaire en Iraq, au moment où la tension entre le gouvernement et Moqtada Sadr a franchi un nouveau pas. La visite de Mme Rice s'inscrit donc avant tout comme un soutien au gouvernement de Nouri Al-Maliki, qui fait face à de nombreux défis. « L'Iraq traverse une période d'opportunités, dont il faut remercier le premier ministre (Nouri Al-Maliki) et le pouvoir iraquien uni », a lancé Mme Rice. Tout en ajoutant : « Jamais les sunnites, les responsables kurdes et ceux des chiites qui n'ont pas de lien avec les groupes spéciaux n'ont aussi bien travaillé ensemble ». La secrétaire d'Etat américaine aurait-elle donc oublié les menaces de « guerre ouverte » lancées par Moqtada Sadr ? Aurait-elle oublié que les récentes violences entre les forces de sécurité iraqiennes et américaines d'une part, et les miliciens sadristes d'autre part, sont les plus sérieuses depuis 2004, et qu'elles ont fait, depuis le 6 avril, à Sadr City, quelque 150 morts et des dizaines de blessés, en majorité des civils ?

C'est pourtant à la veille de son arrivée à Bagdad que le chef radical chiite a menacé de déclencher un soulèvement de ses partisans si les attaques des troupes américaines et iraqiennes contre son mouvement, entamées début mars, se poursuivaient. Une menace que les Américains ont défiée en poursuivant dans la nuit de dimanche à lundi leurs bombardements d'objectifs dans le quartier de Sadr City, bastion du mouvement de Sadr, tuant cinq miliciens. Samedi, l'armée américaine avait en outre annoncé la mort de quarante miliciens chiites et l'arrestation de quarante autres après que les forces de sécurité iraqiennes eurent riposté à une attaque à Nassiriyah, au sud de Bagdad.

Interrogée sur la menace de Sadr, Mme Rice s'est contentée de dire qu'il était difficile de comprendre « ses motivations et ses intentions ». Elle a en outre assuré que le jeune chef radical se trouvait en Iran, laissant entendre que la République islami-

que avait un rôle dans ces événements.

C'est à la suite de l'intensification des affrontements, ces derniers jours, que Moqtada Sadr, fervent opposant à la présence américaine en Iraq, a lancé sa menace. A la suite de l'appel de Moqtada Sadr à la révolte, les mosquées de Sadr City, bastion de l'Armée de Mahdi, dans le nord-est de la capitale iraqienne, ont exhorté à chasser les Américains. Selon des habitants, les haut-parleurs des mosquées ont lancé dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche : « Combattez l'occupant, chassez-le de vos maisons ».

Le commandement américain en Iraq a répondu qu'il était en mesure de parer à une offensive de la milice sadriste, l'Armée de Mahdi, qui compte quelque 60 000 combattants. Le général Rick Lynch, commandant des forces américaines, a averti que « si Sadr et (l'Armée de Mahdi) deviennent très agressifs, nous avons assez de puissance de feu pour porter le combat chez l'ennemi ».

Chercher un contrepoids à l'Iran

Le face-à-face entre les forces américaines et sadristes est donc loin d'être à son terme. Et la visite de Mme Rice avait pour objectif principal de soutenir le gouvernement de Nouri Al-Maliki. Cette visite a également un autre but non moins important. En effet, la secrétaire d'Etat américaine est arrivée en Iraq alors qu'elle était en route pour assister à une conférence internationale au Koweït, où elle est venue exhorter les voisins arabes sunnites de l'Iraq à soutenir le gouvernement chiite de Bagdad. Les Etats-Unis voient dans une mobilisation arabe plus forte en faveur de l'Iraq — notamment de la part de l'Arabie saoudite —, un contrepoids efficace à l'influence de l'Iran. Mme Rice a appelé les pays arabes à faire face à « leurs obligations » à l'égard de l'Iraq, et les a pressés de rouvrir leurs ambassades à Bagdad. « Je pense qu'il



est juste de dire que les voisins pourraient faire plus pour remplir leurs obligations parce que je pense que les Iraquiens commencent à honorer les leurs », a-t-elle dit. Première avancée obtenue par Mme Rice, dimanche, le ministre koweïtien des Affaires étrangères, Cheikh Mohammed Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, a annoncé que son pays avait décidé d'envoyer un ambassadeur dans la capitale iraqienne, bien qu'il ait nié tout lien avec la demande américaine.

Jusqu'à présent, aucun pays arabe n'a de représentant permanent à Bagdad. Et les hauts responsables arabes sont rares à se rendre en Iraq. L'Egypte a dit vendredi qu'elle n'enverrait pas d'ambassadeur à Bagdad tant que la situation en matière de sécurité ne s'améliorerait pas. Des activistes ont enlevé et tué l'émissaire égyptien à Bagdad en 2005. Quant à Riyad, il a promis l'an dernier d'ouvrir une ambassade à Bagdad, mais cette promesse est restée sans suite. Selon un diplomate occidental en Iran cité par l'agence Reuters, les Etats-Unis veulent exhorter les pays arabes à se montrer plus proactifs étant donné l'accroissement de l'influence iranienne en Iraq. « S'ils ne font rien, la situation en Iraq va être complètement dominée par l'Iran car l'Iran fait, lui, quelque chose », a-t-il conclu.

Abir Taleb

TURQUIE: UN OFFICIER ET UN SOLDAT TUÉS DANS DES COMBATS DANS LE SUD-EST

AFP

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 25 avr 2008 (AFP) - Un commandant et un soldat turcs ont été tués vendredi dans des combats avec les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le sud-est de la Turquie, ont affirmé des sources locales.

L'accrochage a eu lieu dans la province de Sirnak, dans une zone montagneuse proche de la frontière irakienne où l'armée procède depuis plusieurs jours à une vaste opération contre les rebelles, selon ces sources.

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a intensifié ses opérations contre le PKK. Elle a notamment effectué des raids aériens ainsi qu'une opération terrestre en février dans le nord de l'Irak, où sont retranchés selon Ankara plus de 2.000 rebelles kurdes.

Le PKK se bat depuis 1984 pour l'indépendance du sud-est anatolien, un conflit qui a fait plus de 37.000 morts

AFP

TURQUIE: DEUX SOLDATS TUÉS ET UN BLESSÉ DANS DES COMBATS AVEC DES KURDES

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 27 avr 2008 (AFP) - Deux soldats turcs ont été tués et un blessé dans des combats avec des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatiste) dans l'est du pays, ont affirmé dimanche des responsables locaux de la sécurité.

La bataille a eu lieu dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche pendant une opération militaire près du village de Suveren, dans la province de Bingol, ont précisé ces sources.

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a intensifié ses opérations contre le PKK. Elle a notamment effectué des raids aériens ainsi que des opérations dans le nord de l'Irak, où sont retranchés selon Ankara plus de 2.000 rebelles kurdes.

Vendredi et samedi, l'aviation et l'artillerie turques ont ainsi pilonné des positions de rebelles kurdes en Irak.

Le PKK se bat depuis 1984 pour l'indépendance du sud-est anatolien, un conflit qui a fait plus de 37.000 morts.



22 AVRIL 2008

Bagdad menacé d'une guerre ouverte par les puissantes milices chiïtes

Pour l'armée américaine engagée en Irak, c'est l'un des pires scénarios : un conflit déclaré avec les puissantes milices chiïtes du jeune chef religieux Moqtada al-Sadr, à la périphérie de Bagdad, et à l'heure où elle envisage un retrait partiel. Samedi, le leader de l'Armée du Mehdi a en effet menacé de « guerre ouverte » le gouvernement de Nouri al-Maliki, un autre leader chiïte, « jusqu'à la libération de l'Irak » si l'US Army ne cessait pas ses attaques contre son mouvement. Les milices de Moqtada ne sont pas seulement les plus nombreuses – environ 60 000 hommes –, elles sont aussi les plus motivées et les plus enracinées dans la population chiïte irakienne. **Missiles.** Les mosquées de Sadr City, la grande banlieue chiïte de Bagdad, ont aussitôt relayé les appels de Moqtada et lancé ce mot d'ordre : « Combattez l'occupant, chassez-le de vos maisons. » Déjà, les combats qui se déroulent depuis le 6 avril dans cette zone, où les Américains construisent un mur

pour l'isoler du centre-ville et prévenir ainsi des tirs de roquettes, se sont avérés les plus meurtriers depuis plus d'un an. Ils ont fait au moins 125 morts, en majorité des civils, et obligé l'aviation américaine à bombarder les faubourgs populaires de cette ville de plus 2 millions d'habitants, non

Dans cette guerre interchiïte se devine l'enjeu des prochaines élections régionales, en octobre, où les partisans de Moqtada al-Sadr apparaissent largement favorisés.

seulement avec des hélicoptères, mais aussi des missiles et des chasseurs-bombardiers. Fin août, le jeune chef radical, dont les forces ont déjà affronté l'armée américaine à deux reprises en 2004, avait imposé un cessez-le-feu à ses hommes, ce qui avait garanti une certaine tranquillité dans les zones chiïtes. Depuis, Nouri al-Maliki s'est employé à réduire par la force l'Armée du Mehdi, notamment à Bassora,

le grand port du Sud. Dans cette ville, les miliciens de Moqtada affrontent en effet, depuis le départ des Britanniques, d'autres groupes armés chiïtes pour le contrôle des activités de contrebande et le trafic du pétrole. Officiellement, l'offensive de Nouri al-Maliki et de l'armée américaine vise à rétablir la loi et l'ordre dans les provinces chiïtes. Mais le jeune chef radical reproche au Premier ministre et ses alliés américains d'épargner les milices rivales liées au gouvernement, comme les brigades Badr, et même de les pousser à s'intégrer aux forces de sécurité. D'où ses menaces lancées depuis la ville sainte de Qom, en Iran, où il affirme poursuivre des études théologiques. **Vote régional.** Certains observateurs voient aussi dans cette nouvelle révolte l'influence de Téhéran, qui a de puissants relais dans l'Armée du Mehdi. En 2006, le mouvement sadriste

avait soutenu la prise du pouvoir de Nouri al-Maliki, obtenant même six portefeuilles. Il s'en était éloigné lorsque celui-ci avait refusé d'exiger de ses alliés un calendrier de retrait des troupes américaines. Dans cette nouvelle guerre interchiïte se devine aussi l'enjeu des prochaines élections régionales, en octobre, où les partisans de Moqtada, qui dispose déjà du plus fort bloc parlementaire, apparaissent largement favorisés. La menace de Moqtada d'un soulèvement généralisé dans les neuf provinces chiïtes contrarie les plans américains, à l'heure où Washington veut réduire, d'ici juillet, son engagement de 20 000 hommes. Si les milices sadristes sont impuissantes à vaincre militairement leur adversaire américain, celui-ci ne peut espérer venir à bout d'un mouvement soutenu par des millions de fidèles, pour la plupart des laissés-pour-compte n'ayant plus rien à perdre.

→ JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN

Le Monde
24 avril 2008

Selon une étude française, l'Iran subit l'effet des sanctions sans fléchir sur le nucléaire

La France et le Royaume-Uni sont favorables à l'élaboration de sanctions européennes accrues contre Téhéran, mais le consensus est difficile à obtenir au sein de l'UE

Les sanctions internationales imposées à l'Iran en raison de la poursuite de son programme nucléaire commencent à freiner la croissance économique du pays. Celle-ci pourrait en 2007 être inférieure de 1 à 1,5 point aux prévisions (un PIB en hausse de 4,5 % au lieu de 6 %). A moyen terme, les sanctions menacent le développement du secteur pétrolier et gazier, alors que celui-ci apporte à l'Etat ses principales recettes en devises. Les montages financiers et les partenariats avec de grands groupes occidentaux – indispensables pour créer une filière de gaz naturel liquéfié – sont rendus très difficiles. L'Iran, qui aurait besoin de 100 milliards de dollars d'investissements étrangers sur dix ans pour devenir exportateur de gaz, accumule les retards. Face à la paralysie des grands projets énergétiques, l'Iran pourrait deve-

nir importateur brut de pétrole brut à l'horizon 2022-2025.

Ce sont là certaines des observations contenues dans une étude menée par des officiels français, à laquelle le ministre des affaires étrangères, Bernard Kouchner, a fait référence lors d'une conférence de presse à Paris, le 8 avril, se réjouissant que les sanctions aient un impact.

Mais si les sanctions mordent – les plus percutantes, selon cette étude, sont les mesures financières américaines, qui ont dissuadé les banques occidentales de se lancer dans d'importantes transactions avec Téhéran – leur effet sur la politique nucléaire du régime reste tout relatif. La réorientation espérée par les Occidentaux ne s'est pas produite, en dépit des dommages causés à l'économie.

Concentré sur l'échéance présidentielle de 2009, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad privilégie une approche à court terme. Le régime éprouve un sentiment d'invulnérabilité lié à la manne qu'il continue de tirer de ses exportations énergétiques : celle-ci lui permet de subventionner les produits de base, alors que l'inflation croît (environ 20 %). L'économie iranienne court

vers un décrochage par rapport à d'autres pays émergents, notamment au Moyen-Orient, où des programmes de modernisation sont mis en place, mais le régime de Téhéran semble déterminé à ne rien céder face à la pression internationale.

Sa riposte consiste à tenter de contourner les sanctions en utilisant des circuits via des pays tiers (Dubai est une plateforme importante), et en s'efforçant de relancer un projet d'« OPEP du gaz » qui lui permet de courtiser la Russie. La Chine, l'Azerbaïdjan, et la Malaisie, seraient d'autres points de contournement des sanctions.

Les responsables iraniens seraient d'autant plus persuadés que les sanctions sont faites pour être contournées qu'ils reçoivent des signaux contradictoires de la part des Occidentaux. L'ambassade d'Allemagne à Téhéran aurait ainsi affiché, devant les autorités, son opposition aux sanctions et sa volonté de poursuivre une politique normale. Les entreprises européennes présentes en Iran cherchent à préserver leurs positions, de peur qu'à l'avenir un compromis diplomatique entre Washington et Téhéran entraîne un retour massif

des firmes américaines, qui se ferait à leur détriment.

Après le vote, en mars, d'un troisième volet de sanctions à l'ONU, la France et le Royaume-Uni voudraient maintenant intensifier les mesures coercitives de l'Union européenne (UE). L'idée avait déjà été émise par Paris à l'automne 2007, mais elle n'avait pas rencontré de consensus. Elle devrait resurgir à l'occasion de la présidence française de l'UE.

De source européenne, on indique que les nouvelles mesures envisagées sont de trois ordres. Scénario minimaliste : un rallongement des listes d'entités iraniennes déjà visées par l'ONU. Scénario plus ambitieux : une interdiction des banques iraniennes Melli et Saderat, assortie d'une limitation des crédits à l'exportation. Scénario jugé difficile : des sanctions européennes contre le secteur gazier iranien. Ce dernier point a été évoqué par le premier ministre britannique Gordon Brown, lors d'un récent voyage à Washington. Le retour au pouvoir de Silvio Berlusconi ne signifie pas pour autant que l'Italie suivra. Il pourrait vouloir ménager les intérêts de la firme énergétique ENI en Iran. ■

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

April 24, 2008

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

IRAQ'S SIMMERING ETHNIC WAR OVER KIRKUK

Tensions are rising between Kurdish, Arab, and Turkmen factions over power and populations in the province, the heart of northern Iraq's oil industry.

By Sam Dagher | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

KIRKUK, IRAQ - Graffiti inside this city's ancient hilltop citadel quickly spells out the tension between Kirkuk's three main ethnic groups - Kurds, Arabs, and Turkmen.

On one wall, an eagle descends on a two-headed serpent meant to symbolize enemies of the Kurdish nation. Next to it, the word "Arab" is erased and replaced with an etched "Kurdish" in a slogan that once read: "Kirkuk is an Arab city." Another slogan reads: "Kirkuk is Turkmen."

Kirkuk has been the object of a bitter struggle over the past five years among Iraq's competing ethnic and sectarian groups. And now Arab, Kurd, and Turkmen factions seem to be digging in, anticipating that tensions may erupt in an area that is the center of northern Iraq's oil industry ahead of a promised referendum on the fate of Kirkuk Province, officially still called Tamim, its previous Baath Party-era name.

Article 140 of Iraq's Constitution was supposed to resolve the issue by the end of 2007 but the deadline for a vote has been extended to the end of June in the hopes that the United Nations may be able to broker a solution by then.

But with or without a referendum, Kurds maintain that almost the entirety of Kirkuk Province, of which the city of Kirkuk is the capital, is a natural part of their semiautonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq. Arabs and Turkmen, on the other hand, say Article 140 is now "null and void" and that other solutions must be devised.

In general, Turkmen support a semi-independent Kirkuk Province while Arabs back the idea of the central government remaining in control.

Meanwhile, the United States is exerting a mix of coercion and incentives to prevent the feuding parties from battling each other over the issue.

But already local security officials say a simmering conflict is under way with no day going by without a tit-for-tat kidnapping or assassination involving a member of the city's three competing population groups. Turkmen and Arab leaders say hundreds of their own have been jailed inside Kurdistan.

"We kidnap terrorists, it's the only way to protect Kurdistan," says Muhammad Ihsan, minister of extraregional affairs in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Mr. Ihsan also says that his government has proof that Turkey, which is adamant that the Kurds not be allowed to annex Kirkuk into the KRG, has members of its military intelligence inside Kirkuk at the offices of the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), the Turkmen political coalition. "This is aggression and interference," he says.

On a recent crisp morning, Ali Hashem, an ITF strongman, was huddled with some of his colleagues at a diner in downtown Kirkuk.

Over a traditional northern Iraq breakfast of crushed yellow lentil soup and hot bread, they spoke about what they characterized as aggression and pressure by the two main ruling Kurdish parties - the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) - regarding the question of Kirkuk.

"In order to defend ourselves, we might be compelled to bear arms one day," says Mr. Hashem, who is a member of the ITF's executive

committee and the party boss in neighboring Salaheddin Province. "Kurds have gone too far; they have taken their full rights and now they want to infringe upon the rights of others."

The talk in Kirkuk is that Hashem is leading a drive to stockpile weapons ahead of any potential armed confrontation with the Kurds. He does not preclude the possibility but says his party is still banking on efforts to draft more Turkmen into local police and Iraqi Army forces, which he says are disproportionately dominated by Kurds.

The ITF, which is a coalition of six parties, receives significant support from Turkey and is even considered by many to be a Turkish proxy party. It's the most militant of the Turkmen parties and has turned the issue of Kirkuk and what it views as the city's Turkmen identity into a rallying cry.

Turkmen in Iraq, a distinct ethnic group, are estimated to number anywhere from 250,000 to 2

led coalition dominates the local council with 26 seats, followed by the Turkmen with nine, and Arabs with six. The Turkmen have been boycotting the council's meetings since November 2006.

In a recent interview in the Kurdish capital of Arbil, the KRG's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani cupped his hands to describe how Kurdish forces have Kirkuk surrounded. "If we want to change things by force, we can do it like that," he says, snapping his fingers.

"But we do not see a solution being imposed by force ... we want a consensus solution accepted by all sides," says Mr. Barzani.

He says his government is under pressure from its own public over the Kirkuk question and that it is trying to juggle that with its commitments to the political process in Iraq.

But Ihsan, who is Kurdistan's chief representative in the national committee that's supposed to resolve the Kirkuk question, says there is a limit to



Crowds: Kurdish men stood outside a government office in Krukuk, where residents lined up for expected resettlement funds.

SAM DAGHER

million. They, along with Kurds, suffered from Saddam Hussein's policy of demographic and geographic engineering that accompanied his Arabization policy of northern Iraq.

Turkmen and Arabs now accuse the Kurds of "Kurdifying" Kirkuk and not waiting for the city's fate to be decided through a vote. Many accuse them of having brought back to Kirkuk more than half a million Kurdish inhabitants since the fall of Mr. Hussein's regime in 2003 and thuggishly seizing control and power here.

The head of Kirkuk's provincial council, Rizgar Ali, a Kurd, says only 240,000 people, including non-Kurds, have returned since 2003. He says that hundreds of Kurdish villages in the province remain destroyed and abandoned.

But in Kirkuk it's hard not to notice the overwhelming Kurdish influence. Entire districts are now thoroughly Kurdish. Neighborhood and street names and billboards glorifying Kurdish peshmerga fighters attest to a new assertiveness. The Kurdish-

the KRG's patience and that a forceful annexation may be an option.

"What do you think, we are going to wait to make Iraq stronger and come back ... even now they are not implementing the Constitution," says the minister. "We are giving a chance until the end of 2008, but no more."

The ITF says it's ready for this eventuality. "We will be able to resist long enough until an outside power intervenes," says Jala Neftachy, a Turkmen provincial council member. She was among a delegation that met with top Turkish officials earlier this year and received assurances that they would stop any forced Kurdish annexation.

"The Turkish government have confirmed this to us; they will not be bystanders, they will interfere by force," adds Ms. Neftachy.

• *Tomorrow: A United Nations solution is in the works that could calm Kirkuk.*

April 25, 2008

TODAYS ZAMAN

Iraqi Kurds welcome MGK decision giving go-ahead for dialogue

Today's Zaman Ankara

Iraqi Kurds, who have long been accused by Ankara of implicitly supporting the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), have applauded a decision by Turkey's influential National Security Council (MGK) that paves the way for talks between Ankara and Iraqi Kurdish groups.

Turkey's top political leaders and military commanders on Thursday discussed relations with neighboring Iraq and gave the green light for talks with Iraqi Kurds after having refused for several years to have dialogue with the Kurdish groups on suspicions that they support the PKK.

"Activities in the legislative field, which constitutes the basis of national consensus in Iraq, and developments toward restoration of Iraq's standing in the region have been assessed, and it has been considered that it will be beneficial to continue consultations with all Iraqi groups and movements," the MGK announced on Thursday in a statement following its regular bimonthly meeting. The statement also said prospects for the deepening of bilateral cooperation with Iraq, particularly in the field of energy, were discussed at the meeting.

Bahros Galali, the Ankara representative of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, described the outcome of the MGK's meeting as "a very positive development."

"We've been extremely pleased with the MGK decision. The Iraqi Kurds want to have good relations with Turkey by establishing cooperation in every field, including security. This MGK decision will be very useful for improving our relationship with Turkey, which we regard as a friend, not an enemy," Galali told Today's Zaman yesterday. Ankara maintains low-level talks with the Iraqi Kurds running autonomous northern Iraq, but has previously refused to have senior-level dialogue, urging them to condemn and isolate the PKK in their region first.

Reliable sources have recently said that Turkish officials are planning talks with Nechirvan Barzani, the prime minister of the de facto autonomous regional Kurdish administration. Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish administration, has also softened his usually harsh tone while describing the state of relations with Turkey in recent speeches.

Earlier this week, speaking about his re-

cent contacts in Baghdad with the central government of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani said that he had originally planned to hold talks with Turkish officials while in Baghdad. Since Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki was abroad, the planned talks couldn't take place, he



added, without elaborating on which Turkish officials he would have met with. "We want good relations with neighboring countries. We especially want better relations with Turkey," Nechirvan Barzani said.



Kurdistan Regional Government
26 April 2008

Miliband and Barzani discuss Turkey, Article 140 and political progress in Iraq

President Massoud Barzani yesterday met Mr David Miliband, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, to discuss political progress in Iraq, relations with Turkey and Article 140 of the Constitution.

The Kurdistan Region President welcomed the UK's Foreign Secretary on his second visit in five months. They touched on a wide range of issues in a meeting attended by Vice President Kosrat Rasul, Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, Deputy Prime Minister Omer Fattah and other officials.

At a press conference following their meeting President Barzani said on Article 140, "This is a constitutional commitment, and there is a clear road map on how to solve this major historic problem. Indeed, we are working hard to solve this issue, but this does not mean that it will be forgotten because of delays or the passage of time.

The main point for us is to look for the best possible way to solve this issue, as it is clearly stipulated in the Constitution."

Miliband said it was necessary for the Turkish government, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Federal Government of Iraq to "bridge the divide" and find a lasting settlement to the situation with Turkey. The Turkish military in recent months launched military operations against the PKK on the border with Kurdistan Region in Iraq.

Mr Miliband said: "There can be no military solution and there must be a political process," a view shared by President Barzani who said he was ready to do whatever is necessary to help find a political solution.

The meeting with the Foreign Secretary also focused on the situation in Basra and the support given to Prime Minister Maliki by President Barzani and President Jalal Talabani of Iraq. Mr Miliband said that support was important, and that he saw a change in the political dynamics of Iraq which could lead to greater unity and political progress, for example, in passing key legislation such as the hydrocarbons law.



Miliband and the President also discussed Article 140 of the Constitution on the issue of disputed territories such as Kirkuk. Miliband expressed his support for the role of the United Nations in implementing Article 140 and, speaking at a press conference after the meeting, said the delays in implementation so far should not be seen as Kirkuk had been forgotten.

Deputy Prime Minister Fattah gave Mr Miliband an overview of the economic progress in Kurdistan Region. At the press conference with President Barzani, Mr Miliband said, "I think there big opportunities for British investment and companies and there is some responsibility on me to make sure that people know the real story of the north of Iraq, and that people know the real peace and prosperity that exists here".

Mr Miliband extended an invitation to President Barzani to visit Great Britain, which the President accepted.

Can the U.N. avert a Kirkuk border war?

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq is expected to unveil a plan in May that it hopes will lead to a compromise over contentious land issues in oil-rich northern Iraq.

By Sam Dagher | Correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

KIRKUK, Iraq

Kirkuk provincial council head Rizgar Ali says one proof of the province's "Kurdishness" is in the maps.

Several maps dating from the Ottoman and British colonial eras hang on his office walls showing the city of Kirkuk at the heart of a Kurdistan that spans parts of Iran, Syria, and Turkey. A 1957 map shows Kirkuk Province's original border prior to it being renamed Tamim and then altered by Saddam Hussein's Arabization policy.

But Ali Mahdi, a Turkmen leader here, has his own maps. His show the city of Kirkuk at the heart of Turkmeneli: the supposed home of Iraq's ethnic Turkmen population.

The vastly different ways that Iraq's ethnic groups view this province and its capital city, Kirkuk, illustrate the deep-rooted, complex, and potentially explosive issue of its status and the ongoing debate over Iraq's internal borders. In Kirkuk, the issue was supposed to have been decided by a constitutionally mandated referendum to take place by the end of 2007. The vote is delayed until June.

In the meantime the United States is using its leverage with all sides — Kurds, Turkmen, and Arabs — to keep the situation from blowing up into an all-out war for control here as the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) works on a plan to broker a peaceful solution to the status of the province that is the home of northern Iraq's oil industry.

In addition to Kirkuk, the UNAMI plan is looking at other disputed areas spanning an arc that is almost 300 miles long and stretches from the city of Sinjar in northwest Iraq to Diyala Province in the east.

"We do put it as a very top priority of ours to deal with this issue ... now we believe that UNAMI's efforts have the best chance of getting at a stable and secure resolution to this issue," says a US diplomat in Baghdad who spoke on condition of anonymity due to embassy requirements.

According to the US diplomat and Muhammad Ihsan, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) minister on the national committee dealing with Kirkuk, UNAMI's efforts involve suggestions for resolving the fate of at least four contested areas in the hopes of leading to a greater compromise on Kirkuk Province territories on which each ethnic group has claims. Its plan is expected to be announced in mid-May.

"If you start with some of the areas that are less controversial ... you might have some processes in place that have buy-in from all the sides involved, so you have an easier way of getting at ultimate resolution on the boundaries," says the US diplomat, adding that UNAMI's proposed solutions look at how commerce and the sharing of water resources would be affected in the process of border resolution.

"We are looking for ways to compromise. Some areas are soft, some areas are hard," says Mr. Ihsan, using the terms "soft" in English to describe the areas that are overwhelmingly made up of one of the three ethnic groups and "hard" being the more mixed and contentious areas.

He says the KRG would be open to working out within the UNAMI-administered process "power-sharing formulas" in places where Kurds are present but do not make up the majority.

In return, he says, the KRG would demand that areas that are overwhelmingly Kurdish and are now de facto under the control of the two main Kurdish parties be annexed to the KRG. As for the city of Kirkuk, he says the KRG is willing to have its fate decided through a referendum but no later than the end of 2008.

Kurdistan's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani says that although his government is determined that the city of Kirkuk and other contested areas become part of its semiautonomous KRG that does not mean it would not be willing to have other communities — namely the Arabs and Turkmen — be represented in the local administration.

"We are ready for power-sharing in Kirkuk," says Mr. Barzani, adding that his government's willingness to have the implementation of Article 140, which calls for a vote on the fate of Kirkuk, extended until June is a sign of goodwill.

But Barzani says the KRG's willingness for compromise does not mean it will give up on the city of Kirkuk. He recounts how his grandfather Mustafa Barzani, considered a Kurdish national war hero, had proposed to Mr. Hussein in 1970 "just do not deny Kirkuk is part of Kurdistan and we are ready for any agreement. He refused and fought us."

For the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), the most militant camp that is supported by Turkey, and many Arabs, Article 140 has expired. The ITF says the only solution now is to declare Kirkuk "a special province" and allow a period of at least 10 years to resolve internal border disputes.

Many Arab leaders here say they are caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes to the Kirkuk question.

"We are like a dog who can't go anywhere because his tail is stuck ... we are accused by the Americans that we support the insurgency and if we take part in the political process we

are labeled by our own people as agents," says Sheikh Abdullah Sami al-Assi al-Obeidi, a member of the Kirkuk council. He has been the target of three assassination attempts since 2005.

The Arab leaders in Kirkuk, including some of the US supported and funded sheikhs involved in the Awakening movement, or *sahwas*, against Al Qaeda, held a conference last month to announce that the Kurds are "dreaming" if they think Kirkuk would ever be part of the KRG.

"Kirkuk is for all Iraqis and it will stay that



Homeland: Ali Mahdi, a Turkmen deputy in Kirkuk, points to a map of the historic Turkmen community in Iraq.

SAM DAGHER

way," says Sheikh Issa al-Jubbouri, who leads a US-funded militia in Zab, southwest of the city of Kirkuk. He says he receives nearly \$250,000 each month from the US military.

But as the resolution of the Kirkuk issue drags on, many average Iraqis feel as if they are living in limbo. Almost daily, hundreds of people come to the provincial council office in the hopes of receiving payment from the national committee tasked with implementing Article 140.

Kurds, driven out by Arabization and who have resettled in Kirkuk, receive roughly \$8,300 in assistance. Arabs leaving receive double that. But there is still much hardship on both sides.

Bikhal Karim, a Kurd, says that her family fears the potential of more violence and still can't afford to stay in the city of Kirkuk and want to go back to Sulimaniyah, inside the KRG.

"When I get this check cashed we are going back," she says.

An Arab family that has returned to Samarra, in neighboring Salaheddin Province, is also trying to collect compensation. "If they share the oil, we do not have a problem if they [Kurds] take Kirkuk," says Omar Mustafa. But his comment is immediately condemned by other Arabs standing nearby, just one piece of evidence of how difficult it will be to solve the Kirkuk question.

Sunnis to return to Iraq cabinet

Amnesty a factor in ending boycott

By James Glanz

BAGHDAD: The largest Sunni bloc in Iraq has agreed to return to the cabinet of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki after a nine-month boycott, several Sunni leaders said Thursday, citing a recently passed amnesty law and the Maliki government's crackdown on Shiite militias as reasons for the move.

The Sunni leaders said that they were still working out the details of their return, an indication that the deal could still fall through. But such a return would represent a major political victory for Maliki, amid a military operation that has at times been criticized as poorly planned and fraught with risk. The principal group his security forces have been confronting is the Mahdi army, a powerful militia led by Moktada al-Sadr, the radical Shiite cleric.

Even though Maliki's U.S.-backed offensive against elements of the Mahdi army has frequently stalled and has led to bitter complaints of civilian casualties, the Sunni leaders said that the government had done enough to address their concerns that they had decided to end their boycott.

"Our conditions were very clear, and the government achieved some of them," said Adnan al-Duleimi, the head of Tawafuq, the largest Sunni bloc in the government. Duleimi said the achievements included "the general amnesty, chasing down the militias and disbanding them and curbing the outlaws."

The recently passed amnesty law has already led to the release of many Sunni prisoners, encouraging Sunni parties that the government is serious about enforcing it. And the attacks on Shiite militias have apparently begun to assuage longstanding complaints that only Sunni groups blamed for the insurgency have been the targets of U.S. and Iraqi security forces.

Exactly which ministries will be given to which Sunni politicians is still under negotiation, said Ayad Samarrai, the deputy general secretary of the Iraqi Islamic Party, the largest party within Tawafuq. Among those under consideration are the ministries of culture, planning, higher education and women's affairs as well as the State Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Samarrai said.

The details are complicated because Ali Baban, who now heads the most powerful of those ministries, the planning ministry, was a member of the Sunni bloc but left in order to stay in his post after the boycott began. Samarrai said that the most likely arrangement was that Baban would remain head of the planning ministry and another

ministry would be given to the Sunnis.

The list of names that Tawafuq would nominate for the ministries was also still being negotiated within the bloc, Samarrai said. "Now we are discussing the details," he said.

Iraqiya, the official government television channel, appeared to confirm the deal, following a meeting between Maliki and David Miliband, the visiting foreign secretary of Britain. Iraqiya said the prime minister "said that reconciliation has proved a success and all political blocs will return to the government."

As Miliband held closed-door meetings with Maliki in Baghdad, the British defense secretary, Des Browne, informed Parliament in London that a freeze on the withdrawal of British troops from Iraq would remain in place, The Associated Press reported. Britain has around 4,500 troops in Iraq, most based at an airport camp near the southern city of Basra. Britain suspended plans to withdraw about 1,500 troops this spring after fighting broke out last month between Iraqi forces and Shiite militiamen.

Browne said British soldiers were training an entire Iraqi Army division, but acknowledged the local soldiers are months away from being ready to deploy, The AP reported.

Also on Thursday, court and legal officials said that the trial of Tariq Aziz, the deputy prime minister of Iraq under Saddam Hussein, would begin next week. The case involves the execution of more than 40 Iraqi merchants in 1992.

A lawyer for Aziz, Badi Arif, said Thursday that Aziz was having unspecified health problems while in prison but "his morale is high."

■ South Iraq 'stable' Maliki says

Maliki issued a statement Thursday saying that the situation in the south of Iraq was now stable and that the government was continuing "to pursue all outlaws," The Associated Press reported.

However, five people died and 28 were wounded early Thursday in the Sadr City district of Baghdad, a stronghold of the Mahdi army and others loyal to Sadr. The figures came from a police officer who asked not to be identified because he was not authorized to speak to the media.

Eight people were killed and two wounded during fighting in the Hussein-ya area of Baghdad, another base of Shiite militants. The figures came from a hospital official who spoke on condition of anonymity out of safety concerns.

On Thursday, a roadside bomb targeting an Iraqi Army patrol exploded in Baghdad's western Mansour area, killing three civilians and wounding 14 others, the police said.

Meanwhile, the U.S. military said Thursday that two of its soldiers were killed in an accident in Salahuddin Province when their vehicle rolled onto its side.

Also in the capital, a rocket or mortar round hit the Polish Embassy, causing damage and lightly wounding one person, Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski said in Warsaw.

Poland plans to withdraw its 900 remaining troops from Iraq by the end of October.

In the western Anbar Province, U.S. troops killed six Sunni insurgents in a clash north of Lake Tharthar. The region, a former resort area, is now a stronghold of rebels affiliated with Al Qaeda.



Reuters

An Iraqi embraced members of his family Thursday in the Adhamiya district of Baghdad. He was among 20 prisoners freed from a jail run by the U.S. military.

Is U.S. exaggerating Iran's activities in Iraq?

By Mark Mazzetti, Steven Lee Myers and Thom Shanker

WASHINGTON: Even though U.S. officials say they have gathered the most detailed evidence so far of Iranian involvement in training and arming fighters in Iraq, significant uncertainties remain about the extent of that involvement and the threat it may pose to U.S. and Iraqi forces.

Some intelligence and administration officials said Iran seemed to have carefully calibrated its involvement in Iraq over the past year, in contrast to what President George W. Bush and other U.S. officials have publicly portrayed as an intensified Iranian role.

None of the officials interviewed disputed the notion that Iran sought to undermine U.S. interests in Iraq, but in recent weeks the Bush administration has sought to emphasize the threat by citing new evidence. The interrogations of four Iraqi Shiite militia commanders, for example, have provided new details about the extent of training conducted by the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, officials said.

Still, the officials offered an assessment of Iranian involvement that was more complicated and nuanced than public statements by Bush and other officials, including Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who said at a news conference this week that "what Iranians are doing is killing American servicemen inside Iraq" by providing training and weapons to Shiite fighters.

It remains difficult to draw firm conclusions about the ebb and flow of Iranian arms into Iraq, and the Bush administration has not produced its most recent evidence. But interviews with more than two dozen military, intelligence and administration officials showed that while shipments of arms had continued in recent months despite an official Iranian pledge to stop the weapons flow, they had not necessarily increased. Most of those interviewed for this article spoke only on condition of anonymity because they were discussing intelligence assessments and potential military operations.

Iran, the officials said, has shifted tactics to distance itself from a direct role in Iraq since the U.S. military captured 20 Iranians inside Iraq in December 2006 and January 2007, several of whom were diplomatic workers opening a consulate in Iraqi Kurdistan. Ten of those Iranians remain in U.S. custody.

The Iranians support a number of Shiite parties and militias, providing weapons both to those fighting and to

those supporting the Shiite-led government in Baghdad. Iran seems to have trained some Iraqi Shiite fighters inside Iran, though the exact number remains unclear. Some officials said the recent numbers involved only handfuls.

"We have very little intelligence collection on actual numbers crossing the border," a senior official familiar with the intelligence reports on Iran said in an interview.

Iran also provides legitimate economic assistance, in particular across the oil-rich Shiite south, while at the same time seeking to retain political and economic influence over a variety of Shiite factions, not just the most extremist militias, which the U.S. military has begun calling "special groups."

There is evidence, officials said, that Iran may not have control over the vari-

ordered his subordinates to prepare a public dossier on Iranian involvement as part of the administration's efforts to sustain support for the war, which is increasingly unpopular at home.

On Capitol Hill, Petraeus said Iranian-backed militias could "pose the greatest long-term threat to the viability of a democratic Iraq."

Publication of the dossier, which includes pages of charts and photographs of seized Iranian-made weapons, has been delayed while the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of Iraq confronts Iran diplomatically with new evidence of Iranian assistance to Shiite militias, one of the officials said.

The administration's focus on Iran has raised alarms among war critics, who accuse the White House of overstating the threat and laying the

Significant uncertainties remain about the extent of that involvement and the threat it may pose to U.S. and Iraqi forces.

ous Shiite groups it has armed. According to a U.S. official, Iran has at times been angered when Iranian weapons were used for intra-Shiite fighting.

"Iran has hedged its bets," Ted Galen Carpenter of the Cato Institute, who has written extensively about Iran's role in Iraq, said. "It doesn't know which Shiite faction is going to come out on top."

For weeks, Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney and the top U.S. officials in Iraq have portrayed Iran as a significant and growing threat to the U.S. war effort in Iraq. In particular, they have cited an intensified barrage of Iranian-made rockets hitting the Green Zone in Baghdad that have killed Americans and Iraqis.

Two weeks ago, Bush cited Iran as a primary justification in his announcement that he would halt further withdrawals of U.S. troops in Iraq after the level reaches 140,000 this summer. He said a U.S. withdrawal "would embolden its radical leaders and fuel their ambitions to dominate the region."

At the White House, the Pentagon, the intelligence agencies and the military headquarters in Baghdad, officials declined to detail publicly the extent of Iran's support for fighters in Iraq, referring instead only in broad terms to training, equipping and financing Shiite militias.

But in the wake of his briefings to Congress on April 8 and 9, General David Petraeus, the senior commander,

groundwork for military action against Iran just as it did against Iraq.

Senator Dianne Feinstein, Democrat of California, who has called for opening talks with Iran, said that while she believed that there was evidence that Iran was aiding Shiite militias, she worried about the tenor of the administration's latest warnings.

"This is not a new thing," she said of Iran's involvement. "Why all of a sudden do the sabers start to rattle?"

The administration has, in fact, discussed whether to attack training camps, safe houses and weapons storehouses inside Iran that intelligence reports say are being used by the Quds Force to train fighters, according to two senior administration officials.

Those sites are dispersed in Iranian cities, making them difficult to strike without risking killing civilians, officials said.

For now, the United States has decided that military strikes in Iran would be untenable and has concentrated on trying to disrupt the routes used to smuggle weapons and fighters across the border, and on diplomatic and financial pressure, those and other officials said.

Much of the new evidence of Iranian activity in Iraq emerged during the Iraqi-led operation last month to seize control of Iraq's second-largest city, Basra. A senior administration official

described the fighting in Basra as "a clarifying moment" for the Iraqis, as well as the Americans, about the extent of Iran's involvement.

The operation in Basra and fighting against Shiite militias that has spread to the Sadr City neighborhood in Baghdad have resulted in the capture of significant caches of weapons, including hundreds of rockets and materials to build the bombs designed to puncture armored vehicles, which kill most U.S. troops, the officials said.

The caches, the officials said, have given U.S. commanders a clearer pic-

ture of how Iranian weapons have entered Iraq and filtered to various militias and criminal groups throughout the country.

"Much of the Iranian-sponsored arms flow through southern Iraq and are used elsewhere in the country — certainly here in the ongoing Sadr City fight," a senior military officer in Baghdad said.

Many of the weapons included serial numbers or packaging materials indicating that they had been made in Iran and in 2008, the officials said. That would contradict Iranian pledges last

year to Maliki that it would stanch the flow of weapons and fighters crossing the border.

Even so, the amount of weaponry does not appear to have increased.

"I would argue that — in fact — that it has been consistent with where it was some time ago — I couldn't tell you whether it was 12 months ago — but essentially, that that support continues," Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, speaking at the Pentagon on Friday, said of Iranian involvement. "And it's not just weapons. They continue to train Iraqis in Iran to come back and fight Americans and the coalition."

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune April 25, 2008

Israel talks must await U.S. change, Syria says

From news reports

DOHA, Qatar: Syria is ready to negotiate with Israel through Turkey to "find common ground" for peace, but direct talks must wait until a new U.S. president is elected, President Bashar al-Assad said in remarks published Thursday.

In comments to the *Watan* newspaper of Qatar, Assad confirmed that Syria had received word from Turkey that Israel was willing to give back the occupied Golan Heights in full in return for peace with the Arab state — one of the issues that led decade-long negotiations to falter in 2000.

Turkish mediation started last April and had brought "positive details," Assad told the newspaper.

"What we need now is to find common ground through the Turkish mediator," Assad said.

The Turkish prime minister, Tayyip Erdogan, who Assad said had conveyed the Israeli message, is expected in Damascus on Saturday.

According to the newspaper's account of Assad's remarks, which it did not publish in full, Assad said that only Washington could sponsor such negotiations, but that the administration of President George W. Bush "lacked the vision and the desire" to push for peace.

"We must be cautious and careful in negotiating this issue, and perhaps with a future administration in the United States, and we can talk after that about

direct negotiations," he said.

Syrian-Israeli talks collapsed in 2000 over the scope of an Israeli pullout from the Heights, occupied since 1967. Israel annexed the Heights in 1981 in a move condemned internationally.

Israel's prime minister, Ehud Olmert, said last week that he had sent messages to Damascus on peace prospects, but he did not reveal the contents. Olmert's spokesman, Mark Regev, declined to comment on the reports of Turkish mediation or the reported offer of a Golan Heights withdrawal, but he said Israel was genuinely interested in restarting talks with Syria.

"Israel wants peace with Syria. We are interested in a negotiated process," Regev said Wednesday. "The Syrians know well our expectations, and we know well their expectations."

Withdrawal from the Golan Heights is a contentious issue in Israel. The territory is a strategic plateau that overlooks a large swath of northern Israel. Israel has objected to past Syrian demands for access to the Sea of Galilee, a main water source for Israel.

After the Syrian reports, an Israeli member of Parliament from Olmert's Kadima Party, David Tal, said he would work to accelerate the passage of legislation making withdrawal from the Golan Heights subject to national referendum.

Those in Israel who favor a deal contend it would take Syria out of the Irani-

an sphere and end Syrian support for some groups hostile to Israel, like Hezbollah, in Lebanon, and Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip.

Olmert is said to be spending the Passover vacation with family members and friends in a wooden cabin on the Golan Heights.

What a complete withdrawal would mean has long been ambiguous, given the differences in the 1923 international boundary between Palestine and Syria, the 1949 armistice line and the confrontation line between Israel and Syria on June 4, 1967, on the eve of the war.

The Syrian foreign minister, Walid Muallem, said Wednesday that if Israel was committed to withdrawing to the pre-1967 border and had the will to make peace, "then there is no objection" to resuming talks.

The peace overtures follow a period of tension between Israel and Syria. Tensions peaked after an Israeli airstrike in September on Syria, directed against what analysts said was a partly constructed nuclear facility, and again after the assassination in February in Syria of Imad Mugniyah, a top Hezbollah commander long sought by the United States for his alleged role in terrorist attacks.

But in festive interviews with the Israeli news media before Passover, Olmert described his hopes for a deal. "I am very interested in a peace process with Syria," he said to the Hebrew daily *Yediot Aharonot*. "I've been acting on this issue, and I hope that my efforts mature into something meaningful."

(Reuters, IHT, AP)

Cleric calls for Iraqi unity to drive out U.S. forces

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune

April 26-27, 2008

By Alissa J. Rubin

BAGHDAD: Under pressure from Iraqi government troops and the U.S. military, the Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr called on his followers on Friday to stop the bloodshed, unite with all Iraqis and focus their firepower on driving out the "occupation forces," meaning the United States and its foreign allies.

The statement, read at Friday prayers, appeared to be part of a carefully calibrated strategy of reaching out to his "Iraqi brothers" while threatening Iraqis who work with the occupying forces.

It echoes the one Sadr made last year when he asked the Mahdi army, his militia, to halt its most aggressive activities, including most sectarian killings. That improved his image nationally and allowed him to build up his own forces.

In the statement, Sadr, who is believed to be in Iran, issued eight edicts in an effort to open the way for a negotiation with the Iraqi government but also to shore up his own support.

He instructed followers "to wage open war against the Americans" but forbade them from "raising a hand against another Iraqi citizen." He urged the Iraqi Army and Iraqi police to stop cooperating with the Americans. He said he would oppose any U.S. military bases in Iraq.

Sadr issued a "final warning" to the Iraqi government to end its crackdown or face an "open war until liberation." But he quickly softened that threat by

saying, "If we have threatened with an open war until liberation, we have meant by it a war against the occupier."

The very public effort to calm the situation follows nearly a month of open fighting in Sadr City, Basra and several provinces in southern Iraq. It appeared to reflect an effort by Sadr to ensure that his movement is able to compete effectively in local elections, scheduled for October.

Sadr and his allies have a strong following in Basra and could be expected to fare well in the elections. They have accused Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, who is allied with rival Shiite factions, of staging the Basra attack as a way to marginalize them before the vote.

For his part, Maliki has been careful not to single out the Mahdi army publicly, saying only that the government is trying to break the grip of all militias in Basra. But citizens in the city have said that most of the attacks have been aimed at Sadr's forces.

If the Sadr forces continued an all out fight against the government they would almost certainly suffer severe losses in manpower and firepower and might be barred from participating in the elections. The Parliament is considering a ban on political parties that sponsor militias.

A similar effort is under way by Sunni political parties that agreed on Thursday to return to the government. By taking control of a few ministries, their spokesmen said, they would be in a better position to compete for seats in

the elections.

Sympathy in Iraq has begun to rise for the plight of impoverished civilians in Sadr City, who are suffering because of the fighting, and Sadr appeared to be trying to get ahead of the changing tides so that he could take credit for allowing aid to reach the embattled neighborhood.

A parliamentary committee visited the area on Thursday and reported that clerics supporting Sadr "are sincere" in making an effort to solve the situation peacefully.

Sadr's followers were subdued as his instructions were read from the pulpit on Friday. In Sadr City, the speech was punctuated only by occasional group chants.

The crowd was larger than normal because of warning, from cars equipped with loudspeakers, of "an important announcement from "Moktada Sayyid." Sayyid is an honorific for descendants of the Prophet Mohammed through Imam Hussein, one of the founders of the Shiite branch of Islam.

Many followers said afterward that they had little hope that the government would respond but that it was the right step to take.

Herald INTERNATIONAL Tribune April 26-27, 2008

U.S. castigates Tehran for meddling in Iraq

Iran still supplying arms, official says

By David Stout

WASHINGTON: The government of Iran continues to supply weapons and other support to extremists in Iraq, despite repeated promises to the contrary, and is increasingly complicit in the death of U.S. soldiers, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Friday in a stark new assessment of Iranian influence.

The chairman, Admiral Michael Mullen, said he was "extremely concerned" about "the increasingly lethal and malign influence" by the government of Iran and the Quds Force of Iran's Revolutionary Guards, a special force that aids and encourages Islamic militants around the world. The Quds Forces in Iran were created during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s and report directly to the leadership of Iran's theocratic government.

Pentagon concerns about Iranian influence in neighboring Iraq is nothing new, but the content and tone of Mullen's remarks left the impression that

far from abating, the worries about Iran have intensified in recent months.

"The Iranian government pledged to halt such activities some months ago," Mullen said. "It's plainly obvious they have not. Indeed, they seem to have gone the other way."

The discovery of weapons caches in Iraq, with devices bearing stamps that indicate they were manufactured quite recently, run contrary to the Iranian promises not to interfere in Iraq, the admiral said. He conceded that he had "no smoking gun" to prove direct involvement by the very highest echelons in Tehran, but he said he found it hard to believe that all the top leaders were ignorant of recent developments.

The Pentagon is sufficiently concerned about Iran's apparently deepening involvement in Iraq that it plans a briefing in the near future by General David Petraeus, the U.S. commander in Iraq, to publicize the caches of weapons, some of which are believed to have been used against U.S. troops in

the recent fighting in Basra, in southern Iraq. Details of the weapons and the Pentagon's concerns over them were disclosed Friday in *The Wall Street Journal*.

"I believe recent events, especially the Basra operation, have revealed just how much and just how far Iran is reaching into Iraq to foment instability," Mullen said.

Of particular concern to U.S. military commanders are explosively formed penetrators, or EFPs, which the Pentagon says are being made in Iran and shipped to Shiite militants in Iraq, where they are used to deadly effect against U.S. forces trying to subdue extremist elements and bolster the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

Asked whether the new evidence of Iranian mischief in Iraq portends an U.S. military conflict with Iran, the admiral said, "I'm not going to add anything to what I've already said in that regard." For now, Mullen said, the best

weapon against Iran is a combination of diplomatic and financial pressure by the United States and other nations alarmed by Iran's attitude.

Pentagon leaders have said they would not rule out military action against Iran. But it is not uncommon for U.S. civilian and military leaders to leave "all options on the table," in an often-used phrase, because to rule out military action in advance is seen as admitting a lack of resolve.

Mullen acknowledged that the U.S. military was being stretched thin by the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. But, he said, "it would be a mistake to think that we are out of combat capability." As for Iranian motives, Mullen said he believed the leadership in Tehran hopes for a weak Iraq, so that Iran can increase its influence in the region.

Moreover, deep resentment remains in Iran toward the United States, which until the Iranian revolution in 1979 long supported the repressive regime of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi as a bul-

wark against Soviet influence in the Cold War. The current Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has shown little indication of wanting better relations with Washington.

Mullen said Iranian influence in Iraq goes beyond shipment of weapons. "They continue to train Iraqis in Iran to come back and fight Americans and the coalition," he said. Reiterating earlier accusations, he asserted that Iranian leaders "continue to broadly support terrorists in other parts of the region," including the militant groups Hezbollah and Hamas.

"And in fact, we're seeing some evidence that they're supporting the Taliban in Afghanistan," Mullen said.

Thom Shanker contributed reporting.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune April 30, 2008

Tariq Aziz faces Baghdad court

By Stephen Farrell

BAGHDAD: Tariq Aziz, who for years was the public diplomatic face of Saddam Hussein's regime, went on trial in Baghdad on Tuesday, facing charges over the execution of Iraqi merchants during the Baathist era.

Aziz, 72, who was deputy prime minister under Saddam, looked frail as he entered the court carrying a walking stick.

It was the first time he had appeared to answer charges since he surrendered to American forces April 25, 2003, two weeks after the invasion.

The case centers on the execution in 1992 of more than 40 Iraqi merchants who were accused by the regime of price-gouging in contravention of strict state controls during the era when Iraq was subject to United Nations sanctions.

If convicted, Aziz faces the death penalty. Among the other defendants are Saddam's half-brother, Watban Ibrahim al-Hassan, and his cousin, Ali Hassan al-Majid, who is known as Chemical Ali.

Majid did not attend the hearing Tuesday because of ill health after he suffered a heart attack in custody. He has already been sentenced to death in another case for war crimes over his involvement in killing tens of thousands of Kurds, including by poison gas. Judge Raouf Abdul-Rahman adjourned the Tuesday hearing until May 20, citing Majid's absence.

Speaking from Jordan by telephone, one of Aziz's lawyers, Badie Arif, said: "It is not a solid case. They don't even have enough to bring him to trial in the first place."

A graduate of Baghdad University, Aziz was born in Mosul into a Chaldean Christian Arab family, and later changed his name from Michael Yuhanna.

He lived in a magnificent villa on the banks of the River Tigris, in which looters found boxes of his trademark Romeo y Julieta "Churchill" cigars, bottles of Chivas Regal Scotch whiskey, Pierre Cardin shoes and books including biographies of Saddam Hussein and Colin Powell, and "Shakespeare's Lessons in Leadership and Management."

Elsewhere in Baghdad on Tuesday, heavy fighting erupted in the Shiite district of Sadr City as American and Iraqi troops continued efforts to curb rocket and mortar attacks on the capital's protected Green Zone.

Many of these attacks originate in nearby Sadr City, a stronghold of the Mahdi army of the radical cleric Moktada al-Sadr.

The American military said it had killed 28 gunmen during one prolonged clash Tuesday morning after a patrol was attacked with small arms, roadside bombs and rocket-propelled grenades. A military statement said American troops had fought back, using rocket launchers.

Doctors in Sadr City hospitals told Reuters that they had received the bodies of 21 people, including women and children.

In Diyala Province, the police in Balad Ruz said they had found the bullet-riddled corpses of six academics who were kidnapped last week. Their families had paid \$15,000 each, but the kidnapers still executed the hostages, Iraqi security officials said.

REUTERS

Vastes opérations de l'armée dans le Sud-Est de la Turquie

27 avril 2008 Reuters

Plusieurs milliers de soldats turcs participent dimanche à deux vastes opérations contre la guérilla kurde du PKK en Turquie, apprend-on de sources militaires.

Deux soldats ont été tués à Bingöl, dans le sud-est du pays, dans une des opérations qui implique 7 à 8.000 militaires. Plus au sud, dans les provinces de Sirnak et Hakkari frontalières avec l'Irak, au moins 15.000 soldats combattent le PKK, ajoute-t-on de mêmes sources.

Les décès annoncés dimanche s'ajoutent aux huit membres des forces de sécurité turques tués au cours de la semaine écoulée dans le Sud-Est, selon les informations de l'état-major.

L'armée turque a mené deux raids aériens contre des bases arrière du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) dans le nord de l'Irak vendredi soir et samedi matin.

Selon ces mêmes sources, les militaires s'efforcent de multiplier

les opérations à la faveur du dégel de printemps, qui facilite les déplacements dans ces régions très montagneuses.

En février dernier, l'armée turque avait mené pendant huit jours une incursion de grande ampleur dans le nord de l'Irak, malgré l'inquiétude de Bagdad et de Washington.

Ankara impute au PKK, qui a lancé son insurrection séparatiste en 1984, la responsabilité de 40.000 morts.



AFP

ANKARA ÉVOQUE UNE INTENSIFICATION DES CONTACTS AVEC LES KURDES D'IRAK

ANKARA, 28 avr 2008 (AFP) - Le chef de la diplomatie turque Ali Babacan a indiqué lundi que son pays envisage d'intensifier ses relations avec l'administration kurde d'Irak du nord, mises à mal en raison des rebelles kurdes de Turquie qui ont trouvé refuge dans les zones sous son contrôle.

"Dans la période à venir, vous pouvez vous attendre à divers contacts à divers niveaux avec l'administration du nord de l'Irak", a-t-il dit lors d'une conférence de presse avec son homologue néo-zélandais Winston Peter, en visite en Turquie.

Le ministre turc, cité par l'agence Anatolie, a rappelé que "certaines divergences" avaient opposé les autorités turques à celles du nord de l'Irak, notamment concernant la présence dans le Kurdistan irakien de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Mais, a-t-il souligné, "la Turquie a une politique générale qui consiste à promouvoir ses liens et le dialogue avec tout les groupes en Irak", laissant vraisemblablement entendre une embellie dans les relations turco-kurdes.

M. Babacan a souligné que ces contacts porteraient surtout sur la lutte contre le PKK et les sujets énergétiques.

La Turquie souhait s'impliquer davantage dans des contrats pétroliers dans le nord de l'Irak, qui sont l'objet d'une controverse entre le gouvernement central irakien et les autorités de cette région riche en pétrole.

Selon des journaux turcs, Nechirvan Barzani, Premier ministre de la région autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak, doit se déplacer prochainement à Ankara.

Le PKK, qui lutte depuis 1984 contre le pouvoir central turc, est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne.

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a intensifié ses opérations contre le PKK. Elle a notamment effectué des raids aériens, soutenu par les services de renseignements américains, ainsi qu'une opération terrestre en février dans le nord de l'Irak, où sont retranchés selon Ankara plus de 2.000 rebelles kurdes.

AFP

TURQUIE: TROIS MORTS DANS DES COMBATS DANS LE SUD-EST

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 29 avr 2008 (AFP) - Deux rebelles kurdes et un soldat turc ont été tués mardi matin dans des combats dans le sud-est de la Turquie, ont affirmé des sources de sécurité à Diyarbakir (sud-est).

Les combats, dans lesquels deux militaires ont été blessés, ont éclaté dans une zone rurale de la petite ville de Genç, dans la province de Bingöl, a-t-on précisé de même source.

Trois "gardiens de village", des miliciens kurdes armés par l'Etat turc pour combattre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, séparatiste), ont par ailleurs été blessés dans des combats qui se sont produits dans la même zone

lundi matin, a-t-on ajouté.

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a intensifié ses opérations contre le PKK. Elle a notamment effectué des raids aériens ainsi que des opérations dans le nord de l'Irak, où sont retranchés selon Ankara plus de 2.000 rebelles kurdes.

Vendredi et samedi dernier, l'aviation et l'artillerie turques ont ainsi pilonné des positions de rebelles kurdes dans la montagne irakienne.

Le PKK se bat depuis 1984 pour l'indépendance du sud-est anatolien, un conflit qui a fait plus de 37.000 morts.

AFP

L'ARMÉE TURQUE AFFIRME AVOIR TUÉ "DE NOMBREUX" REBELLES KURDES EN IRAK

ANKARA, 29 avr 2008 (AFP) - "De nombreux" rebelles kurdes ont été tués la semaine dernière au cours de raids aériens dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé mardi l'armée turque sans donner de bilan précis.

Quelque 43 avions de combat turcs ont participé vendredi et samedi à ces attaques qui visaient des positions du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit) dans les régions de Zap, d'Avashin et de Khakourk, selon la même source.

Plus de cent objectifs rebelles, dont des repaires, des postes de défense antimissile et des centres de communication, ont été détruits et "de nombreux terroristes soupçonnés d'être en train de préparer des attaques contre la Turquie ont été mis hors d'état de nuire", selon l'armée turque.

L'armée va continuer de poursuivre le PKK "à la fois dans le pays et à l'étranger en fonction des exigences militaires", précise le communiqué de l'armée.

Depuis décembre, l'armée turque a bombardé à plusieurs reprises les positions du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak. Elle a notamment effectué des raids aériens ainsi qu'une opération terrestre en février dans le nord de l'Irak, où sont retranchés selon Ankara plus de 2.000 rebelles kurdes.

Le parlement turc a autorisé le gouvernement à déclencher des opérations militaires au-delà des frontières de la Turquie pendant un an, jusqu'en octobre.

Les Etats-Unis, alliés de la Turquie au sein de l'Otan, ont fourni à Ankara du renseignement pour combattre les séparatistes.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne, se bat depuis 1984 pour l'autonomie du sud-est de la Turquie peuplé en majorité kurde. Ce conflit a déjà fait plus de 37.000 morts.

Le Monde
30 avril 2008

Irak 1 145 personnes ont été tuées, selon l'ONU, depuis la reprise des affrontements à Bassora puis à Bagdad

Bagdad : un mois de combats à Sadr City, bastion de l'« Armée du Mahdi » chiite



Un enfant tente d'éteindre l'incendie d'un véhicule blindé après un bombardement, le 12 avril à Sadr City (Bagdad). KAREEM RAHEEM/REUTERS

Combats au sol, tirs de chars d'assaut, bombardements aériens, attaques hélicoptères, usage de drones armés de missiles : les forces américaines, qui ont annoncé lundi 28 avril avoir tué « une quarantaine de criminels » au cours des 24 heures précédentes à Bagdad, dans le grand faubourg chiite de Sadr City, semblent engagées dans une troisième guerre contre la milice du prêcheur chiite Moqtada Al-Sadr, l'« Armée du Mahdi », qu'elles avaient tenté d'éliminer par deux fois en 2004.

Lancée le 24 mars dans le grand port pétrolier de Bassora à l'initiative du premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, l'offensive, désormais conduite par les Américains, qui ont perdu 15 soldats dans les combats, a coûté la vie à au moins 1 145 personnes, 700 à Bassora selon les Nations unies, et 445 civils, soldats et miliciens mêlés à Sadr City, fief du jeune imam chiite dans la capitale.

Fils d'un « grand ayatollah » très populaire parmi les masses chiites déshéritées d'Irak – c'est à la mémoire de ce dernier que l'immense faubourg de Bagdad où résident 2,5 millions d'Irakiens fut renommé Sadr City en 2003 –, Moqtada Al-Sadr, âgé de 34 ans, a fait savoir dimanche qu'il rejetait les quatre conditions posées par le chef du gouvernement pour mettre un terme à l'offensive.

Chiite très pratiquant lui-même et membre du vieux parti Al-Daawa, Nouri

Les Britanniques reportent leur retrait

Initialement programmé par Gordon Brown, le premier ministre, pour « le printemps 2008 », le retrait de 1 500 des 4 100 soldats britanniques qui sont encore en Irak, retranchés depuis décembre 2007 dans un camp près de l'aéroport de Bassora, a été renvoyé à des temps meilleurs. « Au vu des événements de ces dernières semaines, a annoncé, mardi 1^{er} avril, Des Browne, ministre britannique de la défense, il est plus prudent que nous fassions une pause avant de nouvelles réductions de troupes. » – (AFP.)

Al-Maliki, qui tente de débarrasser le pays de ses milices armées avant que les Etats-Unis n'acceptent, en fin d'année devant le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, de rendre à l'Irak sa souveraineté totale, y compris sur les affaires militaires, a notamment exigé la remise aux forces de l'ordre de toutes les armes lourdes et moyennes détenues par « les milices en général, et pas seulement l'Armée du Mahdi », a-t-il précisé. Celle de l'imam Sadr est réputée la plus puissante du pays avec, selon les estimations, 60 000 membres en armes. M. Maliki a aussi exigé la reddition par celle-ci de « toutes les personnes recherchées » par la police.

Les « sadristes » qui ont remporté, en 2005, trente des 275 sièges de l'Assemblée nationale – le double d'Al-Daawa – s'estiment injustement traités, pour des raisons électorales. Début octobre devraient avoir lieu des élections locales, et beaucoup d'observateurs estiment que le « mouvement Sadr », particulièrement bien implanté, notamment grâce à de puissants et efficaces réseaux d'aide sociale, pourrait reprendre à Maliki et ses alliés chiites du Conseil suprême islamique – premier parti de l'Assemblée avec 60 élus – de nombreuses provinces et localités.

Des contacts continuent d'avoir lieu entre M. Maliki et les envoyés de l'imam Sadr, lui-même replié dans la ville sainte iranienne de Qom depuis près d'un an, pour trouver une issue moins meurtrière à cette première épreuve de force d'envergure entre chiites. Jusqu'ici sans succès.

Le cessez-le-feu conclu le 30 mars sous la houlette de Téhéran, considéré comme le « parrain » des deux camps, semble n'avoir été, au final, qu'un faux-semblant. Les combats frontaux entre l'armée gouvernementale et les miliciens de Bassora ont certes cessé,

mais l'offensive s'est poursuivie de manière plus discrète et avec plus de succès, au point que l'armée irakienne a pu annoncer, sans être démentie, qu'elle contrôlait désormais « la totalité » de Bassora. Manouchehr Mottaki, le chef de la diplomatie iranienne, a fait savoir que son pays soutenait l'offensive de M. Maliki « contre toutes les milices ».

Edifié à la fin des années 1950 pour loger les milliers de familles misérables du Sud chiite qui émigraient vers la capitale à la recherche d'emplois, le faubourg de Sadr City, suite d'avenues et de rues transversales rectilignes, encombrées de tonnes d'ordures et bordées de petits immeubles lépreux qui reçoivent, comme sous le règne de Saddam Hussein, un minimum de services publics (eau potable, électricité...), se révèle plus difficile à subjuguier. Depuis un mois, et singulièrement ces derniers jours en raison de la tempête de sable qui a frappé Bagdad, clouant les forces aériennes américaines au sol, des centaines de roquettes et d'obus tirés depuis Sadr City se sont abattus sur la « zone verte » ultra-fortifiée du centre-ville où sont retranchés le gouvernement et le Parlement irakiens, de même que l'ambassade américaine et les chancelleries alliées.

Pour s'en prémunir, l'armée américaine a commencé l'édification d'une nouvelle muraille de béton afin de séparer toute la partie sud de Sadr City – la plus proche de la « zone verte » – du reste de la capitale. Dans les rangs de l'Armée du Mahdi, confie de Bagdad un proche de la milice, « on commence à évoquer le recours aux attentats-suicides ». Une méthode largement utilisée par les rebelles sunnites plus ou moins affiliés à Al-Qaïda, mais inaugurée au début des années 1980 au Moyen-Orient par des chiites irakiens membres du parti... Al-Daawa. ■

PATRICE CLAUDE

TODAYS ZAMAN

April 27, 2008

Op-Ed

Who should the Kurds vote for?

by **BEJAN MATUR***

Imagine that you live in Diyarbakir. If you did not vote for the Democratic Society Party (DTP) in the last election, you must have chosen the Justice and Development Party (AK Party). You did so for a number of reasons.

You held that any option besides voting for one of these two parties would not alleviate your problems with the system. You did not have another option. You voted for either the DTP, which relied on ethnic politics, or the AK Party, which you believed would bring economic services to your region. You believed that you had two options. Did the party you voted for in the last election disappoint you? Did the DTP ignore you by failing to adequately represent you? Then you have the AK Party, which provides services for you. Or did the AK Party for which you voted, thinking it would generate economic benefits for you, upset you when it approved a cross-border operation? Then you have the DTP, which has remained opposed to such operations from the start. Even though you aren't fully content, you always have a political option that will transmit your objection and opposition to the regime. You always will have. You had this option even during states of emergency.

Despite the election threshold and other obstacles that undermine democratic values, there has always been another option; the voters have chosen one of the political parties that would convey their demands to the political sphere, including the Social Democratic People's Party (SHP), Republican People's Party (CHP), People's Democracy Party (HADEP) or others. This time the situation is far graver and more serious than it was 25 years ago, when the country was governed under the rules of a state of emergency. The two parties that represent 95 percent of votes cast in the southeastern region of Turkey are facing the imminent danger of closure. Both parties, which together represent almost the entire Kurdish electorate, may be banned from politics. How would you feel about this? Would you not feel humiliated, denied or ignored as an ordinary citizen? This sense of exclusion and the accompanying feeling of concern and worry are becoming more prevalent and dominant in the region. The current mood may only be compared to the feelings prevalent in the 1990s, when people tasted fear and outrage in connection with frequent extrajudicial killings. This is why you would sense that you might be stabbed whenever you walked on a street in Diyarbakir. Undoubtedly, the hopelessness and the pessimism that took the city captive is related to this unpredictability and uncertainty.



The two parties that represent 95 percent of votes cast in the Kurdish populated southeastern region of Turkey -- the AK Party and the DTP -- are facing the imminent danger of closure.

Interestingly, this also applies to all of Turkey. The policies of the DTP and the AK Party as regards democratization and EU membership mostly overlap, just as the policies of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and the CHP are alike. The latter pair lags behind social demands and goals. And now Turkey seeks to ban the first two, which would have served as the key to resolving the country's most complicated problems. But I think that one point is missed in this matter. Those who seek to benefit from the closure attempts are focused on the short-term advantages involved in the ban. At least for now, they fail to appreciate the long-term repercussions. I believe the Kurdish question will remain forever unresolved if the DTP and the AK Party are banned. Those who favor party closures will not be able to deal with "separatism," an issue they make frequent references to.

Turkey is a country unable to resolve its problems. This has almost become an inherent characteristic of the state. What happens today makes us appreciate the size and magnitude of the potential for the exacerbation of the existing problems -- and not only the lack of will to resolve these problems. I wonder just how those who brag of increasing this potential will fill the void that will be created in the event of the closure of the two parties that serve to transmit the demands of local people to the political center. Think about what will happen when the DTP, which puts emphasis on Kurdishness and reaches out the voters by promising it will transmit the demands of the Kurdish people as regards their cultural identity to the political sphere, is banned from politics, or how people will react to the closure of the AK Party, whose policies are still popular, despite reduced support following the operation in the region. It seems that those who are eager to ban these two parties seek to ensure this: the

people in the region have problems with the regime anyway, they have never reconciled with the state and there is no sign that they will. So some effective alternatives, rather than election thresholds and other obstructions, to fully ignore them should be considered. Imagine there is no DTP or AK Party in the region...

It appears that some hold that it would be easy to resolve the Kurdish question if only there were no Kurds, just as a minister for education allegedly remarked that it would be so easy to run the ministry if there were no students. Maybe they are right; their minds are playing a trick on them. Their concerns over separation or division to which they pay the utmost attention must have blocked their minds. Their minds are so blocked that they fail to appreciate that what they considered to be a resolution will actually trigger the realization of their fears. That is to say, the closure of two parties that represent 95 percent of the voters in the southeastern part of Turkey will force the electorate to make a choice vis-à-vis the regime. That the Kurds have so far not been alienated is not something that has happened by the design of the regime or politics. But this was how history progressed. However, demands by the masses -- the voters -- who were left no option to become alienated by the center, should no longer be considered a preference. If this is the case, why do we react to Osman Baydemir, who once noted that the Kurds feel emotionally alienated by Turkey?

Maybe it is time to attribute different meanings to these remarks. These remarks, which were the subject of prosecution and legal processes, should be excused, simply because this is exactly what is being provoked. From now on, nobody can blame the Kurds for alienating themselves from the state and developing an interest in other centers of attraction. Kurds now no longer even have a choice. They have one option to consider: to alienate, to separate. If the Kurds still remain attached despite all these negative developments, we have to ponder this. When and how will we lose the Kurds, really? Which evil act will alienate us from the Kurds? This is what I see: What is being attempted today is undermining the position of Turkey -- and not the Kurds. Kurds have already lost what they have lost. But the wielders of power who are used to winning all the time have to consider what they would lose. It will at least be better for those who, with the possibility of winning all the time in mind, seek to ban political parties to reconsider this issue one more time.

**Bejan Matur is a poet.*

Turkish soldiers die in Kurd battle

By Emma Ross-Thomas, AP

Thousands of Turkish soldiers fought Kurdish separatists yesterday in two large operations, military sources said, a day after Turkish warplanes launched air strikes on rebel targets in northern Iraq.

Two soldiers were killed in Bingol, southeast Turkey, in an operation involving 7,000 to 8,000 soldiers.

Further south in the provinces of Sirnak and Hakkari, which border Iraq, at least 15,000 soldiers were fighting Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas, the sources said.

Turkey has stepped up operations against PKK inside Turkey and, since the end of a February land offensive against guerrillas based in northern Iraq, has launched a series of air strikes against PKK targets in the neighbouring country.

On Friday night and early Saturday the armed forces launched their second air operation on northern Iraq in a week, the biggest round of air strikes this year, according to military sources.

The strikes did not necessarily herald another land incursion like the February offensive, analysts said. That had prompted concern in Washington about further regional instability and was watched closely on financial markets.

"I don't think there will be a major land operation, maybe small 'hot pursuit' operations," said columnist and political analyst Professor Dogu Ergil. "That would be the last option ... they tried a land operation and it didn't prove too productive."

The February incursion, during which the army said it killed 240 guerrillas and lost 27 of its own men, lasted eight days in harsh winter conditions. The head of the armed forces said after

the withdrawal that further land operations could follow.

Yesterday's deaths add to a toll of eight security personnel killed in the southeast in the last week alone, according to information from the General Staff.

The armed forces tend to step up operations in the spring when the snow melts, making it easier to move around the mountainous region. The General Staff says it targets guerrillas trying to cross back over the border into Turkey.

Before the ground operation in February, Turkey launched a series of air strikes on targets in northern Iraq in December.

Ankara blames the PKK for 40,000 deaths since 1984 when the group took up arms to try to establish an ethnic homeland in southeast Turkey. Like the United States and the European Union, it considers the group a terrorist organisation.

A Kurdish idealist returns to Iraq to 'change attitudes'

By Sam Dagher

Nestled amid Iraq's highest mountains between the Iranian and Turkish borders, lies a town of farmers and traders, smugglers and truckers.

Choman is a place of dramatic beauty with snowcapped peaks and lush valleys. But even though Baghdad seems like a world away, the residents here, and in many other towns in Kurdistan, still struggle to overcome the impact of war.

In the 1980s, Saddam Hussein destroyed these areas to attack Kurdish rebels. Today, Iran and Turkey target separatists hiding in the mountains.

This turmoil has given rise to a generation that knows little more than war and has little hope in the new Iraq.

"It's not easy to rise from the ashes of war, sanctions, and isolation," says Taha Barwari, who returned to Iraq from Sweden with a vision: change the mind-sets of young Kurds.

"We need a creative, educated, democratic, stimulated, employed, equal, and active youth population," says Mr. Barwari, minister of sports and youth for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Since returning to his native northern Iraq two years ago, Barwari has been leading a quiet revolution with the backing of KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, to do nothing less than alter the outlook of young Kurds.

With the help of his like-minded assistant, Asos Shafeek, who is also a recent returnee from Sweden, the minister has established 33 recreational centers around the region especially in deprived communities.

Barwari calls the centers "factories for attitude change."

His ministry is also involved in a project to publish 60 books in the Kurdish language distilling the concepts and ideas of world thinkers. He has pushed for the creation of a special committee made up of representatives of key ministries just to deal with the needs of the youth. His ministry sponsored the first coed summer camp in 2007.

Barwari estimates that about 65 percent of Iraqi Kurdistan's population of about 4.5 million is made up of people between the ages of 14 and 30, while 75 percent of his government's budget is spent on public sector salaries.

His initiatives are primarily aimed at promoting the virtues of volunteerism, critical thinking, independence, and entrepreneurship among the young people in a society overwhelmingly bound by a near-blind allegiance to the two main ruling parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

He says that for Kurds to ever attain their true potential and fulfill their dream of statehood one day, they must first begin to change their own outlook and attitude.

"It's the beginning of something ... they are leading the young to be different for the future. Not only to be political fanatics," says Handrin Hassan, an intern at the ministry visiting from Sweden, which is home to a significant Kurdish community as well as other Iraqis of all sects and ethnicities who have found refuge there over the years from their war-ravaged country.

But in his quest Barwari has faced strong criticism from some members of the old guard in his own KDP who view his ideas as being "too Western."

Nowhere is the impact of what Barwari is trying to accomplish more evident than in some of the remotest and most impoverished corners of the region, such as Choman.

In 1983-84, Mr. Hussein leveled the town in his so-called Anfal campaign against the rebelling Kurds.

"Even the walnut trees were blown up with TNT," says Abdul-Wahid Gwany, the town's mayor.

Residents started returning to Choman and rebuilding their homes in 1991 when the semiautonomous Kurdistan region was established here.

One year ago, Barwari and his aides opened a recreational center here complete with a library, a gym, a movie theater, and a radio station - all facilities that did not exist in the area. Now, three local young people are trying to keep it going on a volunteer basis, despite waning interest from residents, skepticism by local officials, and huge logistical challenges including the lack of reliable electricity supply.

"We have nothing here, so by being involved in

this center, I feel like I am giving something to our community," says Suham Mirhamed, who is a nurse by training and dedicates a lot of her time to managing the center.

One of her assistants, Salar Ismail, a high school student who runs the radio station, says that if it were not for the center he and many of his friends "would just spend most of their time on the streets."

Mr. Gwany, who is also the local KDP boss, is not convinced of the value of the center when most of the area's young people come from families struggling to make ends meet in a place beset by inadequate infrastructure and basic services.

"The Kurdish youth are at a boiling point ... kids do not have jobs and some can't even meet their most basic needs. Volunteerism is not possible under these circumstances," says the mayor, adding that the youth must be paid salaries in order to be involved in the center. "Barwari's idea is bad and it's coming from Europe."



P12 Community centers: Suham Mirhamed (l.), an organizer at Choman's recreation center, participates in a traditional Kurdish dance session.

SAM DAGHER

Mr. Shafeek, Barwari's assistant, says that it's precisely this attitude that they are trying to battle.

"We want our youth to be empowered. We want to create a movement of young people that are strong, motivated and free," he says. "They want slaves."



Spring Season Brings Uptick In Fighting Between Turkish Military And Kurdish Guerrillas

April 28, 2008 The Associated Press

ISTANBUL, Turkey: Ten Turkish soldiers have died in clashes with Kurdish guerrillas since April 20, signaling a seasonal upswing in fighting when winter snows melt and combatants are able to move around rugged terrain more freely.

The renewed violence comes two months after Turkey staged a ground offensive against guerrillas based in Iraqi Kurdistan with the help of U.S. intelligence but without the active support of Iraqi Kurds. It also coincides with Turkish air and artillery strikes on cross-border targets, though experts say such tactics have limited impact on an elusive foe in a vast region.

The persistence of the guerrilla threat raises questions about whether Turkey might deem it necessary to stage another ground operation in Iraq against the guerrilla Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK. The military says it is entitled to do so, but U.S.-led calls for restraint and the prospect of a costly, inconclusive campaign could temper any Turkish zeal for another incursion.

"It's something that they have to be considering," said Aliza Marcus, author of "Blood and Belief: the PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence." Abdulkadir Onay, a Turkish lieutenant colonel and a visiting fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, compared Turkish military action in Iraqi Kurdistan to what he described as "required" Israeli operations in Lebanon and Colombia's recent air strike on a group of leftist rebels who were hiding just across the border in Ecuador.

"Just as the U.S. military has targeted al-Qaida camps in Afghanistan, Turkey will likely continue to tackle the PKK presence in neighboring Iraq," Onay wrote in an analysis this month. Ahmet Banas, a PKK spokesman in Iraqi Kurdistan, said guerrillas "have enough forces" to defend themselves if Turkey attacks in Iraqi Kurdistan again. The PKK is estimated to have a total of 5,000 fighters, down by half from its peak in the early 1990s.

Some recent fighting with the guerrilla group occurred near Mt. Cudi in Shirnakh province and similar mountain routes traditionally used by guerrillas to infiltrate Turkey from Iraq. But Turkish media said

two soldiers were killed in Bingol province Sunday, hundreds of kilometers (miles) from Iraq. guerrilla units inside Turkey Kurdistan are believed to have considerable independence from their masters in Iraqi Kurdistan, getting weapons and other supplies from local smugglers and carrying out hit-and-run attacks.

The PKK detonated 20 mines and roadside bombs from the beginning of this year until April 25, according to the Turkish General Staff. Authorities defused another 95 explosive devices.

The military has reported the combat deaths of 10 soldiers and one member of a paramilitary force comprising village residents since April 20. guerrillas say they seek autonomy in the predominantly Kurdish southeast of Turkey, citing a history of discrimination and human rights abuses by the state. Turkey says the PKK is a terrorist group — a view shared by Europe and the United States — and says the state is committed to social and economic reforms to help the Kurds. Progress, however, is halting.

Turkey's ruling party won more Kurdish votes in elections last year than a Kurdish party seen as the political wing of the PKK, suggesting many Kurds are tired of militancy. But the PKK's profile rose when Turkey sent troops into Iraqi Kurdistan for eight days in February despite U.S. concerns about the threat to stability in the area controlled by Iraqi Kurds.

The Turkish military said it pummeled guerrilla in Iraq's Zap region, though commanders said it was difficult to keep troops exposed for long in the harsh winter. The Feb. 29 troop withdrawal came after U.S. President George W. Bush told Turkish leaders to end the offensive as soon as possible; Turkey's military denied it pulled out under U.S. pressure. Iraqi Kurds have refrained from tough action against their Turkish Kurd brethren, though Turkish commanders want them to arrest rebels and cut supply lines.

"In the best circumstances, it's difficult for (the Turks) to fight in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially without the Iraqi Kurds as an active partner," said Marcus, the author. She also questioned the value of U.S. military intelligence in parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, where few American soldiers are stationed and the distances are huge.

THE DAILY STAR

April 30, 2008

Iraq's Kurds are mistaken in protecting the PKK

By Abdulkadir Onay Commentary by -- Lebanon

Last month, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani visited Ankara for a meeting with his Turkish counterpart Abdullah Gul to discuss, among other things, the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, issue. The PKK currently controls an enclave in northeastern Iraq. The Iraqi Kurdish parties - Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) - flank the PKK enclave. The United States is currently cooperating with Turkey in its operations against the PKK by providing intelligence support. But this cooperation will not be successful unless the Iraqi Kurds, who have the ability to block the PKK enclave, come on board and take a stand against the group.

What can Iraqi Kurds do in this regard and how would this affect their relationship with Turkey?

The Iraqi Kurds reaped the benefits of an alliance with the US in 2003 by providing it with assistance against Saddam Hussein's regime. Since then,

the KDP and PUK have resisted increasing US pressure to take action against the PKK enclave, from where the PKK has carried out terrorist attacks against Turkey. The Iraqi Kurds cooperated with Turkey significantly against the PKK in the 1990s; during that time Turkey provided the Iraqi Kurds with vital commercial and physical access to the outside world, bypassing the Saddam Hussein regime. Turkey also supplied the Iraqi Kurds with crucial protection and access to US military support against Saddam from the Incirlik base in southern Turkey.

However, since the start of the Iraq war in 2003, and with the end of Saddam's rule, the KDP and PUK have ignored that deal with Turkey. In due course, they suspended cooperation with Ankara against the PKK. Furthermore, according to Western security contractors in Iraq, local Kurdish forces are now protecting the PKK and its associated groups by facilitating or providing them with

logistical support.

Because the Iraqi Kurdish leadership does not acknowledge the PKK as a terrorist organization, PKK militants can travel unhindered in northern Iraq provided, in some cases, that they inform the local Iraqi Kurdish authorities. Journalists are also given access to the PKK enclave. For example, last March 8 a Washington Post correspondent reported from there, explaining that the enclave was controlled by neither local Kurdish authorities nor the Iraqi government.

If they are to be regarded as an established authority in northern Iraq, the Iraqi Kurds ought to take action against the PKK presence in their region. The PKK has illegally seized Iraqi territory. Its enclave benefits from logistical support from areas controlled by the PUK and KDP.

Turkish officials believe that Iraqi Kurds view the PKK as a potential bargaining chip in exchange for Turkish recognition of Kurdish autonomy, or a probable declaration of independ-

ence by the Iraqi Kurds. While the Iraqi Kurds have strong ties to the US, their policy of ignoring Turkey may be shortsighted. Once the bulk of the US military leaves the region, the Iraqi Kurds will be surrounded by Iraqi Arabs to the south, Syria to the west and Iran to the east - all neighbors the Iraqi Kurds have reason to fear. When this comes to pass, the Iraqi Kurds will need Turkey both for protection and for access to the US military in Incirlik.

Ankara views the PKK much in the way that the US viewed Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan after 9/11. Presently, northeastern Iraq resembles Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan, in the sense that both are lawless areas in which terrorist groups have set up shop. Hence, just as the US military has targeted Al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan, Turkey will likely continue to tackle the PKK presence in neighboring Iraq.

In this regard, there are a number of key steps that the Iraqi Kurds could take with respect to the PKK issue.

The first would be to recognize that the PKK is a terrorist organization, a measure that would allow the Iraqi Kurds to come on board with Turkey, the United States and the Iraqi government in this regard. Second, the KDP and PUK might be well served to consider denying the use of their land by the PKK and preventing logistical support from their cities to the PKK enclave.

Finally, the Iraqi Kurds could cooperate with Turkey against the PKK

as they did in the 1990s. They could help arrest some of the PKK's leaders and destroy PKK facilities as well as facilitating Turkish policing of PKK camps. Such steps would elevate Turkish-Iraqi Kurdish ties to the level they were at in the 1990s, and even beyond.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's latest proposal, made at the summit of the 57-nation Organization of the Islamic Conference in Senegal's capital Dakar on

March 13, 2008, according to which Iran, Turkey and Iraq should work together to defeat the PKK terrorists while respecting each other's territorial integrity, has already made inroads in Turkey. Indeed, the idea should push everyone to see the bigger picture on the PKK issue: The continued PKK presence in northeastern Iraq not only drives a wedge between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds but also has the potential of bringing Turkey closer to other regional alliances.

Abdulkadir Onay is a visiting fellow in the Turkish Research Program at the Washington

Institute for Near East Policy. The opinions expressed in this article are the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of any institution. This commentary first appeared at bitterlemons-international.org, an online newsletter.

THE
INDEPENDENT

30 April 2008

The Big Question: As Tariq Aziz goes on trial, who is left from Saddam Hussein's regime?

By Patrick Cockburn

Why are we asking this now?

Tariq Aziz, the most articulate spokesman for Saddam Hussein's regime, went on trial in Baghdad yesterday. The 72-year-old is accused of being responsible for the execution in 1992 of 42 merchants, who allegedly raised food prices for no reason at a time when Iraq was under international sanctions. Aziz is on trial with eight others, including Saddam Hussein's half-brother, Watban Ibrahim al-Hassan, and Ali Hassan al-Majid – also known as "Chemical Ali". Al-Majid is already on death row, having been convicted last year of leading a campaign in which tens of thousands of Iraqi Kurds were massacred in the late 1980s. He is too ill to attend court because he has high blood pressure and diabetes.

Aziz, who was not a key decision-maker in Saddam's regime, is accused of signing the execution orders as a member of Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council – but he would have had no choice but to do so. It is unlikely he would have been directly responsible for ordering the executions. Indeed, it was one of the few mass killings for which Saddam was mildly apologetic. His victims were later referred to as "martyrs of the moment of rage". What is the significance of these trials?

They are important because they underline the determination of the Shia-Kurdish government to bring to justice the Baathist leaders who persecuted them for so long. Iraq's new rulers see all of Saddam's ruling Baathist elite as being guilty of hideous crimes. But the trials also emphasise the depth of the divisions between Sunni and Shia Arabs in Iraq. In Saddam's birthplace, Awaja, schoolgirls threw flowers on his grave and sang songs in praise of him this week. But for all of the Kurds, and most of the Shias, Saddam and his lieutenants were the equivalent of Hitler, Goebbels and Himmler. Many Sunnis see these trials, particularly of those leaders not directly involved in security, as a sign that none of their community has a place in the new Iraq. What is left of Saddam's regime?

The Baathist regime which held power from 1968 to 2003 was destroyed by the US-led invasion of 2003. In the final war, even its most elite military detachments did not fight and went home. It was very much a family government, whose inner core consisted of Saddam (executed at the end of 2006) and his sons Uday and Qusay, who were trapped in a house in

Mosul in 2003 and killed in a gun battle. Other top members of Saddam's government were his three half-brothers and more distant cousins such as Ali Hassan al-Majid. The important survivors of the regime who still matter did not feature in the pack of "most wanted" cards issued to US troops (though the former vice-president, Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, is still on the run) but younger men. These are the majors and colonels from Saddam's security services who have been at the heart of the resistance to the occupation.

What was the long-term outcome of Saddam's trial and execution? The gruesome execution of Saddam and the jeers of his executioners in December 2006 excited sympathy among the Iraqi Sunnis and abroad. Iraqis have become so used to appalling violence that they were probably less shocked by the hanging than many foreigners. They also spend most of their time worrying about the violence that threatens them and their families and not that done to the old dictator. Many Iraqis say their lives were safer under Saddam but this does not mean they want him back. They know he ruined their country. The Americans orchestrated Saddam's trial, although they wanted it to have an Iraqi face. These days, the US has less enthusiasm for trying and executing former Iraqi leaders because its policy is to conciliate the Sunnis, including former insurgents who have denounced violence and allied themselves with the Americans. Will Tariq Aziz be given a fair trial?

Iraq is still engulfed in war and no trial will be regarded as fair by all of the population. Evidence is difficult to collect. Saddam seldom gave a direct order for mass killings, although it is known that atrocities such as the murders of 150,000 Shias after the uprising of 1991, would not have taken place without his instructions.

There was more evidence against Chemical Ali, who gassed 180,000 Kurds in 1988-89, because government archives were captured during the Kurdish uprising of 1991. Those giving evidence know that they and their families might be killed. The trials are not fair but then neither was Nuremberg.

Should the trials be stopped because they inflame hatreds?



KAREN BALLARD/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Tariq Aziz: veteran of the Saddam era who is accused of responsibility for the execution of 42 people in 1992

No. The problem for the US and Iraqi governments is that instead of pursuing the 5,000 leading henchmen of Saddam's regime in 2003, they targeted the whole Sunni community of six million people. The army and security services were dissolved and former officers reduced to selling their furniture in order to feed their families. Not surprisingly, they joined the resistance.

The Americans are now pressing the Iraqi government to re-employ many of these former Baathists but it is doubtful this will happen. Here, the trials are more a symptom than a cause. Most former Baathist officers do not fear a formal trial as much as being shot dead on their doorsteps – as has happened to thousands of them. But there are very real criminals who killed and tortured at Saddam's command who should be brought to justice.

How will history judge Saddam and his lieutenants? Saddam Hussein was a monster. He seized power in a country with enormous oil reserves, a well-educated population and an efficient administration – and then ruined it. There was no need for him to crush any sign of dissent as if it was an attempted coup. His regime prided itself on its violence. It recorded its most vicious crimes on video tape.

Saddam was in some ways like Stalin, but there was also an element of Inspector Clouseau about him: he launched disastrous wars and described humiliating defeats as victories. But many Iraqis find it difficult to believe the revulsion expressed by the British and US governments at Saddam's crimes against humanity following the invasion of Kuwait in 1990, when the West had said so little about them previously. For instance, George Bush laments Saddam's use of poison gas at Halabja, which killed 5,000 civilian Kurds in 1988. But the US and Britain said so little to condemn Iraq's use of poison gas against

Iranian soldiers and civilians during the Iran-Iraq war that, in practice, they were complicit in its use. So does this trial bring the Saddam chapter to a close?
Yes...
* It shows that Saddam Hussein's regime really did lose the war and is not coming back.
* If the executions go ahead, there will soon be few of the old leadership left alive.
* The trials send out a clear message about the strength of the present Iraqi government.
No...

* The legacy of Saddam Hussein and of the events that took place during his rule still affects every aspect of Iraqi life.
* Most Sunni and many Shia Muslims see the trials as victors' justice, so they cannot be regarded as fair.
* Many of Saddam's supporters will never accept the present government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
A Nonpartisan Resource for Information and Analysis

April 30, 2008

Baghdad and Kurds Close the Gap

by Greg Bruno - Council on Foreign Relations

In March, despite few signs of progress on an Iraqi national oil law, the Kurdistan Regional Government's Ministry of Natural Resources readied for a hiring spree. Calls went out for legal advisors, engineers, and geoscientists—thirty-five oil and gas experts in all. At the time the job postings seemed like wishful thinking; Baghdad and Erbil, capital of the Kurdish autonomous region, appeared sharply divided on how to develop the region's massive oil wealth. But one month later, the want ads appear to have been a harbinger for warming relations between the Shiite-dominated central government and the northern Kurdish region. Iraq's chief government spokesman has hinted that a national oil agreement is imminent (UPI), and an Iraqi paper reports "major concessions" (Azzaman) have been reached.

Diplomatic breakthroughs have been rare on chief issues dividing Iraqi Kurds and Shiite parties in parliament. The regional government's practice of signing oil contracts with more than a dozen international firms irked central government leaders, and sparked warnings from some analysts that Kurdistan had "overreached" in its ambitions (NYT). Parliament's stonewalling of funds for the autonomous region's peshmerga security forces also frustrated Kurdish officials. Qassim Dawd, an Iraqi parliamentarian and member of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's party, said in January the disagreements had produced "ups and downs and mistrust between the two sides" (IWPR).

But there are signs regional relations are on an upswing. On April 12, Maliki agreed that Kurdistan's regional security forces "have the cover of legitimacy" (AP) and will be organized within two Iraqi army divisions of up to thirty thousand troops. The decision came amid a Maliki-led crackdown on militia groups elsewhere in Iraq. In a statement issued April 22 after meetings with central government leaders in Baghdad, Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said he was "very optimistic" about recent diplomatic gains—including talks on the status of the city of Kirkuk. U.S. policymakers, too, have trumpeted recent developments. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, en route to Baghdad on April 20, praised the Iraqis' crackdown on Shiite militia groups for "coalescing" Sunni, Shiite, and Kurdish interests.

On the oil front, accounts differ as to how close the central government and Kurds are to a formal agreement. Talks are said to be focusing on how to implement a draft oil law (PDF) from February 2007. Reports of a breakthrough sent shares in Norwegian oil and gas producer DNO soaring on April 16. The Norway-based company is one of at least twenty firms to have signed production-sharing deals with the Kurdish government. Barzani said he was confident such deals will eventually be honored. But there are significant hurdles to finalizing a national oil law, as this Backgrounder explains. Iraq's oil minister, who has in the past vowed to invalidate oil development contracts signed between Kurdistan and foreign firms, reiterated his opposition (AP) on April 21, though he did say talks are continuing.

Kirkuk may turn out to be the thorniest issue to resolve, according to the Economist. Kurds see the city as their ancient capital, but Arabs forced to relocate there under Saddam Hussein want Kirkuk to stay under the authority of Baghdad. A vote on its status is scheduled for the end of June. But a senior representative of the UN Secretariat, which brokered an extension to the referendum in December 2007, now believes the only solution to the Kirkuk problem is a political one, which could prove difficult to broker. "The last thing Iraq needs is a conflict about Kirkuk," UN Iraqi envoy Staffan de Mistura told Reuters.



Kurdish peshmerga troops drive Soviet made tanks during an exercise in northern Iraq. (AP/Sasa Kralj)



VANITY FAIR

April 2007

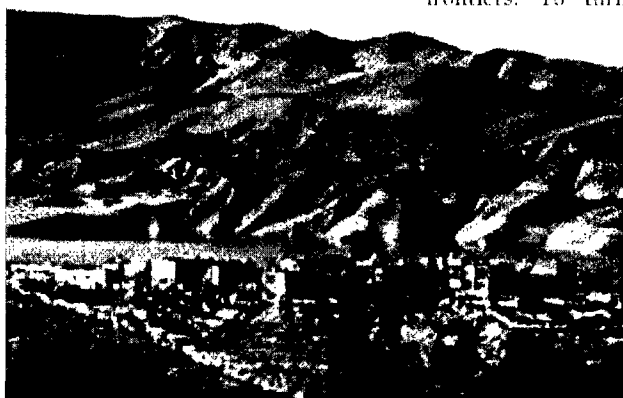
LETTER FROM KURDISTAN

Holiday in Iraq

Over Christmas break, the author took his son to northern Iraq, which the U.S. had made a no-fly zone in 1991, ending Saddam's chemical genocide. Now reborn, Iraqi Kurdistan is a heartrending glimpse of what might have been.

by CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

Last summer, you may have been among the astonished viewers of American television who were treated to a series of commercials from a group calling itself "Kurdistan—The Other Iraq." These rather touching and artless little spots (theotheriraq.com) urged you to consider investing in business, and even made you ponder taking your vacation, in the country's three northern provinces. Mr. Jon Stewart, of *The Daily Show*, could hardly believe his luck. To lampoon the ads, and to say, in effect, "Yeah, right—holiday in Iraq," was probably to summarize the reaction of much of the audience. Sure, baby, come to sunny Mesopotamia, and bring the family, and get your ass blown off while religious wack jobs ululate gleefully over your remains.



A view of Dohuk, the summer resort town by the Zagros Mountains in Kurdish dominated northern Iraq. By Faleh Kheiber/Reuters/Landov

1991, in the closing stages of the Gulf War. With a guerrilla escort, I crossed illegally into Iraq from Turkey and toured the shattered and burned and poisoned landscape on which Saddam Hussein had imprinted himself. In the town of Halabja, which has now earned its gruesome place in history, I met people whose hideous wounds from chemical bombardment were still suppurating. The city of Qala Diza had been thoroughly dynamited and bulldozed, and looked like an irretrievable wreck. Much of the area's lavish tree cover had been deforested: the bare plains were dotted with forbidding concrete barracks into which Kurds had been forcibly "relocated" or (a more accurate word) "concentrated." Nearly 200,000 people had been slaughtered, and millions more deported: huddling in ruins or packed into fetid camps on the Turkish and Iranian frontiers. To turn a spade was to risk uncovering a mass grave. All of Iraq suffered terribly during those years, but its Kurdish provinces were among the worst places in the entire world—a howling emptiness of misery where I could catch, for the first time in my life, the actual scent of evil as a real force on earth.

Thus, I confess to a slight lump in the throat at revisiting the area and seeing thriving, humming towns with multiplying construction sites, billboards for overseas companies,

Internet cafés, and a choice of newspapers. It's even reassuring to see the knockoff "Madona," with pseudo-golden arches, in the eastern city of Sulaimaniya, soon to be the site of the American University of Iraq, which will be offering not only an M.B.A. course but also, in the words of Azzam Alwash, one of its directors, "the ideas of Locke, the ideas and writings of Paine and Madison." Everybody knows how to snigger when you mention Jeffersonian democracy and Iraq in the same breath; try sniggering when you meet someone who is trying to express these ideas in an atmosphere that only a few years ago was heavy with miasmatic decay and the reek of poison gas.

While I am confessing, I may as well make a clean breast of it. Thanks to the reluctant decision of the first President Bush and Secretary of State James Baker, those fresh princes of "realism," the United States and Britain placed an aerial umbrella over Iraqi Kurdistan in 1991 and detached it

from the death grip of Saddam Hussein. Under the protective canopy of the no-fly zone—actually it was also called the "you-fly-you-die zone"—an embryonic free Iraq had a chance to grow. I was among those who thought and believed and argued that this example could, and should, be extended to the rest of the country; the cause became a consuming thing in my life. To describe the resulting shambles as a disappointment or a failure or even a defeat would be the weakest statement I could possibly make: it feels more like a sick, choking nightmare of betrayal from which there can be no awakening. Yet Kurdistan continues to demonstrate how things could have been different, and it isn't a place from which the West can simply walk away.

In my hometown of Washington, D.C., it's too easy to hear some expert hold forth about the essential character of any stricken or strategic country. (Larry McMurtry, in his novel *Cadillac Jack*, has a lovely pastiche of Joseph Alsop doing this very act about Yemen.) I had lived here for years and suffered through many Georgetown post-dinner orations until someone supplied me with the unfailing antidote to such punditry. It comes from Stephen Potter, the author of *Lifemanship*, *One-upmanship*, and other classics. Wait until the old bore has finished his exposition, advised Potter, then pounce forward and say in a plonking register, "Yes, but not in the South?" You will seldom if ever be wrong, and you will make the expert perspire. Different as matters certainly are in the South of Iraq, the thing to stress is how different, how very different, they are in the North.

In Kurdistan, to take a few salient examples, there is a memorial of gratitude being built for fallen American soldiers. "We are planning," said the region's prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, in his smart new office in the Kurdish capital of Erbil, "to invite their relatives to the unveiling." Speaking of unveiling, you see women with headscarfs on the streets and in offices (and on the judicial bench and in Parliament, which reserves a quarter of the seats for women by law), but you never see a face or body enveloped in a burka. The majority of Kurds are Sunni, and the minority are Shiite, with large groups belonging to other sects and confessions, but there is no intercommunal mayhem. Liquor stores and bars are easy to find, sometimes operated by members of the large and unmoled Christian community. On the university campuses, you may easily meet Arab Iraqis who have gladly fled Baghdad and Basra for this safe haven. I know of more than one intrepid Western reporter who has done the same. The approaches from the south are patrolled by very effective and battle-hardened Kurdish militiamen, who still carry the proud title of their guerrilla days: the

Well, as it happens, I decided to check this out, and did spend most of the Christmas holiday in Iraqi Kurdistan, bringing my son along with me, and had a perfectly swell time. We didn't make any investments, though I would say that the hotel and tourism and oil sectors are wide open for enterprise, but we did visit the ancient citadel in Erbil, where Alexander the Great defeated the Persians—my son is a Greek-speaking classicist—and we did sample the lovely mountains and lakes and rivers that used to make this region the resort area for all Iraqis. Air and road travel were easy (you can now fly direct from several airports in Europe to one of two efficient airports in Iraqi Kurdistan), and walking anywhere at night in any Kurdish town is safer than it is in many American cities. The police and soldiers are all friendly locals, there isn't a coalition soldier to be seen, and there hasn't been a suicide attack since May of 2005.

It wasn't my first trip. That took place in

peshmerga, or, translated from the Kurdish language, "those who face death." These men have a very brusque way with al-Qaeda and its local supporters, and have not just kept them at a distance but subjected them to very hot pursuit. (It was Kurdish intelligence that first exposed the direct link between the psychopathic Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Osama bin Laden.) Of the few divisions of the Iraqi Army that are considered even remotely reliable, the bulk are made up of tough Kurdish volunteers.

Pause over that latter point for a second. Within recent memory, the Kurdish population of Iraq was being subjected to genocidal cleansing. Given the chance to leave the failed state altogether, why would they not take it? Yet today, the president of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, is a Kurd: a former guerrilla leader so genial and humane that he personally opposed the execution of Saddam Hussein. Of the very few successful or effective ministries in Baghdad, such as the Foreign Ministry, it is usually true that a Kurd, such as Hoshiyar Zebari, is at the head of it. The much-respected deputy prime minister (and moving spirit of the American University in Sulaimaniya), Dr. Barham Salih, is a Kurd. He put it to me very movingly when I flew down to Baghdad to talk to him: "We are willing to fight and sacrifice for a democratic Iraq. And we were the ones to suffer the most from the

the table with grizzled Kurdish tribal leaders, and as the car bombs thumped across the city I realized how he could afford to look so assured and confident, and to flourish a Churchill-size postprandial cigar. To be chosen by the Iraqi parliament as the country's first-ever elected president might be one thing, and perhaps a dubious blessing. But to be the first Kurd to be the head of an Arab state was quite another. When he was elected, spontaneous celebrations by Kurds in Iran and Syria broke out at once, and often had to be forcibly repressed by their respective dictators. To put it pungently, the Kurds have now stepped onto the stage of Middle Eastern history, and it will not be easy to push them off it again. You may easily murder a child, as the parties of god prove every single day, but you cannot make a living child grow smaller.

I got a whiff of this intoxicating "birth of a nation" emotion when I flew back with Talabani from Baghdad to his Kurdish home base of Sulaimaniya. Here, as in the other Kurdish center, in Erbil, the airport gives the impression of belonging to an independent state. There are protocol officers, official limousines, and all the

appurtenances of autonomy. Iraq's constitution specifies that Kurdistan is entitled to its own regional administration, and the inhabitants never miss a chance to underline what they have achieved. (The Iraqi flag, for example, is not much flown in these latitudes. Instead, the golden Kurdish sunburst emblem sits at the center of a banner of red, white, and green.) Most inspiring of all, perhaps, is Kurdish Airlines, which can take a pilgrim to the hajj or fly home a returning refugee without landing at another Iraqi airport. Who would have believed, viewing the moonscape of Kurdistan in 1991, that these ground-down people would soon have their own airline?

The Kurds are the largest nationality in the world without a state of their own. The King of Bahrain has, in effect, his own seat at the United Nations, but the 25 million or so Kurds do not. This is partly because they are cursed by geography, with their ancestral lands located at the point where the frontiers of Iraq, Iran, Turkey, and Syria converge. It would be hard to imagine a less promising neighborhood for a

political experiment. In Iraq, the more than four million Kurds make up just under a quarter of the population. The proportion in Turkey is more like 20 percent, in Iran 10 percent, and in Syria perhaps nine. For centuries, this people's existence was folkloric and marginal, and confined to what one anthropologist called "the Lands of Insolence": the inaccessible mountain ranges and high valleys that bred warriors and rebels. A fierce tribe named the *Karduchoi* makes an appearance in Xenophon's history of the events of 400 B.C. Then there is mainly si-

lence until a brilliant Kurdish commander named Salah al-Din (Saladin to most) emerges in the 12th century to unite the Muslim world against the Crusaders. He was born in Tikrit, later the hometown of Saddam Hussein. This is apt, because Saddam actually was the real father of Kurdish nationhood. By subjecting the Kurds to genocide he gave them a solidarity they had not known before, and compelled them to create a fierce and stubborn Resistance, with its own discipline and army. By laying waste to their ancient villages and farms, furthermore, he forced them into urban slums and refugee centers where they became more integrated, close-knit, and socialized: historically always the most revolutionary point in the emergence of any nationalism.

he state of Iraq is not sacred," remarked Dr. Mohammad Sadik as we drove through Erbil to his office at Salahaddin University, of which he is president. "It was not created by god. It was created by Winston Churchill." Cobbled together out of the post-1918 wreckage of the Ottoman Empire, Iraq as a state was always crippled by the fact that it contained a minority population that owed it little if any loyalty. And now this state has broken down, and is breaking up. The long but unstable and unjust post-Ottoman compromise has been irretrievably smashed by the American-led invasion. Of the three contending parties in Iraq, only the Kurds now

"I have a serious Plan B. They had a head start, by escaping 12 years early from Saddam's festering prison state. They have done their utmost to be friendly brokers between the Sunni and Shiite Arabs, but if the country implodes, they can withdraw to their oil-rich enclave and muster under their own flag. There is no need to romanticize the Kurds: they have their own history of clan violence and cruelty. But this flag at present represents the closest approximation to democracy and secularism that the neighborhood can boast.

Americans have more responsibility here than most of us are aware of. It was President Woodrow Wilson, after the First World War, who inscribed the idea of self-determination for the Kurds in the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, a document that all Kurds can readily cite. Later machinations by Britain and France and Turkey, all of them greedy for the oil in the Kurdish provinces, cheated the Kurds of their birthright and shoehorned them into Iraq. More recently, the Ford-Kissinger administration encouraged the Kurds to rebel against Baghdad, offering blandishments of greater autonomy, and then cynically abandoned them in 1975, provoking yet another refugee crisis and a terrible campaign of reprisal by Saddam Hussein. In 1991, George Bush Sr. went to war partly in the name of Kurdish rights and then chose to forget his own high-toned rhetoric. This, too, is a story that every Kurd can tell you. However the fate of Iraq is to be decided, we cannot permit another chapter in this record of betrayal. Meanwhile, you should certainly go and see it for yourself, and also shed a tear for what might have been.

Christopher Hitchens is a *Vanity Fair* contributing editor.



Peshmerga soldiers hold Kurdish (left) and Iraqi (right) flags as they participate in a graduation ceremony at a stadium in the town of Sulaimaniya, October 25, 2005. By Azad Lashkari/Reuters/Landov

opposite case. If Iraq fails, it will not be our fault."

President Talabani might only be the "president of the Green Zone," as his friends sometimes teasingly say, but he disdains to live in that notorious enclave. He is now 73 years of age and has a rather Falstaffian appearance—everyone refers to him as "Mam Jalal" or "Uncle Jalal"—but this is nonetheless quite a presidential look, and he has spent much of his life on the run, or in exile, or in the mountains, and survived more dangerous times than these. You may choose to call today's suicide murderers and video beheaders and power-drill torturers by the name "insurgents," but he has the greater claim to have led an actual armed Resistance that did not befool itself by making war on civilians. In Baghdad, he invited me to an impressively heavy lunch in the house once occupied by Saddam Hussein's detested, late half-brother Barzan al-Tikriti, where I shared