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IRAK : UN NOUVEAU GOUVERNEMENT SE FORME PROGRESSIVEMENT

Le 21 décembre, les députés irakiens ont enfin approuvé la formation d'un nouveau gouvernement, mené par le Premier Ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, après 9 mois de négociations entre les différents blocs parlementaires issus des élections du 7 mars 2009, qui avaient amené au coude à coude chiites et sunnites.

Le nouveau cabinet comprendra 42 ministères dont 29 sont pour le moment pourvus et a dû composer avec tous les mouvements politiques irakiens pour maintenir une coalition viable, ce qu'a reconnu lui-même Nouri Al-Maliki : « La tâche la plus difficile au monde est de former un

gouvernement d'union nationale dans un pays où il y a une telle diversité ethnique, religieuse et politique. »

Ainsi le nouveau gouvernement comprend des représentants de toutes les factions politiques parmi les chiites, les sunnites (dont la liste rivale de Maliki, Al Iraqiyya) et les Kurdes.

Parmi les 13 postes non encore pourvus définitivement, la Défense, la Sécurité intérieure et extérieure, et le contrôle des forces irakiennes, seront attribués prochainement à des « personnalités indépendantes », c'est-à-dire non soupçonnées d'œuvrer pour le compte de pays voisins ou bien trop hostiles à

l'une des factions irakiennes. Ainsi le camp sadriste s'est inquiété de la possible nomination de figures politiques hostiles à leur mouvement. D'autres députés auraient aussi souhaité que la totalité des 42 postes puissent être soumis au vote. En attendant, c'est le Premier Ministre qui en assure les fonctions, ce qui ne plaît guère aux parlementaires, comme l'explique le député kurde Mahmoud Othman : « Un accord doit être trouvé concernant tous les postes ayant en charge la sécurité. Pourquoi ceux-ci restent-ils vacants, à la charge du Premier Ministre et ce pour un temps indéterminé ? »

Les trois adjoints du Premier

Ministre sont le Kurde Roj Nouri Shawis, le sunnite Saleh al Mutlaq et l'ancien ministre du Pétrole, Hussein Al-Sharistani, dont le bilan en matière de gestion des énergies et des hydrocarbures avait été pourtant souvent critiqué par l'opinion irakienne, et dont les rapports avec le gouvernement kurde, cette fois au sujet de la gestion par la Région du Kurdistan de ses propres ressources, ont toujours été plus que tendus. Enfin, ces nominations mécontentent aussi les sadristes (qui détiennent 40 sièges sur 325 au Parlement) qui espéraient ce poste pour un des leurs, bien qu'ils aient obtenu 8 des 10 autres ministères qu'ils réclamaient.

Composition provisoire du gouvernement irakien :

Nouri Al-Maliki, 60 ans, chiite, est reconduit dans ses fonctions de Premier Ministre qu'il occupe depuis 2006.

Jalal Tabalani, 77 ans, une des figures majeures de la politique kurde, est reconduit à la présidence de l'Irak.

Osama Al-Nujaifi, 54 ans, sunnite, devient président du Parlement. Avec son frère, le gouverneur de Ninive-Mossoul, il est l'un des principaux leaders sunnites du nord de l'Irak, connu pour sa ligne nationaliste et son opposition aux Kurdes.

Les 3 Vice-Premier Ministres :

– **Saleh Al-Mutlaq**, 64 ans, sunnite. Proche des anciens du Baath il avait été interdit de se porter candidat aux dernières élections, mais a finalement été réintégré dans la vie politique irakienne lors des accords finaux.

– **Roj Nouri Shawiss**, 64 ans, Kurde, issu du PDK, ancien Premier Ministre du Kurdistan ; il a exercé la vice-présidence de l'Irak sous le gouvernement Jaffari et ce poste de vice premier ministre entre 2005 et 2009. Il assure aussi, provisoirement, les fonctions de ministre du Commerce.

– Vice-premier ministre pour l'Énergie : **Husseïn Al-Sharistani**, 69 ans, chiite, ancien ministre du Pétrole.

Ali Al-Dabbagh reste porte-parole du gouvernement,

Pour les principaux ministères, la Défense, la Sécurité nationale et l'Intérieur sont provisoirement gérés par le Premier Ministre. Aux Finances, est nommé Raffi Al-Issawi, un sunnite de la liste al-Iraqiyya. Aux Affaires Étrangères, le Kurde **Hosyar Zebari** (du PDK) est reconduit à son portefeuille et assure en intérim le ministère des Affaires féminines. Le nouveau ministre du Pétrole est le chiite **Abdul Karim Luabi**, de la liste État de droit.

Pour les autres postes, **Dindar Nejman**, de l'Union islamique du Kurdistan, prend la tête du ministère de l'Immigration et des personnes déplacées. **Majid Mohammed Amin**, issu de l'UPK, devient ministre de la Santé. Le ministère des ONG doit revenir à un candidat de l'Alliance kurde.

Au Conseil national des stratégies politiques, nouvelle institution formée pour intégrer à la tête de l'Irak le rival d'Al-Maliki, Iyad Allawi assure la présidence.

ERBIL:

UN DISCOURS DU PRÉSIDENT BARZANI ENFLAMME LA PRESSE ARABE

La question du référendum sur le sort de Kirkouk et d'autres territoires disputés continue d'éroder la confiance de la population dans le gouvernement central irakien. D'autant que l'une des étapes préparatoires à la tenue du référendum, le recensement de la population, vient d'être à nouveau reportée.

Initialement prévu pour le 5 décembre 2010, le Conseil des ministres a décidé en effet, le 30 novembre, de repousser le recensement général de la population

irakienne, ce qui a satisfait les partis arabes et turkmène de Kirkouk qui craignent de voir ainsi entérinée la domination démographique des Kurdes dans cette province.

Ces mouvements opposés au rattachement accusent en effet les Kurdes d'avoir artificiellement gonflé leur population, que ce soit en falsifiant les registres électoraux, en installant en masse des réfugiés ou en expropriant des Arabes et des Turkmènes. Mais Turhan Al-Mufti, qui représente les Turkmènes au Conseil provincial, affirme ne pas contes-

ter le principe même du recensement, mais souhaite en faire, curieusement, un outil de « consensus » visant à satisfaire toutes les communautés dans une perspective égalitaire, ce qui sera sans doute, mathématiquement difficile à réaliser :

“Nous, les Turkmènes avons combattu ces cinq derniers mois pour retarder le recensement, afin qu'il soit mené de façon plus correcte, de sorte qu'il réponde aux demandes de chacun. »

Le 14 décembre, un comité spécialement formé pour mettre en

place le recensement à Kirkouk a tenu sa première réunion, à laquelle assistaient le gouverneur de Kirkouk, le président du Conseil provincial, le directeur du Bureau de recensement, le Bureau de l'Éducation de la ville, le commandant militaire de la 12^{ème} division, le commandant de la 1^{ère} Brigade des gardes de Kirkouk, des représentants du Bureau de la reconstruction ainsi que des responsables des forces armées américaines. Des députés de l'Alliance du Kurdistan, étaient présents mais aucun représentants des partis arabes et turkmène.

Les débats ont porté sur les mesures de sécurité et l'organisation du recensement, assuré par le Bureau de recensement de Kirkouk.

Les fonctionnaires chargés du recensement ont exprimé une volonté optimiste de mener à bien leur tâche. Adnan Baba, directeur du Comité, a déclaré au journal *Aswat al Iraq* être prêt pour cela, une fois que ses cadres auront achevé une formation spéciale dans ce domaine.

Najmaddin Karim, député au parlement irakien pour la liste de l'Alliance du Kurdistan, a accordé un entretien au même journal, dans lequel il indique que des préparatifs techniques et portant sur la sécurité ont été mis en place dans la province, en soulignant que ce recensement n'était pas une « demande kurde », mais qu'il allait servir les intérêts de tous les Irakiens.

Commentant l'absence à cette réunion de la liste Al-Iraqiyya, le député kurde a indiqué que cette absence ne pouvait affecter le travail des réunions, mais qu'il espérait que les élus arabes assisteraient aux prochains débats, « puisque ni les Arabes ni les Turkmènes ne soutiennent le boycott du recensement. »

Pour sa part, une autre députée kurde, Aala Talabani, a souligné que « la formation d'un comité spécial pour le recensement avait été en partie décidée en réponse aux demandes des Arabes et des Turkmènes. C'est pourquoi l'absence de nos collègues d'Al-Iraqiyya n'est pas une attitude très normale. Les blocs arabes et turkmènes, d'après leurs propres déclarations, ont souhaité participer au processus de recensement, mais les députés d'Al-Iraqiyya, qui représentent les Arabes et les Turkmènes de Kirkouk, n'ont pas assisté à la réunion, bien qu'ils eussent dû le faire. Ils représentent en effet non pas leurs propres personnes mais leur liste parlementaire, surtout qu'il y a eu un accord avec cette liste et le comité du recensement. »

Un député d'al-Iraqiya, Umar al-Jibouri, a justifié cette absence par un 'déséquilibre' des représentants de chaque ethnie de Kirkouk dans le Comité, même si les députés arabes et turkmènes de Kirkouk membres d'al-Iraqiyya avaient auparavant été informés de la façon dont le comité de recensement se formerait, par une ordonnance du ministère de la Planification : 3 députés de l'Alliance kurde, 2 députés arabes et un Turkmène.

Dans le même temps, le 10 décembre, se tenait le Congrès général du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan, dirigé par Massoud Barzani. Devant 1300 membres et un large panel d'invités, dont le prédisent irakien Jalal Talabani, le Premier Ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, le président du Parlement d'Irak, Osama Al-Nujaifi et le Président du Conseil de Sécurité, Iyad Allawi, un e délégation officielle turque dirigée par Abdulkader Aksu, l'un des adjoints du Premier Ministre Erdogan, le président du Kurdistan a rappelé

le droit à l'autodétermination des Kurdes au cas où leurs demandes resteraient ignorées de la capitale, notamment le référendum des régions revendiquées par les Kurdes, réaffirmant que l'identité kurde de Kirkouk n'était pas « matière à marchandage ». Massoud Barzani a par ailleurs réaffirmé que le gouvernement de Kirkouk ne pouvait être unilatéral et que toutes les communautés devaient y être représentées.

Ce rappel solennel, traduisant le sentiment général des congressistes, a été largement applaudi, et aucun des invités arabes et turcs n'y a réagi, alors que les media arabes y ont donné un large retentissement. Bien que l'évocation du droit à l'autodétermination des Kurdes ne soit pas une nouveauté dans la bouche de Massoud Barzani, et bien que les officiels irakiens présents au meeting n'aient pas semblé en prendre ombrage, ces simples mots ont en effet enflammé la presse arabe, et des mouvements politiques irakiens, qui y ont vu la menace brandie d'une future « indépendance ».

« Le droit à l'autodétermination concerne les peuples vivant sous occupation, et ce n'est pas le cas du Kurdistan, qui a un statut spécial en Irak », a protesté un député de la liste Iraqiy, Alia Nusayaf. « Je me demande donc si les Kurdes ont demandé le fédéralisme avant tout pour se séparer ensuite de l'Irak. C'est une honte que parmi tous les politiques présents aucun ne se soit levé pour protester. »

Même son de cloche chiite, surtout parmi les partisans du mouvement sadriste. Ainsi, Jawad al-Hasnawi, un député de la liste chiite, considère qu'une telle déclaration ne peut qu'attiser les tensions : « Je pense qu'un Irak qui s'étend de Zakho (ville kurde

à la frontière nord) à Basra est bien mieux qu'un Irak divisé. »

Mais le Premier Ministre du Kurdistan, Barham Salih, a rappelé que Massoud Barzani n'avait fait qu'exprimer le sentiment général des Kurdes, en rappelant que cela ne signifiait pas forcément une déclaration d'indépendance :

« Il y a, parmi les Kurdes, un consensus sur le fait que leur droit à l'autodétermination est légal, légitime. Quand nous avons appuyé un Irak fédéral, nous avons dit que c'était une forme d'autodétermination et nous n'avons jamais renoncé à ce droit. »

Deux jours après le congrès, le neveu de Massoud Barzani, l'ancien Premier ministre Nêçirvan Barzani, a expliqué que le « droit à l'auto-

détermination » ne signifiait pas que les Kurdes avaient, pour le moment, la volonté de se séparer de l'Irak.

« Les Kurdes ont le droit à l'autodétermination, mais nous avons décidé de rester dans un Irak uni. La déclaration du président Barzani a été mal comprise. Si nous avons opté pour l'indépendance, nous l'aurions annoncé, mais nous n'avons rien décidé de tel. Nous voulons rester dans un Irak uni et fédéral (...) L'auto-détermination est un droit naturel du peuple kurde, mais avec ce que nous avons obtenu en 2003 dans le nouvel Irak a fait que nous avons décidé de rester dans un Irak fédéral. »

Quelques jours plus tard, Massoud Barzani est revenu lui-même sur ses déclarations, mais sans reculer d'un pouce sur ce qu'il répète depuis le début de sa

présidence : le maintien de la Région kurde au sein de l'Irak dépend du respect par le gouvernement central de sa constitution et que les Kurdes « resteraient dans un Irak fédéral, mais pas dans une dictature.

« Des gens ont dit : les Kurdes veulent leur indépendance, laissons-les donc partir pour de bon. Mais nous répondons ceci : L'Irak est à nous, c'est notre pays. Mon message à nos frères arabes, sunnites ou chiites, à nos amis et alliés, est le suivant : Nous nous sommes engagés envers un Irak fédéral et démocratique, envers sa constitution. Mais nous ne sommes pas prêts à rester dans un Irak dominé par le chauvinisme. Les Kurdes sont une nation et par conséquent ont le droit à l'autodétermination. Le parlement kurde a décidé de rester, mais à une condition : l'Irak doit être un État fédéral. »

PARIS :

L'INSTITUT KURDE LANCE SA BIBLIOTHEQUE NUMÉRIQUE EN LIGNE

Le 10 décembre, l'Institut kurde de Paris a mis en ligne sa bibliothèque numérique, sur son site. La bibliothèque numérique est constituée d'écrits sur les Kurdes et le Kurdistan. Elle a pour but de mettre le patrimoine culturel kurde en données numérisées.

La bibliothèque est conçue comme une collection patrimoniale et encyclopédique, la bibliothèque numérique offre au lecteur des données consultables par tous publics.

Un large champ chronologique peut couvrir la plupart des domaines : sciences et histoire des sciences, économie, droit, politique, philosophie, littérature et récits de voyages, histoire et ethnologie. Le lecteur, du simple curieux à l'étudiant et au cher-

cheur, pourra y trouver dans des éditions d'époque, des textes de référence, périodiques rares, ... jusqu'alors difficiles d'accès.

Le site est interrogeable par des accès bibliographiques indexés ; la bibliothèque numérique offre aussi la possibilité de recherches en texte intégral sur les tables des matières des livres et des périodiques. La chronologie thématique donnera une vue d'ensemble de cette bibliothèque numérique et offre au lecteur une autre voie d'accès aux collections. Une présentation générale des fonds comportant aussi des liens hypertexte ajoutera un autre mode de navigation, notamment pour les non-spécialistes.

Les collections de textes numérisés sont majoritairement choisies parmi les textes appartenant au

domaine public. Elles forment une bibliothèque encyclopédique de sciences humaines et sociales comportant des textes originaux, des éditions critiques, des ouvrages de référence et des séries de périodiques importants pour la recherche ou difficilement accessibles.

Les contenus accessibles sur le site www.bnk.institutkurde.org sont pour la plupart des reproductions numériques d'œuvres tombées dans le domaine public provenant des collections de la BnK ou pour certaines des bibliothèques numériques libres d'accès.

Initialement, le projet se limitait à la numérisation des œuvres les plus importantes de la bibliothèque de l'Institut. Mais après une vaste consultation des usagers il a été convenu d'étendre

substantiellement le projet aux 12.000 œuvres en 25 langues et aux milliers de documents de la bibliothèque de l'Institut kurde de Paris. Le projet ainsi actualisé était planifié sur 3 ans de réalisation.

Malgré les difficultés techniques rencontrées et la réduction du nombre de bénévoles, un travail important a été réalisé en 2002

sur le projet de bibliothèque numérique. La base de données de la Bibliothèque Numérique est créée en MySQL. La création de cette base est terminée et elle peut donc recevoir les monographies. Un travail important de numérisation avait été réalisé: tous les bulletins mensuels d'information publiés depuis juillet 1983 à octobre 2010 par l'Institut kurde étaient numéri-

sés. Actuellement, ces bulletins représentent plus de 300 numéros, soit environ 50.000 pages au total.

Les publications numérisées sont réparties en 15 thèmes : Art, dictionnaires, économie, généralités, histoire, linguistique, littérature, mémoires, musique, philosophie, poésie, politique, religion, sociologie, thèses.

IRAN :

L'EXÉCUTION D'UN PRISONNIER KURDE REPORTÉE, SA FAMILLE ARRÊTÉE

L'exécution d'un étudiant kurde iranien, Habibollah Latifi, qui devait avoir lieu le 26 décembre, a été reportée, après une campagne d'ONG et de journaux kurdes pour réclamer que son procès soit révisé. Peut-être, de façon plus décisive, l'intervention du président de l'Irak, le kurde Jalal Talabani, pour demander sa grâce, a-t-elle été prise en compte par le gouvernement iranien, selon le journal kurde Awene.

Mais le fait que l'exécution soit reportée ne signifie pas que le prisonnier ne puisse être exécuté ultérieurement. Habibollah Latifi a été condamné en tant que 'moharebeh', ennemi de Dieu, ce qui entraîne automatiquement la peine de mort, par la Cour révolutionnaire de Sanandaj (capitale de la province du Kurdistan en Iran) pour appartenance au PJAK (branche iranienne du PKK).

Le 25 décembre, plus de 200 personnes, militants de partis politiques, membres d'association, journalistes, avaient manifesté dans la ville kurde de Sulaïmanieh pour protester contre l'application de la sentence. À Paris, très tôt le 26, une vingtaine de personnes se sont rassemblées devant l'ambassade iranienne, certains s'enchaînant devant les grilles.

Amnesty International et Human Rights Watch avaient appelé les autorités iraniennes à commuer la peine de mort en prison à perpétuité.

Le directeur du département d'Amnesty International pour le Moyen-Orient, Malcolm Smart, a mis en doute la régularité du procès, ainsi que Joe Stork, adjoint à la direction Moyen-Orient de Human Rights Watch : « Il est clair que Habibollah Latifi n'a pas eu un procès régulier selon les critères internationaux. Les circonstances entourant l'arrestation de Latifi, sa détention et sa condamnation suggèrent fortement que les autorités iraniennes ont violé ses droits fondamentaux.

Habibollah Latifi est actuellement détenu à la prison de Sanandaj. Plusieurs sources indiquent qu'il souffre d'infection intestinale, de problèmes cardiaques et d'insuffisance rénale.

Habibollah Latifi a été arrêté le 23 Octobre 2007 et amené à la prison de Sanandaj. Les rumeurs de sa prochaine exécution courent depuis le 7 juin dernier. Sa famille a plusieurs fois demandé sa grâce, mais en vain. Le 27 décembre, des forces de sécurité iraniennes ont même opéré un raid à leur domicile, confisquant quatre ordinateurs

et plusieurs documents. Ils ont aussi arrêté trois des sœurs du condamné, trois de ses frères, son père et sa belle-sœur. La plus jeune de ses sœurs, âgée de 10 ans, a, quant à elle, reçu du gaz poivre et perdu conscience plusieurs heures. Elle n'a depuis aucune nouvelle des membres de sa famille emmenés dans un lieu de détention inconnu. D'autres informations indiquent que des personnes ayant soutenu la famille dans leurs démarches pour sauver Habibollah Latifi ont aussi été arrêtées, dont des journalistes et des militants. Une liste provisoire de noms circule :

Abbas Latifi (père de l'accusé), Iraj Latifi (frère de l'accusé), Eqbal Latifi (frère de l'accusé), Shahin Latifi (sœur de l'accusé), Elahe Latifi (sœur de l'accusé), Bahar Latifi (sœur de l'accusé), Jiyân Matapour (belle-sœur de l'accusé), Simin Chaichi (poète et écrivain), Hamid Malek Alkilany (militant pour la défense de l'environnement), Saeed Saadi (journaliste), Mahmoud Mahmoudi (journaliste), Jiyân Zafari (ancien prisonnier politique), Wahid Majidy (ancien prisonnier politique), Zahid Moradian (militant), Hashem Rostami (militant), and Pedram Nasrolahi (militant). On signale aussi la disparition d'un étudiant militant, Mokhtar Zarei.

Cette vague d'arrestations pourrait être une nouvelle tactique de

la part des autorités iraniennes, visant à intimider l'entourage des condamnés afin d'empêcher les campagnes internationales pour les sauver et les informations d'être diffusées hors d'Iran. C'est en tout cas l'avis de Mahmood Amiry-Moghaddam, porte-parole d'Iran Human Rights : « Nous ne devons pas oublier que l'exécution de M. Latifi n'a été que reportée et nous ne savons pas pour combien de

temps. Il est possible que les membres de sa famille aient été arrêtés afin de les faire taire quand les autorités vont procéder à l'exécution. »

Mais ces arrestations n'ont pas empêché d'autres manifestants de se rassembler devant le tribunal et la prison de Sanandadj, en demandant des nouvelles des personnes détenues. En réponse, les forces de sécurité ont cerné la

ville, tandis que les communications par téléphone et Internet étaient très ralenties.

De nombreux prisonniers kurdes attendent ainsi dans les couloirs de la mort, en Iran. Douze d'entre eux sont condamnés pour appartenance au PJAK. En novembre 2009, l'exécution d'un autre activiste kurde, Shirkouh Moarefi, a été annoncée, puis reportée.

SYRIE :

RAPPORT SUR LES DEMANDES D'ASILE DES KURDES EN EUROPE

The Institute of Race Relations basé à Londres a récemment publié un rapport sur les populations refoulées de l'Union européenne. Parmi elles, le nombre des Kurdes de Syrie ne cesse de s'accroître, bien que beaucoup d'entre eux aient été forcés de fuir ce pays en raison de leurs activités politiques.

Les Kurdes de Syrie ont défrayé la chronique dès le début de l'année 2010, avec l'arrivée sur les plages corses d'une centaine d'immigrés clandestins, dont la majeure partie était kurde. Cette même année s'est conclue tragiquement sur le suicide d'un autre Kurde de Syrie, dont la demande d'asile avait été déboutée par le Damemark. Mais entre ces deux événements médiatisés, il y a eu bon nombre de grèves de la faim, des jugements, des arrestations et des expulsions qui n'ont pas fait les gros titres des journaux.

La Convention européenne des droits de l'homme (ECHR) s'engage pourtant à protéger toute personne risquant, dans son pays, d'être soumise à la torture ou à des traitements inhumains ou dégradants. La Convention considère même que l'accusation ou les preuves de

terrorisme pesant sur un demandeur ne justifie pas son expulsion si cela lui fait encourir le risque de mauvais traitements. Malgré cela, les Kurdes de Syrie, ressortissants d'un pays régulièrement montré du doigt pour ses violations des droits de l'homme, et dont la lutte politique reste pacifique, sont régulièrement la cible d'arrestations et d'expulsion sans que leur situation soit prise en compte, accusent de nombreuses ONG.

Or, Jawad Mella, président de la Western Kurdistan Association de Londres, rappelle qu'une personne ayant demandé l'asile et ayant, par ailleurs, milité pour les droits des Kurdes, sera fatalement condamnée, à son retour en Syrie, à un nombre d'années 'illimité' de prison.

Le rapport de l'Institute of Race Relations (IRR) passe en revue plusieurs pays membres de l'UE où des Kurdes de Syrie ont déposé une demande d'asile.

En France, le 22 janvier 2010, un navire a débarqué en Corse, à Bonifacio, avec 123 passagers, la plupart des Kurdes de Syrie : il y avait en tout 57 hommes, 29 femmes dont 5 étaient enceintes et 38 enfants. Ils ont été emmenés par les autorités françaises dans 5 centres de rétention dispersés

dans tout le pays : Marseille, Lyon, Rennes, Nîmes and Toulouse.

Le 26 janvier, les juges saisis des dossiers ont déclaré l'un après l'autre que la détention des réfugiés était illégale et ordonné qu'ils soient relâchés afin qu'ils puissent déposer leur demande d'asile. La plupart d'entre eux ont très vite quitté la France pour l'Angleterre, ce qui a entraîné une certaine protestation de la part de politiques anglais, accusant la France de se débarrasser une fois de plus de ses clandestins en les laissant gagner la Grande-Bretagne.

En Norvège, le 19 août 2010, Abdulkarim Hussein, un Kurde syrien originaire d'Alep, né en 1959, a été expulsé de force vers la Syrie. Il avait demandé l'asile politique en 2006.

Jan Erik Skretteberg, de l'association SOS Rasisme en Norvège, avait alors déclaré qu'Abdulkarim Hussein était en danger de mort, ayant à la fois travaillé pour SOS Rasisme et étant aussi le vice-président de l'Association des Kurdes de Syrie en Norvège, en plus d'avoir milité activement pour les droits de l'homme dans son pays et d'y avoir déjà été arrêté et torturé.

De fait, dès son arrivée à Damas, Abdelkarim Hussein a été arrêté par les autorités syriennes et transféré à la prison Al Fayha Prison, contrôlée par une des branches de la Sécurité syrienne. Là, il a été placé en isolement, menacé, battu, a eu les testicules écrasées.

Le 2 septembre, Abdelkarim Hussein a été relâché sans qu'aucune accusation n'ait été portée contre lui. Moins d'une semaine plus tard, il a pu fuir la Syrie en passant en Turquie et le 8 septembre, a demandé une protection internationale auprès du Haut Commissariat aux Réfugiés. Plusieurs personnes en Norvège réclament actuellement que ce pays lui accorde enfin l'asile.

À la mi-mai 2010, la communauté kurde a mené à Chypre une campagne de protestation, en observant une grève de la faim et en dressant des tentes autour du ministère de l'Intérieur, afin d'attirer l'attention sur la situation des Kurdes en Syrie et d'obtenir l'asile politique pour les réfugiés.

Au bout de 4 semaines, la police chypriote a opéré un raid sur le campement, a arrêté les manifestants et en a placés 149 en centres de détention. Sur 42 mineurs, seulement un peu plus d'une dizaine ont été relâchés avec leurs familles. 82 Kurdes étaient en séjour illégal dans l'île, après le rejet de leur demande d'asile et tombaient sous le coup d'une extradition, ce qui se produisit le 11 juin pour 37 d'entre eux.

L'Organisation kurde de défense des droits de l'homme et des libertés publiques en Syrie (DAD), a rapporté en octobre dernier que les services de sécurité syriens avaient arrêté 3 de ces Kurdes renvoyés en Syrie : Rakan Elias Junbuli (arrêté 5

mois après son retour), Mohammed Sheffa Junbuli (arrêté un mois après son retour), Hassan Elias Junbuli (arrêté une semaine après son retour). Hassan Junbuli était, en octobre, toujours détenu par les services syriens, Mohammed et Rakan Junbuli étaient détenus à la prison centrale de Hassaké.

Même quand ils retournent volontairement en Syrie, ces Kurdes encourant des poursuites judiciaires. Ainsi, Faiz Adnan Osman et sa femme, revenus de leur plein gré de Chypre en août dernier, ont été arrêtés tous les deux à leur retour à Damas. Adla Osman fut rapidement libérée mais son mari était toujours en détention en novembre 2010. Les services syriens l'accusent d'avoir participé aux manifestations de Nicosie. Plusieurs informateurs indiquent que Faiz Adnan aurait été torturé.

Le 4 décembre 2010, la Direction de la Sécurité politique de Hassaké a arrêté Ciwan Yusuf Muhammad (né en 1982). Ciwan Muhammad avait été extradé de Chypre en juin 2010, avec 26 autres Kurdes. Il avait dû remettre son passeport aux autorités de l'aéroport de Damas. Il est depuis son arrestation interrogé par différents services.

Au Danemark, 28 Kurdes ont entamé une grève de la faim le 14 septembre 2010, devant le Parlement. L'un d'eux a déclaré à la presse : « Si vous aviez été dans une prison syrienne, vous feriez tout ce qui est possible pour ne plus jamais y retourner. »

Au bout de trois semaines il a été mis fin à la grève, à la fois pour des raisons de santé, plusieurs des grévistes ayant dû être hospitalisés, mais aussi parce que les forces de sécurité syriennes ont commencé à harceler et menacer

leurs familles restés sur place, d'après un reportage de la chaîne kurde Roj TV.

Le 22 septembre 2010, Adnan Ibrahim a été expulsé en Syrie après avoir passé 18 mois au Danemark où vivent les deux-tiers de sa famille. La sœur d'Ibrahim, Golzar, a indiqué n'avoir plus de nouvelles de son frère depuis qu'il a été remis par la police danoise à la police syrienne de l'aéroport de Damas.

Le 15 novembre 2010, Abid Mohammed Atto, né en 1982, a été expulsé, bien qu'un groupe de militants danois ait tenté d'empêcher son embarquement à l'aéroport. Né en 1982, c'est un Kurde 'sans-papier' de Dêrik. Il a été mis en détention dès son arrivée en Syrie par une section des services de sécurité. Il avait fui ce pays en août 2009.

Enfin, un des cas les plus tragiques est celui de ce Kurde de 26 ans, Ramazan Hajji Ibrahim, qui s'est suicidé au centre des demandeurs d'asile d'Auderød. Son entourage affirme qu'il craignait ce qui l'attendait en Syrie après que sa demande d'asile avait été rejetée. Paradoxalement, ce Kurde n'était extradable que de son vivant, et sa famille n'a pu récupérer le corps : le rapatriement, assuré par des organisations kurdes, a été refusé par les autorités syriennes, le défunt étant officiellement apatride ! Il a donc été inhumé à Copenhague, le 18 décembre et c'est l'Association culturelle kurde qui s'est chargée des funérailles.

En Suisse, Sarbast Kori a entamé le 22 novembre une grève de la faim dans la prison de Thum, où il était détenu, pour protester contre sa prochaine extradition. Il a été hospitalisé dix jours après, à Berne, après avoir perdu conscience. Il souffre aussi de traumatismes psychologiques,

en partie dus à sa peur de retourner en Syrie.

En Allemagne, le 3 avril 2010, Anwar Daqouri, demandeur d'asile, a été arrêté par la police

allemande et transféré en centre d'expulsion, devant être extradé dans un délai de trois mois. Farouk Al-Issa, un autre Kurde de Syrie, a lui aussi été arrêté en

Allemagne le 21 juin 2010 et détenu au centre de Hanovre, en attendant d'être extradé. Réfugié en Allemagne depuis 2004, sa demande d'asile a été rejetée.

CULTURE : SORTIE PROCHAINE D'UN LIVRE DE JALAL BARZANJI

Jalal Barzanji, poète et journaliste kurde, doit publier prochainement la traduction anglaise du récit de son emprisonnement dans les geôles de Saddam Hussein, sous le titre *The Man in Blue Pyjama : Prison Memoirs in The Form of A Novel*.

Une première version écrite en kurde en 2007 a été révisée, remaniée et traduite et paraîtra en avril 2011, publié par l'Université of Alberta Press (Canada).

« C'est le récit d'une partie de ma vie que j'ai gardé des années dans mon cœur et ma mémoire, Il m'a été un peu dur de revenir à ces souvenirs, car ce sont de mauvais souvenirs. D'un autre côté, je veux mettre ces souvenirs par écrit, je veux partager ce qui arrive aux gens, aux écrivains quand ils écrivent sur la paix, la beauté et le désir humain. Je veux raconter mon histoire, sans porter de jugement. Seulement la vérité que raconte mon cœur. Deuxièmement, je veux montrer le pouvoir des mots et comment, quand j'étais en prison, ils m'ont donné la force de résister. »

C'est ainsi que l'auteur résume les trois années passées en prison, de 1986 à 1989, pour ses activités littéraires et journalistiques sous le régime de Saddam. Ni la torture ni la privation de liberté ne lui feront d'ailleurs renoncer à écrire et durant trois ans, il va rédiger clandestinement des textes sur du papier passé en fraude. « Si je n'avais pas écrit, j'aurais eu un sentiment de perte.

Écrire fait partie de ma vie et de ma spiritualité. »

Son emprisonnement n'avait pas surpris Jalal Barzanji, qui s'attendait même à être exécuté : « Le régime était contre la liberté et je réclamaï la liberté. Je n'étais pas un adepte de l'idéologie et de la mentalité du régime.

Mon fardeau était double : J'étais un écrivain moderne et un Kurde ...Je vivais dans la peur car je savais faire quelque chose de dangereux, en parlant de paix, de démocratie, de liberté. »

Un soir de 1986, un groupe de militaires a enfoncé la porte de son domicile et l'a emmené en pyjama, yeux bandés et menotté. Il est resté au secret, dans une petite cellule, durant un temps indéterminé. Il a ensuite été transféré dans une cellule plus grande, partagée avec 15 autres prisonniers.

Avec la complicité d'un gardien de la prison, qui lui fournissait clandestinement des morceaux de papiers et un crayon, Jalal Barzanji a continué d'écrire, cette fois des lettres à sa femme, où il raconte en détail sa vie de prisonnier, ainsi que celle des autres.

Barzanji fut gracié au bout de trois ans et relâché, à l'occasion des célébrations de l'anniversaire de Saddam. Tout en restant surveillé, vivant dans la peur, il continue d'écrire. En 1991, après le soulèvement du Kurdistan et le retrait des forces baathistes, on lui demande d'être le rédacteur en chef d'une revue kurde.

En 1996, lors du retour très provisoire des forces de Saddam au Kurdistan, il fuit en Turquie avec sa famille et demande un statut de réfugié auprès du Haut-Commissariat aux réfugiés de l'ONU. Il parvint à émigrer au Canada en 1998 et s'installe dans la ville d'Edmonton. Là, il aide à fonder l'Association des amitiés kurdo-canadiennes et la Société d'entraide aux immigrés d'Edmonton.

En 2007 Barzanji est retenu pour bénéficier d'un fonds alloué par le PEN club du Canada pour soutenir des écrivains en exil ayant fui les persécutions dans leur pays. Cela lui permet de relancer sa carrière d'auteur, cette fois au Canada, et d'achever la première version de *The Man in the Blue Pyjamas*.

Jalal Barzanji est né dans un petit village en 1953, où, en raison de son éloignement, il n'y avait pas d'école, jusqu'en 1960. L'auteur le décrit cependant comme un lieu paisible au milieu de belles montagnes » et dit que c'est là qu'il a appris la « simplicité et la beauté de la vie », et aussi en écoutant les histoires que les villageois racontaient au coin du feu l'hiver ou sur les toits des maisons l'été. C'est en écoutant qu'il a commencé de rêver à des choses qu'il n'avait jamais vues.

Mais cela prit fin quand, une nuit, les forces irakiennes bombardèrent le village et forcèrent ses habitants à fuir. Sa famille émigra à Erbil où, dit-il, c'est là qu'il vit des voitures pour la première fois de sa vie.

À l'université, il lut les auteurs étrangers qui lui donnèrent l'envie d'écrire à son tour. En 1979, il publie son premier recueil de poèmes, *Chute de neige au crépuscule*. Quant à son

deuxième recueil de poésie, *Sans chaleur*, paru en 1985, il le mena tout droit en prison.

Ses autres publications, toutes parues au Kurdistan d'Irak, sont

Guerre (1996); *Pluie bénie* (2002, Kurdish Ministry of Culture); *Mémoires sous le vent* (2006) et *Retour au lieu de ma naissance* (2007).

L'Iran et les Arabes : l'éclairage de WikiLeaks

On savait les régimes arabes inquiets à la perspective de voir l'Iran se doter de l'arme atomique. On ne les savait pas terrorisés à ce point par la République islamique et, jour et nuit, obsédés par la marche au nucléaire entreprise par cette dernière. C'est, parmi bien d'autres, l'un des points les plus passionnants que livre la lecture des documents rendus publics depuis le 28 novembre par le site WikiLeaks et cinq journaux internationaux, dont *Le Monde*.

L'ensemble révèle comme jamais cette ligne de fracture stratégique qui traverse le Moyen-Orient : d'un côté, l'Iran perçu comme une puissance montante et aux visées hégémoniques sur la région ; de l'autre, alliance paradoxale, Israël et les gouvernants arabes, désireux de contrer la République islamique.

Cela était connu, bien sûr. Mais cette réalité est cette fois révélée et commentée de la bouche même des intéressés, cités dans les télégrammes des diplomates américains en poste dans la région.

Editorial

En toile de fond des analyses talentueuses des femmes et des hommes du département d'Etat, il y a la situation créée par la guerre américaine en Irak. En renversant en avril 2003 la dictature de Saddam Hussein, George W. Bush brise le front arabe qui contenait la menace iranienne.

Le vieil antagonisme arabo-persan n'est pas seul en cause. Il y va aussi de la ligne de fracture qui divise l'islam : le monde arabe est majoritairement sunnite,

et l'Iran majoritairement chiite.

Or le renversement de Saddam Hussein provoque un bouleversement majeur dans la région. L'Irak est le seul grand pays arabe où les sunnites sont minoritaires. Avec les chrétiens, ils formaient l'ossature du régime de Saddam Hussein. Et celui-ci – dictature monstrueuse, par ailleurs – était l'un des maillons forts du front anti-iranien.

Défait, il cède la place aux chiites, qui prennent le pouvoir à Bagdad – c'est-à-dire des formations sous influence directe de Téhéran. La ligne de défense arabe anti-iranienne est ébranlée ; la montée en puissance de Téhéran dans la région en est d'autant facilitée...

Nul ne le dit mieux que le roi Abdallah d'Arabie saoudite, cité dans un télégramme de décembre 2005. Il se plaint amèrement

de la situation créée par le président Bush en Irak et observe : « Alors que dans le passé les Etats-Unis, l'Arabie saoudite et Saddam Hussein s'entendaient sur la nécessité de contenir l'Iran, la politique américaine a donné l'Irak à l'Iran comme un cadeau sur un plateau d'argent. »

La terreur que Téhéran inspire aux régimes arabes est telle que ceux-ci sont, quasi unanimes, les premiers à presser les Etats-Unis d'user de tous les moyens, y compris la force, pour arrêter le programme nucléaire iranien.

Jamais jusqu'à présent on n'avait eu l'occasion de mesurer à ce point la virulence des réactions arabes et la vigueur de leurs pressions sur Washington. WikiLeaks et une partie de la presse donnent ici au tam-tam de l'actualité une orchestration qui permet de mieux en saisir le sens. ■

Iran : un spécialiste du nucléaire tué dans un attentat à la bombe

Le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, accuse le « régime sioniste » et les Occidentaux

Dans deux attaques à la bombe quasi simultanées, lundi 29 novembre à Téhéran, un scientifique iranien spécialiste du nucléaire a été tué, et un autre légèrement blessé. Les deux hommes circulaient dans des voitures différentes lorsque des assaillants roulant en moto ont placé des engins explosifs sur leur véhicule, avant de les déclencher à distance.

Ce double attentat a relancé les spéculations sur l'existence d'opérations clandestines visant à saborder le programme nucléaire de l'Iran. Il s'est produit à quelques jours d'une rencontre prévue à Genève, le 5 décembre, entre l'Iran et les grandes puissances, devant

porter sur le dossier nucléaire.

Le président iranien, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a désigné Israël et d'autres pays occidentaux comme responsables de ces attaques. « Sans le moindre doute, a-t-il déclaré, la main du régime sioniste et des gouvernements occidentaux est impliquée. »

Le ministre iranien de l'intérieur, Mostafa Mohammad Najjar, a accusé les services secrets américains et israéliens. « La CIA et le Mossad sont des ennemis de la nation iranienne et ont toujours cherché à lui nuire, de même qu'ils veulent empêcher nos progrès scientifiques », a-t-il dit.

Le physicien nucléaire assassi-

né, Majid Shahriari, « était chargé d'un des grands projets » de l'Organisation de l'énergie atomique iranienne, a affirmé le directeur de cette structure, Ali Akbar Salehi. Ce dernier a prévenu les « ennemis » de l'Iran de ne « pas jouer avec le feu ». Au moment de l'attentat, M. Shahriari se rendait à l'université Chahid Behehti, où il dirigeait le département d'ingénierie nucléaire.

Le deuxième scientifique, blessé, est Fereydoun Abassi, un physicien spécialiste des lasers. Son nom figure dans une résolution de l'ONU imposant des sanctions contre l'Iran en 2007 en raison de la poursuite de ses travaux nucléaires. L'attentat le visant s'est produit à proximité de l'université Chahid Behehti, où il devait enseigner. L'agence iranienne Mashregh News a décrit Fereydoun Abassi comme « l'un des rares spécialistes sachant séparer des isotopes », un

procédé au cœur de la fabrication d'uranium enrichi, qui peut servir pour produire à la fois du combustible de centrale nucléaire et de la matière fissile destinée à une arme atomique.

Mashregh News a par ailleurs laissé entendre que M. Abassi était lié aux Gardiens de la révolution. Pilier du régime, cette organisation est chargée, selon les services de renseignement occidentaux, du volet militaire du programme nucléaire iranien.

Il s'agit du deuxième assassinat,

en un an, d'un scientifique iranien. En janvier 2010, à Téhéran, un autre expert, Massoud Ali Mohammadi, avait trouvé la mort lorsqu'une moto piégée avait explosé au passage de sa voiture. Le président du Parlement iranien, Ali Larijani, avait alors commenté qu'il était « un spécialiste de l'énergie nucléaire ».

Le programme nucléaire iranien semble subir une série de revers. Des problèmes techniques ont été détectés dans l'usine d'enrichissement d'uranium de Natanz – attribués par plusieurs experts occidentaux à un virus informatique, Stuxnet, apparu cette année en Iran et dans d'autres pays. Lundi, sans mentionner Stuxnet, le président Ahmadinejad a reconnu que certains appareils à Natanz avaient connu des « problèmes, créés par du software installé dans des équipements électroniques ».

Des morts violentes ou des disparitions mystérieuses de scientifiques iraniens se sont déjà produites par le passé. En janvier 2007, un spécialiste de l'électro-magnétique, Ardechir Hosseinpour, avait été retrouvé mort – empoisonné, selon plusieurs sources – alors qu'il travaillait sur le site iranien de conversion d'uranium d'Ispahan. ■

Natalie Nougayrède

Les chrétiens d'Irak, pris en "otages entre chiites et sunnites"

Par Vincent Hugué

Le Père Saad Sirap Hanna officie dans une église de Bagdad et voit la communauté chrétienne d'Irak quitter le pays.

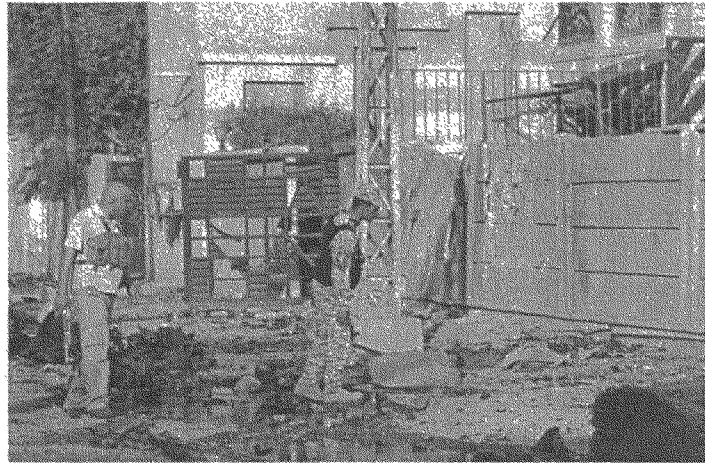
Le Père Saad Sirap Hanna anime l'église chaldéenne Saint-Joseph de Karrada, quartier central de Bagdad. Avant l'invasion américaine et la chute du régime baassiste de Saddam Hussein, sa paroisse comptait 1200 familles chrétiennes. On en dénombre aujourd'hui entre 250 et 300. Ce quadra lucide sait ce qu'il en coûte d'afficher sa foi. Kidnappé en 2006 par un gang terroriste, le Père Hanna a vécu près d'un mois sous la menace de ses geôliers; professeur, il a enseigné la philosophie et la théologie aux deux prêtres syriaques catholiques assassinés lors du carnage de la cathédrale Notre-Dame du Perpétuel Secours, le 31 octobre dernier.

La communauté chrétienne d'Irak risque-t-elle de disparaître?

Le danger pèse sur tout le peuple irakien, pas seulement sur les chrétiens, même si ceux-ci sont particulièrement visés. Il est vrai que nous recevons tant de menace, de messages hostiles à notre présence même, à notre travail, à notre contribution à la vie de ce pays... Le premier péril, c'est l'insécurité. Nous vivons dans une société instable, inquiétante, sans aucun avenir. Nul doute que l'horizon s'est assombri. Après deux ans d'accalmie relative, nous espérons un mieux durable. Espoir déçu: depuis le début de l'année, la régression est patente.

Serait-elle irréversible?

Les chrétiens demeureront des cibles. Car ils forment la communauté la plus faible, la plus vulnérable du pays. Dès lors, ils deviennent les otages des affrontements entre chiites et sunnites et en payent le prix. Religion, ethnies, ingérences étrangères: d'autres facteurs jouent bien sûr, mais l'écueil numéro 1 reste politique. Aujourd'hui, j'ai deux certitudes. Un, la situation va continuer



Le 31 octobre, en pleine messe, un commando terroriste prenait d'assaut la cathédrale syriaque catholique Notre-Dame du Perpétuel Secours de Bagdad, tuant 46 personnes. REUTERS/Mohammed Ameen

de se dégrader. Deux, la prochaine échéance législative, dans quatre ans, déclenchera une nouvelle crise. A l'échelon du pouvoir et des élites partisans, il n'existe pas de réelle intention de faire en sorte que nous restions; l'absence de volonté politique est évidente. Pour sortir de l'ornière, pour bâtir quelque chose ensemble, il faut une vraie réconciliation. Oublier le passé, regarder enfin l'Autre avec bienveillance.

Les chrétiens d'Irak ont-ils la nostalgie de l'ère Saddam Hussein?

Nous ne sommes pas nostalgiques de l'époque Saddam. Nous sommes nostalgiques de la sécurité, de l'amitié, de la fraternité. De toutes ces valeurs du passé.

A vos yeux, qui est derrière les attaques terroristes dirigées contre les chrétiens?

Je l'ignore, mais nous tenons tous à le savoir. Pendant des siècles, nous avons vécu pacifiquement au côté des musulmans. Pourquoi, comment, sous quelle influence leur vision du christianisme a-t-elle changé? Nous voulons comprendre. J'attends de nos frères musulmans qu'ils montrent leur désir de nous voir rester. Aux imams, aux leaders spirituels d'expliquer à leurs ouailles que non, nous ne sommes pas des infidèles, des mécréants, que nous sommes aussi des croyants, d'une foi différente. Les chrétiens d'Irak, pris en "otages

entre chiites et sunnites"

Pourquoi vos compatriotes impudent-ils souvent les attaques aux seuls terroristes étrangers?

Le fait que des Irakiens massacent d'autres Irakiens demeure inconcevable pour beaucoup d'entre nous. Mais regardons la réalité en face: même si les meneurs ou les cerveaux viennent d'Arabie Saoudite, d'Egypte, du Yémen ou d'ailleurs, ce sont bien des gens d'ici qui leur fournissent les plans, les informations, les voitures. Nous avons toujours tendance, nous les Irakiens, à nier nos responsabilités. Un peu comme des enfants.

Que conseillez-vous au paroissien déboussolé tenté de quitter le pays?

Je ne sais pas quoi lui répondre. Si je l'invite à rester, suis-je en mesure de garantir sa sécurité? Non. Quelle responsabilité que la mienne s'il est blessé ou tué! Si je lui recommande de partir, je deviens responsable de sa rupture avec la mère-patrie, les racines. Faute de mieux, je dis donc ceci: "Sois fidèle à la parole du Christ. Si tu restes, je suis avec toi. Si tu pars, je prierai pour toi."

Que vous inspire "l'option kurde", qui consisterait à créer dans la province autonome du Kurdistan une enclave chrétienne?

Nous avons besoin de la protection due à tout citoyen irakien

Toute suggestion est la bienvenue. Mais cette idée-là est erronée. Nous ne demandons pas la protection de tel leader, telle région, tel parti. Nous avons besoin de la protection due à tout citoyen irakien partout en Irak. L'enclave chrétienne, c'est le chemin le plus court vers le ghetto. Nous formons une communauté "négativement" pacifique; effrayée par quiconque peut pointer ses armes sur elle. Sans doute les Kurdes utilisent-ils cette peur à leur profit. Ils veulent aussi montrer ainsi qu'ils constituent une société démocratique, respectueuse de la liberté religieuse. Ce qui est vrai. Pour autant, cette hypothèse

n'est certes pas la solution pour les chrétiens d'Irak.

Dans la région de Karakosh, ancestral bastion chrétien, des groupes d'autodéfense ont été constitués avec l'aval des autorités. Approuvez-vous cette initiative?

Ce n'est pas la bonne réponse. Je récuse l'idée selon laquelle chaque communauté devrait former sa propre force de sécurité. Là encore, nous avons besoin d'une force de police nationale, au service de tous, chrétiens, musulmans, juifs, sabéens, yézidites. Toute autre formule ne peut être que temporaire et risquerait de compliquer les choses.

Adhèrent-vous aux critiques suscitées à Bagdad par l'accueil, en France ou en Italie, de fidèles blessés lors du massacre du 31 octobre?

Nos politiciens sont tellement faibles qu'ils accusent Paris ou Rome d'inciter les Irakiens à quitter leur terre. Faux procès. Nous devons remercier ceux qui secourent les blessés. Que nos chefs cessent de masquer leurs faiblesses sous des accusations infondées; qu'ils prennent leurs responsabilités et reconnaissent qu'ils ne font pas assez pour nous dissuader de partir.



Irak: manifestation contre la fermeture de clubs privés servant de l'alcool

BAGDAD , 3 decembre 2010 (AFP)

DES DIZAINES d'écrivains et de poètes ont manifesté vendredi à Bagdad contre la fermeture de plusieurs clubs privés servant de l'alcool dans la capitale irakienne, dénonçant une répression rappelant l'époque de Saddam Hussein.

"La liberté d'abord", "Bagdad ne sera pas Kandahar", proclamaient les banderoles des manifestants près du bâtiment de l'Union des écrivains irakiens (UEI) dans le centre de la ville.

"Nous n'avons pas besoin d'un Etat à la Khomeiny ou d'un Etat taliban en Irak", a déclaré Fadhel Samer, président de l'UEI, en référence à l'Iran et à l'Afghanistan.

"Ce qui est fait aux libertés individuelles dans ce pays ressemble à ce qui se passait sous la dictature (...). Cela nous rappelle les pratiques de l'ancien régime", a-t-il ajouté.



La manifestation a été provoquée par la fermeture d'un café près du bâtiment de l'UEI, où écrivains et intellectuels se retrouvaient souvent pour fumer le narguilé et boire de l'alcool.

Les autorités de Bagdad assurent qu'elles ne font qu'appliquer depuis l'année dernière un décret promulgué dans les années 1990,

à l'époque de Saddam Hussein, qui interdit aux restaurants et aux hôtels de servir de l'alcool.

L'interdiction ne concerne pas les magasins d'alcool, mais selon la loi irakienne, seuls les chrétiens et les Kurdes peuvent vendre de l'alcool.



Un tribunal danois ordonne la levée de la saisie des comptes de Roj TV

COPENHAGUE, 6 decembre 2010 (AFP)

LA COUR d'appel de Copenhague a ordonné lundi la levée de la saisie de dix comptes bancaires appartenant à la télévision kurde Roj TV, soupçonnée de soutenir le PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, qui figure sur la liste des organisations terroristes de l'UE.

Cette décision confirme un arrêt précédent d'octobre du tribunal de première instance de Copenhague de suspendre le gel des avoirs de Roj TV de 327.000 couronnes danoises (43.900 euros), a-t-on appris de source judiciaire.

En août, le parquet danois avait accusé Roj TV de terrorisme au terme d'une longue enquête commencée en 2005, sur la programmation de la chaîne.

Le procureur du Royaume, Lise-Lotte Nilas, avait déclaré que les émissions de Roj TV "avaient un caractère de propagande pour le PKK, et avait en conséquence décidé de confisquer ses avoirs en attendant un

procès intenté contre la station qui s'ouvrira en août 2011.

"La Cour d'appel a rejeté une nouvelle fois la saisie des comptes de Roj TV car elle empêchait la station de diffuser ses programmes au nom de la liberté d'expression, et constituait une violation de l'article 10 de la Convention européenne des droits de l'homme" a souligné à l'AFP l'avocat de Roj TV Bjoern Elmquist.

La levée du gel des comptes de Roj TV "était nécessaire pour qu'elle ne mette pas la clé sur la porte, non seulement en raison des sommes confisquées, mais parce que les banques ne voulaient plus l'avoir comme cliente à cause de ses démêlés avec la police", selon M. Elmquist.

Roj TV, basée à Copenhague, a commencé à diffuser en 2004 depuis la Belgique vers 68 pays en Europe, au Proche et Moyen-Orient, suscitant de violentes protestations d'Ankara.

La Turquie exhorte depuis des années le gouvernement danois de fermer cette télévision considérée comme un porte-parole du PKK et les Etats-Unis se sont joints plusieurs fois à cet appel, dernièrement en 2009.



1 DECEMBER 2010

Letters From Kurdistan

Temporary Autonomous Zone

Seven years after the American invasion, Iraq's Kurds have weathered an influx of Arabs and Turks and established an enclave of prosperity

The Caravan.

By GRAEME WOOD

IN 2003, Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, felt like a city preparing for a siege. Its residents, nearly all Kurds, were proud of having built a poor but functioning Kurdish homeland. But on Iraq's northern border, the Turkish military stood ready for Ankara to order an invasion. To the south, across the imaginary line that separated Kurdish Iraq from Arab Iraq, violence

was simmering, and Erbil's residents were steeling themselves for the moment when it would spill over their own borders. In the centre of the city, the magnificent citadel—round, brown and layered, very much like Bruegel's 'Tower of Babel'—looked ready to repulse a medieval invasion, as if the city's Kurdish majority could crowd in, pull up the ladders, and watch the waves of Arabic- and Turkish-speakers wash away the Kurdish dream.

Seven years later, Erbil is still Kurdish land. But the invasions have happened, and the Kurds could not be happier. Arabs are everywhere. Where once I had to hunt for a suitable hotel, they are now ubiquitous and filled with Arabs who have fled the violence of the south, and perhaps found work up here as well. The Kurds earn a strong business off housing and feeding them. The Turks are in town, too. Here and there one sees the telltale undotted i's on the sides of trucks, showing that they're loaded with the building equipment of Turkish contractors. One of them, Makyol, just built a new Kurdish airport, a futuristic terminal designed by the UK firm, Scott Wilson. The Turks have come to conquer not with tanks

but with cranes.

New signs of prosperity are everywhere. I stayed in a large housing tract called Italian Village (Shahr-e Itali), so freshly built that most of the doors and windows still had plastic film on them. In the middle of the subdivision, which consisted of luxurious identical houses, like a suburb outside Miami or Tel Aviv, was a mosque whose dome appeared to have been built to look like the Cathedral of Florence. Just outside Italian Village, I found a Dairy Queen fast-food restaurant, filled with Kurds talking rapidly on Bluetooth headsets.

A spokesman for Dairy Queen told me his company had no restaurants in Erbil, and he suspected another Dairy Queen operator in West Asia had gone rogue and set up shop there as a freelancer; just as a mushroom cloud in North Korea bears the marks of the influence of AQ Khan, an ice cream cake in Kurdistan implies the assistance of someone with mastery of Dairy Queen technology in Istanbul or Bahrain.

When formerly oppressed people begin to control their destiny, they follow a familiar script. They start off hapless and beleaguered; this was the Kurds' position 25 years ago, when Saddam Hussein was pounding their villages into a fine powder and nerve-gassing their children. Then they achieve a measure of autonomy (protected in this case by US and UK militaries) and begin to work toward separation, the creation of an ethnic homeland, a Kurdistan. Finally, secure in their dominance over their land, they loosen up and try to cash in on their neighbours.

On my first trip to Kurdistan, I was stopped at a checkpoint by Peshmerga—Kurdistan's armed militiamen—who poli-



A boy walks past a model home at the American Village on the outskirts of Erbil, in Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq.

ced the invisible border separating Kurdish territory from the Arab lands to the south. When I spoke a few words of Arabic to another passenger, one of the guards said "Aha!" and I endured two hours of interrogation to determine if I was an Arab agent scouting for suicide bomb targets. (At the time, the Kurds reported about a dozen thwarted car-bomb attempts each month.)

In the last seven years, the Kurds have moved decisively from this worried, penultimate phase of coping with ethnic oppression into the final and most lucrative one. When I went in October with an American friend to Abu Shahab—the best kebab house in the city, according to a Kurdish friend—the entire enormous, thumping dinner complex buzzed with Arabic conversations. There was no evident discomfort, just three storeys of Arab diners, gleefully parting with their money. We ordered a Kurdistan Flag Pizza—with peppers, tomatoes and white cheese to represent the Kurdish tricolour, with a slice of pineapple in the middle to represent the sun. The Arab families seemed to be sticking to the kebabs. Nearby was a large speedway where families and youngsters could finish the night by strapping into bumper cars and driving

at exhilarating speeds around a closed course.

Only one subject was conspicuously absent in this Iraqi Kurdish wonderland: the fate of the region's other Kurds. The detente with Turks and Arabs in Erbil had gone so well that the pan-Kurdish cause—long the ultimate hope of oppressed Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran—was simply never mentioned. If the Iraqi Kurds felt solidarity across national boundaries, they expressed that solidarity privately.

One morning, in hopes of discovering what rump elements of the still-fighting Kurdish opposition looked like, I drove to a rural area near Koye, about an hour outside Erbil, past shopping centres and car dealerships and a cinema boasting '8D' screens (as if three dimensions were not enough). There I met Mustafa Hijri, who as the secretary-general of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) is a man who has a hard time buying life insurance. Assassins from Iran murdered two of his predecessors (in Vienna in 1989 and in Berlin in 1992), and now he lives in permanent exile out here—15 kilometres from Iran, in a room that gives no hint of the grandeur to be found in the big city

nearby.

In the old days, the loudest voices for Kurdish independence came from shrill, driven members of groups like the Kurdistan Workers' Party. I visited their mountain hideouts, an extraordinary network of huts and bivouacs hived into the Qandil range, and listened while guerrilla fighters droned on about revolutionary Marxism. Iran and Turkey have jointly fought these groups to the point of extinction in Qandil, dropping

a firestorm of artillery and aerial bombardment on their camps. I saw one former guerrilla years later in Paris, and he told me everyone one else I had met in the camps was now dead.

Hijri, by contrast, was not at all fanatical. Rather, he was measured and dignified. "We are trying democratic means, not armed struggle," he said, citing the Swiss model as a rough approximation of what Iran would look like if it adopted the PDKI platform. He res-

ponded evenly to questions about other opposition groups, gently chiding each one that wavered in its commitment to democracy and human rights. After spending several days in the hypercapitalism of Erbil, to come out to this humble political office and hear a man earnestly talk about principles was like trekking to meet a guru. Who knew there were still idealists hidden away in the hills of Iraqi Kurdistan?

For now, the Iraqi Kurds have something less than demo-

cracy. The leaderships of the two major Kurdish parties remain wildly popular and continue to lead the regional government, but they have not yet faced a serious challenge at the polls—unlike the dominant parties in Baghdad, which only just resolved the deadlock of an election that took place eight months ago. But that's no matter. The Kurds have their money, and this is indisputably Kurdish land. The Arabs just come to ride go-Karts.



8 December 2010

Kurds Want Six Ministries in New Iraqi Govt

By HEMIN BABAN

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: A prominent Kurdish lawmaker in the Iraqi parliament says the alliance of Kurdish parties has asked for six ministerial portfolios in the new cabinet expected to be formed soon by Prime Minister designate Nuri Maliki.

Independent Kurdish lawmaker Mahmoud Osman told Rudaw that Kurds would hold the foreign affairs portfolio but would not be able to head the transport portfolio because Maliki's leading Shiite coalition had its eye on the ministry, as it controlled Iraq's ports and airports.

Osman said it would become clear which ministries each party would hold by December 9th. Kurds were interested in several key service ministries, such as planning, water resources, tourism, higher education and agriculture, he said.

The Kurdish alliance, with 49 seats, is an umbrella group of all the Kurdish parties in the Iraqi parliament, except opposition party Gorran.

Although Gorran was originally part of the alliance, it withdrew in late October because of disagreements with the two dominant Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Maliki had earlier said the new cabinet would contain 38 ministries, including the newly added ministry of investment. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is expected to once again be granted to Hoshiyar Zebari, a Kurd who has run the ministry in the last five years.

Kurdish lawmakers had earlier expressed interest in the portfolio for oil. There have been deep differences



Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki (C) walks with Kurdish President Masoud Barzani in Arbil in November. Maliki was successful in getting the backing of Kurds to form a government.

between the Kurdish authorities and the Baghdad government over the control of the country's oil and gas resources in the past few years, resulting in parliament not being able to pass Iraq's Hydrocarbon Law. As it appears that the Kurds have now been granted the Foreign Affairs Ministry, it is much less likely to be granted the Oil Ministry.

Fatih Daraghayi, a Kurdish lawmaker involved in negotiations with the Arab parties in Baghdad, said his coalition gave up the oil ministry "because after gaining the post of the president, we were not certain whether we could also hold the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So we asked for one of the two ministries and, now that it has been almost finalized that we will be given the Foreign Affairs Ministry, we have given up oil."

Maliki's coalition had submitted a proposal to the other parties whereby the ministries would be distributed based on a point system.

According to the system, the chief positions of president, prime minister and parliamentary speaker would earn 10 points each. The proposal said five seats in parliament would earn two points, and the "sovereign ministries" of

defense, foreign affairs, the interior, oil and finance would each earn three points. The "service ministries" such as health, tourism and education would earn two points each and the "ministers of state", such as state minister for women affairs, would earn one point.

But Khaled Shwani, a PUK Kurdish lawmaker, said the point system had failed. He said the parliamentary blocs had instead opted for a different distribution mechanism whereby the senior state positions of president, prime minister, parliamentary speaker and their deputies would not be included in the point system.

Shwani said that the Kurds believed they should be given more of the cabinet, as in the previous government, using a distribution system based on their "national entitlement" as Iraq's second largest ethnic group.

Independent lawmaker Osman criticized the Kurdish alliance's insistence on being awarded the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, saying the distribution of portfolios had become like "an inheritance". He said Kurds should have asked either for the oil or finance ministries, rather than foreign affairs.

SCHUTE: Missed business opportunity in Kurdistan

Turks, Iranians and Jordanians invest while we sit on sidelines

By Harry Schute Jr.

The Kurdistan Regional Government released significant news recently. It announced that Houston's Marathon Oil Corp. had acquired operating positions in four oil blocks in Iraqi Kurdistan. This is good news for oil development in Kurdistan and American business in Iraq. Another news story that same day went unnoticed by the Western press. The four-day Erbil International Fair came to a successful conclusion with nearly 850 companies participating. Only two American companies came to the fair. Where were the rest of the Americans?

This was the sixth consecutive year that Iraqi Kurdistan's capital hosted the fair. Once again, the fair was conducted without incident, with broad business participation and attendance by an array of senior regional and international figures. These included the Czech deputy foreign minister, the Polish minister of reconstruction, the head of United Kingdom Trade and Investment (UKTI) and representatives from among the 17 diplomatic contingents present in Erbil.

Fair organizers proudly proclaimed in their slick English catalog that they had had more than 20 percent growth, with 22 countries represented at the event. Turkey is at the front of that list with 76 companies, followed by, among others Iran - 53; Jordan - 44; Germany - 41; France - 19; United Arab Emirates - 16; Austria - 13; Czech Republic - 11; U.K. - nine (though 39 U.K. companies were visiting the fair with UKTI); China - five; and the U.S. - two.

Some elements of the country list should be no surprise. Turkey is the largest investor by far in Kurdistan and has more than 600 companies active there. The supply base from Europe to Erbil is a mere four-hour flight away, making it relatively easy for the Europeans to participate. The most problematic representation was the large Iranian delegation. Even China and its five-company delegation outdid American business.



illustration: Kurdistan by Alexander Hunter for The Washington Times

Why did all of these companies come to Erbil? They came because they realize there is plenty of opportunity in Kurdistan with a progressive investment law, free-market practices, excellent security and many opportunities. Those opportunities are not just in oil, either. They abound in agriculture, tourism and manufacturing. Kurdistan imports almost everything, yet it has a capable work force that is ready to make its own products and export to the rest of Iraq and the region.

One might ask, "Why don't American companies come?" There are two principal reasons. One is that many Americans still cannot distinguish the differences between Kurdish Iraq and Arab Iraq. As someone who has been to both and has spent considerable time in Kurdistan since 2003, I can tell you they are very different places in terms of security, culture, language and, most significantly, attitude toward America.

The second is that the U.S. government sends a confusing message about American investment in Kurdistan. On one hand, the Defense and Commerce departments have been active proponents of U.S. business. On the other, the State Department is the source of confusing messages.

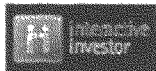
Any business that might be exploring the array of State Department communications would readily conclude that all of Iraq is the same, meaning dangerous. In fact, State is even loathe to

mention the word Kurdistan, likely in deference to the old Turkish hypersensitivity to the word. But if the Turkish consul in Erbil can openly say "Kurdistan region" in front of hundreds of guests, why can't the State Department's Iraq Travel Warning and Iraq Country Specific Information mention the federal region? In fact, the most recent Iraq Travel Warning (Nov. 5) says that "no region should be considered safe" and "attacks against military and civilian targets throughout Iraq continue." The warning mentions "Northern Iraq," but in a confusing paragraph mixing apples and oranges.

As someone who has been working in Erbil, I really don't know what the reference is for the State warnings and alarms. The fact is, no more than 200 U.S. soldiers have been based in all of Kurdistan since 2004 because there is security. No Westerner has been killed or kidnapped in Kurdistan since the war began. Other countries see these facts, and they queue up to get their companies into Kurdistan.

It would seem that because America did the heavy lifting and shed the most blood to bring freedom to Iraq - including Kurdistan - American business ought to be taking advantage of the excellent opportunities that abound and that Kurds want to share with Americans. A few companies, such as Marathon and Hunt Oil Co., have seen this and are enjoying the benefits. If others don't step in, Kurdistan will have to look to companies from those countries that do want to participate, whether they are from France, Germany, China or Iran. In that scenario, both American business and American diplomacy will miss out.

Harry Schute Jr. is a retired U.S. Army Reserve colonel. He commanded an Army Reserve civil affairs battalion in Kurdistan in 2003-04 and later was chief of staff for the Coalition Provisional Authority - North. He is a consulting adviser to the Kurdistan Regional Government



Stability in Kurdistan a boon to UK oil firms

Fiona Bond

At long last the Iraqi government has started the daunting task of forming a new cabinet and with it, the potential overhaul of the oil industry.

After more than eight months of political wrangling following inconclusive elections, Nuri Al-Maliki's appointment as Iraq's new Prime Minister has reawakened the long-stalled federal law issue in the autonomous Kurdish region.

Reports have emerged from Iraq that Kurdish factions - long embroiled in an oil pay dispute with Baghdad - are using the oil issue as a precondition for giving their support to Al-Maliki's coalition and have demanded a new law be passed before mid-2011.

Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh said approving legislation of the long-awaited oil and gas law would be among the new government's priorities. While this by no means suggests a Kurdish victory, it is clear the resolution of the dispute will be high upon the agenda.

Samuel Ciszuk, Middle East energy analyst at IHS Global Insight, said: "The strong Kurdish demand means they will push for a national oil law that will recognise the oil contracts signed separately by the KRG, or at least will not force dramatic changes by bringing them into line with some national standard, protecting the KRG investors and allowing the region's producers to export crude."

Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) have been at loggerheads for over a year regarding the production-sharing agreements signed by the Kurds. The central government protested that the deals went against the law, while the Kurds were adamant that they were in line with the constitution, resulting in the halt of oil exports out of the region.

New oil discoveries

Earlier this week, KRG minister for natural resources, Ashti Hawrami, claimed eight new oil discoveries have been made in the Northern Iraqi region over the past two to three years and 37 contracts have been signed with 40 companies, raking in

over \$10 billion worth of investment into the sector.

News of fervent investment comes as little surprise, with Kurdistan long luring overseas oil companies with the promise of attractive production agreement, including UK-listed Gulf Keystone Petroleum (GKP) and Heritage Oil (HOIL).

While both have acknowledged the volatile and precarious political situation, neither has let it put them off their stride.

FTSE 250-listed Heritage remained optimistic that there is the "potential for export production to recommence when a payment mechanism has been agreed", while just earlier this week, AIM-listed Gulf Keystone commenced the drilling of its Shaikan-2 appraisal well.

It's little wonder that both are keen to keep their drilling campaign underway, with a US Geological Survey estimating around 40 billion barrels of oil and 60 trillion cubic feet of gas.

The Miran Block, of which Heritage Oil owns 75% and is operator, is estimated to house up to 3.4 billion barrels of oil in place.

Gulf Keystone, in turn, said the spudding of its first deep appraisal well on the Shaikan structure could, in the success case, result in a significant increase in current -90 volumes of 1.9 billion barrels of oil in place.

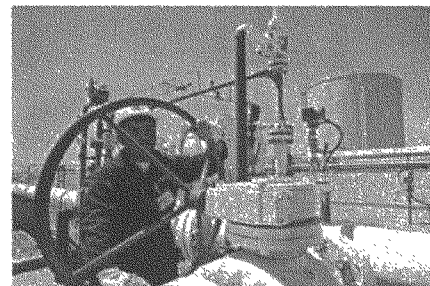
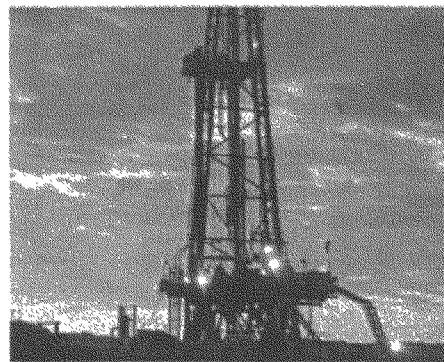
Indeed, Hawrami believes that Kurdish oil production could hit one million barrels a day by January 2014 and said the region is now ready to start exporting 100,000 barrels a day, to be increased to around 150,000 barrels a day by the close of next year or early 2012.

Clear political passage

But before Kurdistan can unlock its production potential, it must first ensure the passage of the national oil law is a clear one.

Al-Maliki has already taken steps to address the oil industry, with the offer open for current oil minister Hussein al-Shahristani to become one of three new deputy prime ministers, with a special brief for energy issues.

This job would allow al-Shahristani to keep control of Iraq's energy sector, even



if the oil ministry is lost to another faction in the broad coalition than Al-Maliki's own.

However, exact details of the new position appear uncertain as it lacks any legal definition - a key point for the opposing Kurds, according to Ciszuk. He believes that the Kurds will view his position as watered down into ultimately just a figurehead, as his chances of retaining control of the Oil Ministry start to grow increasingly slim, leaving it with a greater opportunity to thrash out a deal involving the recognition of its own oil contracts with IOCs.

"This would be crucial for the region, as well as for its upstream investors, as a lot of companies are now making headway in their initial exploration commitments and might be very reluctant to invest in additional appraisals, not to say development, should a resolution to the dispute drag on further," he said.

The question, however, remains as to what extent Kurdish oil contracts might need to be changed to bring them into line with some national standard.

While there is little doubt the Kurds will be pushing for PSA deals when greenfield exploration is involved, only time will really tell.



Les rapports secrets du département d'Etat

Les inquiétudes américaines sur l'ingérence de l'Iran en Irak

Diplomatie, finances, religion, opérations clandestines : Téhéran atteint ses objectifs

Menaces et promesses, aide financière, manipulations politiques, espionnage tous azimuts, tentatives d'influence religieuse, fournitures d'armes et d'explosifs à des milices « pro » ou « anti » gouvernementales selon les périodes, incidents sporadiques plus ou moins provoqués sur les frontières communes, contacts et visites multipliées entre les deux pays... A en croire les télé-

grammes diplomatiques écrits entre 2004 et février 2010 par l'ambassade américaine de Bagdad, obtenus par WikiLeaks et révélés par *Le Monde*, la stratégie iranienne en Irak a usé, au fil des ans, de tous les instruments possibles et imaginables pour influencer les affaires intérieures de son voisin.

Force est de constater que la République islamique d'Iran a atteint, en Irak, nombre de ses objectifs initiaux. Les relations

entre deux pays qui se sont livrés, de 1980 à 1988, une guerre qui a fait près d'un million de morts, restent compliquées, mais permanentes.

Partenaire difficile pour l'Irak, le premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki, le chef du plus ancien parti religieux chiite irakien (Daawa), constitue actuellement un nouveau gouvernement. Il sera dominé par des formations chiites a priori plus favorables aux intérêts iraniens que d'autres partis.

Suite à la brève « occupation », en décembre 2009, d'un puits de pétrole irakien par des soldats iraniens à Al-Fakkah, dans la province de Maysan, Adel Abdel Mahdi, l'un des deux vice-présidents irakiens, invité à l'ambassade américaine le 10 janvier 2010, explique pourquoi l'Irak a choisi d'user de la diplomatie pour obtenir, avec succès, le départ des Iraniens. « Ils ont commis une erreur, dit-il. L'Irak ne peut pas risquer son avenir en entrant dans un nouveau conflit avec l'Iran. Il est très important que le pays conserve de bonnes relations avec l'Iran, de même

qu'avec ses autres voisins, la Turquie ou la Syrie. »

Jalal Talabani, le vieux président kurde de la République post-Saddam Hussein, qui assiste comme souvent à l'entretien, est d'accord. « Selon lui, la racine des nombreux problèmes entre Irak et Iran sur leur frontière est liée aux accords d'Alger signés en 1975 » entre feu le chah Reza Pahlavi et Saddam Hussein, qui n'était alors que vice-président. L'Irak, comme l'ONU, reconnaît toujours la validité de ces accords de délimitation de la frontière. L'Irak veut aujourd'hui les renégocier. Les deux voisins évoquent régulièrement les travaux d'une commission technique conjointe chargée de régler les problèmes de frontière, mais la commission n'a encore produit aucune esquisse de solution.

« Le commandant des Gardiens de la révolution dirige la politique irakienne de l'Iran »

Un télégramme diplomatique américain

En ce début 2010, dans le même bureau américain, Taha Shuker Abbassi, le chef de la division « pays voisins » au ministère des affaires étrangères d'Irak, s'était montré plus pugnace et avait demandé « quel soutien militaire les Etats-Unis seraient prêts à fournir dans le cas d'une attaque par un des voisins ». « Il encourage aussi le gouvernement américain à condamner publiquement l'agression iranienne (...) pour démontrer à l'opinion irakienne le soutien moral américain à l'intégrité territoriale de l'Irak. »

Le diplomate irakien « se lamenta », écrit l'auteur du télégramme : « Les Iraniens se conduisent avec nous comme si le pays était toujours sous la domination de Sad-



Des soldats irakiens reprennent le contrôle du puits de pétrole d'Al-Fakkah, le 25 décembre 2009, dans le sud-est de l'Irak, près de la frontière avec l'Iran, après qu'il eut été « occupé » durant trois jours par des soldats iraniens. ESSAM AL-SUDANI/AFP

dam. » A la fin de son texte, l'ambassadeur américain, Christopher Hill, note : « Il devient clair que les deux parties [l'Irak et l'Irak] réalisent que leurs relations bilatérales sont moins conduites par leur héritage chiite commun que par les priorités du monde réel et des intérêts divergents. »

Dans une note « secrète » du 13 novembre 2009, le diplomate américain rédige un long texte intitulé « Efforts iraniens dans la politique électorale de l'Irak ». Dès le sommaire de son étude, l'ambassadeur reconnaît que « l'Irak est un des joueurs dominants dans la politique électorale irakienne ». La République islamique « use des liens de proximité qu'elle a établis avec des figures chiites, kurdes et une sélection de sunnites (...) en faveur d'une victoire chiite aux élections ». « Un gouvernement irakien pro-Irak, dominé par les chiites et préférentiellement islamiste, demeure la priorité numéro un de Téhéran. C'est pour cela, poursuit-il, que l'Irak cherche à accentuer la pression sur Maliki pour qu'il joigne ses forces aux autres coalitions chiites. » Finalement, M. Maliki ira seul aux élections de mars 2010 mais sera contraint, arithmétique oblige, de s'allier aux autres partis chiites pour rester premier ministre.

« Un Irak économiquement dépendant et politiquement subordonné donnerait à Téhéran une plus grande profondeur stratégique », écrit encore le diplomate. « Le président Ahmadinejad a récemment parlé de l'Irak comme d'une "base chiite" confrontée aux menaces. » Pour parvenir à ces résultats, l'Irak « a compris qu'il lui fallait faire montre d'une grande flexibilité opérationnelle, et même parfois idéologique ». Il n'est ainsi « pas rare » que l'Irak « finance et soutienne des entités chiites ou kurdes rivales – et parfois même sunnites – dans le but de développer une

dépendance financière ». « Les chiffres exacts sont inconnus, mais l'assistance financière iranienne à ceux qui l'acceptent est estimée de 100 à 200 millions de dollars chaque année, dont 70 millions pour les seuls coffres du Conseil suprême islamique en Irak (CSII) » et sa branche armée, la milice Badr.

Depuis 2003, c'est « le général Ghassem Soleimani, commandant des Gardiens de la révolution – force Al-Qods (un proche du Guide suprême iranien, Ali Khamenei), qui dirige la formulation et la mise en œuvre de la politique irakienne du gouvernement d'Irak ». L'intéressé « emploie la totalité des moyens de la diplomatie, de la sécurité, du renseignement et des outils économiques pour influencer ses alliés et ses détracteurs irakiens pour établir un régime plus pro-iranien, à Bagdad comme dans les provinces ». Selon l'ambassadeur Hill, « Soleimani entretient d'anciennes et proches relations avec le président Jalal Talabani, le vice-président Adel Abdel Mahdi (numéro deux du CSII), Nouri Al-Maliki, l'ancien premier ministre [Ibrahim Al-] Jaafari et le président (sunnite) du Parlement, [Ayad Al-] Samarai. »

Pour faire bonne mesure, « les outils d'influence » de l'Irak incluent « des aides économiques aux organisations religieuses, un soutien en armes à des militants chiites sélectionnés et un sanctuaire aux politiciens irakiens qui ont à craindre des Etats-Unis ou qui veulent revitaliser leur crédit politico-religieux comme Moqtada Al-Sadr ». Replié dans un séminaire de Qom depuis plus de trois ans, le prêcheur radical chiite, qui veut devenir ayatollah et dont la milice a livré en 2004 deux guerres meurtrières aux soldats américains, vient d'apporter, sur pression iranienne, le soutien de ses 40 élus à la coalition de M. Maliki.

En juin 2008, le premier ministre irakien, en visite à Téhéran, a

mis les points sur les « i ». Puisque l'Irak prétend tout faire pour aider à « stabiliser » son voisin, ce qui est son intérêt stratégique, pourquoi ne pas commencer « par nous rendre les 17 avions Iliouchine que Saddam Hussein avait envoyés en Iran » avant la guerre lancée en 1991 par Washington, demande M. Maliki au Guide iranien. « Il n'y a pas eu de réponse », souligne le diplomate dans son compte rendu.

Lors de ce voyage, « Maliki affirme avoir présenté à ses hôtes les preuves, "irakiennes et non américaines", des activités clandestines irakiennes dans son pays ». Confessions écrites « des agents et des complices irakiens capturés » et « photos des armes saisies avec estampille iranienne ». Ali Khamenei, rapporte le premier ministre à l'ambassade américaine, « a juré » sur tous les saints du chiisme qu'il n'était pas au courant, qu'il a « personnelle-

Le guide iranien Khamenei « a juré » sur tous les saints du chiisme qu'il ignorait toute activité de déstabilisation en Irak

ment édicté une fatwa interdisant toute activité de déstabilisation en Irak », que quelqu'un a dû « violer ses ordres ». Le général Soleimani jure, lui aussi, que les actes en cause ont dû être engagés « sans autorisation ». Il va enquêter. M. Maliki dira aux Américains qu'« il accorde zéro crédit » à ces dénégations.

Fin 2008, en dépit de la ferme opposition des Iraniens à la conclusion de l'accord stratégique américano-irakien (SOFA) qui prévoit, entre autres, le retrait progressif des soldats américains, Nouri Al-Maliki signe le document et le Parlement de Bagdad l'approuve. L'Irak, se félicite la chancellerie

américaine, commence à « traiter les Irakiens avec plus de respect ». Les relations entre les deux pays « deviennent plus mûres ».

C'est que, écrit Christopher Hill en novembre 2009, les Iraniens ont découvert que « leur pouvoir en Irak n'est pas sans limite ». Leur « principal obstacle politique reste l'autorité dominante et la crédibilité religieuse incarnée par le grand ayatollah Ali Sistani, lequel, bien qu'iranien de nationalité, est un critique de la doctrine du "velayat-e-faqih" (gouvernement des clercs) en vigueur en Iran ».

Lors de sa visite en Irak en mars 2008, si le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad n'est pas allé dans la ville sainte chiite de Nadjaf, nous apprend un télégramme « confidentiel », c'est qu'Ali Sistani, qui vit modestement dans la vieille ville, près du mausolée de l'imam Ali, le premier des chiites, avait fait savoir qu'il ne le recevrait pas.

Problème, Ali Sistani a 83 ans, sa santé est chancelante et, tandis que l'Irak aurait « salarié plus de dix mille imams chiites » en Irak pour élargir le soutien à la doctrine du « gouvernement des clercs », l'ayatollah irakien qui pourrait lui succéder en tant qu'autorité spirituelle, Mohammad Saïd Al-Hakim, serait lui aussi, d'après un télégramme de mai 2008, « adepte du "velayat-e-faqih" » à l'iranienne.

Un autre télégramme américain explique que le grand ayatollah Sistani, qui a discrètement approuvé l'accord sécuritaire irako-américain fin 2008, a « interdit » l'enrôlement d'étudiants religieux iraniens dans les séminaires de Nadjaf. Il « craint les infiltrations » par les services du général Soleimani. Dans la même dépêche, un certain « major Oudaï », chef des services de renseignement de la province de Nadjaf, explique aux Américains combien « l'Irak représente une menace pour la stabilité de l'Irak ». ■

Patrice Claude

Une histoire longue et tourmentée

637 Victoire des musulmans sur les Perses à Qadissiya, près de Nadjaf.

1975 Accords d'Alger délimitant les frontières entre l'Irak et l'Iran, notamment sur le Chatt Al-Arab.

1980 Le président irakien Saddam Hussein, un sunnite, dénonce les accords d'Alger ; début de la guerre entre l'Irak et l'Iran où vient de triompher la révolution

islamique sur le régime du chah Reza Pahlavi.

1988 L'Irak accepte la résolution 598 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies adoptée en 1987, qui prévoit un cessez-le-feu immédiat, le retour aux frontières de 1980 et l'échange des prisonniers.

2003 Chute du président Saddam Hussein à la suite de l'invasion américaine de l'Irak.

Wikileaks Reveals Kurdish Secrets

By WLADIMIR VAN WILGENBURG

AMSTERDAM, the Netherlands: Kurdish affairs such as Kirkuk and drug trafficking are under the international spotlight with the recent release of hundreds of thousands of confidential US documents by whistle-blowing Wikileaks.

In leaked US diplomatic cables the Turkish ambassador to Iraq, Murat Ozelik, told US officials on January 11th that for the first time a Kurdish official understood that Kirkuk would not be included in the semiautonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region, indicating to Turkey that a compromise and a special 10-year status for Kirkuk was needed.

Ozelik said that, during tri-lateral negotiations on December 21st 2009 in Erbil involving Turkey, the Iraqi government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Kurdistan Interior Minister Karim Sinjari said the KRG had now understood that Kurdistan would not be incorporating Kirkuk into the region.

The Turkish official claimed it was the first time a senior Kurdish leader had suggested that there could be some flexibility in the KRG's approach to the implementation of Article 140, which would determine the future of disputed multi-ethnic regions including Kirkuk.

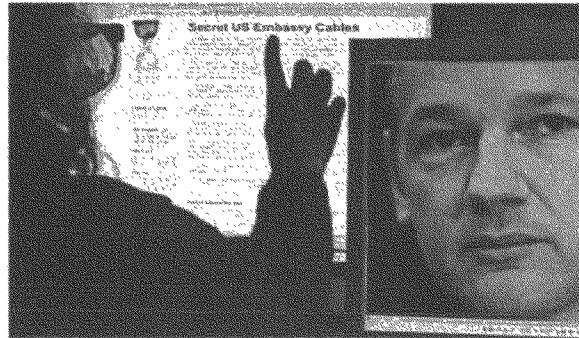
However, Sinjari denied making any compromise on Kirkuk saying that his words were "taken out of their context."

"My words were neither like that nor in that context. They have been misinterpreted," said Sinjari.

"We insist on the implementation of Article 140 without any compromise on it. But we are ready to negotiate in order to facilitate the implementation of the article as it needs cooperation."

Ozelik speculated that if the parties were able to buy enough time, the Kurds would understand that increased economic activity in the context of a more stable Iraq made administrative boundaries less important.

Furthermore, Ozelik said



*Kurds constitute a portion of the secret US diplomatic documents disclosed by Wikileaks. The founder of Wikileaks, Julian Assange, said that more "waves" of leaked cables should be expected in the next month-and-a-half.--
---- Photo/AFP/DPA.*

Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani had asked him to participate in Turkoman-Kurd and Sunni Arab-Kurd reconciliation efforts in Kirkuk and Nineveh respectively. He indicated that Kirkuk's Turkomans realized the limit of their influence in the election law debate and were more receptive to work with Kurds.

Ozelik admitted that Kurds were seen in Ankara as troublesome and also noted that, despite recent progress in ties between Turkey and Kurdistan, Kurds feared the Turkish military's hard-line elements could reverse Turkey's current policy of reconciliation. Ozelik said it was important for Turkey to emphasize to the KRG that Turkey's long-term security and, critically, commercial interests lay in keeping Turkey-KRG relations on an even keel.

Other secret cables leaked by Wikileaks alleged that Turkey's Kurdish guerilla movement, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was involved in drug trafficking.

During a meeting between officers from the US and Iraq at the Trilateral Intelligence Sharing Office hosted by the KRG on November 25th 2009, Major General "Delshad" of the Kurdish Border Guard (Zerevani) said the "PKK/Kongra Gel is involved in narcotics trafficking through transportation and associated services, like protection."

"Safa", an aide of Iraqi Major General "Fukaiki" added that "the PKK regularly uses the border seams to traffic narcotics from Iran through the mountains west to Turkey and onward to the European market."

Wikileaks' revelations are not new as the PKK has often been accused of

being involved in the narcotics trade by Turkey and Europol. In October 2009 the US Treasury named PKK leader Murat Karayilan and two other PKK members as drug trafficking "kingpins", but the PKK denied this, claiming they were against drugs.

But the leadership of the PKK dismissed the allegations as "baseless."

According to further leaked documents, published by Arabic language newspaper Al Akhbar, an outspoken critic of Kurdish security forces in Nineveh, Yezidi Progress Party head Wa'ad Hammad Matto was arrested at his Nineveh home and then detained in Baghdad by Iraqi military intelligence for meeting with Baathists in Syria in October 2009.

Matto, a former KDP-member, claimed the KDP orchestrated the arrest because he did not join the pro-KDP Ninewa Fraternity List led by a KDP leader, Khasro Gorran, in Nineveh in the Iraqi elections.

But, according to the documents, US intelligence sources said he had meetings with prominent Baathist politicians in Syria and was not politically motivated by the Kurds, and this was why he was arrested.

The document shows that Sheikh Abdullah of the Sunni nationalist al-Hadba party paid \$20,000 for Matto's defense in court.

Yezidis are primarily ethnic Kurds, mostly living near Mosul, with smaller communities in surrounding countries. Their religion incorporates local Kurdish and Islamic Sufi beliefs.

Kurdish concessions in Baghdad



Foreign Policy
By Denise Natali

The Obama administration may view the recent Iraqi power-sharing agreement as a milestone toward creating a 'unity' government in Baghdad, yet the real litmus test of Iraq's political viability will come when key legislation is presented to the parliament. Two of the most challenging issues for Baghdad-Arbil relations involve territory and oil -- resolving disputed boundaries and passing a national hydrocarbons law. Although the Kurds are pressed to determine the administrative status of the oil-rich province of Kirkuk, nearly all Arab groups -- Sunni and Shia alike -- remain adamantly against such a proposal. Given current trends in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region, the Kurdish Coalition would do best to nuance its highly-charged nationalist agenda and shift its focus from intractable land claims to Baghdad-approved petroleum deals. The region's long-term political and economic prosperity rests on such a compromise.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) will need to make political concessions because the power-sharing arrangement in Iraq is a façade. The Kurds are not kingmakers or even equal participants, but rather a politically expedient swing vote for the two key Iraq political groups: Nuri al-Maliki's State of Law Party and Ayad Allawi's Iraqiya. Even though the Kurdish leader, Jalal Talabani retained the presidency position and has been able to use his charismatic personality to give the role more substance, it is still a ceremonial post. The Kurdish Coalition may secure one of the key ministries in Baghdad; however, it will not have control of the crux of political power -- the premiership, security forces, or the Council of Ministers.

Nor does the Kurdistan Coalition have any real ally in Baghdad. Maliki may have expressed support for Kurdish nationalist demands during the transition period; however, he is likely to withdraw from his promises as he consolidates power, much the way previous Iraqi leaders have done during regime changes. Iraqiya also is likely to frustrate Kurdish territorial demands. The speaker of the parliament, Usama al-Nujaifi, has a reputation for challenging Kurdish nationalist interests and has opposed the idea of

resolving the Kirkuk issue (Article 140).

The Kurds also have new challenges at the societal level. Nearly all non-Kurdish communities across Iraq have become increasingly concerned, if not hostile, to what they perceive as an over-reaching of Kurdish rights and discrimination of Arabs in the northern region. Their collective response has been to reassure that Kirkuk is an integral part of Iraq and that it will not become administratively attached to the Kurdistan Region. This is why, despite Kurdish influence in Baghdad, no real progress has been made on key Kurdish nationalist issues since 2005. The census has been delayed, Article 140 is defunct, and the Kurds must now address the findings of the Committee to Review the Iraqi Constitution, which seeks to revise those articles that empower the regions.

Indeed, the Kurds face important obstacles in the petroleum sector as well. Even though the KRG has signed dozens of oil deals with international companies and optimistically projects one million barrels daily within five years, the central government does not recognize the contracts.

Consequently, the oil companies are still unable to export their crude to international markets and have not been fully paid for production. Additionally, despite the larger companies that have recently entered the Kurdish market, the Kurdistan region is likely to face increasing competition from southern Iraq, particularly as the central government attempts to re-active its role in OPEC, develop the mega-fields in Basra, and repair its oil infrastructure, with the hopes of expanding output from 2.6 million to more than 12.5 million in seven years.

Even if Baghdad cannot effectively raise production to the levels it predicts, it would still have control of the Iraqi oil sector, including markets in the Kurdish north. Regional states seeking to profit from Iraqi oil, particularly Turkey, are looking toward Baghdad and not Arbil as the main source of revenue generation. Turkey's Energy Minister recently confirmed that foreign companies will need the central government's approval to sign oil and gas deals. Not surprisingly, despite improved relations between Ankara and Arbil, Turkey recently re-extended its pipeline agreement with Baghdad, indirectly bypassing the Kurdistan region.



Still, the Kurdish elites may have a better chance of negotiating a hydrocarbons law than resolving the Kirkuk issue. In fact, slight progress has been made on the oil conundrum, particularly as the focus shifts from 'rights to exploration' to 'transparency of contracts.' In his recent visit to the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament (IKP), soon-to-be ex-Iraqi Oil Minister Ali Sharistani stated that Baghdad would recognize Kurdish oil contracts only if they were all presented openly to the IKP for approval. Further, the central government has included in its draft 2011 budget a line item for oil exports from the Kurdistan Region, although a relatively small amount. The demand for transparency also has become a mantra for the Goran opposition movement, which has recently withdrawn from the Kurdish Coalition and also demands full public disclosure of all KRG-signed oil deals.

The idea of disclosing oil contracts may challenge the secretive nature of the KRG's Ministry of Natural Resources, a one-man show run by Ashti Hawrami. It also may do little to resolve the long-standing political distrust that runs deep between Arbil and Baghdad or the historical legacies of Kirkuk that shape Kurdish identity, which is tied to the land. Yet, given the new role of oil in driving the Kurdistan region's development and the absence of support from key Sunni and Shia Arab groups for Kurdish control of Kirkuk, the KRG may have little choice but to substitute emotional nationalism for political pragmatism. This option may be the best possible way to realize any political and economic gains in the years ahead.

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Meddling by neighbors adds to Iraq's troubles

WASHINGTON

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON

Saddam Hussein's Iraq was a regional menace that sent shudders through its neighbors. Today's Iraqi leaders are struggling to restrain the ambitions of the countries that share Iraq's porous borders, eye the country's rich resources and vie for influence.

"All Iraq's neighbors were interfering, albeit in different ways, the Gulf and Saudi Arabia with money, Iran with money and political influence, and the Syrians by all means," Jalal Talabani, Iraq's president and the senior Kurdish official in the government, told Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates in a Dec. 10, 2009, meeting, according to a diplomatic cable. "The Turks are 'polite' in their interference, but continue their attempts

to influence Iraq's Turkmen community and Sunnis in Mosul."

With American troops preparing to withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011, the meddling threatens to aggravate the sectarian divisions in the country and undermine efforts by Iraq's leaders to get beyond bitter rivalries and build a stable government. It also shows how deeply Iraq's leaders depend on the United States to manage the meddling, even as it exposes the increasing limits on America's ability to do so.

Cables obtained by the anti-secrecy organization WikiLeaks and made available to several news organizations describe flustered Iraqi leaders complaining of interference by manipulative neighbors, some of whom — in the view of the United States — do not want it to regain its previous position of power.

"The challenge for us is to convince Iraq neighbors, particularly the Sunni Arab governments, that relations with a new Iraq are not a zero-sum game, where if Iraq wins, they lose," noted a Sept. 24, 2009, cable from Ambassador Christopher R. Hill that was aptly titled "The Great Game, in Mesopotamia."

U.S. diplomatic cables disclosed by WikiLeaks show that Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's fears about outside interference are so great that he asked President Barack Obama during a July 2009 visit to Washington to stop the Saudis from intervening. Saudi Arabia's efforts to rally the Sunnis, the Iraqi leader complained, were heightening sectarian tensions and providing Iran with an excuse to intervene in Iraqi politics, according to an account of the Oval Office session Mr. Maliki shared with



Baquba, Iraq Policemen during a parade to mark the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraqi cities. As the troops leave, the risk of interference rises.

Mr. Hill.

The suspicions have often been mutual. "I don't trust this man," King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia told John O. Brennan, Mr. Obama's top counterterrorism adviser, according to a cable about a March 15, 2009, meeting at the king's private palace in Saudi Arabia. "He is an Iranian agent."

Jockeying for influence in Iraq by outside countries has been going on ever since Mr. Hussein was ousted, hardly surprising given Iraq's strategic position in the Middle East, its vast oil reserves, its multisectarian population and the fact that it is a nascent, if unsteady, democracy largely surrounded by undemocratic neighbors.

The Iranians, who waged a bloody eight-year war with Mr. Hussein, have no desire to see a strong Iraq emerge from the ashes of his regime, especially one that has ties with the United States.

So they have sought to influence its politics by funneling cash to Iraqi political factions, ordering assassinations and shipping arms to militants, some of which an Oct. 23, 2008, cable from Dubai warned might be disguised as Red Crescent medical supplies. The Saudis, who see Iran as the principal threat in the region, have used their control of satellite television and deep pockets to support Sunni groups. Syria, which Iraqi leaders have repeatedly complained to American diplomats is dominated by a Baathist regime unduly sympathetic to the ousted Baathists in Iraq, has allowed in-

urgent fighters to sneak into Iraq. Even Turkey, which has good relations with the Iraqi government, has secretly financed nationalist and anti-Kurdish Sunni political parties.

Some leading Iraqi politicians have tried to cast themselves as the right ones to resist Iranian influence and help Iraq improve ties with its Arab neighbors.

Ayad Allawi, who leads the Iraqiya bloc, has emphasized his relationship with Arab leaders while his supporters have cast Mr. Maliki's Dawa party supporters as fearful of interacting with the Arab world, the cables show. Mr. Maliki's aides have presented themselves and their boss as being more savvy about resisting Iranian pressure than many of their rivals — if only the Americans can keep the Saudis in line.

Iran, by the United States' reckoning, has done the most to try to shape Iraqi politics. A Nov. 13, 2009, cable sent by Mr. Hill that called Iran "a dominant player in Iraq's electoral politics," estimated that Iran's annual support to political groups in Iraq was \$100 million to \$200 million. Some \$70 million of that,

Jockeying for influence in Iraq by outside countries has been going on ever since Saddam Hussein was ousted.

the cable asserts, is directed to the Is-

lamic Supreme Council in Iraq, a leading Shiite party that has also worked closely with American officials, and its former militia, the Badr Corps.

Using an acronym for the Iranian government, the ambassador acknowledged Iran's pragmatism: "The IRIG recognizes that influence in Iraq requires operational (and at times ideological) flexibility. As a result, it is not uncommon for the IRIG to finance and support competing Shia, Kurdish, and to some extent, Sunni entities, with the aim of developing the Iraqi body politic's dependency on Tehran's largesse."

In a Sept. 24, 2009, cable titled "Prime Minister Accuses Iran of Trying to Destabilize Iraq," Mr. Hill reported that Mr. Maliki had told him that Iran was trying to use its money and influence to try to "control" the Iraqi Parliament and was prepared to provide military support to Shiite militants if political efforts failed. Iran, Mr. Hill quoted Mr. Maliki as saying, was trying to rally the Shiites to counter the "Saudi project to align the Sunni states."

Some cables nonetheless reflect American concern that Dawa party officials inserted into government posts by Mr. Maliki may have close ties to Iran.

A February cable prepared by the U.S. Embassy's political officer notes that Mr. Maliki has moved to replace intelligence officers accused of having Baathist ties with Dawa loyalists. After pushback from Iraqi officials, and, apparently, interventions by American officials, the number of people accused of being Baathists who were to be fired was reduced. But a military intelligence headquarters was forced to hire 47 Dawa political officers who were in exile

in Iran during Mr. Hussein's rule "where they may have received intelligence training," the cable notes.

American diplomats and generals have told Arab leaders in the region that the best way to counter Iran's ambitions is to establish a good working relationship with Mr. Maliki, which means sending ambassadors to Baghdad and refraining from financing and mobilizing opposition groups or insurgents that seek to undermine him. But as Mr. Hill acknowledged in his cable on the "Great Game," American diplomats "still have work to do to convince them that a strong, stable, democratic (and inevitably Shia-led) Iraq is the best guarantee that Iraq will be able to shake Iranian manipulations and see its future bound up with that of the West and its moderate Arab neighbors."

Of all the Arab leaders in the region, President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, the cables suggest, was the most sympathetic to the American approach, a policy that reflects Egypt's deep suspicions of Iran. Omar Suleiman, Egypt's intelligence chief, told Gen. David H. Petraeus in a June 2009 meeting that Egypt's goal was "to bring Iraq back to

the Arab World."

Toward this end, Egypt promised to send a new ambassador to Baghdad, a noteworthy move given that the previous Egyptian ambassador was kidnapped by insurgents and killed in 2005. In a conversation with King Abdullah, Mr. Mubarak advised the Saudi mon-

Like the Iranians, the Saudis have not hesitated to use their money and political influence inside Iraq.

arch "not to search for another man," but instead to accept Mr. Maliki, Mr. Suleiman confided.

The Saudis, on the other hand, have good ties with Mr. Maliki's principal rival. They may have been unwilling to deal with the Iraqi prime minister or send an ambassador to Baghdad, but a Feb. 23, 2010, cable from the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh notes that King Abdullah rolled out the red carpet for Mr. Allawi by inviting him to his desert encampment.

Like the Iranians, the Saudis have not hesitated to use their money and political influence inside Iraq, according to American diplomats. "For now the Saudis are using their money and media power (al-Arabiyya, al-Sharqiya satellite channels, and other various media they control or influence) to support Sunni political aspirations, exert influence over Sunni tribal groups, and undercut the Shia-led Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and Iraqi National Alliance (INA)," Mr. Hill's "Great Game" cable noted.

And Mr. Talabani, the Iraqi president, complained in a Dec. 14, 2009, meeting with a senior State Department official that the Saudis "had pressured Kuwait to backtrack on initial agreements with Iraq on issues dating to the Saddam-era," a cable noted. (The cable quotes Mr. Talabani as saying that Qatar and Bahrain were seeking better ties with Iraq "despite Saudi opposition.")

Syria has been another difficult neighbor. It has long been accused by the Iraqis of harboring senior Iraq Baath Party members aligned with the former regime, and allowing foreign fighters to sneak into Iraq. The Obama administration sought to improve ties with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and even sent a team from the U.S. Central Command to Syria to discuss ways to better control the border. But after a series of bombings in Baghdad in August 2009 that Mr. Maliki attributed to Syria, the Iraqis refused to participate in the discussions.

In a December 2009 meeting with Jeffrey D. Feltman, an assistant secretary of state, Mr. Maliki, who lived in Syria for 16 years during Mr. Hussein's rule, described the Syrian leaders as more difficult to deal with than the Iranians

and recounted that the Syrians had boasted to him during his years in exile that they were skilled in negotiating with the Americans, according to a cable about the meeting.

Of all Iraq's neighbors, Turkey has forged one of the best working relations with the Iraqi government and with Kurdish officials in northern Iraq. Turkey, the cables note, also played an important behind-the-scenes role in helping the United States and Iraq negotiate the security agreement that provides for the withdrawal of American troops by the end of 2011.

But Turkey has been unable to resist the temptation to intervene in Iraq politics. Turkey, an April 2009 cable noted, "played an unhelpful role in recent Iraqi provincial elections through its clandestine financial support of the anti-Kurd al-Hadba Gathering," a Sunni led political group that prevailed in provincial elections in Nineveh Province in Iraq.

According to a Jan. 31, 2010, cable from Mr. Hill, Turkey's ambassador to Baghdad, Murat Ozcelik, also opposed Mr. Maliki's bid to win re-election in his private discussions with American diplomats. While Turkey had supported Mr. Maliki in the past, Mr. Ozcelik said it was backing his rivals now because the Turks believed that if the prime minister was reelected he would "would focus on increasing his own power and would not be cooperative in resolving outstanding issues," Mr. Hill reported.



Iraq's Kurds build up their own army

IRBIL, Iraq, December 7, 2010
United Press International

IRAQ'S TWO MAIN KURDISH PARTIES, which have long sought an independent state in their northern enclave, are building their own army and intelligence apparatus as the country remains gripped by political crisis stemming from inconclusive elections in March.

On Oct. 20, amid the political power struggle to form a coalition government, Barham Salih, prime minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, extended his administration's powers to establish his direct control of the enclave's security and intelligence services.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party is led by Masood Barzani, president of the KRG, and the PUK is headed by veteran guerrilla chief Jalal Talibani, Iraq's president.

Salih set up a body known as the Council of the Assiyeh, which will function as a Kurdish security council. It will be headed by Karim Sanjani and Korsat Rasul, military chiefs for the KDP and the PUK.

Kurdish sources say the two parties' 80,000 fighters, known as peshmerga -- Those Who Face Death -- will be welded into a single Kurdish army of eight divisions.

Intelligence Online, a Paris Web site that covers security issues, reports that the process will be overseen by Jaafar Sheik Mustapha, the minister for the peshmerga.

"He is being advised by several Israeli consultants," it said. Mustafa Barzani reportedly met in Vienna in January with Danny Yatom, former head of Israel's foreign intelligence service, the Mossad, "who has been tipped to coordinate the military merger."

The Mossad and private Israeli defense companies with links to Israel's defense ministry have long been reported aiding the Kurds, an on-off relationship that goes back four decades.

The U.S. military withdrawal is having a serious impact on Kurdish planning. The peshmerga, sworn enemies of Saddam's regime, were the Americans' most dependable allies during the 2003 invasion and the chaos that ensued.

Now they find themselves losing a powerful ally at a time when the Iranian-backed Shiite majority has taken control of the defense and interior ministries, which direct the military and security forces.

The peshmerga, many of them veterans of a long insurgency against Saddam Hussein, remain relatively independent and powerful in the north.

"Ultimately, whatever their organization status, they will retain ultimate loyalty to the Kurdish cause," the Texas global security consultancy Stratfor observed recently.

"The Kurdistan Regional Government, realizing it is losing its security guarantor with the U.S. withdrawal and understanding the consequences of Sunni-Shiite interest aligning against them in a struggle between Kurds and Arabs, decided to form a unified Kurdish army to defend their autonomy."

The International Crisis Group has warned that "the risk



of the balkanization of the security force will likely increase" as the political crisis drags on.

The Kurds have clung tenaciously to their ethnic identity, throughout the cruel years of Baathist rule, largely under Saddam and then in the often chaotic post-U.S. invasion years when their enclave became semi-autonomous under a federal government in Baghdad.

The rebellious KDP and PUK set aside their often violent differences to help the Americans topple Saddam, who waged a genocidal war against them.

Deep-rooted Kurdish nationalism apart, the move toward an independent army has been accelerated by the emergence of an Iraqi military controlled by Shiite leaders since Saddam was toppled.

There are some 35,000 Kurds in the state army. To reduce KRG influence over Kurdish forces, Baghdad has deployed predominantly Kurdish brigades from the 2nd and 3rd Divisions to the south.

It is these forces that will form the backbone of the planned Kurdish army.

The central government in Baghdad, concerned at the KRG's military plans, has suggested absorbing another 30,000 peshmerga into the national army.

But the KRG has rejected that, a decision apparently based on increasing concern that Kurdish forces will inevitably be pushed into open conflict with state forces over the oil-rich Kirkuk region.

The Kurds claim the region is historically part of territory. During Saddam's rule, he drove out Kurds and Arabized the city.

The Kurds, who see the oil fields as the economic core of an independent state, have been reversing that process since 2003.

U.S. forces have kept the lid on the smoldering powder keg. But the fear is that it will eventually explode if no settlement has been reached once U.S. forces complete their withdrawal.



France: interpellation de 6 membres présumés du PKK près de Marseille

PARIS, 7 décembre 2010 (AFP)

SIX membres présumés de l'organisation séparatiste kurde PKK ont été interpellés mardi dans la région de Marseille (sud de la France) à la demande d'un juge antiterroriste parisien, a-t-on appris de sources proches de l'enquête.

Ces six personnes, parmi lesquelles figure "un membre important au niveau européen" du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), ont été arrêtées mardi matin dans la région de Marseille par des policiers de la Direction centrale du renseignement intérieur (DCRI) et des policiers marseillais.

Elles ont été placées en garde à vue à Marseille, disposition qui permet de les garder pendant quatre jours.

Elles ont été interpellées sur commission rogatoire d'un juge antiterroriste

parisien dans le cadre d'une enquête sur le financement du PKK. Certains seraient également impliqués dans des jets de cocktails Molotov à Maignane, ville proche de Marseille, selon une source proche de l'enquête.

A Marseille, environ 250 personnes, selon la police, ont manifesté dans l'après-midi pour protester contre ces arrestations.

Le cortège, composé d'hommes, de femmes et d'enfants de la communauté kurde, a défilé pacifiquement sur la Canebière aux cris de "Libérez nos camarades!". La manifestation s'est dispersée sans incident. Une délégation de quatre personnes a été reçue par le procureur de la République de Marseille, Jacques Dalles.

Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK, en 1984, selon l'armée.



Irak: Rapt entre kurdes et sunnites à Kirkouk

KIRKOUK (Irak), 12 décembre 2010 (AFP)

DES INCONNUS ont kidnappé la belle-soeur d'un haut gradé kurde de la police et ce rapt a été suivi par l'enlèvement d'un chef tribal et de sa fille dans la région multiethnique de Kirkouk, a indiqué dimanche la police.

Samedi soir à Gharnata, un quartier du sud de la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk, à 240 km au nord de Bagdad, quatre hommes vêtus d'uniforme militaire, ont fait irruption dans la maison d'un policier kurde Hamed Taher al-Barzanchi.

Ils l'ont bâillonné et menotté avant d'enlever sa femme Haïfa Abdel Saheb, 25 ans. Ce policier est le frère du chef du département des affaires internes de la police de Kirkouk, le colonel Mohammad Taher al-Barzanchi, a affirmé cette source qui soupçonne le groupe d'insurgés Ansar al-Sunna d'être l'auteur du rapt.

Deux heures plus tard à Abou Mohammad, un village à 35 km au sud de Kirkouk, un autre groupe armé a pénétré au domicile du chef de la tribu sunnite d'Ezza et ont enlevé cheikh Sayyah Thabet al-Ezzi, 52 ans, et sa fille Rima, 18 ans.

Le chef de la police de la province de Kirkouk, le général Jamal Taher Baker, a confirmé le rapt de la femme du policier et a accusé "les criminels de chercher à susciter un conflit ethnique au sein des communautés de Kirkouk".

"La police ne doit pas échanger des personnes enlevées contre des détenus car cela encourage les terroristes et le troc qui a eu lieu récemment était une erreur", a-t-il ajouté. Le colonel Mohammad al-Barzanchi et

cheikh al-Ezzi avaient négocié un tel échange il y a deux mois.

Le 28 octobre, La police de Kirkouk avait accepté, pour la première fois, d'échanger cinq insurgés proches d'Al-Qaïda contre deux filles d'un notable kurde kidnappées quelques heures plus tôt.

"Nous avons joué un rôle pour que soient relâchées cinq femmes arabes, arrêtées pour leur implication dans des crimes terroristes, en échange de la libération des deux filles", âgées d'une vingtaine d'années, avait affirmé à l'époque le colonel kurde Arras al-Kaki, chef des unités anti-terroristes à Kirkouk.

"Deux des cinq criminelles libérées sont les femmes de deux chefs d'Ansar al-Sunna actuellement détenus", avait-il ajouté en affirmant avoir voulu ainsi éviter des troubles dans la ville.

Quatre insurgés d'Ansar al-Sunna avaient enlevé les deux filles de Walid Jalal al-Kaki, un homme d'affaires kurde de 55 ans proche du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK de Massoud Barzani).

Les ravisseurs avaient proposé d'échanger les deux filles, contre cinq femmes et deux hommes arrêtés deux semaines plus tôt dans un maison du centre de Kirkouk, où se trouvaient des armes et des documents d'Ansar al-Sunna. Mais finalement, l'échange n'avait concerné que les cinq prisonnières.

Fondé en 2003, Ansar al-Sunna est une coalition de groupes salafistes surtout actifs dans le nord de l'Irak. Il a revendiqué plusieurs enlèvements d'étrangers et leur décapitation.

Kirkouk est une province multi-ethnique que se disputent les Kurdes, le Arabes et les Turcomans.



Un rebelle kurde tué lors de combats avec l'armée dans l'est de la Turquie

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 11 décembre 2010 (AFP)

UN REBELLE KURDE a été tué samedi lors de combats avec les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie, ont affirmé des sources locales de sécurité.

L'accrochage est survenu dans une zone rurale proche du village de Caliskan, dans la province de Batman, quand une patrouille de l'armée a surpris un groupe de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui a répliqué aux appels à se rendre par des coups de feu, ont

indiqué ces sources.

L'incident survient alors que le PKK a décrété à la mi-août une trêve unilatérale, qu'il a ensuite prolongée jusqu'aux prochaines élections législatives, prévues pour juin 2011, dans le but de favoriser les initiatives du gouvernement turc visant à en finir avec ce conflit.

Le conflit kurde en Turquie a fait, selon les chiffres de l'armée, plus de 45.000 morts depuis le début de l'insurrection du PKK, en 1984. Le PKK est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie, les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne.



Iraqi Kurd leader says Kirkuk belongs to Kurdistan

ARBIL, Iraq, December 11 (Reuters) – By Shamal Aqrawi

IRAQI KURDISH leader Masoud Barzani said Saturday that his semi-autonomous region has the right to self-determination and to the disputed city of Kirkuk, which is located above some of Iraq's largest oil reserves.

The fate of Kirkuk is one of the main issues of contention between the Kurdish region and the central government in Baghdad, which are locked in disputes over land and some of the world's richest oilfields.

Barzani told a congress of his Kurdistan Democratic Party in Arbil that Kurdistan's right to Kirkuk was non-negotiable.

"The Kurdish identity of Kirkuk is not a matter of bargaining," he said.

At the same event, Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki said he would meet the constitutional deadline to form Iraq's new government. He was charged on November 25 with putting together a cabinet and had 30 days to deliver.

Iraq has been without a new government for more than nine months after a March election failed to produce a clear winner.

Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish factions squabbled for months over position and power before finally reaching a compromise last month that would include all the major political blocs in the next government.

KIRKUK'S HOME?

Barzani's region and Iraq's central government have argued for years whether Arbil had the right to sign oil development contracts with foreign oil companies. Baghdad says Iraqi oil resources are under its jurisdiction and calls the Kurdish region's contracts illegal.

The disagreement shut down oil exports from the region last year and they have yet to restart, although the oil ministers of both sides have said recently that exports should begin early next year.

Central to the territorial disputes is the fate of Kirkuk, which U.S. officials say may be sitting on 4 percent of the world's



reserves. The city's population is a mix of Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen and others.

Iraq recently postponed a national census that could determine what percentage of Kirkuk's population is Kurdish, a key step toward resolving whether the city should be part of Kurdistan.

Tensions surrounding the census have escalated recently. Some Arab families have said they are being ordered to leave the city before the population count.

Barzani sought to dispel concerns about Kirkuk's future.

"If there were fears that the Kurds would rule unilaterally in case Kirkuk is joined to Kurdistan, I would like to reassure everyone that we want to make Kirkuk an example of coexistence," he said.

While previous party congresses had discussed and "confirmed the right to self-determination" for Kurdistan, Barzani said this year it would be a fundamental issue on the agenda.

Maliki's pledge to name his new government by the constitutional deadline could be a sign of the difficulty of reaching agreement with rival political blocs on specific nominees for cabinet posts. He had previously said he would name a cabinet by mid-December.

"The government will see the light in this constitutional period and before the limit of 30 days," Maliki told the KDP congress.

"I call upon all the blocs to accelerate submitting their nominees and not to stop long for minor issues," he said.

La Provence 11 DÉCEMBRE 2010

Les Kurdes manifestent contre toutes les répressions

Dans le sillage des "pro-parc des Calanques", une autre manifestation a attiré l'attention des Marseillais, cet après-midi sur la Canebière : celle organisée à l'appel du Collectif méditerranéen pour les droits de l'Homme en Turquie. Un défilé qui a réuni lui aussi près d'un millier de personnes réclamant non seulement l'arrêt de la répression de la minorité kurde par le gouvernement turc, mais également

pour dénoncer "la pression exercée par les autorités françaises sur la communauté kurde de Marseille".

Les représentants locaux du Parti communiste ont notamment exprimé leur solidarité avec les responsables de la Maison du peuple kurde, boulevard Longchamp, dont les locaux ont fait récemment l'objet d'une perquisition.





Irak: Massoud Barzani revendique le droit à l'autodétermination pour les Kurdes

11 décembre. 2010 De Abdel Hamid ZEBARI (AFP) -

ERBIL, Le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a revendiqué samedi lors du congrès de son parti le droit à l'autodétermination pour les Kurdes, ce qui pourrait être un prélude à une scission de l'Irak.

"Nous allons soumettre aujourd'hui la question de l'autodétermination aux personnes participant à ce congrès, car nous considérons que nous avons droit à l'autodétermination", a-t-il déclaré lors d'un discours au début du 13e congrès du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), dont il est le chef.

C'est la première fois que le dirigeant kurde propose en des termes aussi clairs à son parti de se prononcer sur une possible indépendance du Kurdistan irakien, qui bénéficie depuis une vingtaine d'années d'une large autonomie vis-à-vis du gouvernement central de Bagdad.

Le congrès du PDK s'est ouvert en présence notamment du président irakien Jalal Talabani, chef de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), du Premier ministre désigné Nouri al-Maliki et d'Iyad Allawi, chef de file d'Iraqiya, liste laïque soutenue par une majorité de sunnites et qui a obtenu le plus de sièges au Parlement de Bagdad lors des dernières législatives.

Les 1.300 membres du PDK seront appelés à voter sur la question de l'autodétermination, a indiqué une source au sein du parti, sans préciser quand ce scrutin aurait lieu.

Le PDK constitue la principale force politique du Kurdistan, et la coalition qu'il forme avec l'UPK est majoritaire au Parlement régional depuis les élections de 2009.

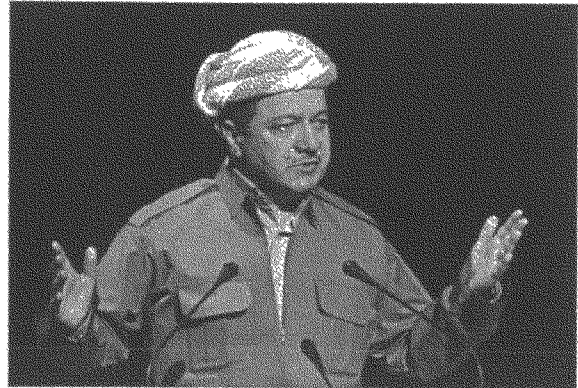
Le parti doit en outre se doter de nouvelles instances dirigeantes, composées d'une cinquantaine de membres.

Le PDK est l'une des composantes de la coalition au pouvoir en Irak. Et M. Barzani vient de jouer un rôle crucial pour dénouer la crise politique dans laquelle l'Irak s'est enfoncé après les élections du 7 mars.

C'est en effet lui qui est parvenu à arracher le mois dernier aux dirigeants des principales formations irakiennes un accord de partage de pouvoir, qui a ouvert la voie à l'attribution des plus hautes charges du pays, après huit mois d'impasse.

M. Maliki a encore 15 jours pour former son prochain gouvernement.

Après une première forme d'autonomie obtenue dans les années 1970, le Kurdistan, qui rassemble trois provinces du nord de l'Irak (Erbil, Dohouk et



Souleimaniyeh), s'est véritablement émancipé de la tutelle de Bagdad après la guerre du Golfe, en 1991.

Mais le Kurdistan a ensuite été divisé par la guerre impitoyable que se sont livrée l'UPK et le PDK de fin 1994 à 1998, qui a fait 3.000 morts.

Les deux partis se sont réconciliés sous les auspices de Washington au point de s'allier pour les élections de 2005, qui ont porté Massoud Barzani à la présidence de la région.

Le Kurdistan possède son propre Parlement et dispose de prérogatives étendues dans tous les domaines, à l'exception des Affaires étrangères et de la Défense.

Une autonomie qui s'est maintes fois heurtée ces dernières années à l'autorité du gouvernement central, notamment sur la question des contrats pétroliers qu'il a signés avec des compagnies étrangères, et que Bagdad ne reconnaît pas.

Les Kurdes revendiquent en outre de vastes portions de territoires hors de leurs frontières administratives actuelles, principalement dans la province riche en pétrole de Kirkouk, mais aussi dans celles de Ninive (nord), Salaheddine et Diyala (centre).

"Quand Kirkouk reviendra dans le giron de la région, nous en ferons un exemple de coexistence (...) et de gouvernance partagée, mais nous ne négocierons pas son identité", a déclaré M. Barzani dans son discours.

Fils de Moustafa Barzani, dirigeant de l'éphémère république kurde proclamée en 1946 à Mahabad, en Iran, Massoud Barzani dirige le PDK depuis 1979.



Irak - Barzani réaffirme l'identité kurde de la ville de Kirkouk

ERBIL, Irak, 11 décembre (Reuters) -by Shamal Aqrawi

MASSOUD BARZANI, leader des Kurdes d'Irak, a affirmé samedi que la ville de Kirkouk appartenait au Kurdistan et que son statut n'était pas négociable.

"L'identité kurde de Kirkouk n'est pas sujet à des marchandages", a déclaré Massoud Barzani à la tribune du congrès du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan.

Kirkouk, dont le sous-sol regorge de réserves pétrolières, est au coeur d'un litige entre les autorités semi-autonomes du Kurdistan irakien et le pouvoir central, qui se disputent le droit de signer des contrats d'exploitation du brut.

Bagdad soutient que la totalité des ressources pétrolières ira-

kiennes relèvent de sa responsabilité et tient pour sans valeur les accords conclus par les autorités semi-autonomes avec des compagnies étrangères.

L'imbroglio a conduit l'an dernier à la suspension des exportations pétrolières en provenance de la région de Kirkouk, suspension toujours en vigueur.

La composition démographique de Kirkouk complique la situation: la population de la ville mêle Kurdes, Arabes, Turkmènes et autres communautés.

Le pouvoir irakien a décidé fin novembre de reporter le premier recensement complet du pays depuis 1987, qui aurait pu fournir des éléments de règlement du litige.

Wary of facing facts, Iraq postpones census

KIRKUK, IRAQ

BY STEVEN LEE MYERS

Here in this contested city, as in much of Iraq, numbers are not facts. They are assertions.

Even the simplest questions — how many people live here now and who? — invite a bewildering swirl of answers from regional officials, each laced with underlying political motives and threats of impending violence.

The simplest way to resolve the matter would be a national census, something Iraq has not conducted in full for nearly a quarter of a century. Its plans to do so, however, have become so mired in ethnic and sectarian discord that many here fear the results would tear the country apart.

The population of Kirkuk, the main city of a region rich in oil and rife with sectarian tension — is either 1.3 million, 1.4 million or 1.6 million, officials here say, though a U.N. report in 2009 cited estimates that it was fewer than a million.

The number of Arabs who have left since the American invasion in 2003 might be 250,000, or not; the number of Kurds who have since arrived is said to be far higher, or not. Turkmens once made up 60 percent of the city of Kirkuk, compared with 30 percent now. Maybe.

"No one can give you an accurate number," said Ali Medhi Sadiq, a Turkmen member of Kirkuk's provincial council.

Iraq's leaders have repeatedly scheduled a census, only to repeatedly postpone it, most recently one to have been

conducted last Sunday. They have done so despite a constitutional obligation to hold one as long ago as 2007, when sectarian bloodshed made it inconceivable.

"The postponement of the census in the past was due to the conditions experienced in Iraq, especially on the security side," the country's prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, said in a statement after the latest postponement. Now, he added, "there are no more security reasons."

What there is, is a fear that a census might turn assertions into facts, especially in the disputed regions of Kirkuk, Nineveh and Diyala, where ethnic identity looms ominously over every issue, from political power to the spoils of land and oil. At the heart of the problem are disputed territories arcing from the Iranian border to the Syrian that the Kurds want to absorb into their semiautonomous region in northern Iraq. In the zero-sum politics of today's Iraq, Arab and Turkmen leaders in those territories warn that an accurate population count would bolster Kurdish claims. So they have vowed to boycott any census.

"If we go to the census now," said a Sunni tribal leader in Kirkuk, Sheik Abdul Rahman Minshid al-Aasi, "it means we will grant our province to Kurdistan."

The last full census in Iraq was done in 1987. Ten years later Saddam Hussein's government conducted one without including the three Kurdish provinces: Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniya, which were slipping out of Baghdad's control under U.S. and U.N. protections dating from the Persian Gulf

war in 1991. That census put the country's population at 19 million.

A new one would measure the profound demographic shifts in Iraq after the U.S. invasion in 2003, including wholesale movements of Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds in the country and the flight of millions of Iraqis abroad.

Barham Salih, the prime minister of the Kurdish region, called the latest census delay a setback to the nascent

"If we go to the census now, it means we will grant our province to Kurdistan."

coalition. "We need to have the confidence and courage to tackle some of these issues head on," he said in an interview in Dokan, a lakeside resort northeast of Kirkuk.

Rather than setting a new date, though, Mr. Maliki's government has instead established a committee to try to resolve the underlying impasse, including Sunni complaints that the census will not be conducted accurately in parts of Nineveh and Kirkuk provinces under Kurdish control. Originally planned for 2007, then October 2009, October 2010 and this, month, the census appears likely to be postponed indefinitely.

"Delaying it has only delayed a problem, making it more complicated," Mr. Salih said of the census. "This will only feed the paranoia. This will only feed the mistrust. This will only feed the sense of a lack of confidence in the leadership of this country that ultimately does not want to solve its problems."

A new exodus of Iraqi Christians

QOSH, IRAQ

BY STEVEN LEE MYERS

A new wave of Iraqi Christians has fled to northern Iraq or abroad amid a campaign of targeted violence and growing fear that the country's security forces are unable or, more ominously, unwilling to protect them.

The flight — involving thousands of residents from Baghdad and Mosul, in particular — followed a siege on Oct. 31 at a church in Baghdad that killed 51 worshipers and 2 priests, and a subsequent series of bombings and assassinations singling out Christians.

This exodus, which is not the first, highlights the ongoing displacement of Iraqis despite improved security overall and the near resolution of the political impasse that gripped the country after elections in March.

It threatens to reduce further what Archdeacon Emanuel Youkhana of the Assyrian Church of the East called "a community whose roots were in Iraq even before Christ."

Those who fled the latest violence — many of them in a panicked rush, with only the possessions they could pack in cars — warned that the new violence presaged the demise of the faith in Iraq. Several evoked the mass departure of

Iraq's Jews after the founding of Israel in 1948.

"It's exactly what happened to the Jews," said Nassir Sharhoom, 47, who fled last month to the Kurdish capital, Erbil, with his family from Dora, a once-mixed neighborhood in Baghdad. "They want us all to go."

Iraq's leaders, including Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, have pledged to tighten security and appealed for tolerance for minority faiths in what is an overwhelmingly Muslim country.

"The Christian is an Iraqi," he said after visiting those wounded in the siege of the church, Our Lady of Salvation, the worst single act of violence against

Christians since 2003. "He is the son of Iraq and from the depths of a civilization that we are proud of."

For those who fled, though, such pronouncements have met with growing skepticism. The daily threats, the uncertainty and palpable terror many face have overwhelmed even the pleas of Christian leaders not to abandon their historic place in a diverse Iraq.

"Their faith in God is strong," said the Rev. Gabriele Tooma, who heads the Monastery of the Virgin Mary, part of the Chaldean Catholic Church here in Qosh, which opened its monastic rooms to 25 families in recent weeks. "It is their faith in the government that has weakened."

Christians, of course, are not the only victims of the bloodshed that has swept Iraq since the U.S.-led invasion more than seven and a half years ago; Sunni and Shiite Arabs have died on a far greater scale. Only two days after the attack on the church, a dozen bombs tore through Sunni and Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad, killing at least 68 and wounding hundreds.

The Christians and other smaller minority groups here, however, have been targeted explicitly and have emigrated in disproportionate numbers. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, these groups account for 20 percent of the Iraqis who have gone abroad, while they were only 3 percent of the country's prewar population.

More than half of Iraq's Christian community, estimated to number 800,000 to 1.4 million before the invasion in 2003, have already left the country.

The Islamic State of Iraq, an iteration of the insurgent group Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, claimed responsibility for the suicidal siege and said its fighters would kill Christians "wherever they can reach them."

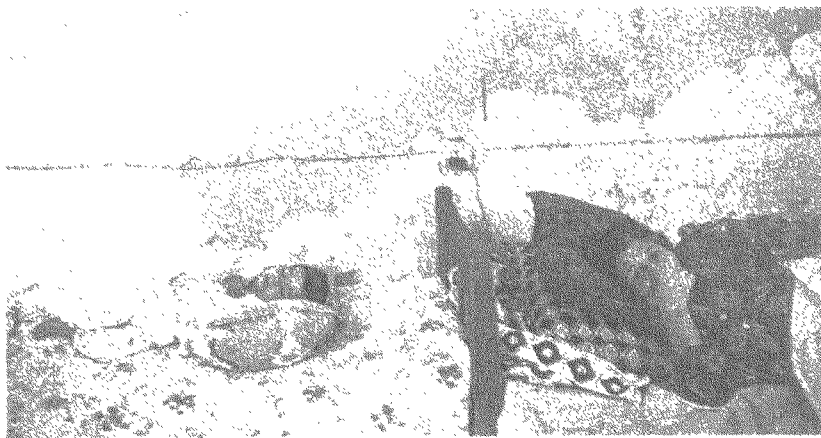
What followed last month were dozens of shootings and bombings in Baghdad and Mosul, the two cities outside of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq. At least a dozen more Christians died, eight of them in Mosul.

Three generations of the Gorgiz family — 15 in all — fled their homes there on the morning of Nov. 23 as the killings spread. Crowded into a single room at the monastery in Qosh, they described living in a state of virtual siege, afraid to wear crosses on the streets, afraid to work or even leave their houses in the end.

The night before they left, Diana Gorgiz, 35, said she heard voices and then screams; someone had set fire to the garden of a neighbor's house. The Iraqi Army arrived and stayed until morning, only to tell family members they were not safe there anymore. The Gorgizes took it as a warning — and an indication of complicity, tacit or otherwise, by Iraq's security forces.

"When the army comes and says we cannot protect you," Ms. Gorgiz said, "what else can you believe?"

There is no exact accounting of those who have fled internally or abroad, though the number is believed to be several thousand.



SHIRO FUKADA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A shelter in Qosh. Iraq's leaders have pledged to tighten security for minority faiths.

The United Nations has registered more than 1,100 families. A steady flow of Christians to Turkey spiked in November to 243, an official there said.

The Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq offered itself as a haven and pledged to help refugees with housing and jobs. Many of those who fled are wealthy enough to afford rents in Kurdistan; others have moved in with relatives; the worst off have ended up at the monastery here and another nearby, St. Matthew's, one of the oldest Christian monasteries in the world.

There have been previous exoduses, especially from Mosul. In October 2008, more than 12,000 Christians left after a wave of assassinations killed 14 Christians. In February of this year, more than 4,000 fled to the Kurdish-controlled region in Nineveh or to Syria after 10 Christians were killed.

When violence ebbed after each exodus, many returned to their homes and jobs, though not all, leaving fewer and fewer Christians. By one estimate, only

"When the army comes and says we cannot protect you, what else can you believe?"

5,000 of the 100,000 Christians who once lived in Mosul remain.

"I expect that a month from now not a single Christian will be left in Mosul," Nelson P. Khoshaba, an engineer in the city's waterworks, said in Erbil, where he joined a chaotic scrum of people trying to register with the local authorities there.

The displacement of Christians has continued despite the legal protections that the Iraqi Constitution offers religious and ethnic minorities, though Islam is the official state religion and no law can be passed contradicting its basic tenets.

Christians have a quota of 5 seats in the new 325-member Parliament, though little political influence. Christmas was declared a national holiday in 2008, but celebrations are muted, and in Kirkuk, a tensely disputed city north of Baghdad, Christmas Mass was canceled altogether last year.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, appointed by the president and Congress, said that the nominal protections for religious minorities in Iraq — including Christians, Yazidis and Sabeian Mandeans, followers of St. John the Baptist — did little to stop violence or official discrimination in employment, housing and other matters.

It noted that few of the attacks against minority groups were ever properly investigated or prosecuted, "creating a climate of impunity."

"The violence, forced displacement, discrimination, marginalization and neglect suffered by members of these groups threaten these ancient communities' very existence in Iraq," the commission said in its latest annual report, in May.

Last week, security officials announced the arrest of insurgents who they said planned the attack on Our Lady of Salvation; those who actually carried it out died when Iraqi forces stormed the church. They offered few details, though, and a spokesman for the U.S. military, which regular joins Iraqi forces during such arrests, said he had no information on those arrested.

Archdeacon Emanuel said the government needed to do more to preserve a community that has been under siege in Iraq for decades — from the first massacre of Christians in Sumail in 1933 after the creation of the modern Iraqi nation, to the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, to today's nihilistic extremism that, in his words, has taken Islam hostage.

Invitations by European countries for Christians to emigrate after the attack, he said, would only hasten the departure of more, which "is not a solution."

Instead, the latest violence should give impetus to the creation of an autonomous Christian enclave in the part of Nineveh Province near here that is now under the control of the Kurdish region. That idea, though, has little political support in Baghdad or Kurdistan.

"What happened has been done repeatedly and systematically," he said. "We have seen it in Mosul, in Baghdad. The message is very clear: to pluck Iraqi Christians from the roots and force them out of the country."



Turkey, Iran battle for clout, deals in Iraq

December 8, 2010 (Reuters) By Rania El Gamal

BAGHDAD – Turkish clothing and beer are hot sellers in the streets of Arbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish north. Far to the south, Iranian cars roam the streets of Basra and Iranian pilgrims flock to Iraq's holy sites.

Sunni Ankara and Shi'ite Tehran, old rivals turned friends, are vying for post-war economic clout in neighboring Iraq to capitalize on an expected oil boom, and have been flexing their muscles in Baghdad's government formation talks, diplomats and politicians said.

Already one of Iraq's main trade partners, Turkey wants a bigger foothold in its southern neighbor through increased investment to counter Iran's growing influence and to boost its stature as a regional economic and political power.

Turkish companies are top investors in hotels, real estate, industry and energy in Iraq's semi-autonomous northern Kurdish region, and increasingly in the Shi'ite south where Iranian influence had been almost unchallenged.

Iraq is Iraq's main trading partner and has been one of the largest investors in its construction and industrial sectors since the fall of Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein.

"It is clear that they are competing, specifically in Turkey's effort to dam in Iranian influence. Iran has undoubtedly gained a significant role in Iraq since 2003, and from about 2007 on, Turkey has started to push back," said Joost Hiltermann of the International Crisis Group.

"They are holding each other in balance."

Ankara, which spent years focusing its diplomacy on Europe, has turned its attention to the Middle East and an emerging role as a neutral mediator and economic power. It has lobbied for an inclusive Iraq government that does not exclude minority Sunnis.

Tehran, a regional Shi'ite power, made sure Iraq's majority Shi'ites tightened their grip on power by backing a merger between the country's main Shi'ite blocs, guaranteeing incumbent Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki another term, politicians said.

Maliki, a Shi'ite, visited Turkey and Iran in October as part of a tour to gain regional backing for his bid to form Iraq's new government in exchange for investment deals.

Iraq's Arab neighbours and the United States are worried about Iran's growing clout in Iraq, particularly as U.S. forces prepare to withdraw by end of 2011, tempting anxious neighbours to vie for influence in Baghdad.

"They (Turkey) are doing this throughout Iraq, in Kurdistan as well as in Baghdad and even Basra, which is not usually an area of Turkish influence," said Hiltermann. "The presence of a Turkish consulate in Basra is very much part of a strategy to dam in Iranian influence in Iraq through investments and trade."

ENERGY, INVESTMENT DEALS

A day before Maliki's visit to Ankara, Turkish oil company TPAO won deals to develop two Iraqi gas fields, a sign of Ankara's ambitions to become an energy bridge between Europe and the Middle East.

TPAO also has small stakes in two Iraqi oilfields, among a series of deals Iraq signed with global firms in a bid to quadruple its crude output capacity to Saudi levels.

As Baghdad embarks on unprecedented energy development, foreign investors also are eyeing opportunities in industry and infrastructure. War-damaged Iraq is starving for housing and electricity investments.

Turkish construction firms are building houses in Arbil, Turkish goods flood the malls and many young Kurds spend holidays in Istanbul, where some learn to speak the language.

About 55 percent of the foreign firms in Iraqi Kurdistan - 640 of 1,170 - are from Turkey, which expects bilateral trade of about \$6 billion last year to grow to \$20 billion in four years.

Iraq has invested in power plants, schools and factories in Iraq, and expects exports to rise to more than \$8 billion in 2010 from \$6 billion a year ago despite Western-backed economic sanctions aimed at curbing business with the Islamic Republic.

Iranian-made Saipa and Peugeot cars are common on the roads and some Iraqis favor an illegally imported Iranian liquor.

"It is best described as the latest manifestation of a latent and sometimes overt Iranian-Turkish rivalry that has existed in the region for decades and centuries," said Gala Riani, Middle East Analyst at IHS Global Insight.

"Iran and Turkey have each historically considered themselves as being the bigger political, economic and military power of the region. In Iraq, both sides are capitalizing on the vast economic opportunities that are present in both the south and the north."

KURDISH FEARS

Turkey and Iran also have an interest in a stable Iraq as they seek a solution to their decades-long conflict with separatist Kurdish rebels, who fight for an ethnic homeland for Kurds. Like Iraq, Turkey and Iran have large Kurdish minorities.

"Turkey remains justifiably somewhat wary of Iran and, to some degree, still a rival. However, Ankara's AKP-dominated government has sought to improve relations with Tehran, in part to reduce the likelihood of regional conflict," said Wayne White, a scholar at the Middle East Institute.

"In Iraq, both Turks and Iranians have no desire for greater Kurdish autonomy. Both seek greater influence in Baghdad, although Iran clearly holds the upper hand in that respect."

But Iraqi political analyst Ibrahim al-Sumaidaie said Turkey may win growing influence in Iraq, at least in the short term, as a more neutral party that can win acceptance from all sides.

"With the rising pressure of the international community and increase of sanctions and hints of military actions against Iran, the near future will witness a rise for the Turkish role," he said.

"The Turkish role has the blessing of the international community and is backed by Arab countries. It has not met any Iraqi objection, as happened with the Saudis, who faced objections from the Shi'ites, or with the Iranians, who faced objections from the Sunnis," he said.

globalpost

DECEMBER 6, 2010

The Kurds: coping with cultural identity suppression

Kurdish people in southeastern Turkey face daily reminders of the suppression of their culture.

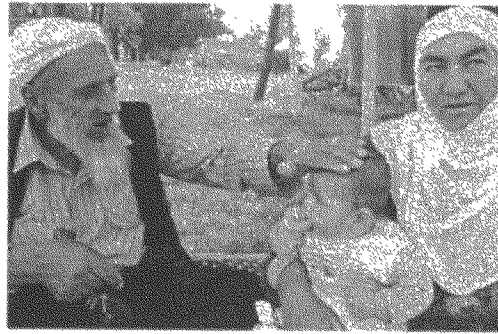
By Shanika Gunaratna
(Northwestern Univ.) Student
Correspondent Corps

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey — Most Americans have never heard of the city of Diyarbakir. To most Turks, it's a city in the country's volatile southeast region, closely associated with the Kurdish resistance movement. To the Kurds who live there, however, it is not only a home but much more: It is a hub of Kurdish language and culture caught between the forces that define daily life and those that threaten it.

Here, the hum of Turkish fighter jets is part of the soundtrack of daily life. Flying overhead nearly everyday, these planes are headed two hours southeast of Diyarbakir to Turkey's volatile border where Turkish armed forces are engaged in a prolonged struggle with the members of the PKK (the Kurdistan Worker's Party). The struggle reached new heights this summer when, after a 14-month cease-fire, the PKK stepped up attacks on the Turkish military (as GlobalPost reported).

Life in Diyarbakir, however, exists beyond the border battles, beyond the headlines, beyond the often tense Kurdish-Turkish relations. The population of Diyarbakir has soared in recent years, with displaced families streaming in to escape border violence. Many of these families boast eight, nine, 10 children.

Thus Diyarbakir has ballooned from a mid-sized, vaguely metropolitan city to one bursting at the seams with one-and-a-half million residents. There are children everywhere. There are many unemployed who try to make a living as lone entrepreneurs selling Marlboro cigarettes or wind-up stuffed animals. There are boys in small clusters soliciting pas-



Life for a Kurdish family is marked different from the foreigners of Diyarbakir than in the city. In the villages, where Kurds are one degree removed from official authority, people feel much freer to speak the Kurdish language and pass it on to their children. Photo: Shanika Gunaratna/globalpost.com

sersby to weigh themselves on rickety scales for small change.

Though characterized as one of the most conservative regions in Turkey, southeast Turkey contains a prism of attitudes and styles. Some women are fully covered, not a strand of hair or square inch of skin exposed. They wear black burqas that drag to the floor and have sparse, sequined details. On the same street, there are young women in tight jeans and rhinestone-studded tops, hair pulled back with bobby pins, eyes done with dramatic black lines and blue shadows.

Diyarbakir exists just off the tourist's radar. The city's most striking "attraction" lies in the ancient basalt city wall that surrounds the inner, old city. Largely unknown outside of Turkey, the wall is the second largest in the world after to the Great Wall of China.

Just a few minutes outside of the walls, the pounding noise of the city vanishes. The transition is sudden, from crowded urban roads and haggling vendors to dusty streets, small square houses, and sprawling cucumber and watermelon patches. Here, on the fringes of Diyarbakir, many individuals choose to speak their native Kurdish over Turkish.

In the central city, this does not happen. While Diyarbakir is an overwhelmingly Kurdish city, Kurdish culture is largely invisible. There are no Kurdish flags in

public. The Kurdish language is spoken only behind closed doors, within families and far from official contexts. To speak Kurdish to a police officer or low-level government official is considered an affront to established order, and one cannot discuss Kurdish issues openly in public without a quick look over one's shoulder.

Southeast Turkey stands in stark contrast to its surrounding regions. In northern Iraq, for instance, the word "Kurdistan" is spoken without a second thought in public, the Kurdish provincial government is semi-autonomous, and everything from road signs to news outlets assert proud Kurdish ownership over the land.

But progress is coming, if slowly. In July, Turkey softened a 2006 anti-terrorism law that had equated protest activities with being a member of a terrorist group and effectively made the PKK's most peripheral supporters terrorists. Under this law, 174 minors under 18 were convicted of terrorist activity for actions such as being present at a rally, singing a pro-PKK chant, or throwing stones, as the New York Times reported. But since the government's hard-line stance changed, minors charged for such activity are now taken to juvenile courts, not courts for serious security crimes.

This summer in Diyarbakir, I taught multimedia journalism to a class of teenagers, some Turkish, most Kurdish. Careful not to get anywhere close to politics in my instruction, I focused on tackling social issues through the lens of the individual. By telling the story of a successful paraplegic musician, for instance, readers can learn about local medical services. By doing a profile on a 10-year-old child trying to supplement his family's income through odd jobs, you can learn about slack child labor laws. Never in the class could we openly discuss Kurdish issues, Kurdish-Turkish relations or protest activities — the very issues that spill out of Diyarbakir and make headlines —



This extended family lives in a cluster of small stone houses in a village 20 minutes outside of Diyarbakir. The Kurdish population in eastern Turkey is visually surprising, with appearances ranging from blond hair and blue eyes to tan skin and black hair. Photo: Shanika Gunaratna/globalpost.com

without risking a knock on the door.

Once, while surfing the internet with one of my Turkish students, we stumbled upon an article about Kurds in southeast Turkey. "Do you know about ... the Kurds?" she asked, pronouncing "Kurds" slowly as if it was a dirty word she had just learned on the school bus.

"They want this to be their own country. I don't like it." She crinkled her nose.

That crinkled nose was a lesson: While official policies beget change in small, incremental steps, attitudes are a much more powerful, resistant force in places like Diyarbakir. Passed on from person

to person, parent to child and friend to friend, attitudes are cemented and reinforced over time. That crinkled nose reflected reality, and was a painful gauge of progress still to be made.



11 DECEMBER 2010

Barzani backs Kurdish referendum

Prominent Iraqi Kurdish leader tells party congress that northern region has right to self-determination.

Al Jazeera

A prominent Iraqi Kurdish leader has called for the right to self-determination for his region, the AFP news agency says.

Massoud Barzani's remarks on Saturday came as Nuri al-Maliki, Iraq's prime minister-designate, is attempting to form a cabinet, in which Barzani's bloc is expected to obtain several ministerial posts.

Speaking at a congress of his Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Barzani said "the issue of self-determination", which he considered "a right", would be presented to those attending the conference "to be studied and discussed".

Iraq's Kurdistan region remains mired in disputes with central government authorities in Baghdad over land and oil revenues.

The comments mark the first time Barzani has officially presented the issue to the KDP's congress, with the proposal set to be voted on during the party's week-long meeting.

Among those in attendance during Barzani's address were al-Maliki, as well as President Jalal Talabani, a fellow Kurd, Osama al-Nujaifi, the speaker of parliament, and Iyad Allawi, whose Iraqiya bloc won the most seats in Iraq's parliamentary elections in March.

Members attending the congress, the first of its kind since 1999, are to elect around 50 new members to the KDP's top leadership committee.

Al-Maliki, who was awarded the premiership on November 25, has two more weeks in which he must form a cabinet. Iraq has been without a new government since the March polls.

Barzani's KDP is a key member of al-Maliki's governing coalition, and the Kurdish leader played a major role in bringing Iraq's divided political factions together to agree a power-sharing deal last month.

Disputes

Iraq's Kurdish north, made up of three provinces, has its own parliament and exerts control over all areas of policy - except for national defence and foreign affairs.

It is currently in dispute with Iraq's central government in



Barzani, right, was instrumental in forging a compromise between key Iraqi parties in November [AFP]

Baghdad over two main issues: a land dispute centred around the ethnically-mixed oil-rich city of Kirkuk and the distribution of revenues from the region's energy reserves.

Arbil claims Kirkuk and parts of three neighbouring provinces, and has attempted signing its own deals with international energy firms without consulting Baghdad, both of which central government authorities contest.

On the subject of Kirkuk, Barzani pointedly told the audience that "when it returns to the region ... we will make Kirkuk an example of coexistence, forgiveness and joint administration, but we cannot bargain on its identity".

The region first attained a modicum of autonomy in 1974, but Barzani's father and then-leader of the KDP, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, returned to war with the Baghdad government instead of accepting limited autonomy.

Kurdistan won greater freedom after the 1991 Gulf War, but Barzani and Talabani, the region's other dominant political leader, remained at loggerheads.

A power-sharing deal was eventually struck between their two blocs and today, Barzani is seen as the dominant part of the pair.

Iraq Kurd leader seeks right to self-determination

ERBIL, Iraq

Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani on Saturday called for the right to self-determination for the northern Iraqi region, a move that could lead to a break-up of the country, Agence-France Presse reported.

His remarks come as Prime Minister-designate Nouri Maliki attempts to form a Cabinet, with Barzani's bloc expected to obtain several ministries, and the Kurdistan region mired in disputes with the Baghdad government over land and oil.

Speaking at a congress of his Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), Barzani said "the issue of self-determination," which was considered "a right", would be presented to those attending the conference "to be studied and discussed".

His comments mark the first time Barzani has officially presented the issue to the KDP's congress, with the proposal set to be voted on during the week-long meeting that opened on Saturday.

The audience included President Jalal Talabani, a fellow Kurd; Maliki; parliament speaker Osama Nujaifi and Iyad Allawi, whose Iraqiya bloc won the most seats in March elections.

The first gathering of its kind since 1999 is to see more than 1,000 delegates elect around 50 new members to the KDP's top leadership committee.

Maliki, who was awarded the premiership on November 25, has two more weeks in which to form a Cabinet. Iraq has been without a new government since elections in March.

The KDP is a key member of Maliki's governing coalition, and the Kurdish leader played a major role in bringing Iraq's divided political factions together to agree a power-sharing deal.

The party, which is part of a joint slate with Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), controls a substantial majority of seats in the Kurdish parliament and jointly holds 43 seats in Baghdad's assembly with the PUK.

Iraq's Kurdish north, made up of three provinces, exerts control over all areas of policy except for national defence and foreign affairs.

It is currently in dispute with Baghdad over two main issues: A land dispute centred on the ethnically mixed oil-rich city of Kirkuk and the distribution of revenues from the region's energy reserves.

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Kurdistan won greater freedom after the 1991 Gulf War, but Barzani and Talabani, the region's other dominant politi-



Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki (right) speaks to Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani during a congress of the latter's Kurdistan Democratic Party in the northern city of Erbil on Saturday. Barzani called during the conference for the right to self-determination for the northern Iraqi region, a move that could lead to a break-up of the country (AFP photo)

cal leader, waged war for control of smuggling routes that provided valuable tariff revenue while former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein was still in power.

A power-sharing deal was eventually struck between their two blocs and today, Barzani is seen as the dominant part of the pair.

New Cabinet delayed

Also yesterday, Iraq's prime minister said he was still seeking Cabinet nominations from the country's top politicians, signalling the improbability of forming a new government earlier than the December 25 deadline, the Associate Press reported.

Nouri Maliki, a Shiite Muslim, had pledged to announce his new government by December 15 and end the political deadlock that began after parliamentary elections in March failed to produce a clear winner.

The delay announced Saturday reflects Maliki's struggle to cobble together an inclusive government.

But he assured political leaders that he remains committed to meeting a 30-day constitutional deadline - ending December 25 - to bring together Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish factions in a government that can overcome enduring sectarian tensions, and appealed for their help to do so.

"I call upon all blocs to quickly present their candidates," the Iraqi leader said during the KDP meeting, promising to announce Iraq's new leadership by December 25.

He also warned politicians not to get distracted with "marginal issues" since the clock is ticking. "We are facing a constitutional deadline and we will not tolerate exceeding it," he said.

Saturday's meeting in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq's north, was also attended by Sunni and Shiite Arab politicians with whom Maliki has had to create uneasy alliances after his political party fell short of winning a majority of seats in parliament.

The new government is expected to include all the major factions, including the Kurds, Shiite political parties aligned with Iran and a Sunni-backed bloc that narrowly won the election.

It will have a slew of issues to tackle, including developing the struggling economy and preventing a resurgence of violence as the last American troops leave by the end of next year.

DES SUNNITES PRÉCONISENT DÉSORMAIS L'AUTONOMIE

BAGDAD, (AFP)

De nombreux arabes sunnites irakiens déçus par les résultats des tractations politiques envisagent de suivre le modèle kurde pour créer leur propre région autonome, et contrebalancer ainsi un pouvoir qu'ils jugent confisqué par les chiites.

Après des mois de négociations, le Premier ministre sortant, Nouri al-Maliki, chef de file d'une vaste coalition chiite, a finalement été chargé fin novembre de former le prochain gouvernement, ce qu'a longtemps convoité un autre chiite, Iyad Allawi, qui a réalisé un bon score aux élections du 7 mars à la faveur du soutien massif des sunnites.

«Que les Kurdes prennent le Nord et les chiites le Sud! Ils n'ont qu'à choisir leurs représentants, ce n'est pas notre affaire», déclare Ahmed Dhiyab al-Joubouri, imam de la mosquée Abdoul Rahman

de Mouqdadiya, dans la province de Diyala (centre), dont la population est majoritairement sunnite.

«Au Kurdistan, ils ont leur propre budget. Les chiites, eux, occupent le gouvernement central», dénonce-t-il. «Nous, nous n'obtenons rien, à part les raids des forces de sécurité et les arrestations». Minoritaires dans le pays, les sunnites, qui ont dominé l'Irak de sa création en 1920 jusqu'à la chute de Saddam Hussein en 2003, avaient largement boycotté les législatives de 2005. Cette année, les électeurs sunnites ont fortement soutenu la liste laïque Iraquiya de M.Allawi. Mais c'est M.Maliki qui a pu forger la plus vaste coalition parlementaire.

«Nous avons voté pour Iraquiya pour enrayer la campagne de marginalisation contre les arabes sunnites», affirme Talal Abdoul Karim Hussein al-Matar, chef de la tribu Albo Aswad, dans la province de Salaheddine. «Mais si le nouveau gouvernement continue comme cela, nous utiliserons la loi sur les provinces pour

obtenir plus de pouvoirs».

La Constitution donne le droit à plusieurs provinces de former, après référendum, une région, ce qui leur confère une part plus importante du budget, et davantage d'autonomie dans la gestion de leurs affaires internes. Pour qu'une telle consultation soit organisée, il faut recueillir l'accord de 10% de la population de la province ou du tiers des membres de son conseil provincial. Cet autonomisme constitue un tournant pour les responsables sunnites, qui avaient initialement rejeté la Constitution, lors de son vote par référendum, en raison justement de son article relatif aux régions. «A Iraquiya, nous rejetons l'idée (de l'autonomie), mais il est vrai qu'elle fait l'objet de discussions», a déclaré Abdoul Karim al-Samarrai, un député d'Iraquiya de Samarra, capitale de la province de Salaheddine.

«C'est risqué, car cela peut entraîner l'éclatement du pays», a-t-il poursuivi ajoutant toutefois que «si les réformes politiques ne sont pas mises en place, les gens vont de plus en plus y réfléchir, et on ne

pourra pas les ignorer». L'intérêt pour l'autonomie est cependant inégal. Si l'idée fait son chemin dans le «Triangle sunnite» (Anbar, Diyala et Salaheddine), les arabes sunnites des provinces de Kirkouk et Ninive, que se disputent Arabes et Kurdes, semblent davantage préoccupés par la querelle avec le Kurdistan que par l'influence du gouvernement central. A ce jour, la province chiite de Bassora (sud) est la seule à avoir organisé une consultation sur l'autonomie.

C'était en 2008, et elle avait été rejetée. Pour le politologue, Taha Moustafa Adel, les problèmes de l'Irak pourraient pourtant être résolus par la création de régions selon les frontières ethno-confessionnelles.

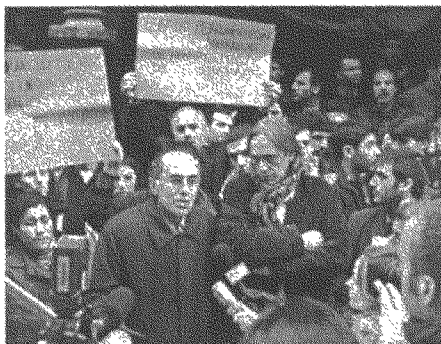
«Nous sommes comme des fils qui avons perdu notre père et qui nous battons pour son héritage, estime ce professeur de l'université de Diyala. «Cette dispute ne s'arrêtera que si l'héritage est justement partagé».

LE FIGARO 14 décembre 2010

PKK: 18 PERSONNES JUGÉES À PARIS

Dix-huit personnes, dont des dirigeants présumés du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), ont été renvoyées devant le tribunal correctionnel de Paris pour des faits présumés de terrorisme et de financement de l'organisation séparatiste kurde, a-t-on appris aujourd'hui de sources proches du dossier.

Ces 18 personnes, essentiellement de nationalité turque, avaient été interpellées en France en région parisienne et en Bretagne en février 2007. Présentées comme des membres actifs du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), elles sont soupçonnées d'avoir participé au financement d'attentats commis en Turquie, ainsi qu'à des combats au Kurdistan irakien. La justice les suspecte également de blanchiment d'argent.



La chambre de l'instruction de la cour d'appel de Paris avait ordonné la libération de la majorité d'entre elles deux semaines après leur interpellation, infligeant un "désaveu" à la justice anti-terroriste, selon leurs avocats.

Au terme de trois ans d'enquête, le juge d'instruction Thierry Fragnoli a toutefois décidé du ren-

voi devant le tribunal correctionnel de Paris de ces 18 personnes et du Centre culturel kurde Ahmet-Kaya, en tant que personne morale, pour y être jugés pour association de malfaiteurs en relation avec une entreprise terroriste et financement d'une organisation terroriste, selon ces sources.

Parmi les personnes renvoyées figurent notamment Riza Altun, Attila Balikci et Nedim Seven, respectivement considérés comme le représentant du PKK en Europe, son "secrétaire" et le "trésorier" du mouvement.

Le PKK, considéré comme un mouvement terroriste par la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis, a déclenché en 1984 une rébellion sécessionniste dans le sud-est de la Turquie, région pauvre et sous-développée, peuplée majoritairement de Kurdes. Ce conflit a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis cette date, selon l'armée.(AFP)



Vers un Kurdistan irakien indépendant?



Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, le 8 novembre 2010 à Erbil. (© AFP Safin Hamed)

Le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a revendiqué samedi lors du congrès de son parti le droit à l'autodétermination pour les Kurdes, ce qui pourrait être un prélude à une scission de l'Irak.

«Nous allons soumettre aujourd'hui la question de l'autodétermination aux personnes participant à ce

congrès, car nous considérons que nous avons droit à l'autodétermination», a-t-il déclaré lors d'un discours au début du 13e congrès du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), dont il est le chef.

C'est la première fois que le dirigeant kurde propose en des termes aussi clairs à son parti de se prononcer sur une possible indépendance du Kurdistan irakien, qui bénéficie

depuis une vingtaine d'années d'une large autonomie vis-à-vis du gouvernement central de Bagdad.

Scrutin sans date

Le congrès du PDK s'est ouvert en présence notamment du président irakien Jalal Talabani, chef de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), du Premier ministre désigné Nouri al-Maliki et d'Iyad Allawi, chef de file d'Iraqiya, liste laïque soutenue par une majorité de sunnites et qui a obtenu le plus de sièges au Parlement de Bagdad lors des dernières législatives.

Les 1.300 membres du PDK seront appelés à voter sur la question de l'autodétermination, a indiqué une source au sein du parti, sans préciser quand ce scrutin aurait lieu.

Le PDK constitue la principale force politique du Kurdistan, et la coalition qu'il forme avec l'UPK est majoritaire au Parlement régional depuis les élections de 2009. Le parti doit en outre se doter de nouvelles instances dirigeantes, composées d'une cinquantaine de membres.

Le PDK est l'une des composantes de la coalition au pouvoir en Irak. Et M. Barzani vient de jouer un rôle crucial pour dénouer la crise politique dans laquelle l'Irak s'est enfoncé après les élections du 7 mars.

Trois provinces du nord de l'Irak

C'est en effet lui qui est parvenu à arracher le mois dernier aux dirigeants des principales formations irakiennes un accord de partage de pouvoir, qui a ouvert la voie à l'attribution des plus hautes charges du pays, après huit mois d'impasse. M. Maliki a encore quinze jours pour former son prochain gouvernement.

Après une première forme d'autonomie obtenue dans les années 1970, le Kurdistan, qui

rassemble trois provinces du nord de l'Irak (Erbil, Dohouk et Souleimaniyeh), s'est véritablement émancipé de la tutelle de Bagdad après la guerre du Golfe, en 1991.

Mais le Kurdistan a ensuite été divisé par la guerre impitoyable que se sont livrée l'UPK et le PDK de fin 1994 à 1998, qui a fait 3.000 morts. Les deux partis se sont réconciliés sous les auspices de Washington au point de s'allier pour les élections de 2005, qui ont porté Massoud Barzani à la présidence de la région.

«Un exemple de coexistence»

Le Kurdistan possède son propre Parlement et dispose de prérogatives étendues dans tous les domaines, à l'exception des Affaires étrangères et de la Défense.

Une autonomie qui s'est maintes fois heurtée ces dernières années à l'autorité du gouvernement central, notamment sur la question des contrats pétroliers qu'il a signés avec des compagnies étrangères, et que Bagdad ne reconnaît pas.

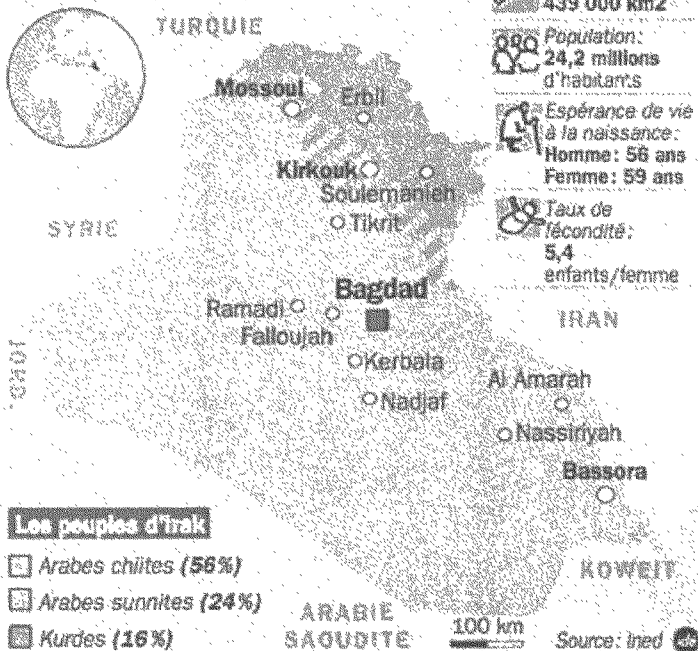
Les Kurdes revendiquent en outre de vastes portions de territoires hors de leurs frontières administratives actuelles, principalement dans la province riche en pétrole de Kirkouk, mais aussi dans celles de Ninive (nord), Salaheddine et Diyala (centre).

«Quand Kirkouk reviendra dans le giron de la région, nous en ferons un exemple de coexistence (...) et de gouvernance partagée, mais nous ne négocierons pas son identité», a déclaré M. Barzani dans son discours.

Fils de Moustafa Barzani, dirigeant de l'éphémère république kurde proclamée en 1946 à Mahabad, en Iran, Massoud Barzani dirige le PDK depuis 1979.

(Source AFP)

L'Irak en chiffres



Prélude à la partition de l'Irak

L'autodétermination kurde, une bombe à retardement au Moyen-Orient

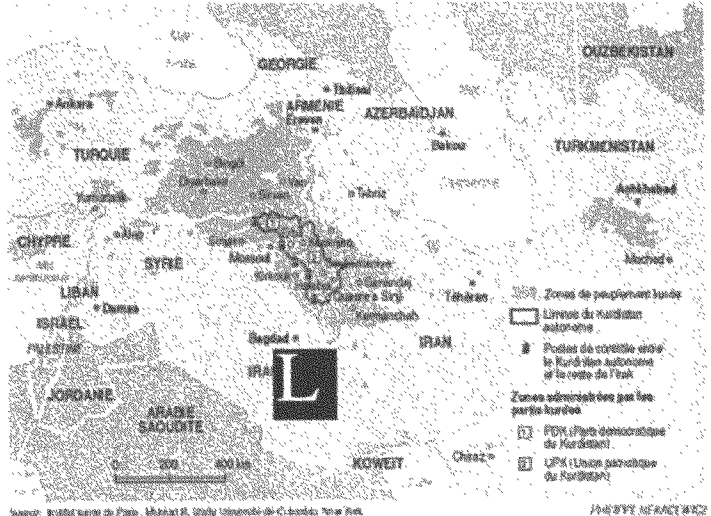
Par Abdelkrim Ghezali

La revendication d'un droit à l'autodétermination lancée par le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, a suscité la stupeur des Arabes sunnites et chiïtes qui y voient le prélude à une scission de l'Irak. «Le droit à l'autodétermination concerne les peuples sous occupation, mais ce n'est pas le cas du Kurdistan qui jouit d'un statut spécial en Irak», a affirmé dimanche dernier à l'AFP la députée Alia Noussayef, de la liste laïque Iraqiya soutenue par une majorité de sunnites. «Je me demande si le fédéralisme réclamé par les Kurdes [durant les négociations sur la Constitution irakienne] visait en fait à former une région pour mieux se séparer de l'Irak», a-t-elle ajouté. En ouvrant samedi dernier à Erbil le 13e congrès du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), dont il est le chef, Massoud Barzani avait affirmé que «la question de l'autodétermination» serait soumise aux participants, «car nous considérons que nous avons droit à l'autodétermination». Le congrès s'était ouvert en présence notamment du Premier ministre désigné Nouri al-Maliki et d'Iyad Allawi, chef de file d'Iraqiya. «C'est honteux que tous les politiciens présents au congrès n'aient pas réagi», a déploré Alia Noussayef. La consternation dominait également chez les partisans du chef radical chiïte Moqtada Sadr. «Ces déclarations ne servent pas les intérêts de l'Irak et suscitent des tensions», a déclaré le député Jawad al-Hasnawi. «Je crois qu'un Irak uni de Zakho [province du Kurdistan, ndr] jusqu'à Bassora [sud du pays, ndr] est bien meilleur qu'un Irak divisé. Les chefs politiques

présents au congrès n'ont pas réagi pour ne pas mettre de l'huile sur le feu», a-t-il souligné. Dimanche dernier, le Premier ministre de la région kurde a enfoncé le clou. «Il y a un consensus au sein des Kurdes sur le fait qu'il est légal et légitime d'avoir le droit à l'autodétermination», a affirmé aux journalistes Barham Saleh. Lors du débat sur la Constitution irakienne, «lorsque nous défendions l'idée d'un Irak fédéral, nous avons dit que c'était une forme d'expression du droit à l'autodétermination. Nous n'avons jamais abandonné ce droit», a-t-il ajouté. Mais le député Khaled al-Assadi, de la liste de l'Etat de droit dirigée par Nouri al-Maliki, s'est montré plus circonspect, en estimant qu'il s'agissait de «propos à consommation interne». «L'autodétermination fait partie de l'ambition kurde et ils en parlent de temps en temps, mais je pense que les Kurdes sont assez sages pour ne pas quitter l'Irak», a-t-il confié.

Aux origines de la conscience kurde

En 1920, le traité de Sèvres prévoyait la création d'un Etat kurde sur les restes de l'empire ottoman détruit, comme pour les autres peuples de la région. Mais le traité de Lausanne de 1923, qui a remplacé le traité de Sèvres, a divisé le Moyen-Orient en plusieurs pays, sans prendre en compte le droit des Kurdes à disposer de leurs terres. Le Kurdistan se situe à cheval sur la Turquie, l'Irak, la Syrie et l'Iran. Pour Hamid al Fadel, professeur de sciences politiques à l'Université de Bagdad, «les Kurdes se sentent aujourd'hui assez forts» et estiment que «c'est le bon moment pour réclamer l'autodétermination en rai-



Source: Institut français de Paris. Modifié et adapté de l'étude de l'Institut de Géographie de l'Université de Cluj-Napoca, Roumanie.

son des divisions parmi les Arabes irakiens entre sunnites et chiïtes». «Je crois que les Kurdes n'ont jamais envisagé un Irak uni», assure-t-il. Le PDK constitue la principale force politique du Kurdistan et la coalition qu'il forme avec l'UPK (Union patriotique du Kurdistan) est majoritaire au Parlement régional depuis les élections de 2009. Après une première forme d'autonomie obtenue dans les années 1970, le Kurdistan, qui rassemble trois provinces du nord de l'Irak (Erbil, Dohouk et Souleimaniyeh), s'est véritablement émancipé de la tutelle de Bagdad après la guerre du Golfe, en 1991. Le Kurdistan possède son propre Parlement et dispose de prérogatives étendues dans tous les domaines, à l'exception des Affaires étrangères et de la Défense. Le Kurdistan n'a pas de frontières, c'est un pays qui n'existe plus sur les cartes géographiques où il était indiqué du temps de l'empire ottoman. Actuellement, seule est appelée «Kurdistan» une partie des provinces kurdes de l'Iran. En fait, le Kurdistan est à cheval sur cinq pays et regroupe 20 millions de Kurdes ; en Turquie, on les appelle les «Turcs de la montagne» et leur terre, la «province orientale». Ils sont 10

millions, on compte 1 Kurde pour 4 Turcs. En Irak, ils vivent dans le Nord, sont environ 3 800 000, soit 1 Kurde pour 3 Irakiens, le gouvernement essaie d'effacer leur histoire récente ; tous les livres mentionnant le nom du Kurdistan ont été détruits. En Syrie, ils sont 1 million regroupés dans la province de Djezira. En Iran, le gouvernement appelle les provinces kurdes la «région occidentale» ; ils y sont 6 millions, soit 1 Kurde pour 5 Iraniens. 320 000 Kurdes vivent aussi en Arménie où leurs droits linguistiques et culturels sont reconnus. (Voir tableau ci-dessous). Ces chiffres remontent à 1987.

Les populations kurdes à tradition nataliste ont connu une importante croissance démographique et doivent avoisiner aujourd'hui les 25 millions d'âmes réparties sur les cinq pays. L'histoire du peuple kurde en tant que groupe ethnolinguistique débute dans les régions montagneuses du sud du Caucase ; cette aire géographique est dénommée Kurdistan. Il y a différentes hypothèses quant à l'identité des ancêtres des Kurdes, entre autres les Kardouques. Les plus anciennes dynasties kurdes connues sous autorité musulmane (du Xe au XIIe siècle) sont les

Hassanwayhites, les Marwanites et les Chaddadites, suivies de la dynastie des Ayoubites fondée par Salah Eddine El Ayoubi (Saladin). Ce n'est qu'au XXe siècle qu'une conscience identitaire kurde a commencé à prendre forme avant que la chute de l'empire ottoman n'accélère l'avènement de fait national kurde qui va s'exprimer avec force notamment dans les provinces sous domination turque, avec comme objectif l'indépendance de tout le territoire kurde. Une autonomie partielle a été réalisée par le Kurdistan Ouyezd entre 1923-1926 et par le Kurdistan irakien en 1991. Le territoire le plus chaud reste le Kurdistan turc où un affrontement entre l'armée turque et le PKK a débuté en 1984. En dépit de la trêve de 1999, des violences sporadiques sont signalées dans la région.

Traitement des Kurdes

Les Kurdes sont une population de montagnards qui occupe depuis l'Antiquité une vaste zone, le Kurdistan, qui s'étend des monts Aurus, à l'ouest du plateau iranien et de la région du mont Ararat jusqu'au pied où s'élève la plaine de Mésopotamie. Ils parlent une langue indo-européenne du groupe iranien. Leur langue est très vivante, puisque beaucoup d'entre eux sont monolingues kurdes, elle est l'élément primordial de leur identité. Ils sont musulmans sunnites de type chaféite ce qui les différencie de tous leurs voisins. L'empire ottoman était très étendu, pendant longtemps, Turcs et Kurdes vivent en bonne intelligence ; à la fin du siècle dernier, la Sublime Porte cherche à dominer les Kurdes en rognant leurs prérogatives ; cela entraîne les premières révoltes en 1826, 1834, 1853, 1855, 1880 ; elles sont simplement des révoltes contre une autorité qui empiète sur les droits acquis. C'est en 1898 que pour la première fois une presse kurde voit le jour. Mustapha Kemal mènera sa lutte d'indépendance aidé par les Kurdes. Après le

traité de Sèvres, l'empire ottoman est démantelé ; l'Irak se voit attribuer les villages kurdes de Mossoul. En fait la Grande-Bretagne avait un mandat sur l'Irak et elle était très intéressée par les réserves de pétrole de Mossoul. Dans le tracé de frontière franco-syrienne, la France, mandataire de la Syrie, intègre trois zones de peuplement kurde : Djezira, Kurd-Dagh, Arab-Pinar. La division du peuple kurde est consommée. Quelles vont être les attitudes des divers pays vis-à-vis des minorités kurdes ? En Turquie : dès 1924, la Turquie interdit l'enseignement du kurde et la loi turque précise que les partis de minorités ne peuvent prétendre à l'existence, sur le sol turc, et viser ainsi à la destruction de l'unité nationale. Trois grandes révoltes en 1925, 1930 et 1955, privent les Kurdes de tout droit. Plusieurs milliers d'entre eux sont déportés en Anatolie, leurs chefs sont exécutés. Il fallut plus de deux ans à l'armée turque pour prendre Dersimou ; la résistance populaire kurde résista à trois corps d'armée. La répression fut d'autant plus violente qu'elle avait coûté cher en hommes et en matériel. D'après le PC de Turquie de 1924 à 1938, il y eût plus de 1,5 million de Kurdes déportés ou massacrés. Le régime progressiste d'Ankara déclara «le pays au-delà de l'Euphrate» en état de siège jusqu'en 1950. Il fut interdit aux étrangers jusqu'en 1965. En Iran : plusieurs révoltes ont lieu contre Reza Chah qui veut instaurer un État centralisé, quand en 1941, les Anglais et les Russes inquiets des amitiés de ce dernier avec l'Axe envahissent l'Iran. Azerbaïdjanais et Kurdes s'organisent. Ils proclament en 1945, la République de Mohabad, elle durera un an jusqu'à ce que les troupes du Chah y pénètrent et exécutent les dirigeants ; Mustapha Barzani et une centaine d'hommes se réfugient en URSS. En Syrie : depuis son accession à l'indépendance en 1946, même si elle ne reconnaissait pas de droit aux Kurdes en tant que minorité nationale, la Syrie n'a

pas été vraiment oppressive jusqu'en 1961. En effet, la langue kurde était admise, des publications circulaient et, si l'école était faite en arabe, nombre d'abécédaires en kurde étaient utilisés. En 1961, on commence à accuser les Kurdes de menées contre l'arabisme. En 1962, le gouvernement lance le plan dit de «la ceinture arabe» prévoyant d'expulser toute la population kurde de la région de Djezira le long de la frontière turque et de la remplacer par des Arabes. La découverte de pétrole à Karatchok n'est certainement pas étrangère à cette politique. Les Kurdes de cette région, recensés, se sont vu retirer tous les droits afférents à la citoyenneté syrienne. 120 000 doivent alors être établis au sud de façon dispersée. Cette politique, un moment en sommeil, sera relancée en 1967. En Irak : dès 1922, le gouvernement reconnaît aux Kurdes le droit de se constituer en gouvernement à l'intérieur des frontières irakiennes. L'Irak obtient son indépendance nominale en 1931, mais il faudra attendre la révolution de 1958 pour que cet État se débarrasse de la domination anglaise. En 1943, on assiste à une révolte organisée des Kurdes, car les promesses ne sont pas tenues ; en 1945, une grande partie d'entre eux passe en Iran lors de la République du Moabad. La révolution de 1958 définit l'Irak comme le pays de deux peuples, arabe et kurde. A ce moment-là, Mustapha Barzani rentre d'URSS. En 1968, les Kurdes se rendent autonomes au sein de la République ; de 1961 à 1968, la lutte des Kurdes entraîne la chute de quatre régimes avant que la tendance actuelle du Baath prenne le pouvoir ; en 1970 une paix est signée et le gouvernement s'engage à donner l'autonomie à toutes les régions à majorité kurde après recensement. Le recensement ne sera jamais fait (il était décisif pour la région pétrolière de Kirkouk). Une région autonome leur sera attribuée de façon unilatérale et sans pouvoir réel. En 1974, la guerre reprend sous

l'impulsion du vieux leader charismatique Mustapha Barzani, soutenu par l'Iran mais en 1975, l'Iran et l'Irak signent l'accord d'Alger, le mouvement de Barzani choisit de se rendre. A partir de ce moment, l'Irak adopte une politique d'arabisation dans les régions kurdes pétrolières et frontalières ; une centaine de milliers de Kurdes sont déplacés vers le Sud ou vers la région «autonome». En 1976, Saddam Hussein fait connaître un nouveau programme qui sera appliqué jusqu'à la guerre Iran-Irak ; sur 20 km de large aux frontières soit trois fois la superficie du Liban, les villages seront détruits au bulldozer, les sources bouchées, les cultures détruites. 1 500 villages seront supprimés ; les Kurdes seront dispersés par petits groupes dans des villages arabes ou regroupés en grand nombre dans les «villages stratégiques», véritables camps de concentration. Les Kurdes d'Irak sont les plus actifs et les plus proches objectivement et subjectivement d'une indépendance.

Cette perspective est d'autant plus possible que les craintes du pouvoir central à Baghdad n'y peuvent rien changer en raison de la situation sécuritaire et de l'état de délabrement de l'armée irakienne qui a besoin de temps pour se reconstituer et devenir opérationnelle sans le concours des Américains. Si les Irakiens sunnites et chiïtes risquent d'être mis devant le fait accompli par les Kurdes, la Turquie n'acceptera jamais l'avènement d'un Etat indépendant dans le Kurdistan irakien, au risque de faire des émules dans le Kurdistan turc dont les velléités indépendantistes sont mises en sourdine par la liste noire américaine qui a qualifié le PKK, bras armé des Kurdes de Turquie, d'organisation terroriste. La Turquie étant l'alliée stratégique des Etats-Unis et le pays tampon entre l'Orient musulman et l'Occident chrétien.

1st General Census meeting in Kirkuk with absence of al-Iraqiya

KIRKUK / Aswat al-Iraq: the Special Action Committee, formed by the Planning Ministry, has held its 1st meeting to discuss the problems of the forthcoming General Census in Kirkuk on Sunday, with the presence of Kirkuk legislatures, representing the Kurdistan Coalition and absence of Arab and Turkoman legislatures, to discuss the security plans and preparations by the Kirkuk Census Office for the General Census operation.

The meeting, attended by Kirkuk Governor, the Chairman of the Province's Council, the Director of Kirkuk Census, the city's Education Office, its Census Commission, the Commander of the Army's 12th Division, the Commander of the 1st Brigade for Kirkuk's Guards, as well as representatives of the Province's Reconstruction Office and the U.S. Forces, discussed the security plans laid for the census day and the obstacles facing them.

Kirkuk's Census officials have expressed their preparedness to carry out the Census in the Province, and Kirkuk's Census Director, Adnan Baba, told Aswat al-Iraq news agency that his office "is prepared to carry out the census in Kirkuk, after the completion of the process to prepare its cadres, who attended special courses in the field of census."

On his part, the Legislature of the Iraqi Parliament for the Kurdistan Coalition, Najmiddin Karim told Aswat al-Iraq that "technical and security preparations have been completed in the Province, pointing out to the confirmations by the leaders of the security forces and the Director of Kirkuk Census Office in this respect."

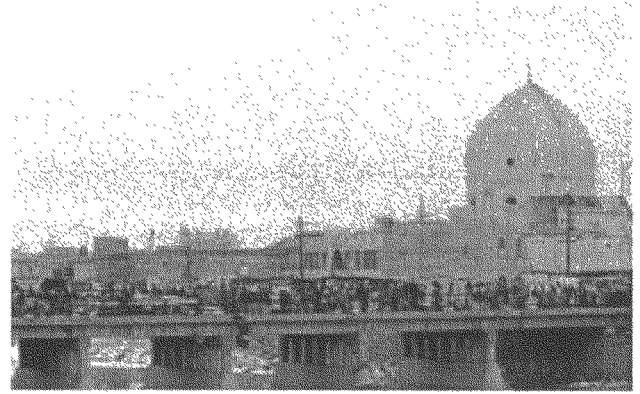
"The Census is not a Kurdish demand, but it is a necessity that shall take place according to the Iraqi government's laws, to accomplish all necessary details related to the whole country of Iraq, because the carrying out of the census shall serve the interest of the Iraqi people," Karim said.

Commenting on the absence of al-Iraqiya Coalition, led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, Karim said: "Their absence won't affect the activity of the meeting, but we do hope that they would participate in the forthcoming meetings, as the Turkomen and Arabs of Kirkuk don't support the boycott of the census process."

He called on Kirkuk Governor, being the chairman of the census committee, to "carry out his duty and raise the meeting's decisions to the higher committees, related to the preparations of Kirkuk Province to carry out the census process."

On her part, the Iraqi Parliament's Legislature, Aala Talabani, told Aswat al-Iraq that "the formation of a special committee for the census took part in response to the demands of (Kirkuk's) Arabs and Turkomen; that is why the absence of our colleagues from al-Iraqiya Coalition had not been a normal attitude."

"The Arab and Turkomen blocs, according to their statements, wish to participate in the census process, but al-Iraqiya legislatures, representing the Arabs and



Turkomen of Kirkuk, did not attend the meeting, despite fact that they should have attended it, not as representing their own persons, but as representatives of their blocs, especially after their agreement to represent the bloc in the action committee of the census," she said.

The Legislature from al-Iraqiya Coalition, Umar al-Jibouri, had justified his bloc's non-attendance of the said meeting, "to have taken place for reasons related to the imbalance of the three components of Kirkuk in the census committee."

"We did not attend the meeting, because we want the Iraqi Planning Ministry to revise its ministerial order in this respect, in such a way that copes with the current laws and rules, because their presence has no relationship with the Kirkuk's current pending problems," Jibouri told Aswat al-Iraq.

Noteworthy is that the Arab and Turkomen Legislatures in Kirkuk, who are all al-Iraqiya Coalition members, have considered the mechanism of the formation of the census committee, issued according to the order, issued by the Planning Ministry as "not coping with Article 23 of Law No.36 for 2008."

The Ministry's order had pointed out to the participation of three legislatures from the Kurdistan Coalition, two from the Arab legislatures and one from the Turkomen, whilst Article 23, pointed out to equal representation by all blocs, representing Kirkuk, whether members of committees or any other committee, according to al-Iraqiya Coalition.

The Iraqi Council of Ministers, in its normal session on 30/11/2010, had defined a new date for the census, instead of 5/12/2010, to take place after the meeting of the political blocs, in which it had agreed to keep the "nationalism" definition within the census document, following the agreement of representatives of Kirkuk and Ninewa Provinces, along with Parliament members of the Kurdistan Coalition, al-Iraqiya Coalition and other blocs, to keep the said definition on the document.

Iraq had witnessed its first general census in 1927, its second census in 1934, the third in 1947, followed by the fourth in 1957, the fifth in 1965, sixth in 1977 and the seventh in 1987, whilst the last census took place in 1977.

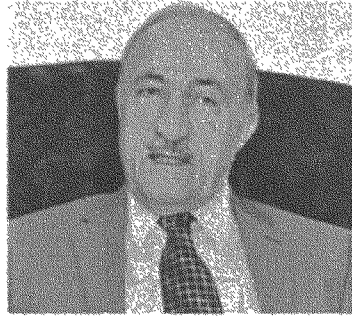
The oil-rich city of Kirkuk, facing a conflict among Arabs, Kurds and Turkomen, is 280 kms to the northeast of Baghdad.

☆☆☆

Iraqiya Bloc Does Not Want to Recognize Article 140 - Kurdish MP

By Sherezad Sheikhani

Erbil, Asharq Al-Awsat - Kurdistan Alliance MP Mahmoud Othman told Asharq Al-Awsat that the National Alliance which is made up of Ammar al-Hakim's Iraqi National Alliance and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition, has endorsed all of the 19-points put forward by Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani with regards to the formation of Iraq's next government. However Othman revealed that Iyad Allawi's Iraqiya bloc objects to some of the Kurdish demands, particularly the points dealing with Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution and the Peshmerga. Article 140 calls on areas with large Kurdish population outside of the Kurdistan Region to hold referendums to decide whether they will join the Kurdistan Region.



Othman told Asharq Al-Awsat that "the Kurdish leadership requires the agreement on the Kurdish negotiating document that is made up of 19 points prior to the announcement of the formation of the forthcoming government otherwise the Kurds will not participate in this government." He added that "the signing [of this 19-point document] has been delayed due to the participation of Kurdish negotiator Dr. Rose Nuri Shaways

in his party's conference, and the preoccupation of other party's members with their consultation on ministerial portfolios which have yet to be resolved, therefore we expect the signing of this document to take place next week."

Othman added that "the Iraqiya bloc continues to reject the two issues relating to Article 140 and the issue of the Peshmerga force. As for Article 140, they want this Article not to be mentioned in the signed agreement, with this instead being substituted with a reference to the problem of the disputed areas being solved constitutionally. As for the issue of the Peshmerga, they believe that so long as the Peshmerga receive their salaries, budget, and military equipment from the Iraqi Ministry of Defense, they should take their orders directly from the Ministry, rather than anybody else."

AKnews

Agency of Kurdistan for News December 17th 2010

KDP leadership council elections results went public

Reported by Hevidar Ahmed

Erbil, Dec.17,2010 (AKnews)- Late Thursday evening the members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)'s 13th congress voted through secret ballot, electing 48 members for the leadership council of the party.

halbjardn kongrai 13According to the initial reports, three women have also been elected through quota system, raising the council's members to 51. The elected members will vote to 15 leaders to represent the KDP politburo. Nine members were also assigned as "spare"-none were women.

The one-week congress ended Thursday night. Some 150 female members were elected to the assembly.

In previous accounts to AKnews, Barzan Mala-Khalid, the official spokesperson for the congress had said from the 1,350 elected members to the congress, women have secured 10% quota. The rest of the total 60 leaders will be elected through secret ballot.

Khalid also said if some female members granted the leadership positions through voting, their seats would not cut from the predetermined share.

Two female members Bayan Sami Abdul-Rahman, the Kurdistan Regional Government' Representative to the UK and the former Kurdish Minister of Martyrs and Anfal, Chnar Saed Abdullah were elected through voting.

halbjardn kongrai 13Among the top elected members are Masrur Barzani, Sidad Mustafa Barzani, and the Yusif Idris



Barzani, the Kurdistan Region's President Massoud Barzani's son, brother, and nephew respectively. Masrur Barzani is also the Kurdistan Region's security chief.

The Region's president himself was re-elected to run the party for the thirtieth consecutive year since the death of his father Mustafa Barzani, in 1979. Mustafa Barzani founded the party in 1946. The former Kurdistan premier, Nechirvan Barzani, the Kurdish president's nephew, was also assigned as the new KDP vice president.

The Kurdistan Interior Minister, Karim Shingali, the current Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, the general secretary of the KDP politburo Fadhil Mirani, the Kurdistan parliament speaker, Kamal Kirkuki, the Kurdistan Education Minister Safin Dizayi, Erbil governor, Nawzad Hadi and the current Iraqi deputy prime minister Rozh Nuri Shawes were also elected.

More details about the outcomes will be leaked at a press conference later today, Friday.

Kurds Threaten To Pull Out Of Iraqi Coalition

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

BAGHDAD -- The Kurdistan Alliance will not participate in the new Iraqi cabinet unless the major Shi'ite parliament faction, the National Alliance, agrees to its "position paper" outlining 19 key demands, RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq reports.

The Kurds attach great importance to signing the 19-point paper as it is tantamount to a government program, senior Kurdistan Alliance deputy Mahmud Othman told RFE/RL.

He said failure to sign the paper would be a serious setback to the political process, because in that case the Kurds would not participate in the government currently being formed.

Prime Minister-designate Nuri al-Maliki is expected to announce his government on December 23, two days before the deadline set by the constitution for doing so.

The Kurdish demands include key positions in the government; recognition of contracts signed by the Kurdistan region government with foreign oil companies but considered illegal by Baghdad; and a solution to disputed areas, above all, multiethnic oil-rich Kirkuk, under Article 140 of the constitution.

That article provides for overcoming the aftermath of Kirkuk's Arabization by former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, a census in the province, and a referendum on joining or remaining outside the Kurdish region.

Othman said only one of the 19 demands was being reformulated, that which states that if the Kurdish ministers withdraw from the government, it shall disband or be dissolved.

But National Alliance parliamentary bloc member Saad al-Muttalibi



Kurdistan Alliance members discuss leaving the coalition government.

told RFE/RL that no paper would be signed, and agreement on the Kurdish demands would be reached by consensus, as is generally the rule in Iraqi politics.

Muttalibi said the objection centered on the Kurds' demands that the National Alliance sign the paper, rather than on its contents.

Meanwhile, National Alliance parliamentary group member Hussein al-Safi told RFE/RL that the Shi'ite bloc would have 19 ministries in the new cabinet, including the oil portfolio and three state ministries without portfolio.

Kadhun al-Shammari, a member of the Sunni-backed Al-Iraqiyah parliamentary group, told RFE/RL that Al-Iraqiyah's overall share is 11 ministries, including the finance and defense ministries.

Shammari said negotiations were continuing on the Ministry of Higher Education, to which both Al-Iraqiyah and the National Alliance have laid claim.

Kurdish parliamentary bloc member Said Rasul said that the Kurds would have six or seven ministries, including foreign affairs.

FINANCIAL TIMES December 17, 2010

Turkish army wades into Kurdish debate

By Delphine Strauss in Ankara

Turkey's military has waded into a debate on the public use of Kurdish, asserting that it has a constitutional duty to protect the republic against threats to national unity.

The general staff condemned proposals by pro-Kurdish politicians to move towards bilingual life in south-eastern municipalities they control, saying they were reaching a point that would "radically change the founding philosophy of the republic".

The Turkish Armed Forces "has always been

and will continue to be the party that protects the nation state, unitary state and secular state," read a statement, released on Friday. It referred to an article of the constitution specifying that the Turkish state is an indivisible whole whose language is Turkish.

In spite of reforms broadening Kurds' cultural rights – including the launch of state-run Kurdish language television broadcasts – the use of minority languages remains a sensitive issue in Turkey, founded as a nation state out of the ashes of the Ottoman empire. Until recently, the army denied the existence of Kurds as an ethnic race; teaching Kurdish in state schools remains a taboo; and the letters x, w and q, used in Kurdish but

not Turkish, are excluded from the Turkish alphabet.

Selahattin Demirtas, leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), said he was calling for free use of Kurdish in education, the media and commerce, not for its use in parliament, and would not support any form of separatism.

Politicians from the ruling Justice & Development Party (AKP) have warned the BDP against steps such as introducing bilingual noticeboards and the governor's office annulled a municipality decision to do this in the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir.

But the army's statement appears to be a warning to politicians not to go too far in promises to the Kurdish minority in the run-up to July elections, when the AKP will

be vying with the BDP for votes in the south-east.

It is the first time the military has made an overtly political intervention of this nature since General Isik Kosaner took over as chief of general staff in the summer.

The military has lost much of its influence over Turkish political life but its ideological views, and belief that it is duty-bound to enforce them, are intact.

Friday's statement appeared a day after the start of a mass trial, in which almost 200 retired and serving officers face charges of plotting a coup in 2003 to remove the Islamist-rooted AKP, shortly after its arrival in government.

Guardian
December 17, 2010

Iran arrests family of Kurdish activist due to be executed

Execution of Habibollah Latifi, who has been in jail for three years, was delayed after protests

Saeed Kamali Debgan

IIran has arrested the family of a Kurdish student whose execution, scheduled to take place on Boxing Day, was delayed because of protests outside the prison in which he has been held for three years.

A source close to the family of Habibollah Latifi, a 29-year-old student activist, said his parents and his three brothers and three sisters were arrested last night.

Human rights activists fear Iran might carry out the death penalty in secret.

At least 10 other Kurdish activists who have been active in the campaign to prevent Latifi's execution were also arrested. Among them was Simin Chaichi, a prominent Kurdish poet.

Latifi was scheduled to be executed yesterday, but the prison governor halted the execution when around 300 protesters gathered outside Sanandaj prison, where he has been since 23 October 2007.

His parents were then given permission to meet him after dawn.

PUK media, an official news website of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), reported that Jalal Talabani, the president of Iraq and the founder of the PUK, had intervened to persuade the Iranian authorities to stop Latifi's execution.



abibollah Latifi is accused of being in the armed Kurdish separatist group the PAJK, which his strongly family denies. Photograph: guardian.co.uk

However, Iran's ILNA state news agency quoted Latifi's lawyer, Saleh Nikbakht, as saying that "the claim that some officials in the countries of our neighbourhood have intervened to prevent the executions of some culprits including Latifi is not true".

Shahab Sheikhi, a Kurdish journalist and human rights activist based in Germany, said: "I am absolutely sure that the reason Iran halted Latifi's execution temporarily is because of the protest outside the prison and also the international attention to his case.

"However, we are very worried that these arrests might be the indication that Iran wants to execute him in secret.

"Sentencing Latifi to death at this critical situation in Iran, when so many people are unsatisfied with the economic situation in the country, has different functions for the Islamic republic.

"Iran wants to show off its authority and control at this moment by executing an opposition activist like Latifi who has been very persistent to his innocence during interrogations and tortures that he had faced."

According to Sheikhi, telephone communications in Sanandaj faced interruptions last night as security officials raided the houses of several activists.

A Guardian phone interview with Latifi's sister, Elahe Latifi, on Friday was also repeatedly interrupted by intelligence services intercepting the conversation.


Iran says Latifi, a member of the Kurdish minority in Iran, is linked to a series of bombings in Kurdistan province in 2007 and is a member of the Kurdish Independent Life party (PJAK), an armed opposition group.

It has convicted him of Muharebeh (enmity against God), a crime punishable by death under Iranian law.

His family denies his connection with PJAK and claims the charges against him are fabricated.

According to Amnesty International, which has been campaigning to stop his execution, his trial was held behind closed doors and in the absence of his lawyer.

In France, six protesters chained themselves to the fences of the Iranian embassy in Paris in a recent show of support.

 Rudaw.Net 21 December 2010

Kurdistan Wants Atomic Energy

By RUDAW

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has sent 14 proposals to the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission requesting permission for the semiautonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan to use nuclear power to supply energy to its people, said a

KRG official at an atomic energy conference of Arab countries last week in Erbil, the capital of Kurdistan.

Dr. Kamal Hamada Amin, the KRG representative in the Iraqi Nuclear Committee, told Rudaw that the KRG planned to begin development of the peaceful use of nuclear energy in 2011 and expected to complete the project by 2015.

Presently, the Iraqi Kurds get an average of eight hours electricity supply per day, which makes them dependent on oil power generators to obtain enough power for their daily lives.

In addition to the requests for per-

mission to use atomic energy, Amin said the KRG had also asked for the authorization to utilize equipment made with uranium in the health and oil sectors, and uranium-based technologies such as used in mine defusing.

Experts point to the existence of uranium in Kurdistan – as yet untapped – without yet knowing how large the reserves are.

Dr. Ali Hassan Ahmed, physics professor at Erbil's University of Salahaddin, said there was "no doubt" that uranium existed underground in Kurdistan.



13 décembre 2010

Barzani inquiète l'Irak en demandant l'autodétermination du Kurdistan

Par RFI

Avec notre correspondante à Bagdad, Fatma Kizilboga

Les réactions s'enchaînent en Irak après la revendication d'un droit à l'autodétermination lancée par le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani. Le chef de file du PDK a formulé cette revendication, le 11 décembre 2010, lors du congrès du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan. Si certains Irakiens craignent désormais une scission du pays, pour d'autres, il ne s'agit que d'une démonstration de force du principal parti politique kurde.

L'effet de douche froide laisse désormais place à la consternation. Le sage médiateur salué quelques semaines auparavant pour ses actions en faveur du dialo-



gue dans la résolution de la crise politique irakienne est aujourd'hui accusé de trahison.

Si certains députés arabes dénoncent la mise en application d'un projet de vieille date, d'autres ne voient dans ces déclarations qu'une démonstration de force du chef kurde.

A quelques jours de la fin du délai légal des tractations, en vue de la formation du prochain cabinet, cet affront est surtout perçu comme une stratégie afin de faire monter les enchères.

En coulisses, on parle déjà de la réattribution du ministère des Affaires étrangères à l'Alliance kurde. Difficile encore cependant de deviner la prochaine étiquette politique du ministère du Pétrole qui reste l'objet de toutes les convoitises.

Reste à savoir si cette menace à demi cachée de Massoud Barzani suffira à faire pencher la balance en faveur des Kurdes.



Les Kurdes restent en Irak à condition qu'il soit un Etat fédéral (Barzani)

ERBIL (Irak), 15 décembre 2010 (AFP)

MASSOUD BARZANI, aussitôt après sa réélection à la tête de Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), a affirmé que les Kurdes pourraient se détacher de l'Irak si le pays perdait son caractère fédéral ou était dirigé par des Arabes "chauvins".

"Certains disent: + Les Kurdes veulent leur indépendance, eh bien qu'ils s'en aillent définitivement+. Mais nous leur répondons: +L'Irak est nôtre, l'Irak est notre pays", a-t-il lancé à la tribune à Erbil, à la clôture du 13e congrès de sa formation, tard mardi.

En ouvrant samedi le congrès du PDK, Massoud Barzani avait affirmé que les Kurdes irakiens avaient "droit à l'autodétermination". Cette annonce avait provoqué la stupeur des Arabes sunnites et chiites, qui y ont vu le prélude à une scission de l'Irak.

"Mon message aux frères arabes, qu'ils soient sunnites ou chiites, à nos amis et alliés, à ceux qui n'ont pas compris nos déclarations, est le suivant: nous sommes attachés à un Irak fédéral et démocratique, à sa Constitution, mais nous ne sommes pas prêts à rester dans un Irak dominé par des chauvins", a-t-il lancé. Il faisait allusion à la dictature centralisatrice de Saddam Hussein.

Après une première forme d'autonomie obtenue dans les années 1970, le Kurdistan, qui rassemble trois provinces du nord de l'Irak (Erbil, Dohouk et Souleimaniyeh), s'est véritablement émancipé de la tutelle de Bagdad après la guerre du Golfe, en 1991.

Le Kurdistan possède son propre Parlement et dispose de prérogatives étendues dans tous les domaines, à l'exception des affaires étrangères et de la défense. En outre, les Kurdes sont devenus des faiseurs de rois, car ils sont indispensables pour la formation d'un gouvernement à



Bagdad.

Fils de Moustafa Barzani, dirigeant de l'éphémère république kurde proclamée en 1946 à Mahabad, en Iran, Massoud Barzani, qui dirige le PDK depuis 1979, a souligné que les Kurdes "étaient une nationalité et avaient donc le droit à l'autodétermination". "Mais le parlement kurde a décidé de rester à une seule condition: c'est que l'Irak soit un Etat fédéral", a-t-il dit.

En 1920, le traité de Sèvres prévoyait la création d'un Etat kurde sur les restes de l'Empire ottoman. Mais trois ans plus tard, le traité de Lausanne a remplacé celui de Sèvres, divisant le Moyen-Orient en plusieurs pays sans prendre en compte le droit des Kurdes, répartis entre la Turquie, l'Irak, la Syrie et l'Iran.



MASSOUD BARZANI: UNE CERTAINE IDÉE DE L'INDÉPENDANCE KURDE



C'est la première fois que le dirigeant kurde se prononce sur une possible indépendance du Kurdistan irakien (nord). Samedi, lors du congrès du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) à Erbil, Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan depuis 2005, a revendiqué ce qui pourrait être un prélude à une scission de l'Irak: «*Nous allons soumettre aujourd'hui la question de l'autodétermination aux personnes participant à ce congrès, car nous considérons que nous avons droit à l'autodétermination.*» Le PDK est l'une des composantes de la coalition au pouvoir en Irak. PHOTO AFP

Le Monde

Mercredi 15 décembre 2010

L'Union européenne et la Turquie laissent s'enliser les négociations d'adhésion

Les ministres des affaires étrangères des Vingt-Sept devaient renoncer, mardi 14, à ouvrir un nouveau chapitre, celui de la concurrence, contrairement à ce qu'espérait la présidence belge

Bruxelles
Bureau européen

Les négociations d'adhésion entre la Turquie et l'Union européenne (UE) sont désormais dans l'impasse. Les ministres des affaires étrangères des Vingt-Sept devaient constater, mardi 14 décembre, à Bruxelles, l'impossibilité d'ouvrir un chapitre supplémentaire parmi la poignée de ceux qui sont encore négociables. «*On ne veut pas dire que le train est sur une voie de garage, mais le mouvement est très très lent*», constate un diplomate.

La présidence belge de l'UE, mue par ce qu'un représentant de ce pays décrit en souriant comme «*l'optimisme de la volonté*», espérait pourtant ouvrir pendant ce semestre au moins un nouveau chapitre avec Ankara, celui portant sur la concurrence. Faute de progrès sur la question, elle a dû renoncer à cet objectif, se bornant à espérer «*une bonne discussion*» sur le dossier mardi.

«*Le climat n'est pas favorable à l'élargissement et Ankara n'en a pas fait assez, pas assez vite*», résume un diplomate belge de haut rang. Toutefois, admet-il, le niveau d'exigence imposé aux dirigeants turcs est très élevé. Depuis le début des pourparlers, en 2005,

treize chapitres sur trente-cinq ont été ouverts.

Aucun ne peut être refermé en raison du contentieux entre la Turquie et la République de Chypre, qu'Ankara ne reconnaît toujours pas. Une douzaine de chapitres ne peut être ouverte pour les mêmes motifs. Et cinq autres font

l'objet d'un veto du président français, Nicolas Sarkozy, car ils présupposent, selon le chef de l'Etat, une adhésion. Contre l'avis d'Ankara, M. Sarkozy milite plutôt, avec les chrétiens-démocrates allemands, en faveur d'un «*partenariat privilégié*».

Le gouvernement turc a décidé d'utiliser désormais tous les moyens pour exprimer sa mauvaise humeur

Certains pays n'ont «*pas encore*» demandé de suspendre les discussions mais la diplomatie belge a compris qu'il valait mieux ne pas appuyer sur l'accélérateur. Elle n'a pas voulu accroître la pression sur les gouvernements les moins porteurs afin de ne pas tenter le diable et pousser ceux qui refusent en réa-

lité la candidature de la Turquie à devoir le dire officiellement dès maintenant. «*Pas question d'agiter le chiffon rouge*», en a raisonnablement conclu la Belgique.

Steven Vanackere, le ministre des affaires étrangères belges, a par ailleurs quasiment jeté l'éponge au sujet des consultations qu'il menait discrètement avec la Commission européenne afin d'apaiser le contentieux entre la Turquie et la République de Chypre. L'idée aurait été d'obtenir l'ouverture de quelques ports turcs aux bateaux chypriotes, en échange d'un assouplissement de l'embargo imposé par la République de Chypre à la

partie occupée par l'armée turque, au nord de l'île. La question chypriote risque sinon, vu le nombre de chapitres gelés pour ce motif, de bloquer durablement les négociations.

Combien de temps les Européens, retranchés derrière la notion d'une Europe «*à approfondir avant de l'élargir*», selon le langage officiel, parviendront-ils à garder le contact avec le gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan? Les Vingt-Sept craignent une surenchère nationaliste en Turquie lors des élections générales de 2011. Le premier ministre et son Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamiste modéré) per-

dent eux aussi patience, jugeant trop négative l'attitude de la Commission européenne à l'égard des récentes réformes constitutionnelles adoptées par référendum, le 12 septembre, en Turquie.

Manifestant un évident agacement, le gouvernement turc a décidé d'utiliser désormais tous les moyens pour exprimer sa mauvaise humeur. Partenaire-clé de l'OTAN, il compte beaucoup sur le secrétaire général de l'Alliance, le libéral danois Anders Fogh Rasmussen, pour plaider sa cause auprès des Vingt-Sept.

M. Rasmussen a répété le 9 décembre, devant le conseil des ministres de la défense, qu'Ankara devait demeurer un partenaire privilégié. Il a sous-entendu que les projets européens de coopération renforcée et de mutualisation de leurs efforts auraient plus de chance de réussir s'ils pouvaient englober la Turquie. Le rapprochement entre l'Union européenne et l'OTAN est bloqué de longue date par Ankara. ■

**Philippe Ricard
et Jean-Pierre Stroobants**

Le gouvernement irakien prend forme, neuf mois après les élections

Nouri Al-Maliki devait présenter, lundi, un cabinet incomplet au Parlement

Sauf ultime coup de théâtre – et le monde politique irakien n'en est pas avare –, le premier ministre sortant, Nouri Al-Maliki, devait enfin présenter, lundi 20 décembre, son nouveau gouvernement au Parlement. Selon les indications fournies aux médias par divers responsables politiques, le cabinet devrait comprendre, non pas les « vingt-vingt-cinq ministres efficaces » souvent évoqués par M. Maliki durant sa campagne en mars, mais plus d'une quarantaine de membres. Neuf mois après les élections générales – record mondial battu en termes d'impasse politique –, le premier ministre sortant, qui n'avait obtenu que 89 sièges alors que son principal challenger, Iyad Allaoui, en avait remporté 91, a dû passer sous les fourches Caudines de ses principaux concurrents.

Au terme d'interminables marchandages et selon une règle mathématique inédite qui attribue à chacun des fiefs mis à l'encan un certain nombre de points (3 points pour les finances, 1,5 seulement pour le secrétariat d'Etat aux droits de l'homme, par exemple), les cinq principales forces politiques du pays obtiendraient, en fonction de ce qu'elles sont prêtes à « payer » et à condition que les autres soient d'accord, tel ou tel ministère.

Ainsi l'Alliance nationale (chiite), qui comprend 159 sièges dont les 89 obtenus en propre par M. Maliki, aurait « droit » à dix-sept portefeuilles (pétrole, eau, justice, transports), dont trois titulaires avec le titre de vice-premier ministre. Le Bloc kurde (57 sièges) en aurait sept, dont celui des affaires étrangères qui resterait entre les mains d'Hoshyar Zibari, et la liste Iraquiya (essentiellement sunnite) condui-

te par Iyad Allaoui, qui a échoué à nouer des alliances postélectorales comme l'a fait M. Maliki, en recevant neuf parmi lesquels les finances, l'éducation, l'électricité, l'industrie, l'agriculture.

Ephémère premier ministre « par intérim », désigné par les Américains en 2004, M. Allaoui, un ancien baasiste « défroqué » il y a trente ans, qui s'est longuement battu pour se rasseoir dans le fauteuil du chef, s'est finalement rendu aux arguments de Washington qui a obtenu, pour lui, le poste de président d'un futur Conseil national des politiques stratégiques (CNPS) dont les attributions et les réels pouvoirs restent à déterminer. Dimanche, M. Allaoui a réaffirmé qu'il était prêt à travailler avec M. Maliki « à condition que les accords » secrets passés avec lui soient respectés. « S'il y a quelque changement que ce soit, alors tout changera », a-t-il prévenu. Selon l'entourage de M. Maliki, le futur CNPS n'aurait qu'un rôle « consultatif » alors que, d'après des proches de M. Allaoui, ses pouvoirs seront « exécutifs ».

Confiance limitée

Preuve de la confiance extrêmement limitée qui prévaut entre les futurs partenaires, c'est à la chancellerie américaine de Bagdad, samedi, qu'un proche de M. Allaoui discutait avec l'ambassadeur James Jeffrey des contours exacts du nouvel organe.

Lundi, si le calendrier annoncé est respecté, c'est un gouvernement encore incomplet que M. Maliki devrait présenter au Parlement. Les trois ministères régaliens de la défense, de la sécurité intérieure et de la sécurité nationale, exclus du système à points réservé aux autres maroquins, reste-

Iran

Forte hausse des prix de l'essence et du gazole

TÉHÉRAN. Les Iraniens ont appris, dimanche 19 décembre, la forte hausse du prix des produits énergétiques appliquée par le gouvernement dans le cadre de la suppression des subventions directes. La veille au soir, le président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad avait annoncé, à la télévision, la mise en œuvre du plan, qualifié de « chirurgie économique ». Le prix de l'essence subventionnée est multiplié par 4 et le prix du gazole par 9. Le gouvernement a précisé que le tarif du pain n'allait pas « augmenter pour le moment ». Les prix de l'électricité, de l'eau et du gaz vont, de leur côté, être multipliés entre trois et cinq. « Ceux qui consommeront moins dépenseront moins », a déclaré Mohammad Reza Farzin, porte-parole du plan. Les subventions directes coûtent à l'Etat quelque 100 milliards de dollars (75 milliards d'euros) par an. Le gouvernement a pris des mesures depuis plusieurs semaines pour éviter tout dérapage des prix. En juin 2007, des violences avaient éclaté après l'annonce de quotas d'essence. – (AFP) ■

raient temporairement entre les mains du premier ministre jusqu'à ce que celui-ci obtienne le « consensus » des quatre autres forces politiques de la coalition pour ses trois candidats. Ces derniers seront-ils choisis et nommés avant le vote de la loi nécessaire à la mise en place du CNPS? Mystère.

En clair, rien de définitif n'apparaît encore gravé dans le marbre et il n'est pas impossible que l'approbation parlementaire du nouveau

gouvernement (qui doit obtenir 163 voix sur 325) soit encore repoussée de quelques jours. Selon la Constitution, après la réélection de Jalal Talabani (un Kurde) à la présidence de la République le 11 novembre, à l'Assemblée, le nouveau gouvernement doit impérativement être investi avant le 25 décembre. ■

Patrice Claude

Le Parlement irakien approuve le gouvernement d'unité nationale



Le Parlement irakien a approuvé, mardi 21 décembre, la composition du gouvernement du premier ministre, Nouri Al-Maliki (photo), mettant fin à neuf mois de tractations politiques depuis les élections législatives du 7 mars. Parmi les 35 ministres nommés figurent 20 chiites, 10 sunnites, 4 Kurdes et un chrétien, respectant l'accord de partage de pouvoir conclu le 10 novembre entre les trois grandes communautés d'Irak (les chiites, les sunnites et les Kurdes). Dix des 45 portefeuilles du gouvernement de M. Maliki, qui entame son second mandat, n'ont pas encore été pourvus notamment, selon le premier ministre, afin de pouvoir y intégrer des femmes. La communauté internationale a salué la formation de ce gouvernement. Le président américain Barack Obama a qualifié le vote de « moment important de l'histoire de l'Irak ». (PHOTO REUTERS)

The Seattle Times

December 18, 2010

Grim Xmas for Iraqi Christians as many flee north

They saw their brethren murdered during Mass and then were bombed in their homes as they mourned. Al-Qaida vowed to hunt them down. Now the Christian community of Iraq, almost as old as the religion itself, is sensing a clear message: It is time to leave.

By REBECCA SANTANA

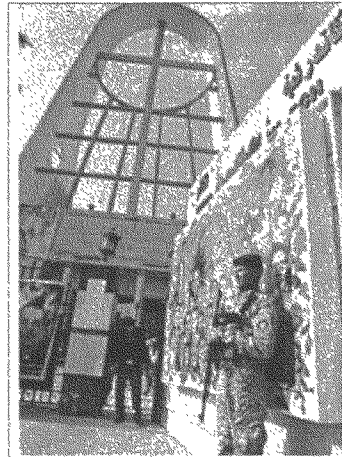
Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq - They saw their brethren murdered during Mass and then were bombed in their homes as they mourned. Al-Qaida vowed to hunt them down. Now the Christian community of Iraq, almost as old as the religion itself, is sensing a clear message: It is time to leave.

Since the Oct. 31 bloodbath in their Baghdad church, Iraqi Christians have been fleeing Sunni Muslim extremists who view them as non-believers and agents of the West. At a time when Christians in various parts of the Muslim world are feeling pressured, Iraqi Christians are approaching their grimmest Christmas since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and wondering if they have any future in their native land.

They have suffered repeated violence and harassment since 2003, when the interreligious peace rigidly enforced by Saddam Hussein fell apart. But the attack on Our Lady of Salvation in which 68 people died appears to have been a tipping point that has driven many to flee northward to the Kurdish enclave while seeking asylum in the U.S. and elsewhere.

What seemed different this time was the way the gunmen brazenly barged onto sacred ground, the subsequent targe-



In this Dec. 10, 2010 photo, an Iraqi police officer stands guard outside Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad, Iraq. Since the Oct. 31 bloodbath in their Baghdad church, Iraqi Christians are fleeing from Sunni Muslim extremists who view them as nonbelievers and agents of the West. At a time when Christians in various parts of the Muslim world are feeling pressured, Iraqi Christians are approaching their grimmest Christmas since the U.S.-led invasion of 2003 and many are fleeing north to the safer Kurdish region of Iraq. (AP Photo/Hadi Mizban)

ting of homes by bombers who clearly knew every Christian address, and the Internet posting in which al-Qaida-linked militants took responsibility for the church attack and vowed a campaign of violence against Christians wherever they are.

Ban Daub, 51, narrowly survived the onslaught. She and her nephew were at prayer when they heard explosions. They escaped before five attackers stormed in, but many of their friends did not. A neighbor died clutching his son and daughter in his arms.

Days later a string of bombs went off outside Christian homes across Baghdad. Daub and her family packed a few belongings and headed to a Christian district called Ainkawa in this Kurdish city of Irbil.

"We are afraid for our sons and our children. There is no life in Baghdad for the Christians," she says.

Since 2003 no Iraqi religious or ethnic group has escaped violence. Tens of thousands died in bombings and street battles between minority Sunnis and the Shiites who supplanted them in power after Saddam Hussein, the longtime dictator, was toppled.

But like many of Iraq's minorities, Christians do not have political clout or militias.

Even before the church attack, thousands of Christians were fleeing abroad. They are more than a third of the 53,700 Iraqis resettled in the United States since 2007, according to State Department statistics.

Since the church attack, some 1,000 families have fled to the north, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said Friday. It said growing numbers of other Iraqi Christians were arriving in Syria, Jordan and Lebanon and contacting UNHCR for help.

How many Christians remain in this nation of 29 million is not reliably known. A State Department report says Christian leaders estimate 400,000 to 600,000 remain, down from a prewar level as high as 1.4 million by some estimates.

In the Middle East and in Muslim countries beyond, Christians are finding themselves subject to violence and harassment. The Vatican is so worried that it hosted a two-week meeting of Mideast bishops this fall, dedicated to supporting Christian minorities.

In Egypt, at least two people died and more than 150 were arrested last month in clashes between Christians and authorities over the building of a new church. In an ominous sign that militancy is transcending borders, the militants who carried out the Baghdad church siege said they were acting on behalf of two Egyptian women who they claimed were being persecuted by their priests for converting to Islam.

In Pakistan, a Christian woman is under sentence of death for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad.

In Saudi Arabia, textbooks

sometimes contain language intolerant of Christianity as well as other religions besides Sunni Islam, according to the State Department report on religious freedom.

In Malaysia, a court decision last year allowing a Catholic newspaper to refer to God as Allah, the Arabic word for God, sparked a spate of arson and vandalism against Christian churches.

Following the Baghdad church mayhem, some European countries offered asylum to Iraqi Christians. But Younada Kanna, a Christian member of Iraq's Parliament, worries that such Western intercession will be seen as discrimination by Iraqi Muslims who wonder why outside countries are so quick to offer assistance to Christians but are often silent when Muslims are attacked in Iraq. This could drive a wedge between Iraq's Christians and Muslims.

"We are a small community here, and we are trying to resist and stay in our homes," Kanna said.

More than 600 Christian families fled to the Kurdish area after the church siege, said the Kurdish interior minister, Karim Sinjari. More may have come without registering with authorities.

The Kurds are Muslims who have suffered oppression and discrimination but now have an autonomous, Western-supported homeland in nor-

them Iraq. Iraq's president, Jalal Talabani, who is a Kurd, has gone so far as to suggest something similar for Iraq's Christians. Meanwhile the Kurdish government has set up a committee to help the fleeing Christians. Proposals include letting them transfer their government jobs to the Kurdish provinces and allowing students to study in Kurdish colleges and universities.

"They've been part of Iraq for years. They are part of the community. They are part of the history. They are part of the culture of this country," said Sinjari, who heads the committee. He believes Christians who come to Kurdistan are more likely one day to return to their homes than those who leave Iraq.

Ainkawa, the Christian enclave 320 kilometers (200 miles) north of Baghdad, has churches, Christmas trees for sale, and a population that has swelled from 7,500 to 22,000 since 2003, according to Ainkawa Mayor Fahmy Matti.

Christians have been in Iraq since earliest Christian times, and although there are several denominations, their enemies do not discriminate.

The Our Lady of Salvation church is Syrian Catholic, and Miriam Suleiman is Syrian Orthodox, but days after the attack her house was the target of a bomb.

She and her family are renting an apartment in Irbil for \$500 a month, her son is on unpaid leave from his government job, and her daughter had to drop out of medical school in Baghdad. Still, they have no desire to go back.

"Maybe there will be peace and stability, but suddenly the situation will deteriorate," said Suleiman, 61. "We want to go abroad. That is it."

Matti, the Ainkawa mayor, said that about 70 percent of the Christians who moved there after the church attack came from Baghdad, and others from Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, 80 kilometers (50 miles) east of here.

Mosul is one of the last bas-

tions of Sunni extremists, who sow terror through assassination, targeting Iraqis of all faiths but Christians in particular.

About 10 Christian families from Mosul recently found refuge at St. Matthew's, a monastery founded in A.D. 374 by a persecuted Christian and now home to a few monks. The families live in the stone rooms, their laundry drying in the courtyard and their kitchen utensils piled on the shelves.

A 23-year-old woman, requesting anonymity for fear of reprisals, said that in Mosul she would try to blend in by keeping her head covered, Muslim-style. She said people would say "Oh, so you are supported by the West because you are Christian. ... They say it is not your country. You should leave."

That is not so easy.

To emigrate, Iraqis need a passport, and must apply for it in their city of residence - in the monastery refugees' case

Mosul, the place from which they fled. A monk at the sanctuary, who for his safety identified himself only as Joseph, said Christians trying to get out often cannot afford hundreds of dollars in bribes to obtain a passport.

Ban Daub and her family fled to neighboring Syria in 2006. In 2008, having been denied asylum and told Baghdad was getting safer, they returned to the capital. A few months later a bomb blast rained glass shards into their bedrooms.

Daub's nephew, Izz Annan Azziz, said that after he left Baghdad for Irbil, a Muslim friend would call daily, assuring him it was safe to come back.

Then another Christian was killed, and the friend called to say that maybe it was best that he leave Iraq for good.

The Boston Globe DECEMBER 21, 2010

Iraq's new oil minister close ally to predecessor

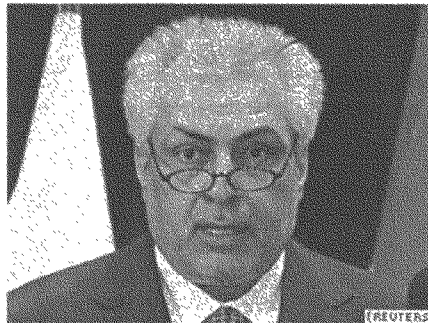
By **SINAN SALAHEDDIN**
The Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraq's new oil minister appointed Tuesday was a close aide to his predecessor, suggesting he is likely to keep pursuing investment by international energy companies for the lucrative sector.

Abdul-Karim Elaibi, a Shiite, replaced Hussain al-Shahristani who was the architect of Iraq's plans to lure international investment to its beleaguered industry. As senior deputy in the oil ministry, Elaibi was instrumental in overseeing Iraq's oil deals with Western companies and neighboring countries.

Iraq has awarded 15 oil and gas deals since 2008 to international energy companies in the first major investment in the country's energy industry in more than three decades.

"Elaibi means good continuity for the oil companies," said Samuel Ciszuk, Mideast energy analyst with IHS Global Insight in London. "He was very much involved in the negotiations of the contracts. He was



very much involved in the talks with the oil companies."

Iraq hopes to raise output to 12 million barrels per day by 2017 — a level that would put it nearly on par with Saudi Arabia's current production capacity — from around 2.4 million barrels currently.

But Elaibi will have an uphill battle achieving those ambitious oil output targets which are seen by some analysts as unrealistic, given Iraq's damaged oil infrastructure, bureaucracy and corruption.

Elaibi also has to address the more than two dozen oil deals the northern self-ruled Kurdish government unilaterally signed

with Western companies which al-Shahristani considered illegal. The previous minister, al-Shahristani, blacklisted the companies involved from participating in any deals in the rest of Iraq.

The new oil minister was born in Baghdad in 1959 and holds a B.A. degree in oil engineering from the University of Baghdad. He started his career in 1983 with the state-run South Oil Company and occupied several posts within the ministry before reaching his latest position.

In the new government, al-Shahristani will be the deputy prime minister for energy, a newly created post. It is still unknown what influence and powers it will have over the growth of oil production and exports.

It is believed that al-Shahristani still intends to wield a great deal of influence over this vital sector of Iraq's economy.

Iraq holds the world's fourth largest oil reserves of 143.1 billion barrels, according to the government's latest estimates. Oil revenues make up nearly 95 percent of Iraq's budget.

Anti-American cleric rebounds

AMARA, IRAQ

As political winds shift in Iraq, Shiite leader becomes a power broker

BY JACK HEALY

The Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr, who in the past decade has been both an anti-American insurgency leader and a behind-the-scenes power broker, was not in attendance when Iraqi leaders met Monday to sketch out a new government.

But with his followers standing to gain control of powerful government posts, his influence is likely to become apparent in many facets of Iraqi public life, from the halls of Parliament to the tomato farms and marshlands here in southeastern Iraq.

Maysan Province, home to Amara, was a stronghold for Mr. Sadr until sweeps by the Iraqi Army in 2008 helped break the grip of his militia. Political change ousted his ally from the governorship here last year.

Now, the winds are shifting again, and the area has become a stage for Mr. Sadr's remarkable political resurgence in Iraq after years of schism, military defeats and Mr. Sadr's own flight to Iran.

His followers are pushing for control of the governor's seat in Maysan Province again, one of several positions they hope to gain as rewards for joining the coalition intended to keep their one-time enemy, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, in office after the months of wrangling that followed inconclusive elections in March.

That the party, the Sadrist Movement, still Iraq's most fiercely populist and anti-American bloc, has come this far is a reflection of its members' efforts in recent years to recast themselves as maturing politicians who can actually govern and deliver badly needed services.

"We want to show the world we are a modern people, an intellectual people," said Fathal Namaa, the group's political director in Maysan. "We don't want to be radical Islamists. I tell my supporters: Don't dress all in black or carry weapons."

They are tracing a path mapped out by militant groups like Hezbollah or Hamas, which built popular support by augmenting their armed wings with social and political groups that ran schools and hospitals and handed out jobs.

"If we're able to succeed this time and erase some of the mistakes of the past, we think we can win the most seats," said Hakim Zamili, who was re-elected easily after beating charges of murder, kidnapping and corruption stemming from his time as an official in the Min-



A billboard in Baghdad depicting Moktada al-Sadr, second from left. His candidates pulled off surprising victories to win 40 seats in the parliamentary election in March.

istry of Health. "And maybe the prime minister's position."

Those outside ambitions may exceed the movement's grasp at the moment. But its growing political power has stoked new worries about how the Sadrists will play a stronger hand.

"We do not see compelling evidence they have renounced, in practice or in theory, the idea that they can use force against their opponents," said James F. Jeffrey, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq.

In Iraq's last government, Mr. Sadr's followers were accused of using their offices to spread corruption and sectarian enmity, with officials lining their pockets and death squads roaming public hospitals. There are also remaining fears, among Americans and Iraqis, that the militia that helped bring Mr. Sadr to power initially, the Mahdi Army, which was responsible for much of the sectarian violence that threatened to tear the country apart, could again be mobilized against his enemies, particularly after the U.S. military finishes its withdrawal.

"We know there are going to be Sadrist ministries," said a U.S. diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity under normal diplomatic ground rules. "We want to make it work. But we will also be true to our own principles, and they may not want to work with us."

In addition to the governor's seat in Maysan, they are seeking control of service ministries and a slot as one of Mr. Maliki's deputies.

"We're going to get everything," Nasser al-Rubaie, a leading Sadrist politician, said as he emerged from Parliament one afternoon.

The posture and power of the Sadrists have forced a shift in tone from U.S. officials, and former Iraqi rivals, who now find themselves thrown together in an awkward partnership.

After fully embracing the political process, Mr. Sadr's candidates pulled off surprising victories to win 40 seats in March.

"We don't want to be radical Islamists. I tell my supporters: Don't dress all in black or carry weapons."

Women on the Sadrist slate, who campaigned in head-to-toe abayas, fared particularly well against secular candidates.

The Sadrists are now embracing — at least in public — the sunny tones of national unity and partnership, referring to Sunni and Kurdish lawmakers as brothers, not foes. After dozens of Christians were massacred at a Baghdad church on Oct. 31, members of Mr. Sadr's group visited the priests to show the party's solidarity.

They send out daily news releases to announce street-cleaning projects, new orphanages and community centers. And at Mr. Sadr's behest, party leaders said some newly elected lawmakers had

been sent to Lebanon and Turkey to attend classes in public speaking and political etiquette.

The party's newest lawmakers include appellate lawyers, engineers and accountants, as well as candidates with less technocratic backgrounds. Among them is Muhammad al-Khafaji, a former

bodyguard to Mr. Sadr whose biography on a Sadrist Web site says he "participated" in the fight against the occupation.

"What the Sadrists want is what Iraqis want," Mr. Khafaji said, sipping a glass of peach nectar. "We have to lead the political process."

In Amara, the resurgence of the Sadr movement has stirred mixed emotions, as well as resistance from the current governor, Muhammad al-Soudani, who has a good working relationship with the Americans.

This is a city where black, red and green banners of Shiite devotion flutter from the rooftops of homes, and where photographs of clerics adorn the awnings of fast-food restaurants. But it is one still unsettled by the Sadrists' time in power, when militias dominated local security and bombings and attacks against U.S. forces were common.

Some residents said they welcomed the Sadrists' return. They blamed the Maliki-supported governor, Mr. Soudani, for persistently high unemployment and creaky services and said they were ready to allow the Sadrists another chance. Some spoke of a deeper fealty to the Sadr family, which includes towering Shiite patriarchs killed for resisting Saddam Hussein's rule.

"The Sadrists are very good people, and qualified," said Abdul Wahid Bedai, 78, whose living room had a photograph of Mr. Sadr's slain father. "We respect them. We respect the movement."



Friday Prayer in the Sadr City district of Baghdad, a stronghold of the militia that fought the Americans. The area is informally named for Moktada al-Sadr's father, a revered cleric.

But Abdul Qarim Muhamadawi, a local leader who was a guerrilla fighter during the Saddam era, spoke to the fears of those who worry about the consequences of handing power back to the Sadrists.

Mr. Muhamadawi, known here as the "Prince of the Marshes," said he had already seen once-imprisoned mem-

bers of Shiite militias back on the streets of Amara, among those said to be released under part of a deal with Mr. Maliki. And he feared the relative stability of the past two years could unwind.

"We are upset about this deal," he said. "This is the moment before the storm."

 **REUTERS**

Iraq oil revenue plan prompts Kurd parl't walkout

December 18, 2010, (Reuters) -By Waleed Ibrahim

*** Kurdish politicians angry over budget proposal**
*** Kurdish budget to be cut each time local oil exports stop**

BAGHDAD — Kurdish lawmakers walked out of Iraq's parliament on Saturday when they learned of a proposal that would cut Iraqi Kurdistan's share of the 2011 national budget if the region fails to deliver crude oil for export.

The semi-autonomous northern Kurdish region has been locked in a dispute with the central government in Baghdad over contracts signed by the Kurdistan Regional Government with foreign companies to develop northern oilfields. Baghdad says the deals are illegal.

The disagreement halted exports from Iraqi Kurdistan last year. Iraqi Oil Minister Hussain al-Shahristani said this month Kurdish oil was expected to flow early next year.

Mohammed Kiyani, a Kurdish politician, said lawmakers had temporarily walked out on the first reading of the budget in parliament after hearing that the Kurdish share would be slashed each time the flow of crude stopped.

"If the export of oil stops, at any time and for any reason, the revenue for that amount will be cut from the Kurdish share of the budget. It's not fair and it's a collective punishment against Kurdish people,"

Kiyani told Reuters.

The Kurdish region was exporting around 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) before the flow was halted last year. Shahristani said the region could produce 150,000 bpd next year.

Iraq's exports last month were just over 1.9 million bpd.

The government is trying to ramp up output capacity to 12 million bpd within six or seven years -- a figure that would rival global leader Saudi Arabia -- from 2.5 million bpd now. But most analysts say that figure is unrealistic.

BUDGET SEES \$73 OIL

Iraq's cabinet approved a draft 2011 budget in November based on an oil price of \$73 a barrel and output of 2.25 million barrels a day next year. The budget still needs parliamentary approval.

Mahmoud Othman, a Kurdish lawmaker, said his bloc had objected to the draft and called for it to be reviewed by parliament's financial committee.

"(The) draft budget was submitted for a first reading without being reviewed by the financial committee of parliament and this is unconstitutional," Othman told Reuters.

A request from the Kurdish bloc to disregard Saturday's first reading and to re-submit it for review was ignored by parliament, Kurdish member Fouad Masoum said.

Any complaints over the first reading of the budget had to be submitted to the financial committee before the second reading of the budget on Tuesday, Masoum added.

Output from the Kurdish region is seen as a key to boosting exports, which provide Iraq with about 95 percent of its federal revenue.

Shahristani, the architect of plans to turn Iraq into a top global oil producer, is to be reappointed oil minister when a new cabinet is revealed on Monday, senior officials told Reuters on Saturday.

Le cinéaste iranien Jafar Panahi, opposé au régime, est condamné à six ans de prison

Le réalisateur du « Ballon blanc », jugé en secret, est interdit d'exercer son métier durant vingt ans

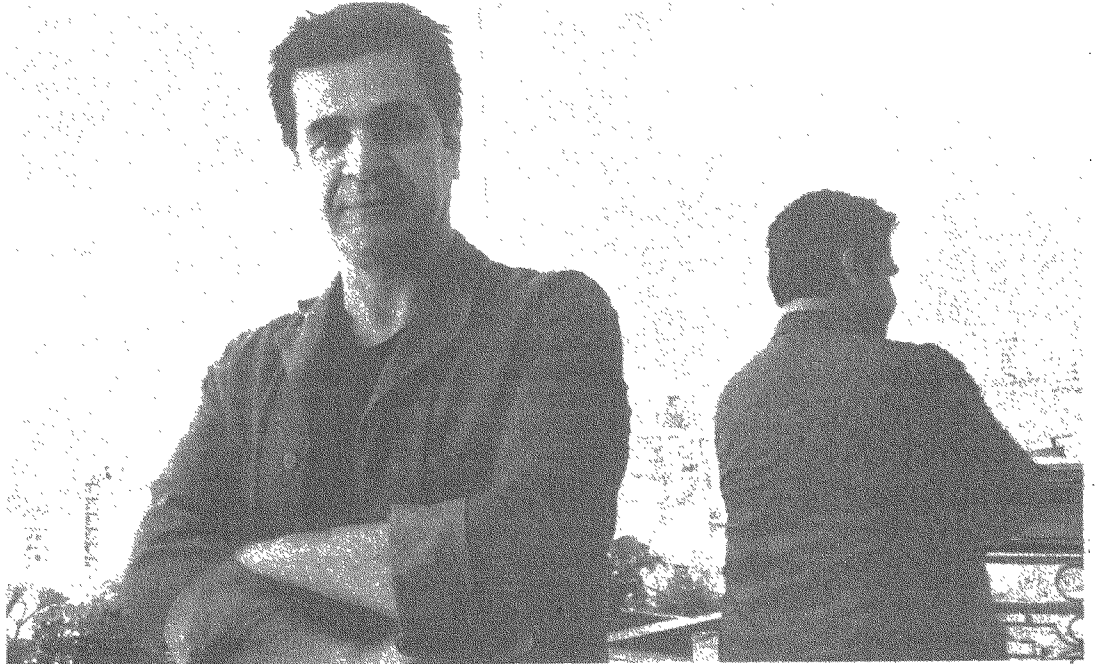
Six années de prison assorties d'une interdiction pour une durée de vingt ans de tourner des films, de sortir du territoire et de donner le moindre entretien aux médias : voilà la sentence qui vient de frapper le cinéaste iranien Jafar Panahi, selon une déclaration de son avocate, Farideh Gheirat, lundi 20 décembre, qui a fait appel de cette décision. Motifs de la condamnation invoqués : « *Participation à des rassemblements et propagande contre le régime.* »

Voici neuf mois que le réalisateur, l'un des plus talentueux de son pays et l'un des plus reconnus hors de ses frontières, fait l'objet de la part des autorités d'une persécution qui tient de la farce kafkaïenne dans un pays où le pouvoir et les cinéastes jouent de longue date au jeu du chat et de la souris.

Tout a commencé lors des mouvements de protestation consécutifs à la réélection – contestée – du président Mahmoud Ahmadinejad en juin 2009. Tandis qu'il prépare un film basé sur ces événements avec le réalisateur Mohammad Rasoulof, qui écope aujourd'hui de la même sentence, Jafar Panahi est arrêté à son domicile le 1^{er} mars 2010, ainsi que sa femme et sa fille, et détenu à la prison d'Evin, à Téhéran.

Libéré sous caution le 25 mai après une détention de trois mois et une grève de la faim d'une semaine, le cinéaste est finalement jugé le 7 novembre dans le plus grand secret. Il tient devant ses accusateurs un plaidoyer d'une dignité et d'un courage exemplaires.

Le soutien international s'est manifesté très vite, venant d'abord du milieu du cinéma. Le Festival de Cannes a lancé le mouvement en mai 2010, en invitant le



Jafar Panahi le 30 août à Téhéran, après sa libération sous caution le 25 mai. ATTA KENARE/AFP

cinéaste, alors emprisonné, à faire partie de son jury.

La Mostra de Venise, en septembre, lui emboîtait le pas en conviant le réalisateur, assigné à résidence, à accompagner un court-métrage inédit récemment tourné. C'est enfin le Festival international du film de Berlin qui a demandé à Jafar Panahi de faire partie de son jury en février 2011. A cette chaîne de solidarité des trois plus grands festivals du monde se sont ajoutées des pétitions de réalisateurs du monde entier, y compris en provenance d'Hollywood, avec les signatures de Steven Spielberg, Martin Scorsese ou Tim Burton.

De fait, le pouvoir iranien ne s'est pas trompé de cible. Jafar Panahi, 50 ans, est certainement le cinéaste le plus engagé, à travers ses films, dans la dénonciation de

l'arbitraire politique et de l'injustice sociale. C'est, pour ne rien gâcher, un immense artiste, qui trône avec Abbas Kiarostami, dont il fut assistant, au firmament du cinéma d'auteur iranien et qui a reçu à ce titre de multiples récompenses dans les festivals internationaux : Caméra d'or à Cannes pour *Le Ballon blanc* (1995), Lion d'or à Venise pour *Le Cercle* (2000), prix Un certain regard à Cannes pour *Sang et or* (2003).

Vives réactions

Le verdict qui vient de tomber est donc une très mauvaise nouvelle pour l'Iran et pour le cinéma. Il a d'ores et déjà suscité de vives réactions, telle celle du délégué général du Festival de Cannes, Thierry Frémaux, qui prépare un comité de soutien, ou encore celle de l'in-

tellectuel Bernard-Henri Lévy pour qui cet événement confirme que Téhéran « *a déclaré la guerre à ses artistes* ». Le ministre de la culture, Frédéric Mitterrand, a de son côté fait part de son « *indignation* » après le « *pseudo-jugement* » qui frappe le cinéaste.

Joint par téléphone en septembre 2010 alors que son visa pour Venise lui était refusé, Jafar Panahi avait eu ces mots : « *Les droits de l'homme sont bafoués en Iran depuis trente ans, mais on n'avait jamais atteint une situation semblable à celle que connaît le pays aujourd'hui. L'atmosphère est irrespirable, la population se sent méprisée. Or, le mépris et l'humiliation, c'est ce qu'il y a de pire pour l'homme. Cela pourrait nous conduire à une situation totalement incontrôlable.* » ■

Jacques Mandelbaum

Iran et Turquie: le rapprochement politique et économique de deux géants

TEHÉRAN - L'Iran et la Turquie n'ont cessé de se rapprocher ces dernières années sur le plan politique mais aussi économique, la Turquie devenant un allié de poids pour les Iraniens dans leurs délicates négociations nucléaires.

Le président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et son nouveau chef de la diplomatie Ali Akbar Salehi participeront jeudi à Istanbul à un sommet économique régional.

Cette visite intervient alors que la Turquie, qui joue l'intermédiaire entre Téhéran et l'Occident dans son bras de fer sur le nucléaire, doit accueillir fin janvier les discussions entre l'Iran et le groupe 5+1 (Etats-Unis, France, Grande-Bretagne, Russie, Chine et Allemagne), après la reprise des négociations nucléaires à Genève début décembre.

"La Turquie est un pays puissant, avec une position stratégique et des points communs idéologiques et culturels avec l'Iran", a déclaré M. Salehi soulignant que le renforcement des relations avec la Turquie était une "priorité".

Longtemps considéré comme l'allié stratégique et même militaire d'Israël dans la région, la Turquie s'est rapprochée des pays arabes et de l'Iran, en particulier après l'offensive d'Israël contre la bande de Gaza en décembre 2008 puis l'attaque de la marine israélienne contre une flottille d'aide humanitaire destinée à Gaza au cours duquel neuf Turcs ont été tués. Ce qui a provoqué une vive colère de la Turquie contre Israël.

Signe du changement intervenu, Ankara a retiré en août l'Iran de la liste des pays constituant une menace pour elle, selon le document définissant la sécurité nationale du pays.



Le président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (G) et son homologue turc Abdullah Gül, le 7 juin 2010 à Istanbul *AFP/Archives/Bulent Kilic*



Le président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le 17 mai 2010 à Téhéran *AFP/Archives/Atta Kenare*

Elle a également voté contre la résolution du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU du 9 juin, renforçant les sanctions économiques internationales contre l'Iran.

Peu avant, elle avait présenté avec le Brésil et l'Iran une proposition d'échange de combustible nucléaire entre l'Iran et les grandes puissances, visant à faciliter un compromis sur le dossier nucléaire, mais qui a été rejetée par les grandes puissances.

Le rapprochement de la Turquie et de l'Iran, qui comptent à eux deux plus de 150 millions d'habitants, s'est également accompagné d'un renforcement des relations économiques et commerciales qui ont atteint 10 milliards de dollars, selon les chiffres officiels, avec pour objectif commun de les faire passer à 30 milliards de dollars entre 2013 et 2015.

En septembre dernier, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a appelé à un "rapprochement économique avec l'Iran", notamment la signature d'un accord de préférence commerciale, en dépit des pressions occidentales.

Selon la presse iranienne, Téhéran

veut également renforcer ses relations commerciales avec la Turquie pour réduire la place des Emirats arabes unis dans son commerce extérieur, après les restrictions bancaires imposées par les Emirats à la suite des sanctions économiques internationales.

L'Iran qui exporte déjà quotidiennement entre 15 et 18 millions de m³ vers la Turquie, a signé en juillet un contrat d'un milliard d'euros avec une compagnie turque pour la construction d'un gazoduc de 660 km qui permettra d'exporter chaque jour 60 millions de m³ de gaz d'ici trois ans vers la Turquie et l'Europe.

Enfin, geste particulièrement significatif, M. Erdogan, lui-même sunnite qui dirige un gouvernement islamocconservateur, a participé jeudi à Istanbul aux cérémonies chiites d'Achoura, en présence d'Ali Akbar Velayati, principal conseiller pour les affaires internationales du guide suprême iranien l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Une première dans un pays sunnite à laquelle les médias iraniens ont donné un large écho.



Un général assassiné, sa fille blessée à Bagdad

BAGDAD, 23 déc 2010 (AFP)

UN GÉNÉRAL de l'armée irakienne a été tué et sa fille blessée par des inconnus qui ont ouvert le feu avec des armes automatiques munies de silencieux, ont indiqué jeudi des sources aux ministères de l'Intérieur et de la Défense.

L'officier supérieur Imad Hachem, qui appartient à la sixième division de l'armée déployée à Bagdad, a été tué mercredi soir à Mansour, dans l'ouest de Bagdad, alors qu'il circulait en voiture avec sa fille. L'âge de cette dernière n'a pas été précisée.

Egalement dans l'ouest de la capitale, à Amriya, le lieutenant-colonel de police Majid Hamid, a été blessé mercredi soir dans les mêmes circonstances, ont précisé ces sources.

Les insurgés multiplient les attaques contre des militaires et policiers pour tenter de désorganiser les forces de sécurité. Le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki a placé la sécurité à la tête de ses priorités.

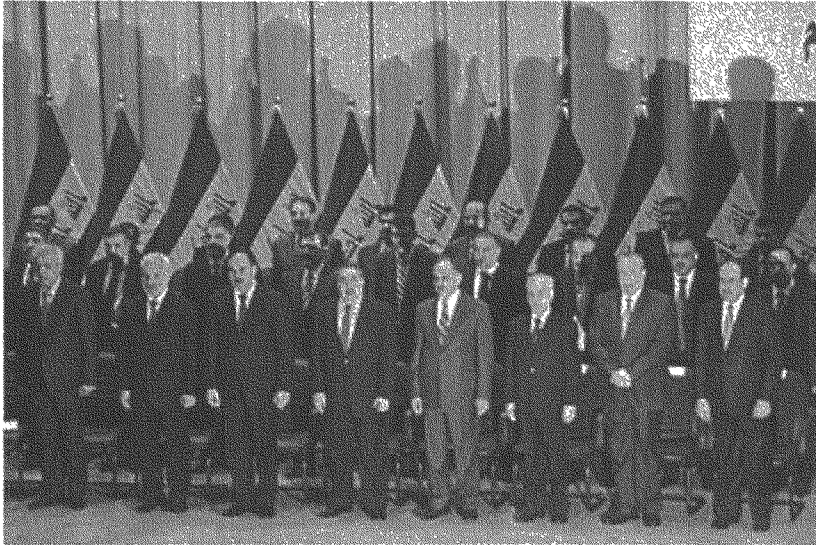
Par ailleurs, dans la ville multiethnique de Kirkouk, à 240 km au nord de Bagdad, la police a découvert le corps de Barbaros Mohammad Habib, un membre de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK de Jalal Talabani), criblé de dix balles, a indiqué le colonel de police Azad Abdallah.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

DECEMBER 21, 2010

Iraq's Political Impasse Ends, Cabinet Approved

Maliki Government Voted In by Parliament, Closing 10-Month Leadership Vacuum; Obama Hails 'Major Step Forward'



The new Iraqi government is seen during a swearing in ceremony in Baghdad, Iraq, Tuesday, Dec. 21, 2010.

By SAM DAGHER

BAGHDAD, Iraq's Parliament officially approved a second term for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and his partial cabinet lineup on Tuesday, ending a grueling political impasse that had stretched for nearly 10 months since inconclusive elections in March.

U.S. President Barack Obama called the government formation a "significant moment" in the country's history and a "major step forward." He also called it a "clear rejection" of sectarian extremism.

The formal and largely symbolic vote was expected, and it came after Mr. Maliki submitted picks for much of his cabinet Monday evening. He had said that several posts would be taken up on an interim basis as political horse-trading continued.

The total number of cabinet posts—including Mr. Maliki's own—also grew, to 45 from 42 on Monday evening, in an apparent bid to placate parties jostling for posts. Ten of those 45 portfolios were left unfilled as of late Tuesday.

In unscripted comments before Parliament, Mr. Maliki expressed frustration with a complex system of governance based on ethnic and sectarian quotas.

"Everyone is upset with me," he said, after a tribal sheikh, excluded from a post he had been coveting, stood up and began shouting.

Mr. Maliki himself will take on the defense, interior and national-security portfolios on an interim basis. Parliamentarians were expected to vote later in the week on the creation of a new national-policy post set aside for Mr. Maliki's chief rival, Ayad Allawi, despite lingering disagreements over its scope and powers.

Mr. Allawi's predominantly Sunni bloc won the most seats in Parliament in March but failed to cobble together a governing coalition. That forced Mr. Allawi to join a unity government headed by Mr. Maliki and dominated by his conservative Islamist Shiite allies, including the movement of anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

Members of Mr. Allawi's bloc were confirmed in 12 cabinet posts on Tuesday. An additional Allawi ally had previously been named speaker of

Parliament, as part of a U.S.-backed power-sharing deal agreed to last month among Iraq's biggest sectarian and ethnic factions.

"We announce our full support for this government, and we will carry out our effective and productive role...as long as we find a reciprocal spirit," said Mr. Allawi in a speech to Parliament.

The U.S. and Iranian ambassadors to Iraq were both in attendance for the ceremonial vote.

A spokesman for U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon congratulated Mr. Maliki on his confirmation as Prime Minister and welcomed the government formation as "a major step forward in Iraq's democratic progress." He called on the new government to "address the major challenges that face the country, including national reconciliation, reconstruction and long-term stability."

Among ministers confirmed on Tuesday was Abdul Kareem Luaiby as oil minister. He didn't run in the elections but is allied to Mr. Maliki. Mr. Luaiby, a senior oil official, succeeded his boss Hussein al-Shahristani, who was given a new job with more power as deputy premier for energy.

Parliament also approved Hoshiyar Zebari, a member of the Kurdish bloc, to retain his post as foreign minister. Rafie al-Issawi, a Sunni Arab who is currently one of two deputy prime ministers, was approved as finance minister.

Largely absent from the cabinet lineup were women, who make up about a quarter of the 325-seat Parliament. One woman was named in Mr. Maliki's cabinet, triggering angry shouts by some during the session Tuesday against their exclusion in the government. The minister of state for women's affairs was one of the 10 portfolios filled temporarily—by Mr. Zebari, the foreign minister.



Kirkukis Dismiss Time Bomb Fears

Residents of disputed area say they get along pretty well, claiming politicians are behind talk of rising tensions.

By Samah Samad - Iraq - ICR Issue 363

THE IRAQI government's decision to postpone a nationwide census has once more cast Kirkuk as an obstacle to political progress, but long-time residents say the contested province has an undeserved reputation.

The census, which would be the first for Iraq since 1987 and had been scheduled for December 5, was postponed indefinitely last week in order to avert potential violence in disputed areas such as Kirkuk, and to examine the inclusion and wording of certain questions, specifically one pertaining to ethnicity.

Contested ethnically-mixed areas include parts of the Nineveh, Diyala and Tamin governorates, but ownership of the oil-rich city of Kirkuk has always been the key issue. This ancient city, reportedly the home of the tomb of the biblical prophet Daniel, is claimed as an ancestral homeland by Kurds, Arabs, Turkomans and Christians.

Because of its rich ethnic and religious diversity, Kirkuk has been dubbed Little Iraq, a microcosm of the nation as a whole. Since the toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, however, the city and its oil have been caught in a power struggle between Baghdad and Erbil, capital of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

The census, which was mandated in the Iraqi constitution to be held in 2007, still appears to a long way off. Kurdish lawmaker Mahmud Othman described the delay of the census as the result of deep mistrust between political groups. But Kirkuk locals say such disputes do not reach the street level or the bazaar where merchants of different ethnic groups conduct business side-by-side.

Kirkuk has long been seen as a hotbed of ethnic and sectarian rivalry, but while nationalistic passions remain high long-time residents still coexist in relative harmony. Analysts say that if violence erupts in the province it is likely to be provoked by rival political forces from outside Kirkuk.

Although there has been sporadic violence in the city of some 800,000 people for many years, native Kirkukis say these outbreaks are between newcomers, especially the new wave of Kurdish immigrants and Arabs who were given incentives to relocate to the city during the Saddam era.

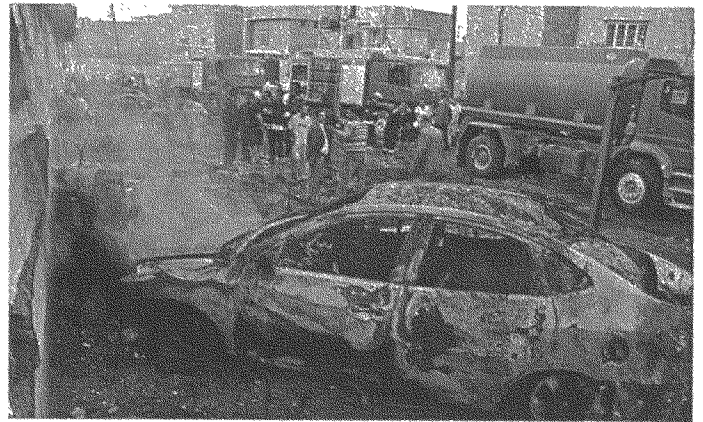
The political bickering and intermittent violence do not affect relations between long-standing Kirkukis who have lived in ethnically-mixed neighbourhoods for many generations, a range of community leaders, politicians and security force members told IWPR.

The reports about sectarian tension escalating in Kirkuk are groundless, Abdul Rasheed, 40, a Sunni Arab schoolteacher, said. These reports come from the media arms of the political parties and are circulated by those who have an interest in the political deterioration of Kirkuk.

The ethnic groups of Kirkuk are often related to each other and have lived side-by-side since ancient times. Inter-marriage is still quite common. These ties will not be affected by political tensions or the census, if they ever have one.

The reason Kirkuk has drawn comparisons to deeply divided areas such as Beirut is because so many different groups lay claim to it, locals and analysts say. Kurdish leaders have vowed to include the city in Kurdistan, while Sunni Arabs and Turkomans claim such a move would further marginalise them.

But lifelong Kirkuk resident and community organiser Ihsan Mohyidin, 63, scoffs at reports that the possibility of a census has created street-level ethnic tension in his hometown. Mohyidin, a Kurd, says that he has relatives who are Turkomans, Arabs and Christians.



* Kirkuk residents survey the aftermath of a triple car bomb attack in November. Fear of violence in disputed areas such as Kirkuk has forced the delay of Iraq's nationwide census, but native Kirkukis say reports of ethnic tension are overblown. (Photo: Metrography)

Although he supports a census, Mohyidin feels that questions requiring a declaration of ethnicity continue to overlook the integration that made Kirkuk a successful city in the past.

In all aspects of everyday life, the original people of Kirkuk are close to each other. You can see it in all the old, mixed neighbourhoods. Only the politicians make these problems, Mohyidin said.

Archbishop Louis Sako, leader of the ancient Chaldean Christian community in Kirkuk, agrees. Sako, who earned a masters degree in Islamic studies in Rome and a doctorate in Iraqi history from the Sorbonne, is known as a mediator between Kirkuk's different groups.

This city has been diverse with many different religions and cultures since the first century, he said. I have heard all the reports about tension between different groups but I don't see it among my congregation or in the mixed neighbourhoods where the long-time Kirkukis live.

The same opinion is held by Colonel Larry Swift, formerly the commanding officer at the United States base in Kirkuk known as Forward Operating Base Warrior. Swift recounted being told in dramatic terms by an analyst before he arrived that Kirkuk was a time bomb.

It's not a time bomb, he said. Kirkuk is not a Bosnia or a West Bank. For that type of situation to happen you would need congenital hatred on the street level, and that's just not here.

Experts agree that the census will provide much-needed demographic information for civic planners charged with reviving the moribund education, health, housing, and transportation sectors. It is also meant to determine who can vote in a subsequent referendum on whether Kirkuk would be governed by Baghdad or included in the Kurdistan region.

But native residents, such as community leader Mohyidin, say that Kirkuk should be left to govern itself.

He says he remembers when the city was known for its togetherness, adding, I think Kirkuk could be a lesson in how different people can live together peacefully in Iraq.

Samah Samad is an IWPR-trained journalist.

Bilingual debate turns into autonomy discussion, triggering wave of criticism

AYSE KARABAT, ANKARA

The bilingual debate, kicked off by a pro-Kurdish party, entered a predicament yesterday when the Diyarbakir Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the decisions of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK), which transformed the discussion into a demand for democratic autonomy.

Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), is the mastermind behind the idea of democratic autonomy, a term no one can clearly define. The pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) argues the term refers to strong local government, but the government and other parties are suspicious that it would lead to the use of a separate language and flag, which they argue is out of the question.

BDP Co-chairman Selahattin Demirtas on Tuesday met with Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin to discuss democratic autonomy, but the meeting was also meant to lower public tension that flared up recently between the BDP and Sahin.

Sahin recently criticized the BDP after some of its members used Kurdish on the floor of the General Assembly in Parliament. The debate heated up after several BDP members opened the debate on the national flag and language. The parliament speaker on several occasions reminded them that speaking in a language other than Turkish in Parliament is forbidden and that public prosecutors should take action to ensure it does not happen.

The parliament speaker urged everyone to respect national laws and assembly rules forbidding the use of languages other than Turkish in official platforms. Sahin warned BDP members against raising tension in the national political debate and asked them to refrain from using any language other than Turkish. We warned our colleagues in that regard, he said after meeting with Demirtas.

According to the account given to reporters by Sahin following the meeting, the BDP promised to not speak in Kurdish in Parliament. Sahin told reporters that everyone -- but especially deputies in Parliament -- should be very careful when it comes to the indivisibility of the nation. He added that all parties



BDP Co-chairman Selahattin Demirtas and other BDP officials are seen in Parliament on their way to the office of Parliament Speaker Mehmet Ali Sahin for a meeting.

should refrain from making statements that might agitate the society.

Demirtas said the aim of the meeting was to correct misunderstandings. We told him that his remarks targeting political parties harm politics. His approach was very positive. We hope that this meeting will serve the process positively, he said and added that they had also submitted a booklet on democratic autonomy.

The DTK, which comprises many prominent intellectuals, representatives of civil society organizations and pro-Kurdish politicians, shared their demand for democratic autonomy with the public over the weekend. The text suggests that the society, in order to construct the democratic autonomy model, should be organized in eight different dimensions, among them political, legal, social, economic, diplomatic, ecological, socio-political and self defense -- a concept that is not clear but aims to establish a security force.

The text also mentions the adoption of the Kurdish flag and other symbols as well as education in Kurdish from kindergarten through university. The text also underlines that Kurds will send their representatives to Parliament to participate in national politics but that they will have their own local parliaments as well.

Demirtas underlined that some parts of the text are unclear but said he is prepared to have a discussion over democratic autonomy.

We suggesting self-administration. This is part of our party program. If Turkey switches to a strong local administration model, this will require constitutional amendments. We suggest a multicultural, multilingual and multieth-

nic country, Demirtas told reporters.

Responding to a question, he said they are not demanding to speak in Kurdish in Parliament, but that some of his party's members said a few words in Kurdish in order to highlight the issue.

Of course the official language is Turkish. But other languages must be given freedom and should be able to be used in media, the public sector and in education, he said.

Sahin, while answering questions from reporters on the meeting, said he had asked Demirtas to explain the relationship between the DTK and the BDP. Demirtas told me that the DTK is an independent civilian initiative. He told me that some of their colleagues had suggested a separate flag and a defense force but that this was only an idea and that the BDP has not launched an initiative to bring these issues to Parliament's agenda, Sahin said, adding that any subject or law can be discussed in Parliament.

Also on Monday, Demirtas, after meeting with the DTK, said all authority is concentrated in the center and their aim is to change this situation, adding that it would not be only for the Kurds but also for other parts of Turkey -- such as in Antalya and Izmir, where such an administrative model is needed.

He underlined that the nation-state should also need to change because Turkey is a multilingual and multi-confessional country. He noted that Turkey can be divided into 20 regional administrations. Turkish will of course be the official language in these administrations. The Turkish flag will be the main flag. But apart from this, there should be local flags and languages. Democracy can be enhanced when the

state gets minimized, he said.

Bahceli: This can go until independent Kurdistan

The demand for democratic autonomy met fierce criticism from the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) yesterday.

MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli claimed that the BDP is challenging the Constitution and the law and aims to stir up a popular uprising.

Everyone should act with common sense in these difficult days, he told his deputies at a meeting of his party's parliamentary group.

He claimed that the aim of the bilingual speeches and democratic autonomy is to force people to accept that there are ethnicities other than the Turkish nation in Turkey as a founding element of the republic. He claimed that this will first be written in the Constitution and then followed by the establishment

of a state system that is based on different languages, flags, parliaments and defense forces.

In the last stage, there will be efforts to establish an independent Kurdistan with the land taken from Syria and Iran also, he said.

Bahçeli said Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had encouraged all these discussions by initiating what he called the separation initiative, in reference to the government-launched democratization initiative to solve the Kurdish problem. He emphasized that it is very interesting that Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has kept his silence over these issues.

Only CHP Balıkesir deputy Ergun Aydoğan, speaking at budget discussions on Monday night, said these demands might lead the country to separation. He said the CHP defends

the unitary state structure but is not against the idea of people being allowed to learn their mother tongues.

Ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) parliamentary group chairman Suat Kılıç said the BDP is overstepping its limits.

The BDP is acting as if it were the representative of all Kurds. Both in general and local elections, we are the ones who get the most votes in the region. It is not right to claim that Kurds want this, Kılıç said on a TV show on Monday night.

In the meantime, the Office of the President said yesterday that President Abdullah Gül will be visiting Diyarbakir, a predominantly Kurdish province in the Southeast, on Dec. 31. This will be his second visit to the province since being elected president in 2007.

thestar
online

December 25, 2010

By Namu Abdulla (Reuters)

Iraqi Christians mark safer Christmas in Kurdistan

AINKAWA, Iraq - Ammar Ablahad fled Baghdad to the northern Iraqi region of Kurdistan just last week, determined to celebrate Christmas with his wife and baby without fear of attack.

"There's a 100 percent difference," said Ablahad, 32, a civil engineer who joined thousands of other Iraqi Christians fleeing to the safer north after deadly attacks and persistent militant threats against a dwindling Christian population.

In the worst recent attack, 52 people died at Baghdad's Our Lady of Salvation church on Oct. 31 when security forces stormed the church after militants took hostages during Sunday mass.

Pope Benedict said in his annual Christmas message that he hoped the holiday would bring consolation to Christians in Iraq and all the Middle East, where the Vatican fears that violence such as the October attack is fuelling a Christian exodus.

Fearing further bloodshed, several church leaders in cities such as Baghdad - which is still plagued by almost daily attacks -- have urged Christians to keep Christmas low-key this year and limit celebrations to prayers and mass.

The threat of fresh violence has led Iraqi security forces to erect high blast walls topped with barbed wire around several churches in Baghdad. Holiday decorations were noticeably absent.

But about 300 km (190 miles) further north, in Ainkawa and other Kurdish towns, the mood is festive. Churches are decked out with fluorescent lights and holiday banners, and Christmas music blares out in the streets.



Kurdistan has been an oasis of relative calm in Iraq since 1991, when the area became a semi-autonomous enclave under Western protection. The region has earned the reputation of being a safe haven in an otherwise dangerous country.

On Christmas Eve, thousands of worshippers crowded into Ainkawa's Mar Yousuf church and its outside yard, decorated with bright lights and a big Christmas tree.

Dozens of policemen with machine guns stood guard outside the church. Authorities stepped up security and erected checkpoints outside the town to ward off any attack, said Lieutenant Rawaz Azad, director of Ainkawa's traffic police.

SANTA CLAUS AND JINGLE BELLS

Outside the Mar Yousuf church, cars inched forward in a traffic jam, as the song Jingle Bells blared from a car stereo. Many of the cars were covered in colourful streamers, or had Santa Claus toys on the dashboard.

On some major streets in Ainkawa, children stood together in anticipation of Santa Claus. Every year, local men dressed in red costumes drive through town in a pick-up truck, distributing gifts to local children.

In Arbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, upscale shopping centres such as the Majidi Mall are decorated with Christmas trees and festooned with banners that say "Merry Christmas".

"It's become impossible to have something like this in Baghdad," said Ablahad, huddling in the cold outside an Ainkawa church with his family.

The U.N. refugee agency said last week that some 1,000 Christian families, roughly 6,000 people, had fled to Iraqi Kurdistan from Baghdad, Mosul and other areas. Iraq's Christians once numbered about 1.5 million. There are now believed to be about 850,000 out of a population estimated at 30 million.

Bayan Awdeh, 50, said even her Muslim neighbours were getting into the Christmas spirit.

"They have bought a Christmas tree as well," she said, as she made last-minute purchases in the Boto Bazaar.

But for some of the refugees, sorrow over the lives they left behind means Christmas is no longer a cause for joy.

"I won't celebrate because I have no money," said Hekanosh Harkuon, a former university professor from Baghdad, as she shopped for winter clothes for her four daughters.

"My husband is a church security guard," added Harkuon. "He's our sole source of income."

Turkey s pro-Kurdish party tries to calm democratic autonomy furor

ANKARA - Hurriyet Daily News

Turkey s main pro-Kurdish party has no intention of dividing the country with its calls for bilingualism and democratic autonomy, but rather seeks total decentralization, its co-leader said Thursday.

I am sure we can persuade whoever we talk to about our model be it the General Staff, the MHP [opposition Nationalist Movement Party] or the president, Selahattin Demirtas, co-leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, told daily Radikal on Thursday.

Attempting to moderate the harsh reactions to the presentation last weekend of a model of democratic autonomy by the Democratic Society Congress, or DTK, an umbrella organization for pro-Kurdish groups, the BDP chief emphasized that the topic of discussion was just a proposal.

We proposed a concrete offer. We gave the opportunity to the government and the state to score a goal. However, they scored an own-goal, he said.

Claiming the government was trying to create a perception that the ruling Justice and Development Party, or AKP, was doing well [in addressing the Kurdish issue], but BDP has ruined it, Demirtas criticized Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoan for not presenting a better local administration project. He said whenever the BDP worked to reinstate places original Kurdish names, it faced harsh criticism, even though the idea was originally a government effort.

Faced with potential threats to close his party, the BDP leader emphasized the importance of pro-Kurdish political groups in resolving the Kurdish problem in Turkey. If the BDP and DTK don t talk, then what will happen? Will everybody go to the



Selahattin Demirtas (R), co-leader of the pro-Kurdish BDP, is greeted by party supporters. AA photo

[Kandil] Mountains? he asked, referring to the northern Iraq base of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK. We try to strengthen politics, we try to stress the solution [to the Kurdish problem] is in politics, he said.

The BDP and DTK have separately begun drafting new constitutions that will be shared with the people after next year s general elections, daily Milliyet reported. While the DTK s draft reportedly refers to a Democratic Autonomous Kurdistan, the BDP uses the term democratic autonomy.

The BDP has two basic messages that it can convince anyone to agree with, Demirtas said: Our purpose is not dividing the country [and] we suggest that a model of decentralization will carry Turkey forward.

The pro-Kurdish politician also argued that the recent reactions by the government and the military have led to the most dangerous process since

the outlawed PKK, which is listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, declared a unilateral ceasefire earlier this year. He said the right steps toward a solution to the Kurdish issue should be taken immediately, in two months time at the most. Three months later the election process will start, he said. Then no political parties could be restrained since there will be a race for votes.

Though he said the latest discussions were unfortunate and the process was risky, Demirtas emphasized that there is still hope, stressing that the latest ceasefire is different than previous ones. It s a ceasefire for both the PKK and the state, he said, adding that this poses an opportunity that should be used.

□□□

Les Kurdes se perfectionnent dans l'art de la politique

Le congrès du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), principal parti au pouvoir dans la région autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak, s'est déroulé au mois de décembre. Le parti, autrefois composé en majorité de combattants anti-Saddam Hussein, est en pleine mutation démocratique et voit émerger une nouvelle classe politique, plus occidentalisée, jeune et féminine.

| Mete Cubukcu | Radikal

Le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan d'Irak (PDK) qui veut montrer de lui-même une image nouvelle en prônant le "renouveau, la justice et l'unité" sera-t-il en mesure d'appliquer son programme? Il y figure désormais des concepts tels que les droits de l'homme et de la femme, la transparence, le partage équitable des revenus, le respect de l'opposition politique ou encore le plurilinguisme? Le congrès du PDK qui vient de se dérouler à Erbil [siège du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan d'Irak] devrait faire sentir ses effets non seulement sur le PDK mais aussi sur l'ensemble des mouvements kurdes, y compris en Turquie, ainsi que sur l'ensemble de l'Irak. Le programme de ce parti, écrit en 1946 lorsqu'il prit le maquis dans les montagnes du Kurdistan, "est en train de redescendre en ville" pour reprendre l'expression de son leader Massoud Barzani [par ailleurs président de la région autonome du Kurdistan]. Le PDK est ainsi en train d'abandonner sa dimension de mouvement de guérilla avec son système de politburo pour tout doucement se muer en un parti politique à l'occidentale plus social et plus libéral. Cela se ressentait d'ailleurs dans la salle où se tenait le congrès. Certes, les anciens peshmergas [combattants kurdes] avec leurs médailles n'ont pas été oubliés et étaient encore visibles mais l'ambiance a changé. La musique de fond diffusée tout au long de ce congrès n'était plus une musique kurde militante mais de la musique classique. De jeunes filles portant des habits traditionnels guidaient les participants dans une atmosphère marquée par une organisation sans faille qui n'avait que peu à voir avec la façon dont les congrès de ce parti se déroulaient auparavant. On a pu constater que les cadres du PDK se rajeunissaient et que le nombre de femmes y



▲ Massoud Barzani, dirigeant du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) irakien, à Erbil, en Irak, le 11 décembre 2010.

était en augmentation.

Toute la classe politique irakienne a fait le déplacement jusqu'à Erbil, reconnaissant l'importance d'un Barzani qui a réussi à dénouer la crise gouvernementale irakienne qui durait depuis neuf mois. Tout le monde était là : le président kurde irakien Jalal Talabani, le Premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, le président du Parlement Ossana Noudjaifi, l'ancien Premier ministre Iyad Allaoui, sorti le premier des urnes en mars 2010, ou encore Ammar Al Hakim, important leader politique chiite. Des personnes qui se retrouvent rarement ensemble dans un même endroit ont donc toutes participé au congrès du PDK. Celui-ci s'est ouvert avec le nouvel hymne national irakien, aussitôt suivi par l'hymne kurde sur fonds de drapeaux irakiens et kurdes. Jalal Talabani, surnommé en kurde Mam Jalal [Oncle Jalal], en tant que président irakien a fait son discours en arabe. Les représentants politiques turcs d'origine kurde, invités à Erbil, semblaient quelque peu contrariés car ils ne parvenaient pas à bien comprendre le discours en langue kurde sorani de Massoud Barzani. Ils parlent en effet une autre forme de la langue kurde, le kurmandji, et aucune traduction n'avait été prévue. Toutefois, l'attention manifestée à l'égard des délégations des partis poli-

tiques venues de Turquie - tant l'AKP au pouvoir, que le CHP, kémaliste et dans l'opposition ou que le BDP, prokurde - était patente, preuve supplémentaire d'une amélioration des relations entre les Kurdes irakiens et la Turquie. D'ailleurs, c'est en vain que l'on cherchait lors de ce congrès une trace du PKK [mouvement séparatiste kurde de Turquie] dont une partie de la direction militaire se trouve au Kurdistan irakien. Le PDK s'est montré suffisamment intelligent que pour ne pas l'inviter. Les relations entre Erbil et Ankara ont atteint un niveau inimaginable il y a dix ans. La Turquie dispose ainsi désormais d'un consulat à Erbil, la compagnie aérienne Turkish Airlines va bientôt ouvrir une ligne vers le Kurdistan irakien, les banques turques font la file pour ouvrir des succursales et plus de 120 milles citoyens turcs travaillent dans la région.

Les Kurdes irakiens, qui ont jeté les bases de leurs nouvelles institutions au début des années quatre-vingt dix, veulent poursuivre ce processus en se démocratisant, mais ils ont encore du chemin à parcourir. En effet, le seul parti d'opposition autorisé, Goran (Changement), n'avait pas été convié au congrès du PDK.

En Irak, un gouvernement et un peu d'espoir

Ce n'est pas encore une situation normalisée, loin de là, mais l'Irak a accompli mardi 21 décembre un pas dans la bonne direction. En accordant sa confiance au gouvernement de coalition laborieusement formé par le premier ministre sortant, Nouri Al-Maliki, le Parlement irakien permet au pays de sortir d'une longue crise politique : il a fallu neuf mois, depuis les élections de mars, pour arriver au vote de mardi...

Ce furent neuf mois de tractations à l'irakienne où ont pesé tous les éléments qui font de ce pays, saigné par six ans de guerre civile, une mosaïque d'intérêts difficiles à concilier.

Il y a les divisions confessionnelles, entre une majorité arabe chiite et une minorité sunnite. Il y a une ligne de fracture ethnique, entre Arabes et Kurdes. Il y a

des influences régionales conflictuelles : l'Iran soutient les partis chiites, l'Arabie saoudite la cause des sunnites, et, au milieu, les Etats-Unis, encore omniprésents, cherchent à se retirer en bon ordre après avoir envahi le pays en 2003.

Editorial

Les élections de mars n'ont pas dégagé de majorité claire. Deux grands blocs s'opposaient : d'une part, une Alliance chiite, dirigée par M. Maliki ; d'autre part, la liste Iraquiya, coalition laïque, pilotée par un ancien chef du gouvernement, Iyad Allawi, qui a obtenu la majorité des voix sunnites.

Bien que les résultats aient donné un léger avantage à son concurrent, M. Maliki a réussi à se maintenir à son poste. Il a offert une large

place à la coalition de M. Allawi dans un gouvernement qui se veut une équipe d'« unité nationale ».

La formule est très optimiste dans un pays où l'invasion américaine a provoqué un terrible affrontement entre chiites et sunnites – lequel fait encore des dizaines de morts chaque mois. L'équipe gouvernementale reste à compléter, mais sa composition repose sur un arrangement fragile.

Si M. Maliki reste le chef du gouvernement, il a dû concéder à M. Allawi la présidence d'un nouvel organisme : le Conseil national des politiques stratégiques. Personne ne sait encore trop le rôle que cette institution devra jouer, mais d'ores et déjà les uns et les autres se disputent sur sa qualité : instance de décision pour les sunnites, seulement consultative pour les chiites...

Avec un premier ministre chiite,

un sunnite, Ossana Noudjaifi, à la présidence du Parlement, et un Kurde, Jalal Talabani, à la tête de l'Etat, l'Irak s'installe dans un partage du pouvoir entre ses trois grandes communautés.

Barack Obama s'est félicité de la formation du gouvernement Maliki. Il y voit un pas de plus vers une normalisation qui pourrait accélérer le calendrier du retrait américain. Les Etats-Unis ont mis fin à leur mission de combat dans ce pays en août ; ils y maintiennent encore 50 000 hommes qui doivent avoir plié bagage d'ici à la fin 2011. L'Irak connaît la guerre depuis près de vingt ans. C'est toujours un pays exsangue, à tout point de vue. L'équipe Maliki, bien que mal assurée, laisse espérer un début d'apaisement communautaire. Il serait temps que l'Irak ait de la chance. ■

La Croix VENDREDI 24 DÉCEMBRE 2010

La Turquie renforce ses liens avec ses voisins orientaux

Istanbul accueille un sommet de l'Organisation de la coopération économique (ECO), qui regroupe dix pays du Moyen-Orient. Le dossier iranien est au centre des discussions

Un train à grande vitesse pour transporter des marchandises de la Turquie au Pakistan et « ainsi ouvrir de vastes marchés européens et asiatiques au bénéfice des peuples de la région ». C'est le projet que défend le président du Pakistan, Asif Ali Zardari, dans une interview parue hier dans le quotidien turc *Hürriyet*. Selon lui, il devrait être baptisé « *train Güll* », du nom du président turc, Abdullah Gül, artisan de l'intensification des liens entre la Turquie et ses voisins orientaux.

Asif Ali Zardari devait participer, hier et aujourd'hui, aux côtés du président turc et du président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, au sommet de l'Organisation de la coopération économique (ECO), une organisation créée en 1985 par son pays, l'Iran et la Turquie, et qui regroupe aujourd'hui dix pays du Moyen-Orient. L'ECO offre un cadre diplomatique et

Le gouvernement turc poursuit avec l'Iran la nouvelle diplomatie du « zéro problème avec les voisins ».

économique privilégié pour la Turquie qui se tourne toujours plus vers ses voisins orientaux, dans un contexte où son adhésion à l'Union européenne n'est pas envisageable à court terme.

Le sommet, qui sera suivi par un sommet à trois entre la Turquie, l'Iran et le Pakistan, devrait permettre la signature d'une série d'accords, en matière de commerce, transports, banques et libre circulation des personnes entre les membres de l'ECO – la suppression des visas serait envisagée. Il intervient un mois avant la poursuite à Istanbul des négociations entre l'Iran et les puissances occidentales au sujet du programme nucléaire de Téhéran, sujet de tension avec la communauté internationale, qui soupçonne Ahmadinejad de développer l'arme nucléaire, malgré ses démentis.

Le sujet a été évoqué mercredi lors d'une rencontre entre le ministre des affaires étrangères turc Ahmet Davutoglu et le nouveau ministre des affaires étrangères iranien Akbar Saleh, qui est aussi à la tête du programme nucléaire. Le journaliste turc Hüseyin Latif, présent lors de cette rencontre, a constaté une « cordialité affichée ».

À l'issue de l'entrevue, une source turque interrogée par l'AFP estimait que la Turquie était « prête par tous ses moyens à maintenir l'élan positif obtenu à Genève ». La reprise des négociations début décembre à Genève avait été jugée constructive par la chef de la diplomatie européenne Catherine Ashton, qui soulignait toutefois la nécessité pour l'Iran d'accepter les garanties exigées par la communauté internationale.

La Turquie poursuit avec l'Iran la nouvelle diplomatie du « zéro problème avec les voisins » amorcée par Ahmet Davutoglu. Hüseyin Latif note qu'elle « considère l'Iran comme un pays ami, qui a le droit de produire de l'énergie nucléaire civile comme ses voisins ». Dans un contexte international peu favorable, la Turquie a tout intérêt au renforcement de ses liens avec l'Iran, et s'invente au fil des mois un rôle d'intermédiaire entre Téhéran et l'Occident.

BENOÎT BERTHELOT.

Iraq's North Seen as Next Trouble Spot

Arabs, Kurds and Smaller Ethnic Groups Face Off in Region

By SAM DAGHER

TUZ KHURMATU, Iraq Now that Iraq's lawmakers have come together to form a government, ending a stalemate that left the country rudderless for months, U.S. diplomats are focusing on another divide ethnic tensions in the north that threaten to rip the country asunder.

Parliament on Tuesday approved a partial cabinet headed by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, filling a vacuum that dates to inconclusive March polls. The breakthrough was the product of a U.S.-backed power-sharing deal, agreed to last month, that called for a unity government encompassing Iraq's main ethnic and sectarian factions.

But in Iraq's north, Arabs, Kurds and smaller ethnic groups continue to face off against each other over nearly a dozen patches of oil-rich territory that lie along a 300-mile arc just beyond Iraq's Kurdistan region.

Kurds, who already have a measure of autonomy in their region, are pushing for more. Members of other groups Arabs and the region's ethnic Turkmen, among others say Kurdish ambitions have gone too far.

Amid the standoff, about 9,600 American soldiers, accounting for about one-fifth of the total U.S. presence still in Iraq, are scrambling to keep the peace as the State Department and the United Nations try to forge a lasting political compromise before U.S. troops leave Iraq at the end of next year.

"No one knows what exactly is going to happen when we unplug completely from here," Col. Larry Swift, commander of U.S. Army forces in Kirkuk, an oil hub within the disputed area, said in an interview before his unit rotated out in early November.

The outcome of the American peace mission has ramifications across the country. Its success or failure could help determine whether Iraq splinters into several spheres of power: Kurdish,



Under U.S. supervision, a group of Iraqi Army soldiers, Peshmerga, a Kurdish military force, and Iraqi policemen patrolled one of the main security checkpoints outside Kirkuk in September. Scott Nelson for the WSJ.com

Sunni Arab and Shiite Arab. As Kurds have bolstered their power in the north, other groups, including Shiite leaders in Iraq's oil-rich south, have pushed for their own autonomy.

U.S. diplomats say Washington's No. 1 priority, following the formation of a new government, will be trying to broker a solution in the north. On Wednesday, U.S. Ambassador James F. Jeffrey said Washington is seeking formal authorization from the Iraqi government to maintain two temporary embassy branch offices in the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul. These, he said, would help "deal with the political issues up there in that very complicated area."

Underscoring the combustible atmosphere here, the region's security services are riven by competing factional loyalties. At the entrance to Tuz Khurmatu, this dusty town that straddles Iraq's northern border and the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, a barricaded compound houses an elite security team answering to Kurdish political leaders. But the town's police chief, a Turkman, takes his orders from the Arab-led provincial government seated in another town 60 miles away.

The mistrust has bred violence, making the region still one of the most dangerous for American and Iraqi forces. Unlike any other place in Iraq, where the U.S. mission officially became noncombat at the end of August, Americans here still man the front lines and form something more akin to a peacekeeping force. U.S. sol-

diers staff checkpoints shared uneasily by Kurdish forces and Iraqi army soldiers, and conduct joint patrols and operations with both sides, targeting insurgents.

In November, a U.S. soldier was killed in a small-arms attack by insurgents southwest of Tuz. The main U.S. base in Kirkuk, north of Tuz, remains the target of rocket attacks, prompting the U.N. in mid-October to temporarily evacuate expatriate staff.

Ethnic-based mistrust goes back decades here but intensified sharply after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein. For much of the past decade, Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen have battled on three fronts: over disputed boundaries across an area that is home to an array of ethnic and confessional allegiances; over control of Kirkuk; and over the fate of the region's oil and natural-gas wealth.

Kurds, pushed by their political leaders and backed up by Kurdish security forces, rushed to populate much of the disputed territories after 2003. They say they simply went back to places they were forced to flee when Mr. Hussein razed hundreds of Kurdish villages in the area.

"We will not accept compromise over Kirkuk's [Kurdish] identity," Masoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish enclave's Kurdistan Regional Government said in a speech this month.

In Baghdad's power-sharing deal, Mr. Barzani emerged as a kingmaker, exac-

ting a heavy price from Mr. Maliki in return for Kurdish parliamentary backing for a second term. Mr. Barzani demanded the government carry out a long-delayed census and referendum on the status of contested territory claimed by both Arabs and Kurds. Both measures would benefit the Kurds after years of staking claims to much of the disputed areas. Mr. Maliki acquiesced.

Arabs and Turkmens say they will boycott a planned census the first nationwide count in Iraq since 1987 citing fears that it will tighten the Kurdish political hold on the region.

All sides are watching and jockeying for position ahead of American forces' scheduled full departure next year.

U.S. forces have agreed to train and equip units of the Peshmerga, a Kurdish military force, to the same level as the federal Iraqi army, which answers to Arab-dominated Baghdad.

U.S. commanders say newly trained Kurdish forces will form a "regional guard" to patrol the disputed area and the northern borders with Syria, Iran and Turkey, alongside the Iraqi army. But ultimate control of the force remains up in the air. The units would technically fall under Iraq's federal "defense architecture," said Barham Salih, the Kurdistan Regional Government's prime minister. But in reality, he said, they would remain a separate, Kurdish-controlled force.

"If people expect us & to surrender

our arms and to surrender all our fate to the nice words of this and that, absolutely not," Mr. Salih says.

Meanwhile, Abdul-Rahman al-Obeidi, an influential Sunni Arab tribal leader from Kirkuk, is lobbying to stand up his own 6,300-strong "Army of the Arabian Knights" to counter the Kurdish influence. He says the Arab force will ensure a "balance of power" with the Kurds.

A senior U.S. official in Baghdad said Washington "would be concerned about any suggestion that Iraq's security would be better served by the establishment of new security militias."

Rudaw.Net 28 December 2010

10,000 Peshmerga in Baghdad To Protect Kurds From Possible Coup

By SAMAN BASHARATI

SULAIMANI, Iraqi Kurdistan: Ten thousand members of the Kurdish peshmerga forces have been sent to Baghdad to protect Jalal Talabani – the Kurdish president of Iraq – and all other Kurdish officials there from the possibility of a military coup, says a senior official from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of Iraqi Kurdistan's two ruling parties.

This is the first time since 2003 that a top Kurdish official has acknowledged the threat to Kurdish politicians of a military coup in Baghdad.

Mala Bakhteyar, a senior member of the PUK's political bureau, said in an interview with Kurdish television channel Gale Kurdistan that the PUK had prepared for the "worst case scenario," including military coups.

"The Kurds [in Baghdad] are one of the main political blocs," said Bakhteyar. "Currently 10,000 peshmerga are deployed there to ensure that



On the march: Kurdish peshmerga forces bearing Iraqi and Kurdish flags.—— Photo/ft.com

Kurdish officials and [PUK leader] Talabani are protected from any plots. It's not as if we are just sitting there in Baghdad quietly waiting for a plot to come along."

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG)'s minister for peshmerga affairs, Sheikh Ja'far Mustapha, confirmed to Rudaw that there were at least "a few thousand peshmerga" stationed in Baghdad to protect Kurdish leaders.

"[They] are in Baghdad to protect Jalal Talabani and other Kurdish officials and...are under the authority of the Iraqi Defense Ministry," said Mustafa

However, he said he did not know if the number of peshmerga in Baghdad was as high as 10,000.

"Because [they] take orders from the Iraqi military chief and Jalal Talabani, we don't have anything to do with them," said Mustafa, adding that Kurds should always be aware of the possibility of a military coup.

"The Kurds should be aware of the Iraqi situation and their own situation," he said.

However, Jabar Yawar, a spokesman for the Peshmerga Ministry, said there was no real threat of a military coup against the Kurds in Baghdad.

"I don't feel there is any threat toward Kurds from the Iraqi government, and we don't have any problems with any country to justify preparing military forces [for this]," said Yawar. "The peshmergas in Baghdad are only there to protect Talabani and the Iraqi Parliament."

Confirming this viewpoint, Shwan Muhammad Darwesh, a Kurdish lawmaker in the Iraqi government, ruled out any possibility of a coup against the Kurds.

"The era of military coups in Iraq is over," said Darwesh.



DECEMBER 23, 2010

Southern Iraqi city eyes break from Baghdad

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN,
Associated Press

BASRA, Iraq — Over a recent dinner, two friends — both local businessmen — dished over a simmering topic in Iraq's oil-rich port city: whether to boost Basra's future by partially breaking away from the federal government in Baghdad.

"How long will Basra act as Iraq's milk cow while we are starving?" Najim Edan said, arguing that the city and province that surrounds it could thrive if it stopped sending more money to the Iraqi capital than it gets back in government aid.

His friend Mohammed Abbas was pessimistic, fearing conflict between local factions and corruption if Basra declares autonomy.

"Believe me, we will not get the milk we want," Abbas replied. "And if we do, we will not get it fresh, but sour."

It's a constant complaint in Basra, where a boom in foreign oil investment has spurred a push to create a self-ruled region in Iraq's south. The constitution allows provinces — or groups of them — to break away into autonomous regions akin to Kurdistan in the north, and Basra's provincial council has twice sought to hold a referendum, only to meet stalling from Baghdad. The movement is likely to rev up once more now that a new government in Baghdad was formed this week.

An autonomy move in Basra could further weaken Iraq's central government by dividing the nation and lead to

tussles over control of oil, as have occurred between Baghdad and the Kurds. A breakaway Basra could also fall into turmoil as local factions vie for power — and could come under heavy influence of neighboring Iran, which already is looking to increase its economic ties with the mainly Shiite province.

Basra is strategically crucial for Iraq. With a population of about 3 million people, Basra is Iraq's second-largest province and home to about 70 percent of the country's proven oil reserves of 143.1 billion barrels. The province, located on the Persian Gulf bordering Kuwait and Iran, is Iraq's only outlet to the sea and is the hub for most of Iraq's oil exports of nearly 1.9 million barrels a day to the international market.

Still, Basra looks like a city forgotten by history, battered by Iraq's repeated conflicts, starting with the 1980-1988 war with Iran through the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

Impoverished residential settlements crowd its outskirts. Piles of garbage and pools of stagnant water and sewage mar its dust-covered streets where donkeys, stray dogs, sheep and goats roam. Some neighborhoods endure water and electricity shortages. The biggest new investment is coming from Iran — including a nearly \$1 billion plan to build housing, hotels and a mall.

"While the foreign companies, mainly the oil ones, are entering Basra to tap into its resources, Basrawis are being crushed by deprivation and poverty," said Wail Abdul-Latif, a former law-



The central government in Baghdad resists Basra's provincial breakaway efforts

maker who is the chief architect of Basra's autonomy bid.

Oil promises a bright future for Basra. Of the 15 oil and gas deals Iraq has awarded to private firms since last year — the first deals of their kind in more than three decades — six are for fields in Basra province.

The province is entitled to \$1 for each barrel of oil produced or refined, and for every 150 cubic meters of gas produced, along with 5 percent from the border-crossing and port revenues. In theory, the oil and gas share alone should amount now to around \$2 million a day for Basra. But Baghdad must approve each project before releasing the funding for it and that is not happening, according to the head of Basra's provincial council, Jabar Ameen Jabir.

With autonomy, the province could try to claim a larger share of oil profits and greater say over how they are used. It would also get a bigger slice of the federal budget given to provinces to fund local administration and security. Basra received \$190 million this year, but as an autonomous region it could claim up to \$9 billion.

The push can be traced back to the 1920s, when a group of Basra's elite demanded it be declared a Gulf statelet under British protection like neighboring Kuwait. The British, who wanted a strong central government in

Baghdad, ignored the calls.

After Saddam's ouster, the Shiite fundamentalist Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq pushed for an autonomous southern region of nine Shiite-majority provinces, including Basra. But the campaign failed to win support. Another attempt in 2008 failed when it was drowned out by calls for nationalism by political allies of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki ahead of provincial elections.

But the tide is turning, and many of al-Maliki's backers now support holding an autonomy referendum.

Declaring autonomy requires approval in a referendum by the province's population. Holding a referendum requires a motion by either one third of the provincial council or one tenth of eligible voters. Once that is attained, the province turns to Baghdad and requests that the national Independent Election Commission organize the vote.

Baghdad can't refuse — but it can drag its feet. Basra's council has twice asked Baghdad to organize the vote. The first time in September, federal officials demanded additional documents to prove the necessary support. The second attempt, in October, bogged down with the nine-month delay in forming a federal government, which has held up projects across Iraq.

Parliament finally approved al-Maliki's new government on Dec. 21.

"There is a comprehensive centralized control from the ministries in Baghdad that represents a major obstacle in developing the province," Jabir said. "We are facing a clear centralized prejudice."

Yet fears abound that self-

rule could unleash political violence in Basra. Al-Maliki's State of Law party currently dominates the provincial council, but radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr's movement — including its militia — holds considerable influence in the city.

"Disputes between the political parties or tribes could erupt, with major influence

from neighboring countries," Yarub al-Mihamadawi of the Basra-based Dialogue, a private cultural institution, said.

Worries of turmoil also hung over Abbas and Edan's dinner conversation.

"That environment will then create a hotbed for corruption and gangs and we will

suffer," said Abbas, a 40-year old car dealer.

Edan, a 41-year-old electrical engineer, likened that possibility to a necessary growing pain.

"This will be only at the beginning, and then everything will be sorted out," Edan said.



Turkish government, pro-Kurdish party quarrel over 'autonomy'

ANKARA /Hürriyet Daily News

The Turkish prime minister has harshly criticized the main pro-Kurdish party's demand for autonomy and the broader use of the Kurdish language, accusing it of sabotaging the democratization of Turkey.

Turkey's common language is Turkish. Any initiative to change this reality cannot be accepted. This is a matter of social peace and unity, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan told parliamentary deputies late Sunday during budget talks at the Parliament.

Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, co-chair Selahattin Demirtas responded to Erdoan on Monday. He cannot stop the change with threats and insults, Demirtas told reporters in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir, adding that they were ready even to die in the struggle. We are trying to deepen the brotherhood while the prime minister is deepening the division.

Erdoan on Sunday was tight-lipped about BDP proposals under the title of democratic autonomy, which envision a semi-autonomous Kurdish region with its own parliament, flag and self-defense force. Outlined in a draft by the Democratic Society Congress, or DTK, an umbrella organization of pro-Kurdish groups, the proposals prompted investigations from a local court and the Supreme Court of Appeals.

Bringing these issues into the public debate will never serve democracy, freedoms, social peace or brotherhood, the prime minister said. Noting that Turkey will hold general elections in June, Erdoan accused the BDP of trying to redesign domestic politics in line with terror organizations' approaches, a reference to the outlawed Kurdistan

Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, co-leader Selahattin Demirtas (L) speaks to reporters in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir. AA photo



Workers Party, or PKK, which is listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

It's a great unfairness to introduce these unserious projects as the demands of my Kurdish brothers. To what extent do the owners of these proposals represent my Kurdish citizens? How much of [Turkey's] East and Southeast do they represent? the prime minister asked.

Reiterating that he will never acknowledge the PKK and its affiliates as representatives of Turkey's Kurdish population, Erdoan said: Those who talk about democracy and freedoms are preventing my citizens from using their citizenship rights. They are doing this through threats and pressure. He added that the government will never allow any sort of surgery to divide Turkey.

BDP leader says PM fueling nationalism

Criticizing Erdoan for fueling nationalism through his statements, Demirtas said Monday that the BDP was trying to defend people's right to use their mother tongue freely. This is not

racism or ethnic division. It's to protect a banned language. We believe in democracy and peace, he said, arguing that the projects put forward by pro-Kurdish groups aim to prevent division in the country.

But if the ruling party is determined to insult Kurds and drive them away from the state, they should come clean and openly say it, Demirtas said. His [Erdoan's] comments will only make the Turkish nationalists happy. The prime minister seems to want to walk hand-in-hand with the nationalists ahead of the general elections; this is his choice. What he is doing will just deepen the crisis.

Demirtas also used a religious reference to criticize the prime minister, accusing Erdoan of defying Allah.

Erdoan says, I will make you all similar, my nation is one, my language is one, whereas Allah says, I created every one of you different, the BDP co-chair said. Mr. Prime Minister, which holy book says that? How is this being a Muslim?

Du kémalisme vers une démocratie libérale



Sahin Alpaya
ZamanFrance.fr

Les lecteurs qui lisent régulièrement mes chroniques connaissent mon point de vue sur l'évolution politique de la Turquie. Je pense, que depuis la guerre froide elle suit un processus qui lui permet de passer de l'état de démocratie apparente, sous la tutelle de l'armée, à celui de démocratie libérale.

La semaine dernière, d'importants événements se sont produits dans le cadre de ce processus. Jeudi dernier, le procès d'environ deux cent militaires encore en fonction ou à la retraite, dont d'anciens chefs de l'armée de terre et des forces maritimes, ainsi qu'une dizaine de généraux et d'amiraux, a commencé. Ils sont accusés d'avoir organisé un complot visant à renverser le gouvernement élu en 2003. Ce plan avait pour nom de code Sledgehammer. L'affaire Sledgehammer—qui désigne ce procès, en préparation depuis octobre 2008, d'un gang qui s'est donné le nom d' « Ergenekon » (en référence à une vallée mythique, anciennement célébrée par les Turcs) composé de militaires retraités, de commandants de l'armée, d'anciens chefs de la police, de journalistes, d'hommes d'affaires et d'autres suspects tous impliqués dans le complot visant à instaurer le chaos dans le pays afin d'ouvrir la voie à un coup d'Etat militaire—montre de tout évidence que ceux qui conspirent contre les gouvernements démocratiquement élus ne pourront plus désormais échapper à la justice.

Fin de l'impunité pour les putschistes

Nous parlons d'un pays qui a déjà connu ces cinquante dernières années énormément de coups d'Etat militaires aboutis ou non. Le fait qu'il réussisse désormais à juger les fomenteurs de coups d'Etat peut être expliqué par le fait que les citoyens en général, mais aussi certains membres de l'élite administrative et militaire, ont finalement réalisé que l'implication de l'armée

dans la vie politique diminue son prestige et surtout son professionnalisme. Ces procès prouvent-ils que la Turquie a réussi à instaurer un contrôle total de l'armée par la société civile ? Non, mais ils montrent que les citoyens ne toléreront désormais plus aucun coup militaire.

Le deuxième événement important qui s'est produit la semaine dernière est le fait que Selahattin Demirtas, le chef du parti pro kurde pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), ait déclaré que désormais la région où il y a une majorité de kurdes serait entièrement bilingue. Il a incité les vendeurs dans les magasins à parler kurde durant leurs transactions quotidiennes, les entreprises et les marques à prendre des noms kurdes, et les restaurants à proposer des cartes et menus en kurde. Il a insisté en particulier sur le fait que désormais tout ceci était légal. Lorsque le président du Parlement a déclaré que le fait de parler kurde au sein du Parlement pourrait conduire à une division entre les partis, Demirtas a répondu, dans une de ces déclarations, que le BDSP n'exigeait pas que le kurde soit parlé au Parlement, ajoutant que son parti ne ferait jamais aucune demande qui pourrait « diviser le pays et créer un conflit ethnique ». L'Etat-major de l'armée de l'air turque (TSK) qui s'était montré particulièrement silencieux depuis la nomination de Gen Isik Kosaner comme chef de l'Etat-major, a brisé son silence et a répondu aux prises de position du BDP en déclarant sur son site : « nous sommes concernés par le fait qu'un certain débat public actuel concernant « notre langue » évolue d'une façon tellement radicale qu'il risque d'altérer les fondements philosophiques de notre République ».

Tourner la page du passé

Le commentaire du président Abdullah Gül, par rapport aux déclarations du BDP, ressemblait à une incitation à la vigilance, peut-être pour les deux partis : "La langue officielle en Turquie c'est le turc, mais il y a aussi d'autres langues qui sont parlées dans notre pays... Alors que nous traversons une période où nous avons commencé à considérer nos

différences comme étant une richesse plutôt qu'une chose dont il faut avoir peur, comme par le passé, des comportements plus responsables et prudents nous aideraient plus efficacement en ce sens". Il n'y a pas de doutes sur le fait que les prises de positions du BDP sont une initiative légitime vis à vis d'un régime où les minorités ethniques et linguistiques ont légalement le droit de parler leur langue maternelle. Cela est évidemment en phase avec le processus démocratique en cours en Turquie répondant aux normes européennes. Si nous voulons vraiment que ce processus ait lieu, il est clair qu'il faut que la démocratie libérale remplace le kémalisme, décrit par l'Etat-major comme étant le "fondement philosophique de notre République".

Le kémalisme, qui fait référence à la laïcité nationaliste turque, repose sur trois piliers. Le premier pilier est la doctrine qui estime que les citoyens ne sont pas assez matures pour décider par eux-mêmes et qu'ils ont besoin d'être guidés par une élite éclairée. Le deuxième pilier se base sur une conception autoritaire de la laïcité, par laquelle l'Etat monopolise, contrôle la religion et limite les libertés religieuses. Enfin, le troisième pilier repose sur un système culturel unifié qui a comme but de rendre homogène toute la population, en la transformant en une nation qui ne parle que turc, et qui adhère à la culture turque et se plie à la forme de l'islam instituée par l'Etat. Les politiques kémalistes, en place depuis la fondation de la République, ont rencontré des résistances de la part des citoyens et ont pu être mises en place seulement par le moyen de mesures oppressives. Ces politiques ne peuvent plus être appliquées dans la Turquie actuelle, ni dans un monde de plus en plus libéralisé et globalisé. La Turquie pourra évoluer plus rapidement vers la consolidation d'une démocratie libérale si l'Etat-Major arrive à comprendre cela, mais surtout si l'opposition du CHP le comprend aussi. Cela n'a pas vraiment d'importance pour le pays si le CHP, dont l'assemblée générale a élu récemment ses nouveaux chefs, est réellement en accord avec le fait qu'il déclare être un Parti social-démocrate. Ce qui compte, c'est que grâce à ses nouveaux chefs, il s'est engagé à le devenir.

La question kurde à nouveau au premier plan de l'actualité politique turque

Jean Marcou

Observatoire de la Vie Politique Turque (OVIPO)

La question kurde occupe à nouveau le devant de la scène politique turque, depuis la tenue d'une table ronde, le week-end dernier à Diyarbakır, à l'initiative du DTK (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi, Congrès pour une société démocratique), ce portail d'organisations de la société civile kurde. Cette table ronde a en effet débattu des voies possibles pour établir un système accordant une autonomie aux Kurdes, sans pour autant déstabiliser l'Etat turc. Les participants ont notamment évoqué une structure fédérale et la création d'un parlement régional.

Cette initiative a provoqué, le 20 décembre, une réaction très vive du président de la Grande Assemblée nationale, Mehmet Ali Şahin. Rappelant qu'il n'y avait qu'un seul parlement en Turquie, celui qu'il préside, il a demandé au BDP, la formation politique kurde, qui siège dans son hémicycle, de se démarquer de telles positions, au risque, si elle ne le faisait pas, «d'avoir à en subir les conséquences». Cette menace n'a pas été appréciée par le leader du BDP, Selahattin Demirtaş (au centre sur la photo), qui a estimé qu'elle était empreinte de l'esprit qui avait motivé le coup d'Etat du 12 septembre 1980. La polémique a été suivie finalement, le 21 décembre 2010, par une rencontre entre les deux hommes, destinée à faire baisser une tension qui s'est nourrie, ces derniers jours, non seulement des propositions de la table ronde du DTK à Diyarbakır, mais également de plusieurs incidents, qui ont défrayé la chronique.

A plusieurs reprises, Selahattin Demirtaş, a évoqué l'idée d'une accélération règlement de la question kurde en Turquie, sans attendre des mesures gouvernementales, par le biais d'initiatives prises par les organisations et la société civile kurdes elles-mêmes. Ainsi, a-t-on vu récemment des députés s'exprimer en kurde dans l'enceinte du parlement, et Selahattin Demirtaş proposer que l'on généralise, dans les provinces kurdes de Turquie, une dénomination bilingue (turc-kurde) des rues et des sites, comme cela se fait en Catalogne, depuis que celle-ci a retrouvé son autonomie en 1977. Ces développements sont intervenus, alors même qu'il y a peu, le leader du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, tout en annonçant la prorogation de la trêve qu'il avait décidée, avant le référendum du 12 septembre dernier, a développé l'idée d'un système fédéral, en encourageant les organisations kurdes à prendre des initiatives en ce sens. Avant d'évoquer la création d'un parlement, le DTK avait ainsi proposé, au début du mois de décembre, la mise en place d'une force de sécurité autonome, destinée à lutter contre la criminalité dans les provinces kur-



des.

Cet ensemble de propositions et d'initiatives montrent que la question kurde est entrée dans une nouvelle phase. Après l'échec de l'ouverture kurde du gouvernement, à la fin de l'an passé, et le regain des actions de guérilla, qui avaient marqué le printemps 2010, les organisations kurdes semblent avoir adopté une stratégie d'action civique, qui consiste à travailler concrètement sur le terrain, en procédant aux avancées culturelles, économiques ou politiques qui peuvent être conduites, dans le cadre légal actuel, et en espérant que ce mouvement incitera le gouvernement à bouger enfin. Alors même que des élections législatives se profilent à l'horizon 2011, le gouvernement se retrouve néanmoins, dans une situation délicate, pris entre son désir de préserver le statu quo qu'il a négocié avec les Kurdes, à l'occasion de la tenue du référendum de septembre dernier, et la nécessité de ne pas prêter le flanc à des réactions nationalistes.

Ces dernières ne sont pas à exclure puisque le procureur en chef de la Cour de cassation, Abdurrahman Yalçınkaya, vient d'ouvrir une information judiciaire contre le BDP, à l'issue de la table ronde de Diyarbakır. Ce redoutable magistrat, qui a déjà obtenu la dissolution du DTP, le prédécesseur du BDP, et qui avait engagé une procédure de dissolution contre l'AKP, en 2008, entend démontrer qu'il existe des liens organiques entre les DTK et le BDP, et s'appuyer sur les propositions fédéralistes de la table ronde de dimanche dernier, pour démontrer que le parti parlementaire kurde contrevient à la législation sur les partis politiques en soutenant des projets qui remettent en cause l'unité de la République. Une démarche contre laquelle le député kurde, Bengi Yıldız s'est élevé, le 22 décembre dernier, en rappelant, qu'il n'y avait pas de liens organiques entre le BDP et le DTK mais seulement une participation individuelle de certains membres du BDP aux activités du DTK. Bengi Yıldız a, en outre, mis en garde le gouvernement contre les effets que pourraient avoir une éventuelle dissolution du BDP, en estimant qu'elle ruinerait les efforts de pacification et de négociations qui se développent depuis les débuts de la trêve proclamée par le PKK. Le député kurde a également rappelé que la Cour Européenne des Droits de l'Homme venait de condamner l'Etat turc pour la dissolution de l'un des prédécesseurs du BDP : le HADEP. Depuis le début des années 1990, 6 formations politiques kurdes ont été dissoutes par la Cour constitutionnelle : le parti du travail du peuple (HEP- Halkın Emek Partisi), le parti de la démocratie (DEP - Demokrasi Partisi), le Parti de la liberté et de la

démocratie (ÖZDEP - Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi), le Parti de la démocratie du peuple (HADEP - Halkın Demokrasi Partisi), le parti démocratique du peuple (DEHAP - Demokratik Halk Partisi) et le Parti pour une société démocratique (DTP - Demokratik Toplum Partisi). Le BDP espère ne pas faire à nouveau cette expérience.

En tout état de cause, dans un esprit de conciliation, à l'issue de sa rencontre avec Mehmet Ali Sahin, Selahattin Demirtas a assuré que son parti ne demandait pas l'usage de deux langues au sein du parlement turc, et que les députés du BDP n'avaient prononcé quelques phrases en kurde que pour attirer l'attention sur leur situation. Dans une démarche, à nouveau très catalane, le leader kurde a poursuivi en déclarant : « Oui, la langue officielle de ce pays est le turc. Mais les

autres langues maternelles doivent aussi pouvoir être librement utilisées en public... » Pour sa part, le leader du parlement, Mehmet Ali Sahin, a qualifié la rencontre de « productive », mais il a estimé que les membres du parlement devaient « prêter plus d'attention à l'unité du pays ». Il faut espérer que cette mise au point contribuera au maintien d'un échange qui ne soit pas un dialogue de sourds, car il est essentiel pour promouvoir une solution politique durable.

JM

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IRAK: QUATRE MORTS DANS UN POSTE DE POLICE ATTAQUÉ PAR DES KAMIKAZES

MOSSOUL — 29 décembre. 2010- (AFP)

DEUX KAMIKAZES ont visé mercredi matin un poste de police du nord de l'Irak, tuant quatre policiers, dont un officier qui avait supervisé la semaine dernière une opération contre la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaïda.

Le double attentat suicide a eu lieu vers 7H00 (4H00 GMT) dans le quartier de Qabr al-Binat, dans l'ouest de Mossoul, deuxième ville du pays située à 350 km au nord de Bagdad.

"Les deux kamikazes visaient le lieutenant-colonel Chamil Ahmed Oglah, qui a été tué", a indiqué un responsable de la police locale à l'AFP.

Un troisième activiste équipé d'une ceinture d'explosifs a été abattu par la police avant de pouvoir activer sa bombe.

Trois autres policiers ont péri dans l'attaque, a indiqué à Bagdad une source au ministère de l'Intérieur.

Mais ce bilan pourrait s'aggraver, car 90% du bâtiment a été détruit par l'explosion, selon le policier de Mossoul, ce qui implique que d'autres victimes pourraient être coincées sous les décombres.

Les forces de sécurité ont fermé les rues proches du poste de police, interdisant son accès aux journalistes.

Cette attaque pourrait être un acte de représailles contre le lieutenant-colonel Oglah, qui avait commandé la semaine dernière une opération contre une cellule d'Al-Qaïda au cours de laquelle un dirigeant de la branche irakienne du réseau avait péri, a indiqué le responsable de la police de Mossoul.

Avant de mourir mercredi, l'officier avait été la cible de quatre tentatives d'as-

sassinats.

Les forces de sécurité irakiennes demeurent des cibles privilégiées des mouvements insurgés en Irak, et notamment de la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaïda.

C'est elle qui avait notamment revendiqué la vingtaine d'attentats perpétrés le 25 août, au cours de laquelle 53 personnes, dont plus de la moitié de policiers, avaient péri.

Les violences en Irak ont nettement diminué par rapport au pic observé en 2006 et 2007. Et novembre a été le mois le moins meurtrier en un an pour la population irakienne, selon des chiffres officiels.

Pour autant, les attentats demeurent très fréquents en Irak, notamment dans la province de Ninive, dont Mossoul est la capitale, en raison de tensions ethniques et confessionnelles qui compliquent la lutte contre Al-Qaïda.

Les relations entre Arabes sunnites et Kurdes sont particulièrement tendues dans la province en raison de la volonté des autorités du Kurdistan de rattacher une partie de ce territoire à leur région autonome, qui regroupe les trois provinces de Dohouk, Erbil et Souleimaniyeh.

Mossoul se trouve au cœur d'une bande de territoire de 650 km de long, de la Syrie à l'Iran, que se disputent le gouvernement central et les autorités du Kurdistan.

Ninive compte en outre des minorités de chrétiens assyriens, de Chabaks, de Turcomans et de Yazidis.

Malgré la baisse des violences, la sécurité a été citée par le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki comme un des dossiers prioritaires de l'action de son nouveau gouvernement, qui a obtenu la semaine dernière la confiance du Parlement.

De nombreuses capitales étrangères ont salué la formation de ce gouvernement, plus de neuf mois après les législatives, comme une étape cruciale pour tourner en Irak la page de près de huit années de violences.



Turquie: une journaliste kurde condamnée à 138 ans de prison

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 30 décembre 2010 (AFP)

EMINE DEMIR, une ancienne rédactrice d'un quotidien kurde de Turquie, a été condamnée jeudi par un tribunal de Diyarbakir (sud-est), à 138 ans de prison pour propagande en faveur des rebelles kurdes, a rapporté l'agence Anatolie.

Mme Demir d'Azadiya Welat (liberté du Pays) a été reconnue coupable d'avoir défendu dans ses écrits la cause du Parti du travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), une organisation considérée comme terroriste par de nombreux pays, un crime sanctionné par le code pénal turc.

Sa peine a été alourdie, le tribunal soulignant qu'elle avait enfreint réguliè-

rement les lois entre 2008 et 2009.

Les juges ont émis un mandat d'arrêt contre la journaliste qui comparait à son procès comme prévenue libre.

Elle peut encore faire appel de la sentence qui a coïncidé avec l'arrivée dans la ville, la plus importante du sud-est turc à majorité kurde, du chef de l'Etat turc Abdullah Gül.

La Turquie compte une communauté kurde estimée entre 10 et 15 millions de personnes. Plusieurs lois ont été adoptées ces dernières années en faveur de l'octroi de droits culturels aux Kurdes pour renforcer notamment les chances du pays d'adhérer à l'Union européenne.

Cependant les médias kurdes sont parfois la cible d'harcèlement judiciaires notamment lorsqu'ils défendent la ligne du PKK.

Plusieurs journalistes kurdes sont emprisonnés en Turquie pour avoir fait l'apologie du PKK ou de son chef emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan.

Kurds' Demand for 'Democratic Autonomy' in Turkey Causes Backlash

By FIRAT KELEHKI / Rudaw

Turkish officials have strongly denounced Turkish Kurds' recent demands for "democratic autonomy," formulated in a draft proposal by the Democratic Society Congress (DTK) and the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

"The proposal is simply pre-election political propaganda; it will produce no results," said Turkish Interior Minister Besir Atalay in a recent press conference.

Altan Tan, a DTK member, said no decision had been made about the proposal's future.

"We simply presented the proposal for discussion," said Tan. "We have gathered opinions on the proposal from 70 to 80 well-known writers in Turkey."

He said another conference may be held in a few months to decide what would be done with the proposal.

Atalay described the democratic autonomy proposals as a divisive and "dangerous trap" for Turkey, and said his government already allowed Turkish Kurds their rights, including those of language.

"Turkey is one country," said Atalay. "Turkey's official language is Turkish, but whoever wants to speak their mother tongue can do so in Turkey. As well as this, the political party law has changed, so today other languages can be used for political campaigns."

Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan also strongly criticized the proposal as a political "trap," and denounced the Kurdish demands for a more decentralized government.

"Turkey is one nation with one language – Turkish," said Erdogan. "We are against a politically decentralized system, [although] we support decentralization in services which can be managed through the municipalities alone."

However, BDP co-chairman Salahadin Demirtash said Erdogan was trying to compete with God's authority over such matters.

"God said: 'I created you in different groups,'" said Demirtash. "If you think it is your duty to unify all the people, Mr. Prime Minister, then tell



Kurdish demands for "democratic autonomy" are being strongly denounced by Turkish officials.

us what kind of Muslim you are. In which book is it written that all people are one?"

He said the prime minister was attacking the basic right of all humans to have their own language, identity and culture.

"If you think you [Erdogan] can erase all these to create one people by scaring the population with a wave of nationalism, then I, as the chairman of the BDP, tell you that the Kurds are not scared," said Demirtash, adding that Kurds simply wanted to co-exist in Turkey in a spirit of "brotherhood."

Nationalists say two languages will partition Turkey

The leftist and nationalist Turkish parties criticized what they viewed as the prime minister's "silence" over the Kurd's democratic autonomy proposal, and described the proposal as a threat to Turkey.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, head of the Republican People's Party (CHP), accused Erdogan of not being ready to take action over the Kurds' call for autonomy.

"What promises might he have made behind closed doors?" said Oglu, adding that officially recognizing two languages in Turkey was a step toward the partitioning of the country.

"Belgium is a very good example for us," he said. "As a result of them using two different languages, they have been divided. This sort of attitude does not bring society closer together; it divides society."

A statement from the Nationalist

Movement Party (MHP) warned all those involved to behave rationally.

"This proposal is a preparation for uprising," it said.

BDP accused of wanting to abolish Turkish constitution

The draft proposal for democratic autonomy was first discussed at a special conference in Diyarbakir on 18th December, attended by a number of Turkish and Kurdish politicians and academics.

The proposal dealt with eight main aspects of autonomy for the Kurds: political, legal, security, economic, social, cultural, environmental and diplomatic.

Midhet Sancar – a university professor who, although invited to the conference, said he was unable to attend – described the draft proposal as a "positive" step, as he said the BDP often demanded that Kurdish problems be addressed but had not offered any solutions up till now.

"Now the BDP has offered a proposal, so let it be discussed," said Sancar.

However, Rashad Dughro, an MHP lawmaker in the northern city of Tokat, told Rudaw the BDP was attempting to abolish the Turkish constitution.

"We will not allow the partitioning of Turkey," said Dughro. "The official language of Turkey is Turkish. When a language other than Turkish is used in Turkey, it is a strategy to partition Turkey."

Iraqi Kurds push for recognition of oil deals

The insistence from the Kurds could foil Iraq's ambitious plans to raise daily oil exports to 2.25 million barrels in 2011.

By SINAN SALAHEDDIN Associated Press

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Kurds said Tuesday they won't resume oil exports from their self-ruled territory unless the central government recognizes the contracts they have already signed on their own with international energy companies.



In this May 31, 2009 file photo, an employee works at Tawke oil fields in the semiautonomous... (AP Photo)

The Kurds' condition could foil ambitious Iraqi plans to raise daily oil exports to 2.25 million barrels in 2011 from the current 1.9 million. Oil revenues account for nearly 95 percent of Iraq's budget as the energy-rich nation tries to rebuild the country after decades of wars and international sanctions.

Since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled the regime of Saddam Hussein, the Kurds have sought greater control over oil in their autonomous region in northern Iraq while Baghdad has argued that oil is a national resource under the central government's control.

Ali Hussein Balo, an adviser to the Kurdish Ministry of Natural Resources said the crude-rich region can significantly contribute to the nation's target of raising oil exports next year by shipping 150,000 barrels a day out of the country, but only



Iraqi oil minister Abdul-Karim Elaibi speaks to reporters in Baghdad, Iraq, Monday, Dec. 27, 2010....(AP)

if all "our deals are recognized officially in a signed paper by Baghdad," he told the Associated Press.

Iraqi Kurds have signed more than two dozen production sharing agreements with mid-sized companies from Turkey, U.K., Austria, U.S., Canada, Korea and China. Under those deals, the companies are entitled to a share of the profits from the oil produced.

The deals are deemed illegal by the Baghdad central government that has only awarded 15 oil and gas service contracts to international companies since 2008.

Baghdad managed to negotiate more attractive terms in its deals, paying developers just a flat fee for each barrel produced, rather than surrendering a share of the profits. They do not recognize the Kurdish deals and refuse to honor the production sharing agreements.

The Kurds started exports in June 2009. They were halted few months later amid disagreements with Baghdad over payments.

Iraq's new oil minister, Abdul-Karim Elaibi, last week declared the dispute over how private companies accounted for equipment costs and other expenses for reimbursement has been settled, clearing the way for the exports to resume.

Elaibi said Baghdad would receive all the oil produced for export and would pay only the costs incurred by the developers.

"Baghdad wants everything free of charge," Balo said by phone from Irbil, the capital of the Kurdish autonomous region in northern Iraq. "We can't do that since we are committed to the companies to have a share in the produced oil," he said.

In 2004, the Oslo-based DNO became the first independent Western oil company to secure an oil deal in Iraq after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion by signing a production sharing contract with the Kurds to develop the Tawke field in Dahouk province.

Le Kurdistan, abri de Noël pour les chrétiens d'Irak

Ammar Ablahad a quitté Bagdad pour le Kurdistan irakien, résolu à fêter Noël avec sa femme et son bébé sans craindre un attentat.

par Namo Abdulla / (Reuters)

AINKAOUA, Irak -

"La différence est complète", dit cet ingénieur des travaux publics âgé de 32 ans qui s'est joint à des milliers d'autres chrétiens d'Irak partis pour le Nord à la suite d'attaques meurtrières et de menaces persistantes contre une communauté chrétienne qui ne cesse de diminuer.

Le plus sanglant de ces attentats a fait 52 morts le 31 octobre en pleine messe à la basilique syriaque Notre-Dame du Perpétuel secours de Bagdad, lors d'une prise d'otages suivie d'un assaut des forces de sécurité.

Dans sa bénédiction "urbi et orbi", le pape Benoît XVI a exprimé samedi l'espoir que Noël allège la douleur des communautés chrétiennes d'Irak et du Moyen-Orient, où le Vatican redoute que la violence n'accélère un exode chrétien.

Soucieux de prévenir de nouveaux bains de sang, plusieurs dirigeants chrétiens ont recommandé à leurs coreligionnaires de fêter Noël avec discrétion et de limiter les cérémonies aux prières et aux messes.

Le risque de nouveaux attentats a amené les forces de sécurité irakiennes à mettre en place des murs de protection surmontés de fils barbelés autour de plusieurs églises de Bagdad. Les décorations de Noël brillaient par leur absence.

Mais à 300 km environ au nord de la capitale, à Aïnkaoua et dans d'autres villes kurdes, l'atmosphère est à l'allégresse. Les églises sont ornées de lumières fluorescentes et de banderoles tandis que des haut-parleurs diffusent musique et chants à plein volume.

OASIS SEMI-AUTONOME

Le Kurdistan est une oasis relative en Irak depuis 1991, année où la région a acquis le statut d'enclave

semi-autonome sous parrainage occidental. Elle passe désormais pour un havre de sécurité dans un pays globalement dangereux.

La veille de Noël, des milliers de fidèles étaient rassemblés à l'église Mar Youssouf d'Aïnkaoua et dans sa cour extérieure, ornée de lumières vives et d'un grand sapin de Noël.

Des dizaines de policiers armés de mitraillettes montaient la garde autour de l'église. Des barrages étaient en place hors de la ville afin de prévenir toute attaque, a indiqué le lieutenant Raouaz Azad, directeur de la police de la route.

Devant l'église Mar Youssouf, des voitures couvertes de serpentins de couleur et arborant de petits pères Noël sur leurs tableaux de bord avançaient péniblement, pare-choc contre pare-choc, au son de la chanson "Jingle bells" (Vive le vent).

Dans certaines rues d'Aïnkaoua, des enfants attendaient le père Noël. Chaque année, des hommes habillés en rouge parcourent la ville en 4x4 et distribuent des cadeaux.

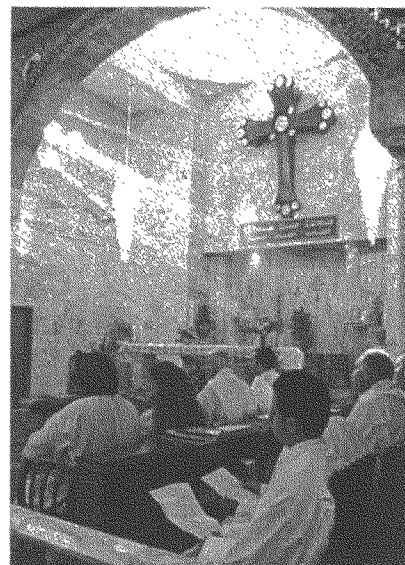
A Erbil, capitale du Kurdistan irakien, des centres commerciaux sont ornés d'arbres de Noël et de banderoles proclamant "Joyeux Noël".

"Il est devenu impossible d'avoir ce genre de chose à Bagdad", note Ablahad en se protégeant du froid devant une église d'Aïnkaoua avec ses proches.

Le Haut-Commissariat de l'Onu pour les réfugiés a indiqué la semaine dernière qu'un millier de familles chrétiennes, soit environ 6.000 personnes, avaient gagné le Kurdistan irakien en provenance de Bagdad, Mossoul et d'autres régions.

Les chrétiens d'Irak étaient naguère un million et demi. On estime aujourd'hui leur nombre à 850.000 environ sur une population totale de 30 millions d'habitants.

Bayane Aoudech, femme de 50 ans, a déclaré que même ses voisins musulmans participaient à l'atmosphère festive de Noël. "Eux aussi ont acheté un arbre de Noël", a-t-elle dit



Dans une église à Kirkuk, à 250 km au nord de Bagdad. Au Kurdistan, les chrétiens ont pu fêter Noël dans un climat moins tendu que dans la capitale irakienne. (Reuters/Ako Rasheed)

en faisant quelques achats de dernière minute au Bazar Boto.

Mais pour certains réfugiés, le chagrin qu'inspire la vie à laquelle ils ont tourné le dos limite les réjouissances de Noël.

"Je ne vais pas faire la fête parce que je n'ai pas d'argent", confiait Hekanoch Harkouone, ex-professeuse d'université de Bagdad, en cherchant des vêtements d'hiver pour ses quatre enfants. "Mon mari est chargé de la sécurité de l'église, ajoutait-elle. Il est notre unique source de revenus."

'A success story in the Middle East'



By Janet Ritz

huffingtonpost

A recent conversation with Qubad Talabani, the Kurdish representative to the U.S. for their regional government, centered on what the son of Iraq's President Jalal Talabani called the U.S.'s success story in the Middle East. It was during an interview that covered politics, religion, Turkey, Iran, and the Kurdish attitude toward the U.S. for their involvement in Iraq.

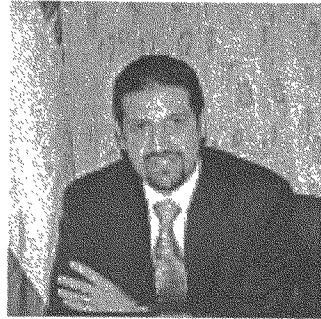
As Qubad Talabani stated, "there is a success story in the Middle East that has significant U.S. fingerprints on it and I can't point to too many of those right now in the Middle East."

A 2007 profile described the Iraqi president's son as "English-accented, a onetime Italian-car mechanic with an American wife-[who] handles his duties with aplomb, rushing around town in subtle suits to meet with policy makers and power brokers."

The Italian cars and the mechanical engineering degree have since given way to the mechanics of diplomacy. My interest in the Kurds began with research for a book. Their history and culture fascinate me. I became aware of Qubad Talabani as part of that research and have watched his transformation from Kurdish exile raised in Britain to the diplomat on the Washington scene.

Mr. Talabani was candid, engaging and achingly interested in putting across to the American people what the Kurds have accomplished and how much of that progress they attribute to past, current, and -- emphasized -- ongoing U.S. engagement in the region.

We started with his father's reelection as president of Iraq and the confirmation of Jalal Talabani's objection to the death penalty, which came up when he



said he would not sign the execution order for Saddam Hussein's former Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Tariq Aziz. It was one of many times during our discussion that I was reminded of how different the Kurds were than perceptions of them by many in the West.

That difference was evidenced by a statement from Qubad Talabani about a growing nationalist movement among Kurdish youth that had them turning from Islam to Zoroastrianism, the ancient religion of the Kurds when they were known as the Medes. It's a faith that includes, as its precepts, tolerance toward other religions, protection of the environment, equality of the sexes, truth, and loyalty toward family, country and God.

There's no evidence of a wider movement, although those in Iraqi Kurdistan are now free to explore that option. Most Kurds are Muslim, which is practiced by those in rural areas. But, even there, it is not the same as in other parts of the Middle East.

I brought up a saying I'd heard, "Kurds hold their Islam with a light touch." Mr. Talabani explained the phrase, "Kurds are Kurds first today and, in my opinion, it's because -- when we were being massacred -- nobody came out in the Muslim world to say: 'hang on a minute. This is wrong.' No religious authority from Cairo or Saudi Arabia or any of the other epicenters of the Muslim world came out and said here are Muslim brothers being massacred by supposed Muslims in the form of Saddam's Iraq. That's gone a long way, again,

toward increasing nationalism, which I believe is a defensive ideology. Nothing instills nationalism more than oppression and fear."

In Iraqi Kurdistan, nationalism is the common belief in a distinctly pluralistic society where the Kurds have opened their gates to Iraqi Christians seeking refuge from extremist violence.

"We've had this welcoming policy [to Iraqi Christians]," Mr. Talabani explains; "we've probably settled in Kurdistan 12,000 to 15,000 Christian families and, regrettably, hundreds of thousands have left Iraq altogether. Those who've chosen not to leave Iraq have resettled in Kurdistan."

They've shown the same tolerance toward other religious minorities. Problems, when they do arise, are cultural in nature. Mr. Talabani was candid about the challenges faced by women in their rural regions, with crimes of honor killings and female genital mutilation, on which, he said, Kurdistan, unlike other parts of the Middle East, reports and has begun work to stop. It won't be easy. In the male dominated culture that exists in the rural areas, he points out that it will take religious leaders and village elders to change the practices. There's been some progress in those efforts, including a statement by the Kurdish Islamic authority to condemn the practices, but, as he said, "we can't shy away" from the problem. There's more work to be done.

That's in contrast with the high participation of women in their parliament, their presence in the armed forces (Peshmerga and police), their access to education and activities in civic life. The cities of Iraqi Kurdistan are booming. There's money from oil and billions in investment from foreign companies, pouring into everything from resource development to mega malls. The regional government has built an information technology academy, a police academy, water and grid infrastructure improvements with electricity near prewar levels, unlike the rest of Iraq.

Also unlike the rest of the country, Iraqi Kurdistan is verdant, cooler in summer, snowy in winter with tall mountains, wildflowers, rushing rivers and water-

falls (see slideshow below).

"Iraqi Kurdistan is to me..." Talabani said, "I consider it a vibrant, thriving, civil society in the heart of a turbulent Middle East. I view it as this beautiful part of the world with majestic mountains, sweeping valleys with a natural beauty that is unrivaled, but with a population that has seen so much tragedy that has instilled in us an enormous sense of national pride."

That pride includes the fact that there has not been, to date, any U.S. casualties due to hostile action in Iraqi Kurdistan. "This is because the Kurds," as Mr. Talabani points out, "like Americans."

"It's important for Americans to know that out of the nearly five thousand U.S. casualties in Iraq, not one of those casualties have occurred in the Kurdistan region," he said, "we've not lost one U.S. serviceman or civilian, for that matter, in Kurdistan, through hostile action. We're proud of a statistic that always makes us knock on wood because we want to keep it that way. Why is it? First and foremost, Kurds, by and large, view the United States as liberators. We didn't view you as occupiers. We liked the fact that you were there."

Talabani acknowledged Western concerns that the Kurds might be too close to Iran, but defied those making the statements to prove that anything has been done against U.S. interests.

"What I've told those who've expressed their concern about Kurdish closeness to Iran," Talabani said, "is find me one example where we have carried out an action or a policy that has been consistent with Iran's interests and, at the same time, detrimental to U.S. interests. We haven't done it. Of course we want to have good relations with all of the countries that we live next door to. We didn't pick the neighborhood that we live in. It picked us."

He was more specific about another neighbor.

"Turkey has transformed from this secular, cold war ally of the United States," he explained, "[which was] Ataturk Kemalist's vision, pro-Israel, another non-Arab, pro-Israeli group of democrats who were secular in the

Middle East. That was the perfect combination of attributes for the United States at the time. That is no longer the same Turkey. Turkey has changed. Turkey has a new government, a new mandate; a new platform -- a very strategic and systematic shift in policy which places its emphasis on the region of the world it lives in."

This brought up the problem of Kirkuk, a city that straddles the Iraqi Kurdistan border atop vast oil and gas reserves. Saddam Hussein depopulated the Kurds from the city, leveling whole neighborhoods, and replaced them with Arab and Turkmen families. Resolving the issues of property rights and administration of the reserves has become what Mr. Talabani called "messy."

It's messy because everyone has claim to the province with its oil. The Arab and Turkmen families established by Saddam have lived there a generation. The Kurds that were displaced have come back to demolished homes and streets. The inclusion of the Turkmen garners Turkey's interest, as does the oil and, especially, their concern about Kurds expanding their territory should they be given the administration of Kirkuk.

The Turks watch this because they have their own large Kurdish minority which is not as well off as Iraq's Kurds. A rebel Kurdish group out of Turkey, the PKK, which encamps just over the Iraqi border, has been declared a terrorist group by the U.S., EU and Turkey. The PKK does not have the support of Iraqi Kurdistan but have not been dislodged from their mountain camps in the north of Iraq. The U.S. has been working with Turkey to improve the lot of the Turkish Kurds, which could reduce support for the PKK within Turkish borders, but one has to wonder what it would take to improve their situation enough when they can look across the border at a thriving Iraqi Kurdistan while they struggle to survive.

Oil was another topic for conversation. Foreign investment has come into Iraqi Kurdistan like a spigot opened on a well-head. They held a recent ceremony to open a facility near Erbil. Deals have been made with scores of companies. The Kurds are open for business. Their position on these resources is that it's

their investment fund; there to help them develop their society.

"The oil of Iraq," Talabani explained, "has been a curse for the Kurds since Iraq's inception. We've never truly benefited from our so-called natural resource. On the contrary, this resource has been used to fund the war of genocide against the Kurdish people. So, for the first time, we have an opportunity to develop our oil and gas sector with the hope of reinvesting the proceeds of the sale of that oil and gas into developing infrastructure, into our educational sector, into our agricultural sector."

The genocide to which he refers is Saddam's Anfal Campaign of the late 1980's. During that time, the Kurds of Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan were gassed from the air in what still is the largest poison gas attack upon a civilian population. The description of that gassing is horrific, with many of its victims women and children. More Kurds were rounded up and disappeared in what the Iraqi High Criminal Court has, just this past year, declared a genocide against the Kurdish people. The Kurds feel this loss at their core and are still recovering their dead. There was a recent ceremony in their capital city, Erbil, where the bodies of long-missing Kurdish children were returned to their families.

The Iraqi Kurds' peaceful society is a testament to their growing maturity. They've seen violence used against them and between their own factions in an outbreak of internecine conflict during the 1990's. They resolved the differences with the support of the Clinton Administration and formed a government with the two parties (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdish Democratic Party) that power-share in their semi-autonomous region. The Kurdish parliament held an election in 2009 where a third group, known as the Change List -- in opposition to the two primary parties -- took twenty-five seats. They are building their democracy.

Given the past horrors to which they'd been subjected, the Kurds have no patience for extremist groups like Al Qaeda. "Our society does not tolerate the so called insurgency," Mr. Talabani was adamant, "Al Qaeda tried to set up a base in Kurdistan after it knew it was going to get hammered in Afghanistan. The intention was to set up a base of operations

in Kurdistan and it couldn't because the society there, although it was predominantly Muslim, although it was in the rural areas predominantly conservative, it was just not tolerant of that intolerant ideology."

The impression I took away from the interview was that the Kurds have more in common with the West than the American public has been made aware. They are sophisticated in their understanding of the fickle nature of world powers. They know the Iraq War was unpopular and have their own take on the U.S. invasion of Iraq that differs from the one offered by the Bush administration.

"There's what I wished America came into Iraq for and what they did come into Iraq for," Talabani explained, "I think that, ultimately, after 9/11, there was a new order and a new state of play in the world and the United States was leading the charge. Saddam was viewed with weapons of mass destruction as a mortal threat to say peace, stability, of allies in the region and, by extension, the United States. That's why the principle argument for the liberation of Iraq was that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. We were quietly, publicly, actively trying to inject into the justification for this war issues of human rights violations, issues of genocide against the Kurds, issues of genocide against Iraqis, issues of torture and of the constant struggle of many Iraqis - the lack of political freedom, so all of the stuff that is not considered important in world politics, regrettably."

What's not regrettable from the Kurds' point of view is the formation of their semi-autonomous region and the relative freedom they now enjoy while they pursue opportunity and manage the associated growing pains that come with the rebuilding of a diverse society.

It's not been without its challenges. The Kurds interacted closely with the Bush administration for years, and, for better or worse, knew how to deal with them. The transition to the Obama administration has presented its own challenges for the Kurds. Mr. Talabani was specific:

"What the world is looking for, in particular, what we are looking for as Kurds," he pointed out, "is a clear vision from the United States. What are its core interests? What are its core prin-

ciples? We see the debate in the United States. We know that there is Iraq fatigue. We know that there is a world economic crisis the United States is caught up in and is suffering as a result of it. We know all these things. We're reading the tea leaves. We've become more astute in observing political reality. If the United States is serious about a long-term commitment with Iraq, we're ready."

In reference to a comment by President Obama that America was 'turning the page in Iraq', Qubad Talabani responded directly. "You've talked about promoting democracy. It's starting in Kurdistan. Embrace it. Support it. Defend it. You want to talk about energy security. It's starting in Kurdistan. We can apply it nationally. Counterterrorism is happening today in Kurdistan. All of the things that we have hoped for in broader Iraq are today happening in the Kurdistan region of Iraq."

The Kurds understand the difficulty of President Obama's position. Mr. Talabani referred to the president as "caught between Iraq and a hard place" and said he knew how that felt. To this, he added, "what would be nice for Americans across the political spectrum to know is that you have a friend in the Kurds. And, even though there may be times when we might disagree with one another, this friendship we feel is strong, is deep, and is based on core values and core principles."

He closed with, "there is a success story in the Middle East that has significant U.S. fingerprints on it and I can't point to too many of those right now in the Middle East. This success story needs to be embraced. It shouldn't be feared. It needs to be developed. It shouldn't be ignored. I'm hopeful this administration along with future administrations in the United States will appreciate this and help us where we need help, guide us where we need guidance, work with us when we need to be worked with."

IRAQ . Le Parlement a accordé sa confiance au gouvernement d'unité nationale dirigé par Nouri Al-Maliki et a adopté son programme visant à libéraliser l'économie, développer la production pétrolière et les services tout en combattant le terrorisme et la corruption.

Les défis du nouveau gouvernement Maliki

Maha Salem

Neuf mois après les élections législatives, le gouvernement iraquien a enfin été approuvé par le Parlement. De longues tractations ont eu lieu tout au long du mois dernier, afin de former ce gouvernement de compromis. Mais une lourde tâche pèse sur les épaules de celui-ci. Il faudra tout d'abord rétablir la sécurité en Iraq et confirmer l'instauration d'un régime démocratique. A cet égard, le premier ministre iraquien Nouri Al-Maliki a sélectionné cinq dossiers prioritaires : la sécurité, les finances, le pétrole, l'électricité et les relations avec l'étranger. « Les défis qui nous attendent sont énormes. Nous devons avoir une politique claire dans les domaines de la sécurité, des finances, du pétrole et de l'électricité et améliorer nos relations extérieures », a déclaré Al-Maliki, lors du premier Conseil des ministres réuni au lendemain de l'intronisation du gouvernement. Mais le premier ministre iraquien n'a toujours pas nommé de ministres ni pour l'Electricité ni pour le Pétrole. Il a expliqué aux députés qu'il avait décidé de retarder ces nominations en raison de la réception tardive de certains postulants. « J'ai décidé de retarder ces nominations, car j'essaie de choisir les meilleurs et les plus expérimentés, mais malheureusement, j'ai reçu certaines (candidatures) très tard, et j'ai besoin de temps pour les examiner », a expliqué Maliki.

Avec une seule femme qui est secrétaire d'Etat sans portefeuille, ce gouvernement de compromis compte 45 ministères et secrétariats d'Etat. L'Alliance nationale, qui regroupe les partis religieux chiites et occupe 159 des 325 sièges, s'octroie la part du lion avec le poste de premier ministre, de vice-premier ministre et 17 portefeuilles, dont celui du Pétrole.

Juste après, il y a la liste Iraquiya (91 sièges) qui obtient un poste



E n

de vice-premier ministre et 8 ministères, dont les Finances, et les Kurdes (57 sièges) qui gardent leur poste de vice-premier ministre et gèrent 3 ministères, dont les Affaires étrangères. La petite coalition Wassat (10 sièges) obtient 2 ministères, et un chrétien devient ministre de l'Environnement. Selon un décompte de l'AFP, parmi les ministres nommés jusqu'à maintenant figurent 20 chiïtes, 10 sunnites, 4 Kurdes et un chrétien.

Pour M. Maliki, il faut choisir le plus vite possible les ministres concernés par la sécurité, afin de garantir la stabilité du pays. Jusqu'à maintenant, Maliki assure l'intérim des ministères de la Défense, de l'Intérieur et de la Sécurité nationale, les forces irakiennes doivent être capables d'assurer la sécurité lorsque les 50 000 derniers soldats américains auront quitté le territoire d'ici fin 2011. A plusieurs reprises, le premier ministre a annoncé qu'il ne souhaite pas de prolongation de la présence américaine, tout en se targuant d'avoir divisé par sept le nombre des morts depuis son arrivée au pouvoir en 2006, même si cette année 3 500 personnes ont été tuées dans des actes de violences. « Nous avons surmonté la violence et frappé les hors-la-loi, mais cela ne veut pas dire que la violence est finie, qu'il n'y a plus d'opposition armée », a-t-il précisé.

Une autre question dérange

Maliki : le manque de présence féminine au nouveau cabinet. Ainsi, sous la pression des députés, le Parlement a voté samedi une résolution affirmant que la question des femmes était « sa priorité », et qu'un comité de suivi a été créé à cet effet. C'est ce qu'a annoncé son président Oussama Al-Noujaifi. Si la Constitution stipule qu'un quart des députés soit des femmes, il n'y a, en effet, aucun quota pour le gouvernement. Et la nomination d'une seule femme au gouvernement a mis le feu aux poudres. Accusé, Nouri Al-Maliki a renvoyé la responsabilité aux groupes politiques, qui n'ont pas présenté suffisamment de candidates pour le gouvernement, malgré ses appels répétés. « J'avais demandé à tous les groupes politiques de proposer des femmes, et je ne vous cache pas que je n'ai reçu qu'une seule candidate ». Et pour trouver une issue à cette question, il a insisté sur le fait que l'un des 43 points de son programme de gouvernement fait mention de « la nécessité de promouvoir la condition féminine ».

Un nouveau programme

Les députés ont approuvé le programme gouvernemental en 43 points, qui prévoit notamment de « passer d'une économie centralisée à une économie de marché, de développer les secteurs industriel et commercial ainsi que celui des transports », selon le document présenté aux parlementaires.

plus, le programme insiste aussi sur la lutte contre la corruption, le développement des services, l'encouragement aux investissements, l'accroissement de la production pétrolière, la lutte contre le terrorisme et le confessionnalisme, et l'amélioration des relations avec les pays voisins. L'Iraq compte principalement sur sa production pétrolière, pour relancer son économie, notamment après la conclusion cette année de contrats d'exploitation avec des compagnies internationales. La production a atteint 2,5 millions de b/j.

Par ailleurs, les services publics sont toujours dans un état déplorable, notamment la production d'électricité. C'est le nouveau vice-premier ministre Hussein Chahristani, ministre du Pétrole et de l'Electricité par intérim dans le gouvernement sortant, qui est chargé provisoirement du dossier en attendant la nomination du titulaire. La demande d'électricité ne cesse de croître et les coupures de courant ont entraîné de violentes manifestations. Quant aux relations internationales, c'est au ministre des Affaires étrangères, le Kurde Hoshyar Zebari, en poste depuis 2003, que revient la tâche d'améliorer les relations avec les voisins, notamment avec la Syrie, et surtout l'Arabie saoudite, qui n'a jamais accepté de voir les sunnites évincés du pouvoir au profit des chiïtes.

Par ailleurs, le cabinet n'est pas totalement renouvelé, puisque le

premier ministre, un vice-premier ministre kurde, le chef de la diplomatie, le ministre de la Jeunesse et des Sports ainsi que deux secrétaires d'Etat gardent leurs postes.

Le chef de la liste laïque Iraquiya, le rival de M. Maliki, et qui a longtemps espéré occuper le poste de ce dernier, a proposé de « tourner la page ». « Nous espérons que le gouvernement, né dans la douleur, réussira pour le bien de la population, et nous lui

apportons notre plein soutien », a déclaré Iyad Allaoui. « Ce cabinet ne représente pas l'ambition du premier ministre, mais celle des groupes politiques. (M. Maliki) aurait préféré diriger un gouvernement basé sur une majorité (parlementaire) plutôt qu'un cabinet d'alliances. Mais les résultats des élections ont fait qu'un gouvernement de la majorité aurait été un gouvernement d'une seule couleur confessionnelle, ce qu'il a voulu éviter », a indiqué Ali Moussawi, un

proche conseiller du premier ministre.

Les législatives de mars ont été marquées par le confessionnalisme. Les chiites ont voté pour la liste de l'Etat de droit de M. Maliki et l'Alliance nationale iraquienne alors que les sunnites se sont prononcés en masse pour la liste laïque Iraquiya de l'ancien premier ministre Iyad Allaoui. Ce dernier, un chiite laïque, a d'ores et déjà fait savoir qu'il rejoindrait le gouvernement en

tant que dirigeant d'un nouveau Conseil national de politique stratégique. Sa décision est de nature à apaiser les craintes de ceux qui redoutaient un regain de violences intercommunautaires.



Le président irakien rencontre les dirigeants kurdes de Turquie sur la question kurde

24 décembre 2010 - xinhua

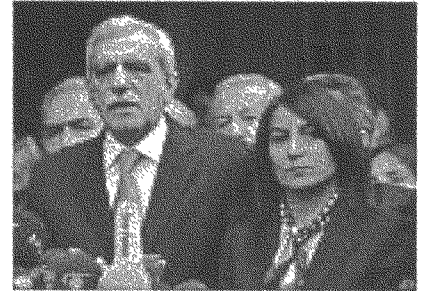
Le président irakien Jalal Talabani a rencontré jeudi à Istanbul d'éminentes personnalités kurdes de Turquie en marge du 11ème sommet de l'Organisation de la coopération économique (Economic Cooperation Organization, ECO) dans le but de trouver une solution pacifique au problème kurde.

Le président du Congrès pour une société démocratique (DTK) Ahmet Turk et le vice-président Aysel Tugluk, qui ont rencontré M. Talabani, ont été tous les deux exclus de la politique en décembre 2009 et leur parti, le principal parti kurde de Turquie, avait été dissout lorsque le Conseil constitutionnel l'a reconnu coupable de liens avec les terroristes du Parti des travailleurs kurdes (PKK).

A l'issue de la rencontre à huis clos, Ahmet Turk a déclaré qu'ils avaient discuté de la façon de promouvoir la paix dans la région, de ce qui peut être fait pour développer la démocratie et du type de mesures devant être prises pour accroître la fraternité régionale.

Le DTK a été inscrit sur l'agenda de la Turquie ces

derniers jours, pays qui abrite l'Assemblée démocratique autonome, où les Kurdes se réunissent pour discuter des détails d'une éventuelle autonomie, une position à laquelle le gouvernement turc est fermement hostile.



Interrogé pour savoir si M. Talabani a soutenu l'idée de l'autonomie démocratique, M. Turk s'est abstenu de commenter directement, mais a déclaré: "personne ne protesterait contre une solution autonome".



Un ancien cadre du parti turc pro-kurde DTP demande l'asile en Grèce

SALONIQUE (Grèce), 29 décembre 2010 (AFP)

UN ANCIEN cadre du parti pro-kurde pour une société démocratique (DTP), dissout par la Cour constitutionnelle turque en 2009, a demandé l'asile en Grèce après son arrestation à l'aéroport de Salonique (nord), a-t-on appris mercredi de source policière.

Ancien vice-président du DTP, Mustafa Sarikaya, 46 ans, a été arrêté il y a une semaine à l'aéroport de Salonique pour détention "de faux passeport" et "entrée illégale" sur le territoire, lors d'une escale de son avion en provenance de Paphos (Chypre) et à destination de Sofia (Bulgarie).

Après avoir été jugé en flagrant délit par la Cour correctionnelle de Salonique et acquitté car il se trouvait "en état de nécessité", M. Sarikaya a déposé une demande d'asile aux autorités grecques, qui doivent prochainement se prononcer.

Lors de sa déposition devant la cour, M. Sarikaya a indiqué qu'il avait passé vingt ans dans les geôles turques en raison de son activité politique et que sa vie serait en danger en cas de retour à son pays.

La décision de la Cour constitutionnelle turque de dissoudre le DTP en 2009 avait été qualifiée d'"inquiétante" par le ministre suédois des Affaires étrangères, Carl Bildt, dont son pays présidait alors l'Union européenne.

Parmi divers problèmes qui entravent le progrès des négociations entre l'UE et la Turquie engagées depuis 2005, figure le respect des libertés politiques. Par ailleurs, dans la ville multiethnique de Kirkouk, à 240 km au nord de Bagdad, la police a découvert le corps de Barbaros Mohammad Habib, un membre de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK de Jalal Talabani), criblé de dix balles, a indiqué le colonel de police Azad Abdallah.

EDITORIAL OPINION

IRAQ'S NEXT STEPS

At last, the country has a new government, which includes all of Iraq's major communities. Now its leaders must address the country's many problems.

Nine long months after parliamentary elections, Iraq has a new government. Its leaders can't waste any more time on petty maneuvering.

The March elections were only the second since Saddam Hussein's ouster. Forming the government was a sordid and costly process. The political paralysis meant important economic decisions were not made, leading to even higher unemployment. Basic services deteriorated even further. And, Iraqi voters have grown even more cynical about the democratic process.

The new government will have to work hard to establish its credibility. We have mixed feelings about Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki winning a second term when so many voters wanted change. In the past, he has shown disturbing autocratic tendencies and bolstered his power by inflaming sectarian differences. This time he needs to prove himself as a leader for all Iraqis.

In the election, his Shiite-dominated State of Law coalition came in second — by two seats — to the multi-ethnic Iraqiya slate led by Ayad Allawi, a former prime minister. But Mr. Maliki outmaneuvered his rival and finally put together a winning coalition.

As part of the deal, Mr. Maliki accepted an American proposal to have Mr. Allawi lead a still-to-be-created council to oversee national security issues and provide some check on Mr. Maliki's powers.

The new government rightly includes all of Iraq's major communities. We are especially encouraged that Sunnis — disenfranchised after boycotting the 2005 election — were given several top posts, including speaker of Parliament. Mr. Allawi's bloc has a large number of Sunni supporters, which is another reason why the new council should be given real clout.

A secularly minded Sunni also became the minister of education, succeeding a religious Shiite, increasing the chance that education will become more secular and inclusive. Unfortunately, Iraqi women were shortchanged, being offered only one minor government office.

Iraq's factions, with their competing priorities, are going to have to work hard to make progress on the country's many problems. They must pass laws ensuring an equitable division of the country's oil wealth. They must make sweeping economic reforms, without which there is no chance of creating jobs for the 450,000 mostly young Iraqis entering the work force each year. They need to keep their promise of jobs to the thousands of Sunni fighters who came in from the cold.

At this point, Iraq's most dangerous fault line may be the oil-rich region of Kirkuk, which is claimed by Arabs and Kurds. Washington must press Iraqis to find a solution, making clear that a Kurdish secession or a grab for Kirkuk would mean the end of American support.

President Obama has rightly promised to withdraw all American troops from Iraq by the end of 2011. In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* that was published on Tuesday, Mr. Maliki insisted that that deadline is firm. Still, the two leaders need to consider whether some number of forces — American or from the United Nations — should remain temporarily as a buffer in Kirkuk.

The administration deserves credit for goading Iraqis into a political deal. But the long delay and Iraq's daunting list of problems is a reminder that, even after the troops come home, Iraq will continue to need American attention, support and pressure.

On 6th try, bombers kill a top police chief in Iraq

BAGHDAD

BY JOHN LELAND

An attack Wednesday morning by three suicide bombers in the northern city of Mosul killed a top police commander there and destroyed the police headquarters, adding more unrest to a region already torn by extremist violence.

The commander, Lt. Col. Shamel Ahmed al-Jabouri, had been hailed for taking on terrorist groups operating in the area. The attack was the sixth attempt on his life, and the second in the last three months, a police official said.

A week earlier, Colonel Jabouri led an assault that killed Munathel Salim, who

was thought to be the leader of the Mosul branch of Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.

Mosul, the capital of Nineveh Province, has remained a hotbed of sectarian bloodshed even as overall violence in the country has dropped during the last two years.

At 6:30 a.m., three men wearing explosive vests entered a fortified police compound in Mosul on foot, the authorities said. The first blew himself up inside the concrete blast walls. In the mayhem that followed, the other two bombers ran into the headquarters building and detonated their explosives, killing Colonel Jabouri in his quarters, said Abdulrahman al-Shemari, who heads the provincial security and defense committee.

The blast brought down the building, trapping others inside. Local officials said they did not know how many people were killed or wounded. But an official at the Interior Ministry in Baghdad said four people had been killed by the bomb and the collapse of the building, a one-story structure that had been damaged during previous attacks in the area in 2006 and 2007.

The continued violence in Mosul has stirred fears that the area will descend into carnage after the remaining American

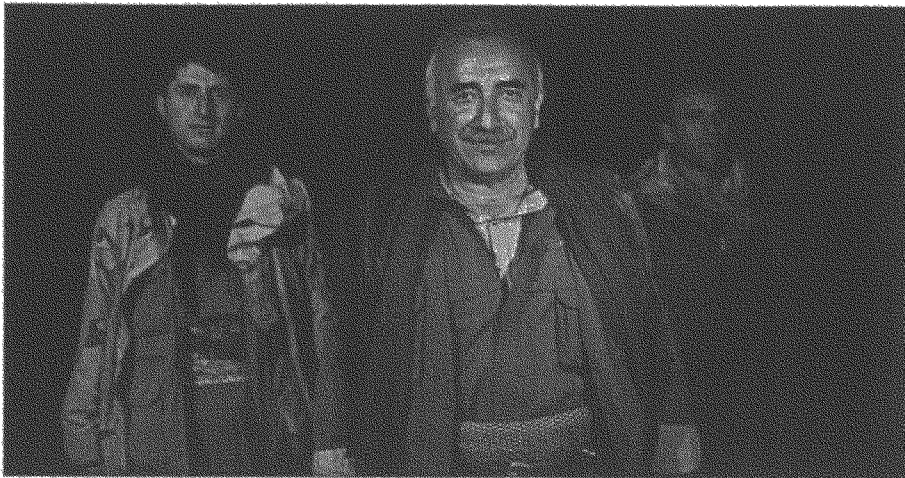
troops leave the country. By agreement, that withdrawal must finish by the end of 2011. Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki was quoted as saying this week in *The Wall Street Journal* that he would not extend the deadline for troops to leave.

Colonel Jabouri "was a sharp sword against the terrorist groups in Mosul," a police official said. "We have lost one of our heroes."

The official said the commander had a long history of battling terrorist groups in the area. Just three months earlier, a suicide bomber wearing an explosive vest tried to rush at him in a coffee shop, but the officer's guards opened fire before the attacker could get close, and no one was hurt in the explosion.

The attack Wednesday came two days after suicide bombers assaulted the heavily fortified government compound in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province, which is in western Iraq and another battleground of the insurgency. Both attacks may have been retaliation for recent police operations against terrorism suspects in the regions. In Anbar, where the attack killed at least 14 people, the police have arrested 93 people in the previous week and a half.

A Kurdish Rebel Softens His Tone for Skeptical Ears



Shiho Fukada for The New York Times

"We want the Kurdish problem — as a nation's problem, as a people's problem — to be solved not by guns, but by dialogue."

MURAT KARAYILAN

By STEVEN LEE MYERS

QANDIL, Iraq

HIGH in the craggy mountains of Iraq's northern frontier, where men (and, in this case, women) with guns have long operated beyond the control of any government, Murat Karayilan sounds more interested in pursuing peace than the war he has led against Turkey.

"We are not weak," Mr. Karayilan said in an interview in this village, where he and other fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or the P.K.K., represent the law of the land, despite official claims to the contrary.

"Our youths are always ready, hot-blooded and combative, but we want the Kurdish problem — as a nation's problem, as a people's problem — to be solved not by guns, but by dialogue."

Many will doubt Mr. Karayilan's sincerity, especially in Turkey. The party's violent struggle has lasted more than a quarter-century and cost 40,000 lives. But now, perhaps more than ever before, there are indications that the war may have reached its endgame.

And that has put Mr. Karayilan — either a noble insurgent fighting oppression or a narco-terrorist commander — at the center of a different kind of offensive.

He has been making the case for Kurdish rights in Turkey in surrepti-

tiously arranged, if not exactly clandestine, interviews from his mountainous redoubt, irritating officials on both sides of the border who would rather see him fade into obscurity.

"The Kurdish people are an ancient people in the world," he said. "All their national and linguistic rights have been denied. Our goal is to achieve those rights."

Mr. Karayilan's party, long designated a terrorist organization and since last year a drug trafficker by the United States, has declared a new cease-fire and already extended it into the new year. Whether by design or under duress, the party has reduced its own political demands, tempered by the profound political and economic changes that have swept Turkey and Iraq.

Mr. Karayilan no longer calls for a separate Kurdish state, but for a degree of autonomy within Turkey that is inspired by, but stops considerably short of, the federal system the Kurds set up for themselves in Iraq after the American invasion in 2003.

Iraq's Kurdish leaders, eager to expand trade and cross-border cooperation, have supported efforts to end the fighting, offering their own model of self-determination and rising prosperity as an example. Even as officials in Turkey rule out negotiations with the party itself, intermediaries have held secret talks to discuss the possibility of a lasting peace, according to officials in Iraq and Turkey.

The presence of the P.K.K. has long been an irritant in relations, prompting cross-border raids and bombings as recently as last summer. Increasingly, though, it would seem to be a surmountable one.

"We continue to remind all: Violence will not be the way to solve this issue," said Barham Salih, the prime minister of the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq.

Iraq's Kurds are "mindful of our relationship with Turkey," Mr. Salih added. The experience of the Kurds within Iraq's democratizing if not yet fully democratic system "dispels the notion that the Kurds are a destabilizing element in this part of the world," he said.

"We don't have to be stuck in the conflicts in the past," he said.

MR. KARAYILAN is a garrulous man, portly but fit, mustachioed and nattily dressed in the handmade olive-gray uniform that the party's fighters wear. His past is murky enough that the United States Treasury Department's official terrorist designations give two birth dates for him, making him either 56 or 60.

He has been the day-to-day commander of the Kurdistan Workers' Party since its charismatic founder, Abdullah Ocalan, was captured in 1999, tried and sent to an island prison in the Sea of Marmara.

The leadership moved to Qandil shortly afterward, and its fighters live more or less openly in what amounts to an undeclared haven. Its fighters — a large number of them women — adhere to a disciplined, ascetic lifestyle. While they have always used the mountains as refuge, the toppling of Saddam Hussein has made this much easier — to the chagrin of the Turkish government, which routinely complains to the United States and Iraq to do more to curtail the P.K.K.'s movements.

"For the first time in history, the Kurds have breathing space," said the movement's spokesman, Roj Welat.

Mr. Karayilan's exact base is, of course, kept secret, but the party's presence in the gorges around Qandil is not. Uniformed fighters maintain a checkpoint on the road from the Kurdish regional capital, Erbil, not far beyond the last official checkpoint.

The party's flag flutters over its territory, while Mr. Ocalan's portrait hangs ubiquitously. Mr. Ocalan remains the move-

ment's revered leader, but he "is not in a position to give orders" from prison, as Mr. Karayilan put it, though his messages and writings are still circulated.

The party runs a clinic with a German doctor and a factory to make the uniforms. It neatly tends a cemetery with a 30-foot white obelisk that looms over the graves of Kurdish fighters from Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria.

Mr. Karayilan said donations from Kurds in their homeland or abroad sustained the movement. American and Turkish officials say smuggling does. As for weapons, Mr. Karayilan smiled coyly when asked. "You can get whatever you want," he said. "It's the Middle East."

The party unilaterally declared a ceasefire after an eruption in cross-border violence from 2007 to 2009. The lull has largely coincided with concessions from the Turkish government under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to expand rights for the country's Kurdish minority by, for example, allowing a Kurdish-language television station and

Kurdish-language studies at universities.

Mr. Erdogan's government has ignored the party's announced terms for an end to violence altogether, including the release of arrested Kurdish political activists and the creation of a reconciliation commission like the one in post-apartheid South Africa. Instead the government has struck a more nationalistic tone before elections in June. Nevertheless, the government is expected to offer some new gestures for Kurds in hopes of marginalizing Mr. Karayilan's group.

"Some of the things listed as preconditions are already part of the democratic standards by our government for all of our citizens, not only for Kurds," said Omer Celik, a member of Parliament and one of Mr. Erdogan's leading political advisers.

Mr. Karayilan said the Turkish government lacked the political will to pursue a true peace, though, tellingly, he did not close the door on a negotiated resolution.

He spoke for nearly two hours in a cinder-block house here in Qandil, not far from another house badly damaged by two Turkish bombs in the summer.

He traveled with only a small retinue of guards in Toyota Land Cruisers and took few other precautions. When the interview ended, he apologized for not being able to stay for dinner.

For all his polite charm, he remains strident at times, denouncing what he called Turkish occupation, oppression and genocide. But the outline of an accommodation that he sketches no longer seems so far-fetched.

He urged the United States, as well as other nations, to stop seeing the conflict through the prism of the "war on terror," but rather through that of self-determination. "It is the cause of a nation that needs to be addressed," he said.



Voice of America.....31 December 2010

Turkish President Talks Unity on Visit to Kurdish Province

Dorian Jones | Istanbul

Turkey's President Abdullah Gul, right, and city's mayor Osman Baydemir speak to the media in Baydemir's office in Diyarbakir, Turkey, 30 Dec 2010

Turkish President Abdullah Gul sent out a message of unity during his long anticipated trip to the southeastern Kurdish province of Diyarbakir.

Diyarbakir extended a warm greeting to President Abdullah Gul.

Throughout his two day visit, the city's Kurdish cultural identity was visible, from music to dance to the Kurdish language. Everywhere he went there were bilingual street signs in Turkish and Kurdish. This highly important separate linguistic identity was also the inspiration behind a gift to the president from the mayor of Diyarbakir, Osman Baydemir. "This is the dictionary of our beautiful Turkish and our beautiful Kurdish and it is a treasury of 40,000 words," Baydemir said. "I am honored to present



Turkey's President Abdullah Gul, right, and city's mayor Osman Baydemir speak to the media in Baydemir's office in Diyarbakir, Turkey, 30 Dec 2010

this to you," he said.

Baydemir is one of the leading figures behind a campaign launched this month for Kurdish cultural and political rights, focusing on the greater use of the Kurdish language.

Kurds make up around a quarter of Turkey's population of 72 million. During the 1980's, the Turkish authorities refused to acknowledge that the Kurdish language even existed and while

controls on its use have been eased somewhat, there are still restrictions in place.

Speaking at a dinner with local businessmen Thursday night, President Gul tried to take a balanced approach.

The official language of the Republic of Turkey is Turkish. This will continue in this way. However, we have citizens using different languages, he said. Kurdish is used here, he said, and there are

some other citizens using Arabic in other places. All these are ours, our languages.

Observers say the president's stance is in mark contrast to the strong condemnation of the Kurdish demands by the Turkish government. His busy schedule included meetings with Kurdish political and business leaders in another contrast with the government, which has curtly dismissed the main Kurdish party as just an extension of the outlawed Kurdish rebel group, the PKK.

But it is the government that wields the real power in Turkey, not the president. And analysts say the government's condemnation of Kurdish demands will go down well with nationalist conservative Turkish voters. With elections due in less than six months, political commentator Cengiz Aktar expects rifts between Turks and Kurds to deepen.

"The more we get close to the elections the stake gets higher and higher, so it will create more and more tensions in the country,"

Aktar said. "Because many of those politicians who take the floor and talk about this issue, they talk in terms of division of the country, secession etc, and this is very, very bad."

Observers warn electoral politics could well overwhelm any good will generated by President Gul's visit.

TODAYS ZAMAN

30 December 2010

How will Erdoan manage the Kurdish question on the eve of the election?



Columnists

EMRE USLU

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The Kurdish nationalist Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) has successfully injected a new political debate in Turkish domestic politics: the demand for a bilingual society. After remaining silent for some time, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoan has now strongly rejected opening the language issue up to debate, saying Turkey has only one official language and that is Turkish.

Erdoğan even went so far as to accuse those asking for a bilingual society and governmental services of being the same as traitors. This is exactly what the BDP wants to hear from Erdoğan. By pushing Erdoğan into the nationalist corner the BDP excludes its only contender for the support of Kurdish voters. On the eve of the election Erdoğan is facing a dilemma of whether to highlight a Turkish nationalist rhetoric or stress further democratic reforms. There are three options before Erdoğan to escape such a dilemma as the election approaches.

The first possibility is that Erdoğan can continue to promote liberal democratic reforms and take the risk of losing some nationalist votes. Although some Kurdish nationalists and pro-Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Kurds would love to see such an occurrence, it is very difficult for Erdoğan to adopt such a position before the election. Yet, some Kurds, who claimed to be at the center of negotiations between Abdullah Öcalan and the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), still insist that the Erdoğan government will take surprising steps in February. For instance, a Kurdish figure known as Fisherman (Balıkcı), who claimed to know the details of the negotiations, insists that soon we will see positive developments in the Kurdish question. If it is true, then Erdoğan needs to develop a powerful argument, such as a declaration from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) to lay

down its arms for some period of time, in order to convince his Turkish constituency. I see this option as too optimistic to believe. I think it is based on the naivety of non-Öcalanist Kurds who want some promising steps taken in order to convince Kurdish voters.

The second possibility is that Erdoğan will wear his nationalist mask and become the forerunning nationalist leader that will be able to drown the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) under the 10 percent threshold and gain Turkish nationalist votes, while losing Kurdish voters. Erdoğan has proven that he can secure Turkish nationalist voters. For instance, during the last referendum the prime minister managed to convince 58 percent of voters from traditionally MHP stronghold cities. Yet, even if Erdoğan wears his nationalist mask and uses nationalist arguments at the center of his election rhetoric, the nationalist political mandate is not so easy to control either. While the BDP is highlighting Kurdish nationalist demands, the Turkish nationalist MHP is using what the BDP is saying and is holding the Erdoğan government responsible for the BDP's bold language and Kurdish demands. Therefore, Erdoğan needs to convince voters that what the MHP is arguing is not correct.

The third possibility is to bring President Abdullah Gül in and ask him to play a critical role in the Kurdish question. It seems that the most likely scenario is this one. While Erdoğan is highlighting Turkish nationalist discourses, President Gül, on behalf of state institutions, can step in and deliver a hopeful message to the Kurds. By using this method Erdoğan does not risk losing nationalist votes and at the same time Kurdish voters can hear a positive message that will secure their votes as well. Given the fact that both Erdoğan and his opponents consider the upcoming election the most important political event for the near future of Turkish politics, Erdoğan and Gül will share dual responsibility to overcome the political challenge before them. For that matter, I consider Gül's Diyarbakir visit a milestones for the future of the Kurdish question.

KURDISH SELF DETERMINATION: THE GOOD AND THE BETTER



Asharq Al-Awsat

By Amir Taheri

A recent remark by Iraqi Kurdish leader Massoud Barzani that the issue of "self determination" remains on the table has come as a gift to those who have always claimed that partition is the best solution for Iraq. Over the past seven years we have seen dozens of seminars, mostly held in the United States, on how best to carve Iraq up. Meanwhile, books and articles on the subject amount to a sizeable library.

The election of Barack Obama as President of the United States encouraged the partitionists. Obama himself had no particular position because, as in other issues, he wanted to have as much wiggle room as possible. However, his vice president Joseph Biden, who had passionately argued in favour of the war in Iraq, had promoted partition for years before his new position forced him to either shut up or equivocate.

Inside Iraq, however, the idea has never been raised in the context of a public debate. The reason for this is that Arabs, who account for almost 80 per cent of Iraq's population, have had no desire to raise it while the Kurds, during the reign of successive despots in Baghdad, did not dare even hint at it.

Now that Iraq is an open society there is no reason why the issue of Kurdish self-determination should not be raised.

Barzani is wise not to want to brush the issue under the carpet. After all, when the southern Sudanese are allowed self-determination and at a time that the Kosovars are building a state

of their own, no Kurdish leader worth his salt could pretend that the issue does not exist.

But what does self-determination actually mean?

If one takes self-determination to mean the right to choose one's government through free and fair elections, the Iraqi Kurds already enjoy that right. As head of the autonomous Kurdish government in Erbil, Barzani himself is a living testimony to this fact.

However, many of those who speak of self-determination mean something else: the right to break away from Iraq and form an independent state in the provinces where ethnic Kurds form a majority of the population.

And, who might benefit from such a development?

Before the Khomeinist revolution, the safe assumption was that Iran would not wish the Kurds of Iraq to have a state of their own.

The reason was that Tehran feared that such a development could attract its own Kurdish minority to secession.

Today, the picture is different. The Khomeinist regime, or at least the part of it that is still dominant, sees the world through a pan-Shi'ite prism. Its long-term strategy is to assume the leadership of united Shi'ite communities across existing frontiers and then use this as a platform for claiming the leadership of Islam as a whole in an as yet ill-defined "final confrontation" with the "Infidel" Western powers.

That strategy would benefit from the break-up of Iraq. For the past four years Tehran has been promoting the so-called "federal" agenda for Iraq in the hope of creating a client republic in the eight central and southern provinces of Iraq where

Shi'ites form a majority of the population.

The break up scenario would also make sure that a carved up Iraq would not be able to challenge Tehran's ambitions for regional hegemony. A united Iraq with a population of 30 million plus huge potential wealth thanks to oil reserves and water resources would be in a good position to counter-balance Iran.

Moreover, Iraq is the second largest Shi'ite majority country after Iran. In time, Najaf could re-emerge as the main centre of Shi'ite scholarship and religious guidance, making it harder for the Khomeinists to pursue their pan-Shi'ite dreams. Even today, there is evidence that Grand Ayatollah Ali-Muhammad Sistani, who is based in Najaf, is emerging as the most popular Shi'ite marja'a or "source of emulation" in Iran.

Turkey's position may have also changed. Until the liberation of Iraq, the popular view was that Turkey did not want an independent Kurdish state for fear that such a development might push its own ethnic Kurds towards secession. Between 1981 and 2003, Turkey also enjoyed the carte blanche issued by Saddam Hussein for military incursions in northern Iraq. That enabled the Turks to pursue Kurdish rebels deep inside Iraqi territory with the consent of the despot in Baghdad. As long as a despot was in power in Baghdad, a united Iraq suited Turkish interests. A democratic Iraq, however, is unlikely to tolerate foreign military incursions into its territory for long. It would be hard for Turkey to provoke a war situation with its only democratic neighbour in the Middle East without provoking adverse reaction from the international community.

Thus today, as neo-

Ottomans in Turkey pursue dreams of empire, Ankara may be tilting towards a new position that favours the break up of Iraq. After all, the Ottoman Empire was made possible by the fact that the Arabs were divided into countless mini emirates or had no states of their own. A mini-Kurdish state in northern Iraq would have no choice but kowtow to Ankara even if that meant continued Turkish military incursion into its territory.

Syria may also favour the break-up of Iraq. Such a development would make Syria the most populous Arab state in the strategic region between Egypt and Iran and thus a more important player. A united and democratic Iraq, on the other hand, would be a daily challenge to a Syria dominated by a despotic elite in a client situation vis-a-vis the Khomeinist regime in Tehran.

Part of the Jordanian ruling elite would also be favourable to a break-up of Iraq. A smaller Iraq would make tiny Jordan look bigger while old dynastic claims to rule in Baghdad are revived.

One other regional player, Israel, has always been favourable to the dismembering of Iraq. Many in Israel's leadership believe that Iraq is the only Arab country large and, potentially, wealthy enough to pose an "existential threat" to the Jewish state. They argue that a smaller Iraq would be less likely to harbour dreams of leading the Arabs in a new major war against Israel.

But what if all partitionists are mistaken in their various calculations?

The first big losers could be Iraq's own Kurds. They would not only have to bear the huge cost of building a new state but would also continue to pay for its maintenance and defense in a

hostile region. Several studies show that a citizens of a mini Kurdish state in Iraq would end up much poorer than they are today. Landlocked and cut off from the bulk of Iraq's huge oil wealth, the Kurds might find "self determination" not such a good deal after all. Even in Europe, the partitions that we have witnessed recently have often ended up to the detriment of the secessionists. The Slovaks are now 40 percent poorer than when they were part of a united Czechoslovakia. With the possible exception of Slovenia, all the seven states that have emerged from the break-up of Yugoslavia are relatively poorer. There is no reason why Iraqi Kurds would do any better.

That would not be the only cause for concern. The areas that would presumably form the new mini state

include a number of ethnic groups that do not regard themselves as Kurds. The new state would have to either suppress those minorities by force or accept their demand for the creation of micro-states in accordance with the most radical interpretations of the Treaty of Lausanne.

The regional powers that favour the partition of Iraq would also end up as losers. All those states include within their frontiers a wide variety of ethnic minorities, including Kurds, who might be interested in their own versions of "self determination". History shows that when the contours of one state are put in doubt the frontiers of all states within this region are open to change. Most of the states surrounding Iraq have treated it either as a nuisance or an actual threat. And in the case of some,

Kuwait and Iran for example, they have not been wrong. However, new Iraq will not be what it was under the mad dictators of the period between 1958 and 2003.

In 1989, French President Francois Mitterrand and British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were opposed to the re-emergence of a united Germany. Their fear was based on the memories of the Weimar Republic and the Nazi Reich. Today, united Germany is the principal guarantor of stability in Europe and the continents ultimate economic insurance. The lesson is that fears of the past should not block the hopes of the future.

Barzani should press his analysis to its logical conclusion and formally put the issue of "self determination" on the agenda for national debate. Unless one is wrong, a majority of Iraqi Kurds are

attached to Iraq provided they are allowed to enjoy a wide measure of autonomy within a pluralist system. Since 1991 Iraqi Kurds have succeeded in developing an original system of autonomy that maintains their links with Iraq without putting their fate in the hands of those in power in Baghdad. Both Barzani and his ally-cum-rival Jalal Talabani deserve credit for an outcome that seems to satisfy a majority of Kurds in Iraq. As far as Iraqi Kurds are concerned, their current status is good enough, and there is no reason to upset it in the name of something better. Often, better could become an enemy of the good

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Guardian
December 27, 2010

Iraq's Luaibi says Kurdish oil exports to resume soon

- Minister confirms Kurdish exports due to resume soon
- Minister - "nothing new" regarding Kurd contracts dispute

By Ahmed Rasheed

BAGHDAD(Reuters) - Iraq's new Oil Minister Abdul Kareem Luaibi confirmed on Monday that exports from the semi-autonomous northern Kurdish region were expected to resume soon.

But he said there was "nothing new" regarding a disagreement between Iraqi Kurdistan and the central government in Baghdad over contracts to develop the northern oilfields.

News agency reports last week had quoted Luaibi as saying Baghdad would honour the contracts, such as one Norwegian oil firm DNO has with the region's government.

Shares in DNO rose 9 percent after the reports.

Baghdad considers contracts signed by the Kurdistan Regional

Government with foreign firms to develop oil fields in the north to be illegal.

With permission from the Kurdish regional government, DNO became the first western company to drill for oil in Iraq after the U.S. invasion of 2003.

But the disagreement between Iraqi Kurdistan and the central government in Baghdad over the contracts to develop the fields halted exports from the region last year.

Asked by reporters when Kurdish oil exports would resume, Luaibi said, "There is no specific time, but it will be soon."

Asked about the reports that Iraq would honour contracts signed by the Kurdistan Regional Government, he said:

"(There is) nothing new in this issue. The agreement that we reached with our brothers in Kurdistan in April was that the Kurdistan Regional Government is to export

all the produced quantities from the region through the Iraqi export network and the revenues will go to the federal budget," Luaibi said.

"In return for that, the government pledges to pay all the expenses and costs which were used to develop the oil field."

Before the flow was halted last year, the Kurdistan region was exporting around 100,000 barrels per day.

Hussain al-Shahristani, Iraq's former oil minister, said earlier this month Kurdish oil was expected to flow early next year. Shahristani said the region could produce 150,000 bpd next year.

Output from the Kurdistan region is seen as a key to boosting exports, which provide Iraq with about 95 percent of its federal revenue.

TURKEY FLEXES ECONOMIC, POLITICAL MUSCLE IN IRAQ

by Deborah Amos

Turkey is stepping up its role in Iraq, vying with Iran as a regional power. These powerful neighbors use investments and building projects to ensure long-term influence. The competition is heating up as the U.S. prepares to withdraw troops from Iraq by the end of next year.

Northern Iraq is the staging ground for Turkey's bid for economic dominance, and the Marina restaurant in Irbil is the kind of place that businessmen come to make deals. The food is pricey, and the live entertainment is in Turkish, a sign of Turkey's growing role. In the central market, Turkish products are available in every shop stall.

Local university professor Birzo Abdul Qhader surveys the goods on display.

"These baskets are Turkish, the plastic flowers, towels, the children's clothes," he says.

Turkish builders are active, too. A Turkish firm designed and built Irbil's new international airport. Turkish companies have invested in new five-star hotels and housing estates. And in the energy sector, state companies are exploring for oil in the south, while private oil companies are staking claims to discovered oil near Irbil.

"They've basically traded the stick for the carrot," says Greg Gause, who teaches about the politics of the Middle East at the University of Vermont.

"The Turks have predominant influence of any foreign power, even rivaling the U.S., and they've done it through a clever and low-key strategy," he says.

The economic boom in the north is due to the relative stability in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan region. It is also due to a dramatic shift in Turkish policy.

"[The Turks] are a very serious player in the Kurdish economy, which is doing much better than the rest of Iraq," Gause says. "But they've also gained a lot more day-to-day influence than they've ever had in the past."

Turkey's Historic Shift Toward Iraq

For years, Turkey opposed Kurdish autonomy in Iraq and did not recognize the Kurdish regional government, preferring to deal exclusively with Baghdad. Turkey has long feared that Kurdish aspirations for independence would incite Turkey's own Kurdish minority. The Turkish army conducted cross-border raids against the PKK, separatist Kurdish rebels who are fighting for an ethnic homeland for Kurds.

But the government in Ankara, dominated by the AKP, or Justice and Development Party, has made a historic shift, symbolized by an official visit by Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmed Davutoglu and the opening of a Turkish consulate in Irbil. Turkey's overall trade with Iraq has jumped to more than \$6 billion a year, and Ankara's goal is to raise trade to \$25 billion in five years, making Iraq its top trading partner. With Iraq's vast oil reserves, Turkey aims to be a major energy bridge from the Middle East to Europe.

Eric Davis is a Middle East specialist at Rutgers University. He notes that the Turkish chamber of commerce and industry has been lobbying the government not to allow the military to attack PKK forces whenever it wants, because that threatens investments in the north.

Indeed, stability in the north has led to a housing demand,



Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan (right) meets with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani in Istanbul, Dec. 22, 2010. Turkey is vying with Iran to be the most influential regional power in Iraq

which opened opportunities for Turkish contractors. Turkish laborers are building thousands of housing units in Irbil. Success in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq has led to bids farther south.

"Maybe we will go further down to Basra," says construction manager Serdar Kutsal, who has plans for a project in Karbala, south of Baghdad. "We will — but most likely we will go with our Kurdish friends."

In Baghdad, a Turkish consortium outbid an Iranian group for an \$11 billion project to renovate Sadr City, the capital's largest Shiite neighborhood. Turkey is contesting Iran's economic dominance in southern Iraq with a consulate in Basra that focuses on trade.

"Different kind of influence — I know what Turkey is trying to do, and it is definitely a win-win policy," Kutsal says.

This is a historic rivalry, says Davis of Rutgers University. "This is like going back to the Ottoman Empire and the Safavids ... in the 1500s. This is the old struggle for Iraq between the Turks and the Iranians," he says.

Building Ties In Kurdistan And Baghdad

In the modern contest, carried out in business suits rather than military uniforms, Turkey appears to have Arab and American backing to keep Iran in check. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki visited Ankara to get Turkish support for his bid to form the new government. He also sought approval in many more visits to Tehran.

"I think that's the long-term Turkish goal here, and in many ways, the long-term Iranian goal is to so tie the business and economic elements that their influence becomes so pervasive that it's unquestioned," says Gause of the University of Vermont.

Iran has historic political ties to Iraq's Kurds and Shiite Arabs and used those connections to press for an Iraqi government in line with Iranian interests. Turkey flexed political muscles, too, says Joost Hiltermann with the International Crisis Group.

"The regional states absolutely had an influence — but none of them was able to impose the solution it wanted," he says.

With so much at stake, Turkey continues to build ties to the leadership in the Kurdistan regional government as well as Baghdad. In a telling piece of political symbolism, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of a predominantly Sunni Muslim nation, attended the Shiite commemoration of Ashura, one of the most important holidays on the religious calendar. It is a gesture that will likely be noted by the dominant Shiite leaders in Baghdad. The Turks have shown that religion can be good for business.

In an office in Irbil, Turkish businessman Ardel Ahiska explains that it is good to be a Turk in Kurdistan.

"It is a big market for the Turkish businessmen, Turkish trade man," he says. "We will be rich together."

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Pétrole: l'Irak va entériner les contrats signés par le Kurdistan (ministre)

LE CAIRE, 25 decembre 2010 (AFP)

L'IRAK va reconnaître les contrats signés par le Kurdistan irakien avec des compagnies pétrolières étrangères, a affirmé samedi son nouveau ministre du Pétrole, Abdel Karim al-Luaybi, lors d'une réunion de l'Opep au Caire.

"Oui, nous les reconnaitrons", a répondu M. Luaybi, interrogé sur cette question par Dow Jones Newswires, lors d'une rencontre de l'Organisation des pays exportateurs de pétrole (Opep).

Bagdad et la région semi-autonome du Kurdistan s'opposent de longue date au sujet des contrats signés par le Kurdistan avec des compagnies étrangères depuis 2004.

Le gouvernement central a jusqu'à présent refusé d'entériner ces contrats car il veut des contrats de service, rémunérant les compagnies pétrolières au baril extrait, plutôt qu'un partage des bénéfices tirés de l'exploitation des ressources comme le prévoient les contrats du Kurdistan.

M. Luaybi, titulaire du portefeuille du Pétrole dans le nouveau gouvernement de Nouri al-Maliki approuvé mardi par le Parlement, a précisé que le gouvernement central rembourserait les sommes déjà investies par les compagnies dans la région.

Vendredi, M. Luaybi avait indiqué que le gouvernement irakien activerait un accord signé plus tôt dans l'année avec le Kurdistan pour exporter du brut.

"Nous avons déjà signé un accord avec le Kurdistan (...) Si Dieu le veut, cet accord sera activé dans les prochains jours", avait-il dit à la presse.

Le gouvernement autonome du Kurdistan a signé 37 contrats avec 40



companies – soit un investissement total prévu de 10 milliards de dollars - notamment dans la prospection et la production de pétrole, avait déclaré récemment le ministre de la région chargé des Ressources Naturelles, Ashti Hawrami.

Le Kurdistan irakien avait commencé le 1er juin 2009 à exporter du pétrole pour la première fois de son histoire, dans un climat d'hostilité avec Bagdad qui nie à sa province le droit de signer des contrats sans son aval, avant de suspendre ces exportations en octobre 2009.

La question pétrolière a fait l'objet d'âpres discussions lors de la formation du gouvernement, le député kurde Mahmoud Othmane affirmant que l'Alliance kurde ne participerait pas au gouvernement tant que M. Maliki n'aurait pas avalisé les contrats signés par le Kurdistan.



26 décembre 2010

Iran: la justice suspend la pendaison d'un militant kurde

La pendaison prévue dimanche matin d'un militant kurde, Habibollah Latifi, accusé de coopération avec le groupe rebelle kurde Pejak, a été "suspendue", a déclaré son avocat, Nemat Ahmadi, cité par l'agence Isna.

"Pour l'instant l'application de la peine a été suspendue", a déclaré Me Ahmadi.

La pendaison devait avoir lieu à la prison de Sanandaj, chef-lieu du Kurdistan iranien.

Me Ahmadi a expliqué que cette décision avait été prise à la suite d'une lettre qu'il a envoyée au chef de l'autorité judiciaire, l'ayatollah Sadegh Larijani, lui demandant "un nouvel examen du dossier" et que la peine soit "commuée".

Le condamné à mort, Habibollah Latifi, jeune étudiant en droit, avait été jugé coupable de coopération avec le groupe Pejak (Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan), selon son avocat.

Ce groupe, interdit en Iran et classé par les Etats-Unis parmi les organisa-



Vingt à trente personnes ont manifesté dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche devant l'ambassade d'Iran à Paris, où certaines se sont enchaînées aux grilles pour protester contre l'exécution dimanche d'un jeune militant kurde, selon les organisateurs et la police. (c) Afp

tions terroristes, est lié au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) actif en Turquie. Il a mené ces dernières années de nombreuses opérations armées au Kurdistan iranien.

Arrêté fin 2007, M. Latifi avait été accusé d'avoir participé à un attentat la même année contre la voiture d'un procureur du Kurdistan, et à une attaque contre un commissariat de police, ce qu'il a nié.

Amnesty International a appelé

samedi l'Iran à la "clémence" envers M. Latifi, qui "n'a pas bénéficié d'un procès équitable", ce qui rend son exécution "d'autant plus insupportable" selon l'organisation de défense des droits de l'Homme.

Vingt à trente personnes avaient manifesté dans la nuit de samedi à dimanche devant l'ambassade d'Iran à Paris pour protester contre la possible exécution de M. Latifi.