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INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS
Tél. : 01- 48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01- 48 24 64 66

www.fikp.org

E-mail: bulletin@fikp.org

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IRAK : UNE PÉRIODE POST-ÉLECTORALE INCERTAINE

Les résultats officiels des élections parlementaires irakiennes publiés le 25 mai, par la Haute Commission Électorale se présentent comme suit :

État de droit, la liste de Maliki, arrive donc en tête dans 10 provinces sur 18, tandis que les résultats des partis sunnites se sont avérés décevants pour leurs dirigeants, probablement en raison de la fragmentation de leurs formations politiques, et de la concurrence de plusieurs leaders, comme Al-Nujayfi et Al-Mutlaq. Cela peut montrer aussi un désenchantement sunnite envers des élections qu'ils ont jugé soit perdues d'avance, soit inutiles.

Les résultats pour la Région du Kurdistan et les provinces où vit

une importante population kurde sont les suivants :

- État de droit (du Premier Ministre Maliki) obtient 92 sièges (+ 2 par rapport à 2010)
- Le mouvement sadriste obtient 34 sièges ;
- Le conseil suprême islamique (chiite religieux) obtient 31 sièges ;
- La Coalition de la réforme d'Usama Al-Nujayfi obtient 28 sièges (+ 14) ;
- Le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (Barzani) obtient 25 sièges (- 4) ;
- La Coalition arabe d'Iyyad Allawi obtient 21 sièges ;

- L'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (Talabani) obtient 21 sièges (+ 7) ;
- Goran (Mouvement pour le changement) de Nawshirwan Mustafa obtient 9 sièges (+ 1) ;
- Le Mouvement national de la réforme d'Al-Jaffari obtient 6 sièges ;
- Le Parti islamique de la vertu (une branche sadriste) obtient 5 sièges ;
- La liste « Diyala est notre identité » obtient 5 sièges ;
- Yekgirtu, l'Union islamique du Kurdistan obtient 4 sièges ;
- L'Alliance démocratique civile obtient 3 sièges ;

- Komal, le Groupe islamique du Kurdistan obtient 3 sièges (+ 1)
- Autres partis : 23 sièges ;
- Minorités : 8 sièges.

Erbil :

- Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (Barzani) : 7 sièges
- Union patriotique du Kurdistan (Talabani) : 4 sièges
- Goran (Mouvement pour le changement, Nawshirwan Mustafa) : 2 sièges
- Komal (Groupe islamique, Hassan Ali) : 2 sièges

Total : 15 sièges**Suleimanieh :**

- Goran (Mouvement pour le changement) : 7 sièges
- Union patriotique du Kurdistan : 6 sièges
- Parti démocratique du Kurdistan : 2 sièges
- Komal (Groupe islamique) : 2 sièges
- Yekgirtu (Union islamique du Kurdistan, Ahmad Aziz) : 2 sièges

Total : 14 sièges**Duhok :**

- Parti démocratique du Kurdistan : 8 sièges
- Yekgirtu (Union islamique du Kurdistan) : 2 sièges
- Union patriotique du Kurdistan : 1 siège

Total : 11 sièges**Kirkouk :**

- Union patriotique du Kurdistan : 6 sièges
- Front turkmène (Baha Al Din Sahaay) : 2 sièges

- Parti démocratique du Kurdistan : 2 sièges
- Al-Arabiyyah (Al-Mutlaq) : 1 siège
- Coalition arabe - Kirkouk (Assi Ali) : 1 siège

Total : 12 sièges**Ninive :**

- Coalition de la réforme (Al-Nujayfi) : 12 sièges
- Alliance du Kurdistan-Ninive (Barzani) : 6 sièges
- Coalition nationale (Allawi) : 4 sièges
- Alliance nationale - Ninive (Al-Hakim) : 3 sièges
- Coalition Al-Arabiya (Al-Mutlaq) : 3 sièges
- Union patriotique du Kurdistan (Talabani) : 2 sièges
- Coalition Irak (Al-Chamri) : 1 siège
- Mouvement yézidi de la réforme et du progrès (siège réservé, Jijo Brim) : 1 siège
- Conseil shabak (siège réservé, Mohammad Ahmad) : 1 siège

Total : 31 sièges

Si l'on additionne tous les sièges des partis kurdes, on aboutit à un total de 62 députés, soit cinq sièges de plus que dans la précédente législative. À ce total, il conviendrait d'ajouter les 4 sièges des minorités religieuses du Kurdistan, traditionnellement alliées à l'Alliance du Kurdistan, faisant de celle-ci le deuxième bloc parlementaire à Bagdad après le parti État de droit de Maliki.

Il faut noter la progression de l'UPK et de Goran et la baisse du PDK, qui espérait au moins 28 sièges, de l'aveu même d'un de ses responsables, Khosro Goran, qui a exprimé, sur le site Internet du PDK, la déconvenue du parti, qui comptait aussi « remporter

plus de sièges à Erbil et à Ninive » ainsi qu'au moins un siège dans la province de Diyala.

Forte de ce score global, la présidence du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan affirme, dans un communiqué publié sur son site, que les Kurdes irakiens ont « droit » à la présidence de l'Irak fédéral (ceci dans l'expectative de la prochaine « démission » de Jalal Talabani, que la maladie a empêché d'exercer ses fonctions depuis 2012).

Depuis l'adoption par référendum de la constitution irakienne, en 2005, les fonctions de la présidence ont été assumées par Jalal Talabani, alors que les postes de Premier Ministre passaient successivement des mains d'Iyyad Allawi, Ibrahim Al-Jaffari et de Nouri Maliki qui prétend à présent à exercer un troisième mandat.

Si le cabinet irakien est, du fait de leur supériorité numérique, dominé par les chiites, la présidence du Parlement irakien est, depuis 2010, dévolue à un sunnite arabe, Usama Al-Nujayfi, ce qui, depuis la fuite et la condamnation à mort par contumace du vice-président sunnite Tarik Hashimi, compense le déséquilibre dans la répartition des postes entre entités ethniques ou religieuses.

Un Kurde à la présidence, en plus de jouer un rôle plus neutre au milieu des partis sunnites et chiites, aurait aussi l'avantage, pour ceux qui craignent une scission du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan et de l'Irak fédéral, de maintenir une présence et une implication kurdes au sein du gouvernement central, alors que si aucun poste de dirigeant n'est accordé aux Kurdes, cela ne ferait qu'accroître ou entériner la prise de distance, politique et administrative, de la Région du

Kurdistan, surtout depuis que Nouri Maliki a cessé de payer les salaires des fonctionnaires kurdes, ce qui encourage fortement Massoud Barzani à parler ouvertement d'indépendance.

Mais si la présidence du GRK réclame, dans son communiqué, la présidence de l'Irak comme « un droit du peuple du Kurdistan », rien, dans la constitution irakienne, ne fonde cette attribution automatique, qui résulte d'un arrangement consensuel entre factions politiques après la chute de Saddam, les mouvements arabes rivaux s'étant satisfaits, jusqu'ici, de donner ce poste à un Kurde dont le rôle était d'arbitrer leurs conflits.

De plus, la Région du Kurdistan réclame que tout président irakien – qui est élu par le Parlement de Bagdad – soit approuvé par le Parlement kurde d'Erbil, ce qui a déclenché la fureur d'autres mouvements politiques irakiens.

Mais au-delà des réactions épidermiques que provoque toute avancée des Kurdes vers un statut non plus fédéral, mais confédéral, le remplacement de Jalal Talabani par un autre Kurde est loin de rencontrer une grande opposition dans les milieux politiques arabes, bien au contraire. L'absence du président Talabani de la scène irakienne a coïncidé avec une aggravation des conflits entre Kurdes et Arabes, mais aussi avec une détérioration du climat politique et par conséquent sécuritaire de tout l'Irak, alimenté en partie par la mésentente entre sunnites et chiites. Aussi, depuis la mise en retrait de l'actuel président d'Irak, d'autres noms kurdes sont régulièrement mis en avant, issus du PDK ou de l'UPK.

Ainsi, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan, par la bouche d'un des membres de son bureau politique, Roj Nuri Shaways qui est aussi vice-premier ministre irakien, avait déclaré sur la radio kurde Nawa, que « de nombreuses lignes politiques et partis » (sans cependant les nommer) avaient demandé à l'actuel président de la Région kurde de succéder à Talabani, mais que Massoud Barzani n'accepterait cette fonction que sous certaines conditions (principalement celles portant sur un accroissement des pouvoirs présidentiels).

Finalement, le PDK a préféré mettre en avant la candidature de Hoshyar Zebari, l'actuel ministre des affaires étrangères irakiens, qui serait un choix plus consensuel que Massoud Barzani, en tout cas du point de vue irakien.

C'est, en tout cas, l'avis de Mahmoud Othman, vétéran de la politique kurde et député au Parlement de Bagdad dans l'Alliance du Kurdistan qui a annoncé, le 12 mai, sur la radio Iraqi FM, la possible candidature de Zebari, approuvée par le PDK, mais qu'il restait à obtenir, pour cela, l'accord de l'UPK qui a ses propres candidats à mettre en avant et rétorque que le PDK ayant déjà en main la présidence du Kurdistan, il ne peut prétendre à assurer en parallèle celle de l'Irak comme l'a expliqué au quotidien Al-Musama Adel Murad, membre du Conseil central de l'UPK.

Le gouverneur de Kirkouk, Najmaldin Karim, un membre de l'UPK très proche de Jalal Talabani puisque c'est un de ses médecins, est ainsi vu comme un candidat possible issu de l'UPK, d'autant que

c'est le député kurde qui a obtenu la victoire la plus massive aux législatives, et ce dans une province où les conflits entre Kurdes, arabes sunnites et Turkmènes sont incessants.

Mais si la constitution irakienne prévoit que le président doit être élu par le parlement afin, ensuite, de désigner un Premier Ministre, dans les faits, la victoire des urnes prépare avant tout l'avènement du futur chef du gouvernement : Nouri Maliki, de façon prévisible, est vainqueur relatif de ces législatives mais doit former des alliances pour un gouvernement de coalition. Or, il a réussi à s'aliéner tant de factions irakiennes, en plus des Kurdes, que beaucoup prédisent qu'un troisième mandat pourrait entraîner l'éclatement du pays. Ne pouvant rien faire avec le veto des Kurdes et d'une bonne partie des sunnites, il doit chercher à se concilier les uns et les autres, ce qui va à contre-pied de la politique de rétorsion pratiquée contre Erbil ces derniers mois, et des sanglantes représailles à Anbar, province sunnite au bord de la révolte.

Les Kurdes, jusqu'ici, ont passé pour les « faiseurs de rois » de la politique irakienne. Aujourd'hui, Massoud Barzani laisse entendre qu'ils pourraient bien ne pas participer au prochain gouvernement, et ce divorce déjà administratif pourrait devenir plus que politique, mais institutionnel: « Toutes les options sont sur la table. Le temps est venu des décisions finales. Nous n'allons pas attendre une autre décennie et vivre à nouveau la même expérience. Si nous boycottons le processus, nous boycottons tout [le parlement et le gouvernement]. » (source Reuters, 13 mai).

>>>>>

KURDISTAN : LE PÉTROLE KURDE ARRIVE SUR LES MARCHÉS INTERNATIONAUX

Le 13 mai 2014, le ministre turc de l'Énergie, Taner Yıldız, annonçait, dans une conférence régionale sur l'énergie, donnée à Istanbul, que le pétrole acheminé et stocké dans le port de Ceyhan était prêt à la vente :

« Nos réservoirs de stockage à Ceyhan pour le pétrole du nord de l'Irak sont pleins. Il n'y a aucun obstacle à la vente. Ce pétrole appartient aux Irakiens et ce sont eux qui le vendront. »

Taner Yıldız a aussi assuré que des « responsables officiels de Bagdad, d'Erbil et de Turquie supervisaient les ventes » et que l'argent serait déposé dans la banque d'État turque Halk-Bank. Il a donné le chiffre de 2, 5 millions de barils stockés, soit la pleine capacité des réservoirs, et indiqué que le pétrole serait probablement vendu en Italie et en Allemagne.

Peu de temps auparavant, le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (GRK) avait déjà annoncé que son pétrole serait vendu courant mai, et Massoud Barzani, le président kurde, avait qualifié cette décision de « décision politique » en la présentant ouvertement comme une riposte à la « punition » budgétaire du gouvernement central qui, depuis le début de l'année, prive les fonctionnaires de la Région kurde de leur traitement :

« Nous allons continuer de produire du pétrole, de l'extraire et de le vendre. S'ils (Bagdad) persistent dans l'escalade, nous le ferons aussi de notre côté. »

Le 23 mai, le GRK annonçait officiellement que la première cargaison de pétrole kurde (1 million de barils) avait quitté Ceyhan pour voguer vers les

marchés européens, et que ce n'était que la première vente, qui allait être suivie de nombreuses autres, afin d'écouler le pétrole du Kurdistan, via son nouvel oléoduc.

Les revenus de ces ventes sont considérés par le GRK comme faisant partie de la part du budget irakien qui leur est alloué constitutionnellement mais les gouvernements kurde a ajouté qu'il restait « ouvert à toute négociation » avec Bagdad, et qu'il s'acquitterait même, envers les Nations Unies, du versement de 5% en réparation de ce que doit l'Irak après l'invasion du Koweït ; ce prélèvement serait ainsi déposé dans un compte à part.

Du côté irakien, la liste parlementaire État de droit de Nouri Maliki, s'est « étonnée » publiquement de l'absence de réactions, non pas de la communauté internationale, mais des autres partis irakiens, comme l'exprime un membre de cette coalition, Qasim Al-Araji :

« Il est surprenant que les blocs et les partis politiques qui rejettent un troisième mandat de Nouri Maliki n'aient eu aucune prise de position sur le fait que le Kurdistan a commencé d'exporter et de vendre son pétrole, sans l'assentiment du gouvernement fédéral... cette exportation est pourtant contraire aux positions des partis religieux chiites [vigoureux opposants à Maliki] quand ils affirment que le pétrole appartient au peuple irakien. »

Le gouvernement irakien n'a pas tardé, lui, à réagir, en annonçant que des poursuites judiciaires allaient être lancées contre la Turquie et BOTAS, la compagnie nationale qui gère l'oléoduc qui a convoyé le pétrole kurde, en évaluant le préjudice qui lui aurait

été fait à plus de 250 millions de dollars.

Commentant la « demande d'arbitrage international » déposée par le ministère du Pétrole irakien contre la Turquie, le Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan a dénoncé, dans un communiqué officiel, un « comportement incompatible avec les pratiques établies et acceptées », qui « menacent la capacité d'exportation de pétrole de l'Irak et sa position diplomatique dans le monde », ainsi que ses relations avec les marchés mondiaux. Le ministère irakien est aussi accusé d'agir en violation de la constitution de 2005 et des lois internationales car, le rappelle la Région du Kurdistan, l'article 110 ne donne aucun pouvoir à ce ministère en ce qui concerne l'exploration, la production et l'exportation des hydrocarbures kurdes, pouvoirs et autorités que confèrent au GRK, par contre, les articles 112 et 115 de cette même constitution.

Le GRK rappelle en effet que selon la constitution, le gouvernement fédéral a droit au partage de ses revenus pétroliers quand ils proviennent de gisements exploités avant 2005 et que les exportations ne concernent que les puits plus récents ; la Région a ainsi le droit de recevoir directement des revenus de la vente de ses hydrocarbures, et rappelle avoir, jusqu'ici, volontairement, appliqué le même système du partage sur tous ses gisements, d'avant ou d'après 2005.

Enfin, le gouvernement kurde vise plus directement le ministère du Pétrole irakien (et derrière le ministre, le vice-premier ministre en charge des questions de l'Énergie, Hussein Sharistani, l'adversaire le plus obstiné à contrer les projets d'indépendan-

ce énergétique des Kurdes). Erbil accuse en effet le ministère d'avoir présenter les faits de façon biaisée, et même fausse, au gouvernement fédéral, sur l'étendue et la nature des exportations, omettant notamment de rapporter que la plus grande partie des revenus pétroliers kurdes était perçue directement par SOMO, l'agence étatique chargée de la commercialisation du pétrole irakien, rattachée pourtant à ce même ministère, et que les bénéficiaires en avaient été jusqu'ici versés à l'État irakien.

Le gouvernement du Kurdistan réaffirme ainsi sa volonté de jouir de ses droits constitutionnels concernant la perception directe des bénéfices pétroliers et Muayad Tayeb, le porte-parole du groupe parlementaire de

l'Alliance kurde à Bagdad, a indiqué, le 26 mai, que l'argent du pétrole exporté servirait à payer les fonctionnaires de la Région kurde, en place de Bagdad, moins les 5% revenant au fond de dédommagement du Koweït. Il a aussi critiqué la prise de position de Washington : la Secrétaire d'État, Jen Psaki, a en effet déclaré que les USA ne soutenaient pas ces exportations faites sans l'accord du gouvernement central, alors que les mêmes États-Unis n'ont pas eu un mot pour critiquer l'attitude irakienne sur le partage des revenus et le gel des traitements des fonctionnaires kurdes.

La position du gouvernement kurde est, pour résumer, un retour aux véritables dispositions de la constitution qui alloue

17% du budget total de l'Irak au Kurdistan et si le gouvernement fédéral continue de bloquer les salaires, le GRK prélèvera ce qu'il faut sur l'argent de son pétrole pour assurer le traitement de ses fonctionnaires.

Quant aux menaces de poursuites judiciaires à un niveau international, dont Hussein Sharistani a menacé la Région kurde tout comme la Turquie, le porte-parole du gouvernement d'Erbil, Safeen Diyazee, a fait remarquer, peut-être ironiquement, que comme le Kurdistan faisait (encore) partie de l'Irak, ce dernier ne pouvait engager de poursuites auprès des tribunaux internationaux contre une de ses propres régions et qu'il ne s'agissait donc que d'une affaire interne au pays.

PARIS-ROME : TROIS RENCONTRES OFFICIELLES DE MASSOUD BARZANI

Le 22 mai, le président de la Région du Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani, entamait une tournée diplomatique européenne, en commençant par Paris, et devant ensuite se rendre en Italie, afin de discuter, officiellement, des relations bilatérales du Kurdistan avec ces États, en général, et plus particulièrement pour aborder la question de la crise entre les Kurdes et Bagdad et venir faire entendre de vive voix le point de vue du GRK dans ce conflit...

Coïncidence du calendrier, ces visites de Massoud Barzani ont débuté en même temps que l'annonce par la Turquie de la mise en vente, sur les marchés internationaux, du pétrole kurde, au grand dam de l'Irak qui a menacé aussitôt Ankara de poursuites judiciaires.

Le 23 mai, Massoud Barzani était reçu à l'Élysée par François Hollande. Sa dernière et première

visite en France en tant que président de la Région kurde remontait à juin 2010, et il y avait alors rencontré Nicolas Sarkozy. Le président Hollande lui a, selon le communiqué officiel de l'Élysée, « fait part des préoccupations de la France concernant la dégradation sécuritaire en Irak. Il a également souhaité que le processus électoral en cours puisse s'achever en toute transparence et dans le respect des échéances constitutionnelles.

Le Chef de l'Etat a en outre exprimé son soutien à la constitution d'un gouvernement de réconciliation en Irak, dans un esprit d'unité permettant à toutes les communautés d'être justement représentées et de répondre aux défis qu'affronte le pays.

Il a enfin souligné la volonté de la France de renforcer ses liens avec la région du Kurdistan, dans le cadre des institutions fédérales irakiennes. »

Du côté kurde, le directeur du département des Affaires étrangères, Falah Mustafa, a rapporté au journal Rudaw que la France avait promis son « soutien » à la Région, notamment lors de la « prochaine étape » des Kurdes, mais sans préciser la nature précise de cette étape, alors que, dans le climat politique actuel, la riposte des Kurdes peut aller d'un statut de confédération, à un référendum permettant une future indépendance, si Nouri Maliki persistait à vouloir prendre la tête d'un troisième cabinet..

Falah Mustafa a aussi rapporté que le président Barzani avait clairement affirmé au président François Hollande ainsi qu'à de hauts responsables français, que les Kurdes avaient « d'autres options » au cas où Bagdad ne parviendrait pas à changer de politique envers la Région du Kurdistan :

« Il a été souligné que la Région du

Kurdistan avait fait de son mieux, mais qu'il n'était pas possible de continuer dans cette voie et, pour l'avenir, nous disposons de plusieurs solutions concrètes. »

Fuad Hussein, le chef du cabinet présidentiel a cependant précisé que la question de l'indépendance n'avait pas été abordée au cours de la rencontre, mais que François Hollande avait dit à Massoud Barzani que « quelle que soit la décision que vous prendrez, il devrait y avoir un échange de vues entre nous ».

Massoud Barzani s'est ensuite envolé pour Rome, et y a d'abord rencontré, le 30 mai, le pape François pour la première fois. En 2009 et 2011 il avait déjà rendu visite à son prédécesseur, Benoît XVI.

Cette fois, l'entretien devait porter plus sur la situation sécuritaire et sur l'accueil des quelques 30 000 chrétiens d'Irak venus se réfugier au Kurdistan.

Interviewé par Radio-Vatican au sujet de cette visite et de ce que représente le Kurdistan d'Irak pour des milliers de chrétiens menacés, monseigneur Rabban Al-Qas, évêque de Zakho-Amadiya, a jugé que cette rencontre était une « aide » pour ces chrétiens du Kurdistan. Il a souligné « l'exception » qu'était le Kurdistan, par comparaison avec le reste de l'Irak, où il n'y a pas de « paix stable » mais où, au contraire, les factions politiques s'entre-déchirent, où ne

règne aucune entente ni collaboration, par exemple entre le Premier Ministre et les leaders des autres partis :

« Il n'y a pas de gouvernement [...] rien n'a été fait contre la pauvreté, au contraire, les gens se sont beaucoup appauvris et vivent dans la peur ; ce peuple a souffert et il continue à souffrir » a ajouté Mgr Rabban, qui a notamment stigmatisé la corruption des élites politiques irakiennes.

« Si vous comparez cela avec ce qui se passe au Kurdistan, où il y a un grand respect » entre les communautés, [...] la Région kurde est une exception. Je ne peux pas dire que c'est un paradis mais il y a, là où nous vivons, une liberté, quelque chose de palpable, des compagnies étrangères, beaucoup de commerces... celui qui le veut peut étudier, devenir universitaire, celui qui veut travailler ici a sa chance. »

Massoud Barzani a ensuite rencontré la ministre italienne des Affaires étrangères, Federica Mogherini, pour discuter, là encore, des relations bilatérales, de la situation en Irak et en Syrie et de la question des réfugiés chrétiens au Kurdistan.

Lors de ces deux rencontres, la communauté kurde a été sensible au fait que le Vatican comme le gouvernement italien avaient accueilli Massoud Barzani avec le drapeau kurde déployés aux côtés du drapeau irakien, ce que Fuad Hussein a estimé être un « message pour le peuple du Kurdistan,

que le monde extérieur comprenait le statut de la Région du Kurdistan. C'est la reconnaissance de l'identité du peuple du Kurdistan, de son identité légale. » (Rudaw).

La ministre Federica Mogherini a indiqué que l'Italie avait 400 projets d'investissements dans la Région du Kurdistan et se montrait désireuse de renforcer ces liens dans le futur :

« Nos relations économiques et commerciales sont très bonnes. Nous cherchons à les améliorer et à les accroître à l'avenir. »

De l'avis de Falah Mustafa, il y a, au niveau international, un intérêt accru pour la Région du Kurdistan et l'attitude des chancelleries envers les Kurdes a changé à cet égard :

« Ce que nous sentons, d'une point de vue personnel et professionnel, est que ces voyages, ceux du président comme ceux du Premier Ministre sont différents des précédents. La lecture que fait la communauté internationale du Kurdistan est à présent différente, sa volonté de nous écouter davantage est différente. »

De son côté, Fuad Hussein a résumé les thèmes abordés dans cette série de rencontres, en révélant que la majeure partie des entretiens avait porté sur la situation actuelle en Irak, sur la formation de son prochain gouvernement et un possible pas en avant des Kurdes vers un référendum sur l'indépendance.

SYRIE :

MASSACRES ET ENLEVEMENTS MASSIFS DE KURDES PAR L'EIIL

L'organisation jihadiste État islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIIL) a perpétré des raids contre trois villages autour de Serê Kaniyê (Ras al-'Ayn) et a tué des dizaines de civils, dont des femmes et des enfants, selon

l'agence de presse ANF, proche du PKK, qui indiquent que des corps d'au moins 15 personnes, dont 7 enfants, ont été découverts. Le village de Temad, près de Serê Kaniyê, a ainsi été attaqué à la voiture piégée par EIIL, ce qui a causé plusieurs victimes.

De source YPG (les forces armées du PYD), des troupes d'EIIL, qui avaient été repoussées par les Kurdes, se sont retirées en massacrant plusieurs civils dans au moins deux villages.

CANNES : SIMAV OU « EAU ARGENTÉE » APPLAUDI AU FESTIVAL

« **E**n Syrie, les Youtubeurs filment et meurent tous les jours. Tandis que d'autres tuent et filment.

A Paris, je ne peux que filmer le ciel et monter ces images youtube, guidé par cet amour indéfectible de la Syrie.

De cette tension entre ma distance, mon pays et la révolution est née une rencontre.

Une jeune cinéaste Kurde de Homs m'a « Tchaté » : « Si ta caméra était ici à Homs que filmerais-tu ? »

Le film est l'histoire de ce partage.

C'est ainsi que se présente un documentaire filmant en direct la guerre de Syrie a été très remarquée au festival de Cannes : « Simav », « Eau argentée » en kurde, porte le nom de son co-auteur, une Kurde de Syrie, Wiam Simav Bedirxan, 35 ans, qui enseigne à Homs et y a filmé la guerre avec les moyens du bord, en partenariat avec le réalisateur syrien Ossama Mohammed, 60 ans, exilé en France depuis 2011. « Simav » mêle des documents qu'Ossama Mohammad a ramené

de Syrie avec lui, des vidéos publiés sur Youtube, et les échanges, par chat et en vidéos, avec Wiam Simav qui raconte de Homs ou de Deraa le quotidien de la Syrie en guerre, filmé durant 3 ans au moyen d'une caméra DV ou d'un téléphone portable. Y sont insérées aussi des scènes de violence, notamment de torture, perpétrées par les forces syriennes, filmées par les bourreaux eux-mêmes et postés sur les réseaux sociaux, ainsi que les exactions des milices jihadistes.

Le 16 mai, jour de la projection, Simav Bedirxan avait rejoint sur la scène Ossama Muhammad qu'elle rencontrait pour la première fois. Ayant quitté la Syrie provisoirement, via la Turquie, c'est in-extremis que la cinéaste a pu gagner Nice en avion et assister à la projection de son film.

« Cette révolution s'est faite aussi par les images. Elle a été, de manière inédite, une guerre des images qui a mobilisé les deux camps. En tant que cinéaste, je devais en prendre acte. J'ai longtemps cherché, jusqu'au jour où j'ai reçu, à la Noël 2011, par Facebook, le premier courrier de cette jeune femme, Simav, dans lequel elle me disait qu'elle avait

décidé de filmer pour ne pas mourir, en me demandant des conseils. Ce message a été pour moi un moment de vérité, j'ai compris que c'était une opportunité artistique qui nous était offerte et au fur et à mesure que nous échangeions, chaque message pouvant aussi bien être le dernier, j'ai compris que le film, c'était nous deux, et à travers nous deux et les images de Simav, le peuple syrien tout entier. » (Le Monde).

Interviewée par Le Monde, Simav Bedirxan exprime son désir « de retourner au plus vite en Syrie », même si « en tant que femme, en tant que non voilée et en tant que Kurde » elle n'avait, avant la guerre, jamais senti avoir sa place en Syrie :

« Je suis partie à Alep acheter une caméra que j'ai fait entrer clandestinement à Homs, j'ai contacté Ossama, et je me suis mise à filmer sans pouvoir m'arrêter. Même en dormant, je tenais la caméra. Je crois que si j'ai survécu, c'est grâce à cette caméra : elle était comme un cœur qui battait, et Ossama à Paris était le cordon ombilical qui me reliait à la vie. »

CULTURE :

MORT D'ABBAS KAMANDI

Abbas Kamandi, chanteur, poète et peintre kurde de la ville de Sine (Sanandadj) est mort dans sa ville natale, le 22 mai, d'une insuffisance cardiaque à l'âge de 62 ans, alors qu'il se trouvait hospitalisé pour des problèmes rénaux.

Né dans une famille modeste, Abbas Kamandi n'avait jamais pu faire d'études supérieures, mais a commencé d'écrire à l'âge

de 16 ans. Un peu moins de deux ans plus tard, il avait remporté son premier prix littéraire en 1970, dans un concours organisé par Radio-Sine. C'est là qu'il avait fait la connaissance de Hassan Kamkar, le père des fameux Kamkaran, qui fut son maître en musique folklorique.

Il avait ensuite travaillé pendant plus de trente ans dans cette même radio et est aussi l'auteur de plusieurs dramaturgies pour

la radio et la télévision. Il dirigeait aussi la Maison de la culture et de la littérature de sa ville.

Aux débuts de la révolution islamique, alors que les arts de la scène et de la musique n'avaient plus droit de cité en raison des interdits religieux, il se concentra davantage sur l'aspect anthropologique et ethnologiques des musiques populaires dont il était un expert approfondi. Pendant 18 ans, il a ainsi collecté des

légendes, des proverbes, des croyances, devinettes et autres traditions orales.

Auteur de plus de 150 chansons, en ayant enregistré lui-même une soixantaine, ses œuvres étaient très populaires parmi les Kurdes d'Iran. Il laisse aussi une œuvre écrite de plusieurs recueils de poésie, quatre romans et une anthologie biographique des personnalités éminentes de Sine et Kermanshan.

Il a aussi exposé en tant que

peintre en 2012 à Suleimanieh où ses chansons étaient aussi appréciées, notamment « Sabri giyan », qu'il avait enregistrée en duo avec la chanteuse Shaheen Talabani. Il s'est aussi produit avec le groupe kurde Kamkaran.

Son souci était de perpétuer l'art du chant kurde, dans ce qu'il a de distinctif, en le préservant des influences de la pop turque ou arabe : « Quelquefois, quand vous écoutez nos chanteurs, vous ne pouvez dire si leur musique est kurde, arabe ou

turque jusqu'à ce qu'ils chantent les premiers mots ». (Rudaw).

Lorsqu'on lui demandait s'il avait été influencé par la musique persane, il répliquait : « Non. J'ai influencé la musique persane. »

Ses obsèques ont eut lieu le 26 mai, à Sine, des milliers d'habitants de Sine, des artistes, musiciens, écrivains ont accompagné sa dépouille, formant un cortège funéraire au rythme du daf, le tambour traditionnel kurde.

Le Monde
Samedi 3 mai 2014

Après les élections législatives, l'Irak face aux risques de partition

Analyse

Bagdad
Envoyé spécial

Les insurgés sunnites ont raté leur cible. Les élections législatives irakiennes du mercredi 30 avril, qu'ils avaient promis de perturber, se sont déroulées dans un calme inattendu. Seize personnes ont été tuées dans le pays, l'un des bilans journaliers les plus bas du mois d'avril. Dans la capitale transformée en camp retranché, pas une seule attaque meurtrière n'a été recensée. « C'est une gifle pour le terrorisme, le scrutin a eu raison d'Al-Qaida et de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant [EIL, un groupe djihadiste à la pointe de l'insurrection sunnite] », s'est glorié jeudi 1^{er} mai le premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki.

A la tête de la Coalition de l'Etat de droit, l'homme fort de l'Irak, un islamiste chiite de 63 ans, vise un troisième mandat consécutif, au grand dam de la quasi-totalité de la classe politique, persuadée que son style séctaire et brutal est à l'origine de la remontée en flèche des attentats depuis un an. Quelques heures après l'auto-satisfecit de M. Maliki, la publication des données complètes par les ministères de l'intérieur, de la défense et de la santé rappelait une sombre réalité : avec 1009 personnes tuées dans des attaques, le mois d'avril a été l'un des plus sanglants depuis 2008, l'année de sortie de la guerre civile. Un chiffre qui préfigure les dangers menaçant l'Irak dans l'hypothèse où le premier ministre serait reconduit à son poste. « Si Maliki reste au pouvoir, il faut craindre un éclatement du pays », estime un diplomate occidental.

Les résultats officiels du scrutin ne seront pas proclamés avant la mi-mai. Mais comme aucune des listes n'est susceptible de remporter la majorité des 328 sièges du Parlement, cette annonce ne suffira pas pour connaître l'identité du prochain premier ministre. Une longue période de tractations entre partis risque de s'ouvrir, comme après les législatives de 2010, quand M. Maliki avait damé le pion, au bout de neuf mois d'intrigues, à son rival laïque Iyad Allawi, pourtant arrivé en tête. Cette fois-ci, le premier ministre sortant ambitionne de former un cabinet

Le scrutin du 30 avril s'est déroulé dans un calme relatif ; les résultats sont attendus pour la mi-mai



Le quartier sunnite d'Adhamiya, à Bagdad, à la veille des élections du 30 avril. LAM DUC HIEN POUR « LE MONDE »

appuyé sur une majorité simple, composée des partis chiites et de quelques ralliés sunnites et kurdes. A l'entendre, tous les maux qui accablent l'Irak aujourd'hui sont la conséquence du gouvernement d'entente nationale, formé en 2010 et aussitôt paralysé, en raison de conflits incessants entre ses membres. Son modèle idéal : l'Etat mésopotamien, centralisé et autoritaire.

Ses adversaires, au contraire, ne jurent que par le gouvernement unitaire, la seule formule à même de réconcilier l'Irak, selon eux. Ils attribuent les crises politiques des dernières années au fait que l'accord de partage du pouvoir, qui a propulsé M. Maliki à la tête du gouvernement, n'a jamais été appliqué. Le ministère de la défense n'a pas été attribué à un sunnite et les promesses faites aux Kurdes ont vite été enterrées.

Parmi celles-ci : le vote d'une loi sur les revenus pétroliers et l'organisation d'un référendum sur les « territoires disputés », des régions en lisière du Kurdistan irakien, qui sont revendiquées par Erbil, capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan. « Maliki veut un gouvernement à sa main, alors que l'opposition veut une véritable coalition, décrypte un expert étranger. S'il parvient à ses fins, il faut craindre un accroissement du terrorisme et

une possible guerre côté kurde. »

Dans l'Anbar, la grande province sunnite de l'ouest, Fallouja et une partie de Ramadi sont aux mains de l'insurrection. Si l'EIL mène aujourd'hui le combat, l'initiative du soulèvement revient aux tribus locales, excédées d'être marginalisées par Bagdad. Le pouvoir central

Le modèle de Nouri Al-Maliki, c'est l'Etat mésopotamien, centralisé et autoritaire

n'a satisfait aucune de leurs revendications, exprimées dans des manifestations pacifiques début 2013, telles que la libération de prisonniers, la révision de la législation anti-terroriste ou la suspension de la loi qui exclut de la vie politique les ex-membres du parti Baas, celui de Saddam Hussein.

Outre l'EIL, qui recrute beaucoup d'étrangers et prône un djihadisme transnational, à cheval sur l'Irak, la Syrie et le Liban, la rébellion armée est menée par deux autres factions, qui puisent dans le réservoir des anciens militaires baasistes : Ansar Al-Islam, une milice salafiste nationaliste, et la Naqshbandiyya, une confrérie sou-

fie. Pour l'instant, ces combattants ne sont pas parvenus à s'établir au-delà de leurs bases de l'Anbar, sauf pour une brève période, dans la ville de Souleimane Pak, dans les territoires disputés du nord. « Ces régions sont des zones de non-droit, explique Arthur Quesnay, chercheur de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient basé à Erbil. La population sunnite y réclame pour l'instant un retour de l'Etat. Mais si Maliki est reconduit et qu'il lance une offensive contre Fallouja, les esprits pourraient se radicaliser. Ce serait une catastrophe. »

Du côté kurde, la tension reste vive depuis que l'armée irakienne et les peshmergas (combattants kurdes) ont été à deux doigts d'entrer en guerre, fin 2012. En représailles à la décision d'Erbil de commencer à exporter du pétrole directement, Bagdad a coupé les salaires des fonctionnaires dans les trois provinces qui forment le Kurdistan. « L'entourage de Maliki estime que le Kurdistan est en train de partir, que c'est inéluctable, que ce sera le Cachemire de l'Irak », confie un diplomate. Les forces centrifuges qui agitent le pays risquent de s'accélérer d'autant plus que, durant les prochains mois, toute l'énergie du pouvoir sera consacrée à la formation d'une nouvelle coalition. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE



Turquie: Libération de 2 soldats turcs enlevés par le PKK, attentat manqué dans l'Est

Istanbul, 2 mai 2014 (AFP)

DEUX MILITAIRES turcs, enlevés il y a cinq jours par des séparatistes kurdes dans le sud-est de la Turquie, ont été libérés tard jeudi, a-t-on indiqué de source de sécurité locale.

Les deux militaires, qui étaient en bonne santé, ont été remis à des représentants d'un parti politique kurde légal de Lice, la ville aux abords de laquelle ils avaient été kidnappés le 26 avril, a-t-on précisé de même source.

L'enlèvement survient après la mise en garde lancée par le fondateur du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, illégal), Abdullah Öcalan, qui purge une peine de prison à vie, via un communiqué confié à son avocat, sur la possibilité d'un retour à la violence.

Le rapt des soldats visaient, selon les ravisseurs, à dénoncer la construction dans

cette zone d'un poste militaire turc.

Par ailleurs, une puissante bombe a explosé jeudi au passage d'un convoi militaire, sans faire de victime, ont rapporté les médias.

L'incident s'est produit à Tunceli (Est) et le PKK est blâmé par les autorités locales.

Le gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc a engagé en 2011 des discussions avec Abdullah Öcalan afin de mettre un terme à un conflit qui a fait plus de 45.000 morts depuis 1984.

Le PKK a décrété un cessez-le-feu unilatéral il y a un an et commencé le retrait de ses combattants vers leurs base du nord de l'Irak. Mais ce mouvement a été interrompu, les Kurdes jugeant qu'Ankara n'avait pas respecté ses promesses. ●



Les Kurdes revendiquent la présidence de l'Irak

Erbil (Irak), 4 mai 2014 (AFP)

LES KURDES ont revendiqué dimanche la présidence de l'Irak, occupée traditionnellement par un membre de leur communauté mais qu'ils pourraient perdre après les élections législatives de mercredi dernier.

La présidence fédérale est "un droit pour le peuple du Kurdistan", a martelé la présidence de cette région autonome du nord de l'Irak dans un communiqué.

Selon un accord non écrit mais accepté de facto par les trois principales communautés irakiennes, la présidence revient à un Kurde, le Premier ministre est chiite et la présidence du Parlement est donnée à un sunnite.

La Constitution irakienne ne rend néanmoins pas obligatoire la distribution des postes à la tête de l'Etat selon ces critères religieux ou ethniques.

Président depuis 2006, le Kurde Jalal Talabani, soigné en Allemagne depuis décembre 2012 à la suite d'une attaque cérébrale, est arrivé au terme de ses deux mandats et ne peut pas se représenter.

La succession de cet homme, respecté par de nombreux Kurdes et dont le rôle de médiateur dans les crises politiques a été salué au-delà de sa communauté, fait craindre la possibilité de perdre la présidence, alors qu'il sera difficile aux Kurdes de trouver un candidat ayant l'aura de M. Talabani et que certains leaders sunnites ont déjà commencé à faire campagne.

La présidence du Kurdistan irakien réclame dans son communiqué que tout candidat soit approuvé par le Parlement de la région, une exigence qui risque de provoquer la colère des politiciens arabes.

Si la charge présidentielle est avant tout symbolique, elle constitue pour les Kurdes une reconnaissance de leur place en Irak après des décennies de marginalisation et de violences. Des dizaines de milliers de Kurdes ont été tués du temps de Saddam Hussein, notamment dans des attaques chimiques.

La question de la présidence pourrait accentuer les tensions entre Bagdad et le Kurdistan irakien, qui s'opposent déjà au sujet du pétrole, de revendications territoriales et de la répartition du pouvoir. ●



2 MAI 2014

Irak : Halabja, sur les traces d'un massacre

2 mai 2014
www.france24.com

Il y a 25 ans, Saddam Hussein a orchestré l'un des plus grands massacres du XXe siècle. Pendant la guerre Iran-Irak (1980-1988), le régime de Bagdad accuse les Kurdes de trahison et de collaboration avec l'armée iranienne. En représailles, le 16 mars 1988, la ville d'Halabja, au Kurdistan irakien, est bombardée à l'arme chimique. En quelques heures, 5 000 personnes sont tuées. Aujourd'hui, les séquelles de ce massacre sont encore prégnantes. Nos reporters se sont rendus sur place.

L'opération Anfal menée sous l'ordre d'Ali Hassan al-Majid (surnommé "Ali le Chimique"), le cousin de Saddam Hussein, a détruit la ville d'Halabja et anéanti une grande partie de sa population. Le 16 mars 1988 à partir de 10 h 45, les chasseurs-bombardiers Mig et Mirage de l'armée irakienne



survolent la zone pendant cinq heures et larguent des bombes chimiques contenant un mélange de gaz moutarde et de neurotoxiques Tabun, Sarin et VX. Un épais nuage blanc, puis jaune s'élève. Une odeur écœurante de pomme se répand. Les habitants, pris au piège, s'effondrent les uns après les autres. L'attaque chimique tue jusqu'à 5 000 personnes, en majorité des femmes et des enfants, et en blesse des milliers d'autres.

Un quart de siècle plus tard, qu'est devenue cette région attaquée à l'arme chimique ? Quelles sont les conséquences sur le long terme d'un tel massacre ? Comment vivent aujourd'hui les survivants et leurs descendants ? C'est avec ces questions en tête que nous nous sommes rendus à Halabja.

Nous avons découvert que tous les habitants de cette ville kurde, située à 250 kilomètres au nord-est de Bagdad, ont été touchés d'une façon ou d'une autre par le bombardement. Dans chaque maison, on garde des pommes en souvenir des disparus. Chacun a en mémoire des histoires plus tragiques les unes que les autres.

Nous avons rencontré des survivants de l'opération Anfal. Ils portent encore les stigmates du massacre. Cancers, problèmes respiratoires et dermatologiques sont le lot quotidien des habitants de la région. Nous avons aussi côtoyé des victimes indirectes, ces enfants nés avec des malformations, ou d'autres tombés malades après avoir découvert une fosse commune... Il y a enfin ces bombes qui n'ont pas explosées et que les agriculteurs retrouvent par hasard dans leurs champs...

"GÉNOCIDE" ?

Aucun psychologue, aucun médecin spécialisé n'est pourtant présent dans la région. ➔

➔ Les victimes se rendent en Iran, pays frontalier, pour consulter et s'endettent pour être soignés. Depuis plusieurs années, un centre spécialisé pour accueillir les victimes est en construction à Halabja.

Aujourd'hui, les Kurdes veulent faire reconnaître le massacre d'Halabja comme un "génocide". La communauté internationale, qui soutenait l'Irak contre l'Iran au moment des faits, a fermé les

yeux. Seul le tribunal spécial irakien et la cour d'appel de La Haye ont avancé le terme de "génocide" en 2007.

Certaines entreprises occidentales sont par ailleurs accusées d'avoir fourni des armes non conventionnelles à Saddam Hussein. L'année dernière, le 10 juin 2013, vingt Kurdes d'Irak ont déposé au tribunal de grande instance de Paris une plainte contre X pour "complicité de

crimes contre l'humanité" et "rebel". Ils demandent une enquête sur le rôle de plusieurs personnes et sociétés françaises susceptibles d'avoir rendu possible ce massacre à l'arme chimique. Outre la condamnation d'éventuels complices, les victimes d'Halabja souhaitent que la justice les aide sur un plan médical et économique. ○

Par FRANCE 24

L'ORIENT
LE JOUR

2 mai 2014

« Je me fiche de savoir qui est président, tant que c'est un Kurde »

www.lorientlejour.com
2 mai 2014 (AFP)

Souleimaniyeh (Irak) — Les Kurdes irakiens pourraient perdre la présidence de l'Irak au lendemain des élections législatives, un poste symbolique mais important, qui maintient le lien ténu entre leur région et Bagdad.

Selon un accord non écrit mais accepté de facto par les trois principales communautés irakiennes, la présidence revient à un Kurde, le Premier ministre est chiite et la présidence du Parlement est donnée à un sunnite.

Président depuis 2006, Jalal Talabani, soigné en Allemagne depuis décembre 2012 à la suite d'une attaque cérébrale, est arrivé au terme de ses deux mandats et ne peut pas se représenter.

La succession de cet homme, respecté par de nombreux Kurdes et dont le rôle de médiateur dans les crises politiques a été salué au-delà de sa communauté, fait craindre la possibilité de perdre la présidence.

Il sera en effet difficile pour les Kurdes de trouver un candidat ayant l'aura de M. Talabani, au moment où l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan, son parti, jadis un des deux plus importants de cette région autonome du nord de l'Irak, est en perte de vitesse.

Et certains leaders sunnites ont déjà commencé à faire campagne pour réclamer le poste.

Pourtant, selon Qoubad Talabani, l'un des fils du président et responsable kurde de premier plan, avoir un Kurde à la tête de l'Etat est nécessaire pour "recréer un Irak qui inclut tout le monde".

"C'est un poste très important, et c'est un poste que les Kurdes voudraient garder, un poste que l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan voudrait conserver", ajoute-t-il.

Si la charge est avant tout symbolique, elle constitue pour les Kurdes une reconnaissance de leur place en Irak, après des décennies de marginalisation et de vio-

Président depuis 2006, Jalal Talabani est arrivé au terme de ses deux mandats et ne peut pas se représenter. La succession de cet homme, respecté par de nombreux Kurdes et dont le rôle de médiateur dans les crises politiques a été salué au-delà de sa communauté, fait craindre la possibilité de perdre la présidence.



lences. Des dizaines de milliers de Kurdes ont été tués du temps de Saddam Hussein, dont des milliers dans des attaques chimiques.

"Pendant des années, le président a été un Arabe, et nous avons été opprimés", déclare Aram Abdulkarim, un membre des peshmergas --les forces de sécurité kurdes-- rencontré à Souleimaniyeh et qui juge essentiel que le fauteuil présidentiel soit occupé par un Kurde.

"Je me fiche de savoir qui est président, tant que c'est un Kurde", renchérit Wahid Hamedamin, un homme âgé vêtu du costume traditionnel kurde, qui vivait autrefois dans un village du Kurdistan cible de l'une des attaques chimiques de Saddam Hussein.

- QUERELLE -

S'il est quasi-certain que le poste de chef du gouvernement restera aux mains des chiites, le Premier ministre sortant Nouri al-Maliki ayant de bonnes chances d'être reconduit, la situation est plus floue pour les sunnites et les Kurdes.

Une fois les résultats des législatives publiés -- ils ne sont pas attendus avant plusieurs semaines -- le Parlement doit élire le Premier ministre, le président et le président de la Chambre à la majorité des deux tiers.

A Souleimaniyeh, certains sont prêts à accepter de perdre la présidence en échange du poste de président du Parlement.

"Cela reste essentiel pour nous que l'un

de ces postes aille à un Kurde", souligne Aram Shekh Muhammed, candidat aux législatives de mercredi sous les couleurs de Goran. "Il est important que les Kurdes aient des droits".

Pour Michael Knights, chercheur au Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "si les Kurdes n'ont ni l'un (la présidence) ni l'autre (la tête du Parlement), ce serait un gros problème, et un signe que les Arabes retombent dans les anciennes habitudes anti-Kurdes".

Une déconvenue qui viendrait s'ajouter à la querelle déjà profonde entre Bagdad et la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, qui s'opposent au sujet du pétrole, de revendications territoriales et de la répartition du pouvoir.

La région se plaint depuis longtemps de ne pas recevoir les 17% du budget fédéral qui doivent lui être alloués, et accusent Bagdad de payer en retard les sommes qu'il veut bien leur verser, considérant le gouvernement fédéral comme responsable des difficultés budgétaires et des retards dans le paiement des salaires.

Le président irakien, doté de pouvoirs limités, ne pourra probablement pas remédier à ces problèmes, même s'il est Kurde.

"Mais cela mettrait un Kurde à la tête de l'Irak au sein de la Ligue arabe et sur la scène internationale", rappelle M. Knights.

Former US diplomat warns of possible 'grave mistake' in Syria

Ryan Crocker, former US ambassador to Syria, Iraq and Lebanon, warns against a regime change plan that would depose the Alawite power structure in Syria and advises the Obama administration to contain the fighting by backing US regional allies, but not to intervene militarily.



Author Barbara Slavin
 May 1, 2014
www.al-monitor.com

Ryan Crocker, a distinguished former US ambassador to Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, told a Washington audience May 1 that US military intervention would likely not produce a better outcome in Syria and that the Barack Obama administration should focus on a “post-Assad” but not a “post-Alawite” future for that war-torn country.

“We would be making a grave mistake if our policy were aimed at flipping the tables and bringing a Sunni ascendancy in Damascus,” said Crocker, who experienced the pitfalls of US military involvement in Lebanon in the 1980s and in Iraq in the past decade. The United States would have no assurance, he said, that a Sunni government would be an improvement on that of Bashar al-Assad and the probability would be that such a government would be “dominated by the worst of the worst” religious extremists.

Crocker, who spoke along with several other regional experts at the Council on Foreign Relations, said the United States should focus on shoring up Syria’s neighbors, providing more assistance to refugees and displaced Syrians and seeking to influence Syria’s ruling Alawite minority to, over time, eventually jettison Assad.

This post-Assad but not post-Alawite strategy could more easily win buy-in from the Syrian government’s main external backers — Russia and Iran — though Crocker suggested that outside powers alone could not end the fighting and that the conflict would go on for many more years until the combatants are exhausted.

The UN estimates that more than 140,000 Syrians have been killed over the past three years and 9.3 million others are in need of assistance. It has appealed to the Syrian government to permit unfettered access to deliver humanitarian aid as demanded by a UN Security Council resolution in February — a resolution that the Syrian government has not implemented.

Born in Washington state, Crocker said that as a westerner, he was accustomed to forest fires and that the Syrian war resembled a western fire.

Such fires cannot be put out but can be contained, he said. “No reasonable intervention by us will make things better and we could make it worse.”

Paul Pillar, a former CIA expert on the National Intelligence Council for the Near East and South Asia, largely concurred with Crocker’s minimalist recommendations for US policy. However, Charles Dunne, director of the Middle East and North Africa programs at Freedom House, suggested that limited US military intervention for humanitarian purposes as well as more assistance to the externally based Syrian opposition could have an impact on the Damascus government.

The panelists appeared to agree that one potentially fruitful avenue was preparing dossiers on individuals alleged to have committed crimes against humanity for possible submission to the International Criminal Court or another tribunal.

In fact, Stephen Rapp, head of the State Department’s Office of Global Criminal Justice, has been compiling such information for the last two years against both the Syrian regime and members of the Syrian opposition. On April 30, the House Foreign Affairs Committee adopted a resolution from Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., chairman of the Subcommittee on Human Rights, urging the Obama administration to instruct US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power to seek the creation of a Syrian war crimes tribunal. That appears unlikely now — especially



Ryan Crocker, then-US ambassador to Afghanistan, speaks during an interview at the US Embassy in Kabul, Sept. 14, 2011. (photo by REUTERS/Rafiq Maqbool)

given Russian opposition — but could influence Syrian Alawites down the road to pull away from Assad, Crocker said.

Pillar suggested that the Obama administration was right to focus on achieving a nuclear agreement with Iran and trying to defuse the Ukraine crisis with Russia. “If you can successfully conclude this [agreement with Iran], more possibilities will open up” regarding Syria, he said. “A few months from now, Ukraine won’t be more intense.”

Asked by Al-Monitor if Iranian-Saudi rapprochement might also be useful, as it was in ending Lebanon’s civil war in 1989, Crocker said the “sheer exhaustion of the participants” and the fact that Syria was victorious in shoring up its influence in Lebanon “ended that phase of the civil war. ... Syrian forces were running the show. That is probably how this [the Syrian civil war] will end because of what happens on the ground, not because of some grand Saudi-Iranian bargain,” which Crocker thought is unlikely.

Despite frustration among US Sunni allies, such as Saudi Arabia, at the unwillingness of the United States to intervene more forcefully in Syria, the US public has shown no interest in even limited military intervention in Syria as evidenced by the congressional debate last fall over cruise missile strikes to punish Syria for its use of chemical weapons. The evolution of the Syrian opposition into one riddled with al-Qaeda elements has made many Americans unsure of the wisdom of trying to remove even a regime as brutal as Assad’s.

Crocker said those advocating military intervention underestimate the extent to which this is an existential struggle for Syria’s Alawite community and other minorities within the country. He pointed to the massacre in Hama in 1982, when Bashar’s father, Hafez, bombarded the city to exterminate the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and in the process killed 15,000 civilians.

“This regime has been preparing for what is unfolding now for the last three decades,” Crocker said. After Hama, “they knew a day of reckoning would come. ... Americans barely remember Hama but no Sunni or Alawite will ever forget it.”♦

Barbara Slavin is Washington correspondent for Al-Monitor and a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council where she focuses on Iran. On Twitter: @BarbaraSlavin1

Iran's Kurdish Activists See 'No Sign of Change' Under New President

By FUAD HAQIQI
2 / may / 2014
<http://rudaw.net>

Despite the optimism that followed the election of moderate Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Kurdish activists say they have seen "no real sign of change so far."

Rahim Farahmand, a prominent Kurdish political campaigner in Iran, said that Iranian officials would not grant permission to any grouping that has the word "Kurd" in its name.

"The Iranian Ministry of Interior does not recognize our group as a 'Front' and had issues with the word 'Kurd' in the title," he said.

Farahmand and a group of Kurdish activists filed an official request last year for permission to engage in political work, without much success.

"They have asked us to drop the word 'Kurd' and replace it with 'National,'" Farahmand said.

"Instead of 'Front' they suggested 'Party.'"

He said that despite permission granted to other political groups in the country, he and his colleagues have accepted the ministry's conditions to drop both words, in exchange for official recognition.

"The replacement of the title would not affect our political opinions. We just want to work within the laws for political parties."

He said that his group has suggested several other names without the objectionable names, but that the ministry has not responded.

The Kurdish United Front was founded in 2005 in Iranian Kurdistan. Bahaaddin Adab, a representative from the province of Sanandaj, was a leading figure in creating the front.

Rahim Farahmand, who heads the group, said the Front has been effective despite severe criticism directed at it.



Members of the Kurdish United Front. Photo: Rudaw

But Tahir Khido, a university student in Tehran, noted that the party suffers from a "lack of political agenda and organization."

"I think the Front should regroup itself from head to toe," he said.

The Front has five councils in four Kurdish provinces, and one in Tehran.

"The Front has no transparent and detailed structure," Khido said. "Even in terms of political agenda, it should have adopted a more coherent program."

Some in the Front say they should assume stronger national

schemes. They maintain also that the Front should keep its original name. But many others have chosen a more "realistic approach" within the Front and say they should "carry on despite setbacks."

Farahmand said that President Rouhani seems to be a reformist, "But I sense that his immediate surrounding blocks his reforms."

"We still hope for an official permit," Farahmand says. "Nonetheless, even without it, we carry on with our political and social activism." ■

Kurdish tourism board woos Gulf Arabian investors

Sananda Sahoo
May 11, 2014
www.thenational.ae

Iraq's Kurdish tourism board is courting Arabian Gulf residents as it looks to attract US\$4 billion in foreign investment to the region.

"We want to show the people here that we are ready to receive tourists and investment," said Mawlawi Jabar Wahab, the head of the general board of tourism for the Kurdish region.

The region's tourism sector received \$3.2bn in foreign investment last year, he said, and the figure is expected to rise by 15 per cent in the current year.

About 3 million tourists visited the Kurdish region last year, up 26 per cent on a year earlier.

Residents of Lebanon, Turkey and the UAE are among the major investors in the region, according to Mr Wahab.

Abu Dhabi-based Cristal Hotels and Resorts looks to have three hotels in the



Mawlawi Jabar Wahab, the head of the general board of tourism for the Kurdish region, says they are ready to receive tourists and investment. Mona Al Marzooqi / The National

region, out of its planned 13 in the Middle East and Africa, in two years. It is opening the 95-room \$13 million luxury Cristal Erbil Hotel in June. Another 198-room \$25m Cristal Grand Erbil is expected to launch in 2016, along with a 156-room rebranded pro-

perty in the city next year.

"They are rich in oil and gas and minerals, the region is lovely and visitor numbers will only grow," said Peter Blackburn, the president and chief executive of the Cristal Group.

The properties there expect 70 per cent of the visitors to be business travellers and the rest leisure.

Hilton is scheduled to open its first two hotels in Iraq in Erbil next year.

The Dubai developer Emaar is working on a \$3bn mixed-use project. Called Downtown Erbil, it will eventually have residential and commercial areas, hotels and malls, and is expected to be ready in 2017.

Damac Properties has had a tougher time. The Kurdish government cancelled its Dh55bn project in 2010 after the company failed to start work during the global financial crisis.

"We want to attract 7 million tourists by 2025 and make Erbil a global destination," Mr Wahab said last week.

He led a delegation to the Arabian Travel Market in Dubai that concluded on Thursday, the first for the tourism board. With a budget of \$100m this year, the board is also making the rounds of other international travel exhibitions, such as ITB Berlin in March and World Travel Market London in November, to drum up support. ●

Syrian Kurd leader urges Turkey to join fight against jihadists

After prolonged tensions, relations between Turkey and the Syrian Kurds are showing signs of a thaw.



www.al-monitor.com
Amberin Zaman
07 May 2014

Border crossings to Turkey controlled by the largest Kurdish militia group known as the People's Protection Units (YPG) were long sealed by the Turkish side. But the restrictions have been eased for the delivery of humanitarian relief. Officials from the self-administered Syrian Kurdish region called Rojava traveled to Ankara in March, where they met with Western diplomats and held back-channel talks with the Turkish government. They also meet regularly with UN officials based in the southern Turkish city of Gaziantep to coordinate aid efforts. This wouldn't be possible without Ankara's blessing. The shift reflects growing acceptance in Ankara that the YPG is a dominant force on the ground and points to future engagement on the political level.

In April, contacts between Ankara and the YPG took a further unexpected turn when a convoy of some 18 Turkish military vehicles, including tanks, crossed into Syria through the YPG-controlled Kobane gate to resupply the Tomb of Suleiman Shah. One of the main reasons that Turkey has shut out the YPG is that it is closely linked to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Yet, it is unthinkable that Turkish troops could have passed through Kobane without consulting them first. According to unconfirmed reports, radical Islamist fighters from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) disrupted the Turkish convoy's progress and forced it to return to Turkey via a longer route through the Jarabulus crossing that is under its control. But the Turkish convoy rotated the troops and delivered its supplies.

ISIS has been vying with the YPG and rival Syrian opposition factions for control of areas running along the Turkish border. It reviles Turkey's leaders as infidels and has threatened to overrun the Tomb of Suleiman Shah, which is under Turkish jurisdiction. In short, ISIS is an enemy of Turkey and the YPG alike, which ought to mean that Turkey and the YPG ought to be joining forces against it.

Salih Muslim agrees. The co-chairman of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is the political wing of the YPG, spoke to Al-Monitor from Moscow this week. Here are excerpts from the hourlong interview that I conducted via Skype on May 5.

Al-Monitor: Is it true that Turkish troops consulted with the YPG before crossing into Syria?

Muslim: Yes, there was contact and the transiting of the Turkish convoy was mutually agreed to. The YPG took all necessary measures to ensure its safe passage to the Tomb of Suleiman Shah. But then it seems ISIS intervened and the convoy was forced to return via Jarabulus. The details of what exactly transpired remain murky.

Al-Monitor: ISIS remains one of the biggest threats to Rojava, and the YPG accuses Turkey of supporting ISIS. Is Turkey still supporting ISIS in its fight against the YPG? If so, how can we explain the hostile stance ISIS espouses against the Turkish government, especially in the social media?

Muslim: In the same way al-Qaeda has become a global brand, so too has ISIS. Everyone affixes the label to suit his or her own agendas. Everyone has its own ISIS. The [Syrian] regime has its ISIS; Saudi Arabia has its ISIS. They are continuing to fight against us, particularly around Kobane. But we are inflicting heavy losses on them; fear has crept into their eyes. Increasingly, they resort to suicide bomb attacks or IEDs [Improvised Explosive Devices].

To return to your question as to whether Turkey supports them, as you know, the Turkish government has declared ISIS to be a terrorist group. ISIS is fighting Syrian opposition factions. Such as the Islamic Front, Ahrar al-Sham, which are supported by Turkey. But there are certain elements within the Turkish state who continue to collaborate with ISIS, and when I say ISIS, I am referring in particular to the Chechen fraction.



Salih Muslim, the co-chairman of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), poses during an interview in Marseille, southern France, Dec. 1, 2013. (photo by BERTRAND LANGLOIS/AFP/Getty Images)

Al-Monitor: Who are these elements within the Turkish state?

Muslim: These are people within the deep state who don't want peace between Turkey and the Kurds, who are hostile to the Kurds and who also act under the guise of Turkish nongovernmental aid organizations to promote their radical Islamist world views. And it's obvious who they are.

I'm repeating my call on Turkey to join forces against these terrorists who are our common enemies, enemies of Syria and enemies of the free and democratic world.

Al-Monitor: In a previous interview you called on the Turkmen to join forces against ISIS. Did they respond?

Muslim: We are acting together in areas where Kurds and Turkmen live within close proximity. Mostly around Afrin. A new agreement was reached between the YPG and the Turkmen forces there, uniting them under the umbrella of a newly formed group called Shams Shemal, or the Northern Sun.

Al-Monitor: You mentioned that there was "an ISIS that is controlled by the Assad regime." So is the regime using ISIS to squeeze Rojava?

Muslim: Just look at what has been happening in Raqqa [province] recently. Just the other day a convoy of 50 ISIS vehicles drove past two regime units stationed along the road to Direspiye to reinforce their troops fighting against us. There was less than a kilometer [0.62 mile] separating them, yet the regime did nothing. Doesn't this tell it all? The regime supports ISIS. And this disproves the lie that we are collaborating with the regime. We are not. We are fighting the regime.

Al-Monitor: Will the Rojava Kurds be taking part in the presidential elections? You were quoted by the Iranian media as saying your administration would allow balloting to take place under the supervision of the regime.

Muslim: Either way, the Kurds will not participate. We saw what the past elections were like. They are no more than an exercise in pledging allegiance to the caliph. You either accept him [Assad] as your caliph or you don't. We don't.

Al-Monitor: Getting back to your relations with Ankara, there appears to be a thaw. Aid convoys are being allowed to cross through YPG-controlled border gates. Can we expect you back in Turkey any time soon?

Muslim: Who knows? It is true that pressure has been easing somewhat. Aid convoys and people are allowed to cross twice a week — on Mondays and Thursdays — via the Mursitpinar crossing to Kobane. Just the other day, there was a terrible car accident in Kobane. Four people who were critically injured were instantly allowed into Turkey for treatment. And our officials have been meeting with the United Nations people in Gaziantep to coordinate relief efforts. Right now, Sinam Mohamed, who is the co-chairwoman of the Rojava People's Council, is in Gaziantep talking to →

⇒ the UN and, naturally, in one way or another, Turkish officials are involved in the talks. Sinam came through Afrin, not Kobane.

All of this marks a change, but we want bigger and lasting changes. Why, for instance, is Turkey continuing to dig a trench near the border area with Afrin? What is the purpose of this? Turkey has to recognize and accept that Rojava is here to stay and that it is as much in Turkey's interest as in ours to normalize ties. Peace with Rojava will have a positive impact on the [Kurdish] peace process within Turkey because we are all the same people. These borders are artificial. And no matter how many trenches you dig, the Kurds will remain united.

AI-Monitor: You say the Kurds are united, but your relations with the Iraqi Kurds and particularly with Massoud Barzani, the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), are terrible.

Muslim: Indeed, and it is very difficult to understand why. They, too, are digging trenches [along the border areas under the KDP's control.] They should be with us morally, economically and militarily. Instead they are digging trenches. You cannot even carry a bag of rice across the border any more. What is the reason?

AI-Monitor: They say you have usurped power in Rojava by force, that you are sidelining the other Kurdish parties and that you are

collaborating with the regime.

Muslim: If the opposition parties expect to share power without lifting a finger, without working for the people, just on the strength of external support, this is totally unrealistic. They were given a chance under the Hewler [Erbil] Agreement [uniting all the Syrian Kurdish parties under the umbrella of the Kurdish Supreme Council set up under Barzani's sponsorship in 2012] to take part in the administration. But they were lazy. Simply lazy. They wanted power to be handed to them on a plate. They did nothing for the people and now they want us to undo everything, to scrap our elected councils, our agreements with the Arabs, the Armenians, the Syrian Orthodox Christians with whom we are sharing power and to start from zero. This is utterly unreasonable. Still, we say we are willing to work together. Our doors are open to everyone. And the Iraqi Kurds are our brothers. Mr. Barzani is our brother. But they are accusing us of collaborating with the regime and in doing so they are legitimizing attacks against us by ISIS. This is an insult to the memory of our martyrs. ♦

Amberin Zaman is an Istanbul-based writer who has covered Turkey for The Washington Post, The Los Angeles Times, The Daily Telegraph and the Voice of America. A frequent commentator on Turkish television, she is currently Turkey correspondent for The Economist, a position she has retained since 1999. On Twitter: @amberinzaman



6 May 2014

Iranian Kurdish Group Shifts Policy, Seeking Democratic Autonomy

rudaw.net
6 May 2014

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region— Leaders of the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) said recently that they pursue a new approach in their struggle for Kurdish rights in Iran, by making changes to the leadership system and their political agenda.

The group is to form the Democratic Community and a Free Rojhelat (KODAR), adopt a system of co-chairmanship and a special focus on women's rights and democratic autonomy for Iranian Kurds.

Massoud Manaf, an Iranian Kurdish journalist says that given PJAK's close connections with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), changing the leadership system isn't surprising.

"All the PKK organizations have the co-leader system," said Manaf. "PJAK's is an attempt towards giving women more participation in the decision making processes."

According to Manaf, who closely follows PJAK affairs, the group will appoint a woman co-leader.

In a statement, PJAK said that these moves are a response to changes taking place in the region and a way to prepare for future challenges facing the party.



A group of PJAK fighters playing volleyball in the Qandil Mountains. Photo: AFP

"Taking into account changes on the regional and global level and particularly in Kurdistan, and the sensitive stage the Kurdish people are going through, we need change in the internal system of our party and the approach of our struggle in Eastern (Iranian) Kurdistan," read the statement.

PJAK was founded a decade ago by a group of Iranian Kurds under the leadership of Abdulrahman Haji Ahmadi. It is believed that PJAK has close ties with the PKK and both groups are based in the Qandil Mountains along the Iran-Turkish border.

Kurdish analyst Mamand Roje believes that PJAK leaders have realized that they wouldn't be able to maintain the party in Eastern Kurdistan through armed struggle alone.

"PJAK knows it cannot control Eastern Kurdistan through arms, so it seeks to make an active political atmosphere," said Roje.

"For this they need a process, they started from Europe by holding a conference and now they take the second step by holding a conference in Qandil to reshuffle the leadership of PJAK," he added.

Despite a ceasefire reached

between PJAK and Iran in 2011, both sides have clashed along the border in the past few years and PJAK fighters have claimed responsibility for killing a number of Iranian border guards.

PJAK leaders urge the Iranian government to reciprocate the group's initiative and address the plight of the country's Kurdish population.

"KODAR calls on Iran to engage in dialogue for the solution of the Kurdish question, other democratic issues in Iran and announce its preparation for opening to democracy," read the statement.

Roje believes that PKK's hand can be seen behind these changes within the PJAK, saying that the PKK is interested in creating a system of self-rule in Iranian Kurdistan modeled after what it has already achieved in Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava).

"But the PKK cannot copy and paste the model of Rojava in Eastern Kurdistan, because eastern Kurdistan has its own parties and leaders," Roje told Rudaw.

Roje said that PJAK is an influential party in Iranian Kurdistan and it boasts many followers, but that other Kurdish groups wouldn't accept a new system imposed on them. ■

Iran and the Kurdish regional government to build two pipelines



Anadolu Agency
07 may 2014
www.dailysabah.com

IRBIL, Northern Iraq — Iran is close to constructing a crude oil pipeline as well as a natural gas conduit to Iraq's autonomous Kurdish north, according to Kurdish Regional Government officials in Irbil, the region's capital.

Iran and Kurdish Regional Government officials joint negotiations continued Wednesday on the oil pipeline and gas pipeline projects between two sides, Abullah Akrayi, Kurdish official responsible for Iranian Affairs, told the Anadolu Agency.

The first pipeline will carry crude oil from the Kurdish region to Iran. Iran will refine and dispatch back the oil. The natural gas project is aimed at transferring Iranian gas to cities such as Sulaymaniyah and Irbil.

Akrayi said talks for the two projects began last year but the start of the construc-

tion work was delayed due to resignation of the Iranian oil minister, Rostam Qasimi.

With Iran's oil refineries in the western city of Kermanshah, Akrayi said that Iran was ready to buy crude oil from the Kurdish regional government.

"Iran will supply the oil and gas that we need. We expect that the [Kurdish] delegation and Iranian officials will come to a conclusion."

The Kurdish regional government currently continues to transfer 25,000 tonnes of oil per day from Haji Homaran, Bashmak and Perwizhan border gates to Iran, Afghanistan and Armenia overland.

The Kurdish government wishes to decrease oil prices by transferring oil and gas via pipeline instead of overland, with the aim of increasing the volume.

In November 2013, Turkish and Kurdish regional administration officials signed an agreement that would enable Kurdish oil to flow from Kirkuk to the port of Ceyhan on

Turkey's south-eastern Mediterranean coast but Iraqi oil has not yet been exported to international markets.

Iran could supply gas to Europe if desired - deputy min.

Iran is ready to export natural gas via a pipeline or in liquefied natural gas form to European countries, the country's Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs Ali Majedi said Wednesday.

Sending the gas with the Trans Anadolu Pipeline project, which will carry Azerbaijani natural gas to Europe, is the most cost-effective choice, Majedi said to the official Iranian news agency IRNA.

Underlining that an agreement on natural gas supplies with Europe would be a win-win deal, Majedi added that such an agreement would also help Europe to reduce its dependency on gas from Russia.

Iran currently holds world's second largest proven natural gas reserves. ♦



7 May 2014

Senior PKK Leader Says Group No Longer Seeks a Kurdish State

rudaw.net
7 may 2014

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — Mustafa Karasu, a senior leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, said that the PKK has abandoned its policy of seeking a Kurdish state and is now aiming for democratic rule in the Kurdish regions and focusing on the work of MPs in the Turkish parliament.

"Previously, we had a view to creating a national state, but we abandoned it," the Dicle News agency quoted Karasu as saying.

He said that, despite his party's leftist ideologies, its leaders had always believed in establishing a national state.

"But in the end we realized that it was wrong," he said. "Now, we are working for a democratic life and finding our fate in freedom, without establishing a state."

Karasu said his group is seeking to solve the Kurdish question through a process of democratization in Turkey.

"This is a strategic project and we need to change our previous strategy," he said.

Karasu hailed the recent merger of some parliamentarians of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) into the People's Democratic Party (HDP) as an important move.

"We've decided deputies to be represented under the HDP group in parliament by transferring the BDP deputies to the HDP," HDP co-chair Ertugrul Kurkcü told the official Anadolu Agency last month, adding the decision was taken after the March 30 local elections in Turkey.

He said that deputies from both parties would act jointly under the HDP umbrella in parlia-



Karasu: 'Now, we are working for a democratic life and finding our fate in freedom, without establishing a state.'
Photo: DIHA

ment during the August 2014 presidential elections.

BDP Chairman Selahattin Demirtas and deputy Sirri Sakik would also reportedly go under the HDP umbrella following an upcoming BDP congress.

Karasu said that the HDP can become the democratic representative of Kurdish ambitions across

Turkey, "despite the different views and ideas within the HDP."

According to Ahmet Alis, a historian from Bogazici University and an expert on Turkey's Kurds, with this step BDP deputies hope to appeal to the whole of Turkey, not just the country's Kurdish southeast where the BDP is strong.

"Until now, the BDP had no strength outside the 15 Kurdish provinces in the southeastern part of the country. If they continued as BDP, they would not be able to reach out to the rest of Turkey," Alis told Rudaw.

Karasu said that if armed struggle had failed to establish a Kurdish state, "then a political struggle is a necessity, and that is how we must understand the HDP." He added that the HDP is far removed from the many leftist groups that have always tried to "organize the masses to their own end."

According to Karasu, the HDP plans two assemblies of several hundred members to represent and run the affairs of the Kurdish areas of Turkey. ■

An Explosion and a Blockade, and a Syrian Pact Is in Limbo

By ANNE BARNARD and HWAIDA SAAD
MAY 8, 2014

BEIRUT, Lebanon — A deal to evacuate insurgents from the Old City of Homs in central Syria hit a snag on Thursday when rebels in Aleppo Province refused to allow all of a humanitarian convoy to enter two villages they had blockaded, as called for under a pact between the government and the rebels, opposition activists and a pro-government television channel reported.

The problems came as insurgents in the northern city of Aleppo set off an enormous explosion that leveled the historic Carlton Hotel, facing the city's ancient citadel, where government troops had been billeted. Clouds of dust and debris towered above the citadel's ramparts, underscoring the insurgents' vow to continue the fight and their ability to carry out damaging attacks despite retreating from Homs.

The Islamic Front, the insurgent coalition that claimed responsibility for the blast, also controls territory where the aid convoys were blocked from entering the villages of Nubol and Zahra. Its members are among those who have objected to the deal on the grounds that rebels should make no compromise with the government.

The government was preventing the last busload of fighters from leaving Homs's Old City until the aid was allowed to reach the villages, the Lebanese television channel Al Mayadeen reported, leaving the completion of the deal in limbo. Several hundred fighters remained in the Old City after nearly 1,000 left on Wednesday for insurgent-held areas in northern Homs Province. Scores of prisoners and hostages held by rebels in Aleppo and Latakia Provinces have been released.

The problems on Thursday highlighted the challenges of carrying out a deal that requires cooperation from far-flung, disconnected insurgent groups. The accord, which provides for rebels to leave the blockaded Old City with their weapons and hand over the symbolic territory to the government, has been seen as a turning point for both sides after a nearly two-year standoff that has reduced fighters and civilians in the center of Homs, once called the "city of the revolution," to eating grass.

Despite the hitches, several more busloads of rebels arrived in northern Homs and could be seen, in videos posted online, smiling and hugging in apparent relief. The governor, Talal Barazi, toured a damaged square just outside the Old City with television cameras, vowing against a backdrop of blackened buildings, "When the armed men leave the Old City of Homs, we will rebuild the city in no time."

Mr. Barazi did not address the presence of increasingly pro-government militias, some of



Forces loyal to President Bashar al-Assad looked for survivors in the debris of the Carlton Hotel in Aleppo, leveled by insurgents. Credit George Ourfalian/Reuters

whose members have expressed anger at anything short of total defeat for the insurgents. He said that a similar evacuation deal was in the works for the last rebel-held neighborhood in Homs, Hay al-Waer, an area of high-rises on the city's outskirts. Some 200,000 people in the neighborhood, half of them displaced from elsewhere, remain under a government blockade and shelling.

Saying a process of reconciliation was underway, Mr. Barazi and state television correspondents were careful to describe those departing as gunmen or fighters, not terrorists, as official news media have typically called the entire armed opposition.

With Mr. Barazi on state television was Yacoub El Hillo, the senior United Nations official in Syria, who praised the deal as a way of calming the conflict. United Nations vehicles accompanied the departing insurgents and the aid convoy, along with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent.

Ahmad al-Ali, a member of a local government committee in Homs, told state television: "We won. We are standing here in the heart of Homs, and all the unwanted are leaving the town."

Some opponents of the government have described the deal as a way of pushing people opposed to President Bashar al-Assad, disproportionately Sunni Muslims, out of Homs, and have expressed concern that the demographic makeup of the diverse city, Syria's third largest, is being altered.

It was unclear why the convoy to the Aleppo villages had failed. Some reports said that insurgents had wanted to allow in only a few trucks, but that the government had refused to let the convoy go farther unless all 12 trucks were allowed.

Jamal Awad, a local official from Zahra

who fled to a Damascus suburb, said in a telephone interview that the first truck had been stopped by insurgents, emptied and forced to go back. "Our men in the village were watching what was happening" through binoculars, he said. "They saw the armed group queuing."

But in an indication that other aspects of the deal were moving forward, Mr. Awad said insurgents had released 13 of the 63 civilians abducted from a bus months ago.

State television said that insurgents had freed at least 40 women and children in Latakia Province after killing numerous civilians there last year in villages populated by the Alawite minority, to which Mr. Assad belongs. The massacre was documented by Human Rights Watch.

In Aleppo, the Islamic Front declared that the attack on the hotel, by fighters who tunneled underneath it, had killed 50 soldiers and was a response to the indiscriminate bombing that has killed hundreds of civilians in the province in recent months. The front, an Islamist coalition that includes many groups that broke off from the Western-backed Free Syrian Army, said the attack was a prelude to a "large-scale operation" meant to secure territorial gains.

A state television reporter was shown in front of what was left of the hotel: a hill of large stone blocks where just the tops of palm trees, which once stood in the hotel courtyard, poked through. He said that soldiers had been posted there but that there was no sign of rescue activity. SANA, the state news agency, did not mention casualties, but said that the "enormous attack" had destroyed historical sites and that explosives had been detonated "under archaeological buildings."

The Carlton was built as a hospital in the era of Ottoman rule before World War I. According to residents, government forces had lived there for two years, using it as a base for sniper and mortar attacks and to hold positions in the citadel. Insurgents, too, operate in Aleppo's sprawling medieval Old City, drawing government bombardment that has severely damaged the area. The United Nations has called on all sides to stop bombing historic sites and using them as bases.

The tactic of tunneling under opponents' fortifications has a nearly 900-year pedigree in Aleppo: When Crusaders besieged a Muslim-held castle there in 1131, the premature collapse of a siege tunnel killed their leader, Count Joscelin I of Edessa.

In video images posted on YouTube, the Islamic Front showed what it said was a similar attack this week on a government outpost in Idlib, southwest of Aleppo. The images showed a huge blast in which the group said 35 government soldiers had died.

IRAK : Le spectre de l'éclatement

7 mai 2014

Jean-Frédéric Légaré-Tremblay
www.ledevoir.com

Même si les premières élections législatives en Irak depuis le retrait des Américains en 2011 se sont plutôt bien déroulées le 30 avril, elles ne peuvent occulter le fait que le pays va mal. En plus du regain de violence, l'État est l'un des plus corrompus de la planète et sa gestion est calamiteuse, au point que le spectre de l'éclatement plane désormais sur le pays, affirme Harith al-Dabbagh, spécialiste des systèmes juridiques des pays arabes au CERJUM.

Avec plus de 9500 civils tués l'an dernier et déjà 4000 cette année, la violence est au plus fort depuis 2008. Qu'est-ce qui l'attise ?

Au début, il y avait le mouvement de résistance contre l'occupant américain. Aujourd'hui, il s'agit davantage d'une guerre menée par des combattants extrémistes majoritairement étrangers voulant instaurer un État islamique en Irak. L'intervention américaine a ainsi transformé le pays en terrain de prédilection du djihad ; avant, ces mouvements

n'avaient aucune présence dans le pays.

Bon nombre d'actes de violence sont le fait de groupes mafieux et criminels. Les enlèvements avec demande de rançon sont monnaie courante. Il y a aussi en toile de fond une lutte de pouvoir dans un contexte de sectarisme politique exacerbé. Les milices liées aux différents partis religieux se livrent à des assassinats ciblés. Sans oublier le conflit historique arabo-persan, renouvelé et aggravé par le clivage religieux sunnite-chiite. C'est l'impact local de l'affrontement des ambitions hégémoniques de l'Iran et de l'Arabie saoudite, en plus de celles de la Turquie.

Le premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki brigue un troisième mandat, qu'il a de très bonnes chances d'obtenir (les résultats seront connus à la mi-mai). Or, les critiques à son égard fusent de toutes parts. Qu'est-ce qu'on lui reproche ?

Installé par les Américains parce que faible et facile à manier, Al-Maliki est aujourd'hui l'homme fort de Bagdad. Il est accusé par ses détracteurs d'utiliser la force pour exclure ses opposants, museler la presse et diriger une police secrète qui procède à des enlèvements, des tortures et des assassinats ciblés, notamment contre les sunnites.



Nouri al-Maliki

S'ajoute à cela une gestion calamiteuse des affaires de l'État, faisant de l'Irak l'un des États les plus corrompus de la planète. Un système de détournement des biens publics est organisé entre les différentes factions au pouvoir. Les Irakiens ont perdu espoir dans la capacité du gouvernement à gérer la reconstruction et à assurer les services de base.

Selon la nouvelle Constitution, l'essentiel du pouvoir exécutif est entre les mains du premier ministre. Il est le vrai chef de l'exécutif, le commandant en chef des forces armées et le responsable de la politique générale de l'État. On dénote dans la dernière campagne une mobilisation massive de l'appareil d'État pour assurer sa réélection.

On craint de plus en plus un éclatement de l'Irak. Est-ce envisageable ?

Ces problèmes font effectivement planer le spectre de l'écla-

tement du pays. La Constitution de 2005, rédigée sous la houlette des Américains, est lacunaire et défectueuse. Plus de 50 lois devaient la compléter, mais aucune n'a pour l'instant été promulguée. Parmi celles qui font cruellement défaut : les lois sur les partis politiques, sur la Cour suprême fédérale, sur le pétrole et le gaz et sur le Conseil de la fédération.

La structure fédérale est incomplète. Le système est devenu, dans l'opinion publique, synonyme de partition du pays. Sa portée demeure floue : parle-t-on d'une fédération ethnique (Arabes-Kurdes), confessionnelle (sunnites-chiites) ou territoriale (18 gouvernorats) ? Pour l'instant, il n'y a qu'une seule région, le Kurdistan, qui jouit d'un statut privilégié. Or les crises s'accumulent entre Bagdad et le Kurdistan dans des dossiers comme l'exploitation du pétrole et les revendications territoriales. Et les sunnites, qui se sentent opprimés par un gouvernement à dominance chiite, commencent à réclamer un statut semblable.

Il n'y a pas de projets transcendant les lignes communautaires et s'adressant à l'ensemble de la population irakienne. Le pays n'est plus conçu que sous forme de communautés, de clans, de confessions et de factions.

□□□



Un groupe kurde d'opposition appelle Téhéran au dialogue

Khoran (Irak), 6 mai 2014 (AFP)

DES LEADERS d'un groupe d'opposition kurde qui a combattu les forces iraniennes ont annoncé la formation d'une nouvelle organisation et appelé au dialogue avec Téhéran.

Ces leaders du PJAK (Parti pour une vie libre au Kurdistan), basé dans le nord de l'Irak, ont tenu lundi une conférence de presse dans le village de Khoran, situé dans une zone montagneuse, pour annoncer leur nouveau groupe.

Ils ont appelé cette nouvelle formation "Organisation de la société libre et démocratique pour l'est du Kurdistan" (Kodar).

"Nous allons tenter d'aborder les problèmes avec Téhéran par la voie du dialogue", a indiqué à l'AFP le leader du groupe, Rizan Javid.

"Nous adressons un appel à la République d'Iran pour débiter un dialogue, et nous sommes prêts au dialogue", a dit M. Javid, ajoutant que les précédents appels au dialogue n'avaient pas reçu de réponse.

La plupart des membres de Kodar ont combattu dans les rangs du PJAK, le principal mouvement kurde de lutte armée contre le régime de Téhéran. Les autres cadres du PJAK doivent annoncer dans les jours prochains s'ils rejoignent le nouveau groupe, a-t-il dit.

Des affrontements réguliers ont opposé le PJAK, un groupe considéré comme "terroriste" par Téhéran, aux forces iraniennes, ces dernières ripostant par des bombardements contre les bases arrière du parti en Irak, dans les zones montagneuses près de la frontière entre les deux pays. ●

Turquie: libération de trois journalistes détenus depuis 2006 pour "terrorisme"

Le Monde.fr avec AFP |
08.mai.2014

Trois journalistes turcs, condamnés à la prison à perpétuité, ont été libérés, jeudi 8 mai. Fusun Erdogan, fondatrice et directrice de publication de la radio alternative Radio libre, Bayram Namaz et Arif Celebi, de l'hebdomadaire Atilim, avaient été emprisonnés en novembre 2013 pour « terrorisme ».

La justice turque les accuse d'appartenir au Parti communiste marxiste-léniniste (TKP/ML), illégal en Turquie, et d'avoir tenté de « renverser l'ordre constitutionnel par la violence ».

Les trois journalistes ont, en fait, bénéficié d'une nouvelle loi, votée en mars, qui réduit de dix à



Fusun Erdogan et deux autres journalistes ont été libérés, le 8 mai, en attendant leur procès en appel.

cinq ans la durée maximale de détention provisoire précédant un procès. Les prévenus ayant fait appel de leur condamnation et déjà passé plus de cinq ans derrière les barreaux, ils ont ainsi pu sortir de prison en attendant un prochain procès.

TRENTE-DEUX JOURNALISTES ENCORE DERRIÈRE LES BARREAUX

En novembre, leur condamnation avait été considérée

comme un nouveau durcissement de la politique d'Ankara à l'égard de la presse. La Turquie demeure le pays avec le plus grand nombre de journalistes emprisonnés : selon la Fédération européenne des journalistes (FEJ), après les libérations de jeudi, 32 professionnels de la presse y sont encore emprisonnés. La plupart sont détenus pour leurs liens présumés avec des groupes proches des rebelles kurdes du

Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Les libérations de jeudi « nous ont redonné de l'espoir pour notre campagne qui vise à décriminaliser la presse en Turquie, mais il nous faut maintenant continuer le combat pour ceux qui restent encore derrière les barreaux », a réagi le président de la FEJ, Mogens Blicher Bjerregaard.

Ankara réfute les accusations d'autoritarisme à l'égard de la presse. « La diffusion des journaux en Turquie atteint cinq millions d'exemplaires [par jour]. Les trois quarts d'entre eux sont hostiles à l'AKP [Parti de la justice et du développement, au pouvoir] », a plaidé jeudi son porte-parole, Huseyin Celik. ■

La confrérie Gülen subit la colère d'Erdogan

www.lefigaro.fr
Par Laure Marchand
le 09/mai/2014

Le premier ministre turc réclame l'extradition de son ancien allié Fethullah Gülen, exilé en Pennsylvanie. Les proches de cet influent imam dénoncent une « campagne de lynchage » contre leur communauté religieuse.

La discrétion est une de ses caractéristiques. Signe de l'intensité de la guerre engagée avec le gouvernement islamo-conservateur, la confrérie de Fethullah Gülen a fait une entorse à son précepte. Mustafa Yesil, un des représentants de cet influent imam exilé aux États-Unis et qui compte des millions d'adeptes, a dénoncé « la campagne de lynchage » conduite par le premier ministre turc contre la communauté religieuse. Cette déclaration publique intervient après que Recep Tayyip Erdogan a réclamé la semaine dernière l'extradition du leader musulman qui vit en Pennsylvanie. « Ils



Un manifestant anti-Erdogan montre une affiche représentant le premier ministre turc avec Fethullah Gülen, son ex-allié contre les militaires, en décembre 2013 à Istanbul.

devraient au moins l'expulser», a-t-il insisté dans une interview à la célèbre émission américaine « Charlie Rose ».

Le chef du gouvernement turc est persuadé que le leader de la confrérie, son ancien allié, est à l'origine des enquêtes pour corruption lancées à la fin de l'année contre son entourage. Il le soupçonne aussi d'être derrière la mise en

ligne sur Internet de conversations enregistrées clandestinement et qui le mettent en cause directement. Depuis, Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'a cessé de déclarer qu'il veut « éliminer cette structure parallèle » à l'État. « La demande d'extradition de M. Gülen est scandaleuse, mais il s'agit juste de déclaration pour son électoral, réagit Mustafa Yesil. Mais elle ne m'inquiète guère car

« Le bilan sera lourd, et la communauté va entrer dans une période de repli »

Ahmet Altan, un économiste proche de la confrérie.

il n'y a pas une seule preuve qu'il ait commis un crime. »
Chasse aux sorcières à tous les niveaux de l'État

À défaut de pouvoir toucher la tête pensante de ce réseau aussi puissant qu'occulte, un procureur d'Ankara vient d'ouvrir une enquête à son encontre et la chasse à ses partisans s'intensifie en Turquie. Après des milliers de limogeages au sein de la police et de la justice, une cinquantaine de hauts fonctionnaires ont été congédiés des ministères début mai, des directeurs d'institutions publiques remplacés, et le chef du gouvernement s'est félicité que l'ensemble des sympathisants de la confrérie à l'intérieur de son cabinet aient tous été identifiés. Quel contraste avec le pacte conclu ces dernières années entre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et Fethullah Gülen pour mettre →

→ fin au pouvoir politique de l'armée.

Parallèlement à l'enquête visant Fethullah Gülen, les procureurs à l'origine des raids anticorruption de décembre font à leur tour l'objet de procédures judiciaires et 425 inspecteurs, selon le ministère de l'Intérieur, sont mobilisés pour traquer les fonctionnaires soupçonnés d'être responsables des échanges téléphoniques piratés.

Mais cette purge à l'intérieur des

structures de l'État ne rassasie pas Recep Tayyip Erdogan qui a promis de frapper le réseau au portefeuille. La fermeture annoncée des «dershane» va représenter un coup dur, car ces établissements privés de soutien scolaire très prisés en Turquie représentent une rentrée d'argent majeure pour la confrérie. Contrôles fiscaux et réglementaires se multiplient dans les entreprises réputées pro-Gülen. La société minière Koza s'est ainsi vu retirer des permis d'exploitation. Asya Bank, proche du Hizmet, tente, elle, de se

remettre d'une tentative de déstabilisation. Selon les médias, les institutions publiques ont retiré 4 milliards de livres turques de l'établissement de finances islamiques en quelques jours.

«Les sociétés ont désormais peur de passer de la publicité dans les médias» du nouvel ennemi public numéro un, de peur d'être à leur tour dans le collimateur gouvernemental, souligne Ahmet Altan, économiste proche du mouvement. Les municipalités récupèrent des locaux mis à sa

disposition, des terrains cédés à des universités sont repris, énumère Mustafa Yesil. «Erdogan a dit qu'il ne fallait pas nous donner la plus petite goutte d'eau», rappelle-t-il, sourire en coin.

Face à cette guerre, «le bilan sera lourd et la communauté va entrer dans une période de repli, pronostique Ahmet Altan. Mais elle a déjà été confrontée à ce type de difficultés avec l'État, elle survivra, continuera à travailler, la patience est inscrite dans son âme.» ■

El Watan

13 mai 2014

Dans un café du nord de l'Irak, l'histoire du pays en vitrine

<http://www.elwatan.com>
le 13.05.14 AFP

Immobiles dans leurs cadres, Saddam Hussein, un rebelle kurde et le dernier roi de l'Irak observent les clients d'un café du Kurdistan irakien, dont les murs couverts de photographies racontent l'histoire du pays.

Les clients viennent boire du thé ou du masté, une boisson à base de yaourt servie avec des glaçons, et fumer des cigarettes dans ce petit café d'une allée du marché couvert d'Erbil, la capitale de la province autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

Mais une fois assis sur les banquettes recouvertes de tapis qui courent le long des murs, il leur est pratiquement impossible de s'adosser sans toucher un cadre photo, tant le café en est tapissé du sol au plafond voté.

"Je n'aime pas l'argent, mais j'aime les photos", explique le propriétaire, un vieil homme vêtu de noir, petite moustache grise et foulard noir et blanc sur la tête, qui répond au surnom affectueux de "Mam" - "oncle", en kurde.

Mam Khalil est tombé amoureux de la photographie dans sa jeunesse. Collectionnant les clichés, il a transformé petit à petit son café en une véritable galerie qui retrace l'histoire de l'Irak à travers la monarchie, la dictature et, enfin, la fragile démocratie actuelle.

A l'instar du pays, la ville d'Erbil a connu de grands changements depuis que Mam Khalil a commencé sa carrière de collectionneur. Dans sa jeunesse, elle ne comptait qu'une citadelle, qui surplombe encore le marché, et quatre quartiers, se souvient-il.

Mais l'argent du pétrole l'a transformée en une ville moderne, avec de meilleures infrastructures et des immeubles modernes étincelants.

Aujourd'hui, il y a "de meilleures



Mam Khalil, 76 ans, le 12 mai 2014 à Erbil, la capitale de la région autonome kurde du nord de l'Irak, devant les galeries de photos retraçant l'histoire du pays qui tapissent les murs

maisons, de meilleures conditions de vie, de meilleures voitures, de meilleures rues, de meilleures femmes", résume Mam Khalil dans un grand sourire.

- **Fayçal II et Saddam Hussein** -

Mais son café donne un aperçu de l'Irak d'il y a quelques années, ou quelques décennies.

Ici, Fayçal II, dernier roi d'Irak renversé en 1958, inspecte la garde royale. Là, Mulla Mustafa Barzani, rebelle et leader kurde, père de l'actuel président de la province, pose à côté de son fusil. Un peu plus loin, moustachu et souriant, Saddam Hussein serre et brandit la main de Barzani, une image probablement immortalisée après un accord de paix conclu en 1970 entre Bagdad et les Kurdes.

Des personnages de l'histoire plus récente, voire de l'actualité, peuplent aussi les murs du café, comme ces hommes politiques kurdes et arabes photographiés à l'occasion d'un passage dans le café.

Certains sont identifiés par une légende, mais d'autres ne sont connues que de Mam Khalil, ou ont été oubliés dans les méandres de l'Histoire.

Mam Khalil lui-même apparaît sur certains clichés, notamment sur une photographie en couleurs prise il y a plus de soixante ans. Il avait alors les cheveux noirs, et une ébauche de sourire sur le visage.

Ayant dû abandonner l'école à la mort de son père, en 1948, il est embauché quelques années plus tard dans un café. Il commence à accrocher des photos aux murs, au grand dam de son patron qui "détestait ça" - mais le laisse faire à cause de son ardeur au travail.

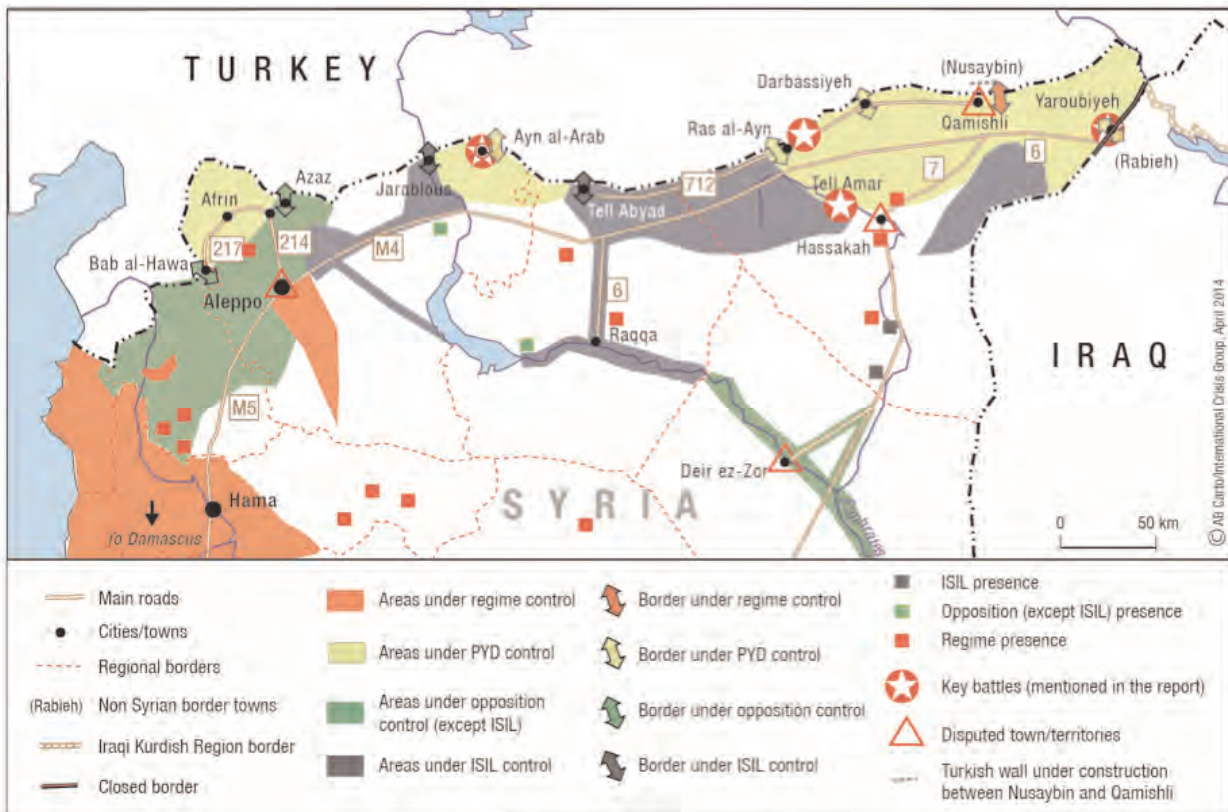
En 1967, quand il rachète l'établissement, il peut enfin accrocher autant de photos qu'il y a de place sur les murs, couvrant presque chaque centimètre carré.

Si aucun de ses quatre enfants ne compte reprendre l'affaire, Mam Khalil n'exclut pas que quelqu'un d'autre veuille poursuivre la tradition après sa mort.

D'ailleurs, il continue à l'enrichir: quand il est fatigué de répondre aux questions, Mam Khalil réclame un tirage d'une des photos prises pendant l'entretien. Une nouvelle photo pour les murs du café.

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Flight of Icarus? The PYD's Precarious Rise in Syria



<http://www.crisisgroup.org>
Middle East Report N°151 / 8 May 2014
Erbil/Brussels,
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the Syrian regime and opposition locked in a seesaw battle, Kurdish forces have consolidated control over large portions of the country's north. Their principal players, the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD) and its armed wing, the People's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Gel, YPG), now dominate three large, non-contiguous enclaves of Kurdish-majority territory along the Turkish border, over which the PYD proclaimed in November 2013 the transitional administration of Rojava (Western Kurdistan). Kurdish governance is unprecedented in Syria and for the PYD, an offshoot of the Turkish Kurdish insurgent movement PKK, from which it draws ideological, organisational and military support. But it is unclear whether this is a first step toward stability and the Kurdish aspiration for national recognition, or merely a respite while the civil war focuses elsewhere. The PYD alone will not determine the fate of Syria's north, but it could greatly increase its chances by broadening its popular appeal and cooperating with other local forces.

For all its successes, the PYD's rise is in no small part illusory, attributable less to its own prowess than to its links with other regional forces. Perhaps most important is its de facto alliance with the regime, which handed territories over to it while continuing to give material support to those territories. The party's gains also flow from its backing from

the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerane Kurdistan, PKK), outlawed as a terrorist organisation by the EU and U.S. and long active over the border in Turkey. The PYD is in practice an ideological, organisational and military part of this leftist group, of which the umbrella organisation is in theory the Union of Communities in Kurdistan (Koma Ciwakên Kurdistan, KCK). It benefits ideologically from the prestige of Abdullah Öcalan, the movement's long-time leader; and with the PKK's backing, the YPG has become the immediate region's strongest military force, one whose success in fending off jihadi militants is perhaps the single most important reason for the Kurds' waxing fortunes.

Ironically however, these same factors, crucial to the PYD's success, are also its Achilles heel. First, its PKK heritage has encumbered the party with a rigid, authoritarian culture and vague program that are out of sync with popular expectations. Heavy-handed governance prompts at best grudging acquiescence from a constituency whose younger generation, particularly, appears to aspire to something different. Syrian Kurds have since the 1980s constituted up to one third of the members of the PKK, whose past bombings and murders of civilians have rendered the insurgency a pariah in Western capitals; affiliation with it blocks efforts to gain international legitimacy.

Secondly, suspected collaboration with the regime has taken a toll on its popularity. The Damascus authorities have maintained a light albeit firm presence in PYD-controlled areas, reportedly acting mostly beneath the surface. Even as they relinquished control over certain state

assets (notably administrative and security buildings) to the PYD, they have maintained their hold on, and continue to disseminate, state resources without which the Rojava project would wither.

Thirdly, the PYD's competition for dominance with would-be allies, most importantly the Kurdish Democratic Party of Masoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, has created popular disenchantment and fatigue; this has left room for regional powers – notably Turkey and Iran – to manipulate the various sides in pursuit of their own interests. Barzani is on good terms with Ankara and Washington, so the PYD has few allies other than Damascus, Iran and, to an extent, the Nouri al-Maliki-led government in Baghdad.

These challenges raise questions about the depth and durability of the Rojava project. For PYD supporters, it is the kernel of future Kurdish self-rule. For detractors, it is an empty shell, a tool of the regime. It is hard to identify a way forward for Rojava. Its dependence on the regime alienates constituents, yet any step toward Kurdish partners and other actors risks jeopardising its dominance on the ground by undermining relations with Damascus.

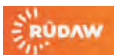
Kurdish rights – not to mention longer-term local stability –

are unlikely to be realised by the PYD forsaking its natural allies for a partnership of convenience with the same regime that long denied them. What all peoples of northern Syria need, Kurdish and non-Kurdish, is a common strategy for dealing with both Damascus and the minority communities in the region. This would require that the PYD:

- decrease its heavy reliance on its own military and the regime and instead broaden its support base among both Kurds and non-Kurdish populations, as well as the more pragmatic strands of the Syrian opposition;
- prepare, jointly with its support base, a strategy to replace the regime as a service provider and ensure the region's access to resources; and
- diversify relations with foreign powers to diminish their ability to exploit communal tensions in their own interests.

Bringing northern Syria together would be no mean task, but the reward could be as great as the mission is difficult: emancipation from a regime that someday is likely to turn brutal attention back to the country's north.

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7 May 2014

PUK, Gorran Agree on Cooperation, Dialogue

rudaw.net
7 May 2014

SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region – After a week of tensions and mutual accusations immediately following last week's provincial elections, the Change Movement (Gorran) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) have reached a preliminary agreement on finding a mechanism to work together in the city of Sulaimani.

The announcement came after Salahaddin Bahaddin, former leader of the Islamic Union (Yekgirtu), stepped in as mediator between the two rival groups, both of which claim Sulaimani as a stronghold.

Meanwhile, it was reported Tuesday that Gorran head Nawshirwan Mustafa and Hero Ibrahim Ahmed, a senior leader of the PUK, had instructed their parties to avoid inflammatory reports and tone down rhetoric against each other.

"Nawshirwan Mustafa has said that they would negotiate on the posts once the official results would come out to form provincial council

and other administrative posts with everyone, including PUK," Hama Saeed Hama Ali, former Kurdistan Region MP, quoted Gorran's leader as saying in the meeting with Bahaddin.

The former Yekgirtu leader mediated between the rivals over the last two days, meeting senior leaders of Gorran and the PUK, who reportedly have decided to open a new page to keep the security of Sulaimani intact.

Rudaw sources said that ending the media war was one of the outcomes of the mediation, aimed at lowering tensions in Sulaimani city.

In the meantime, a well-placed source told Rudaw that, in Bahaddin's meetings, "emphasis was placed on the peace of Sulaimani, and ways of transferring power peacefully."

According to Ali, the PUK has demonstrated it is prepared to start a dialogue and cooperation to end tensions with Gorran.

Fahmi Hama Tofiq, the chief of staff of the former Yekgirtu leader, also reaffirmed that Bahaddin had met first with Mustafa and then with Ahmed.



Votes are counted in Sulaimani after last Wednesday's elections.
Photo: Rudaw

"Gorran and PUK agree that the tensions should not get out of control and the situation should be resolved through understanding," Tofiq said.

According to the preliminary results of last Wednesday's provincial polls, Gorran has won over 350,000 votes, while the PUK trails with more than 253,000 votes in Sulaimani.

The PUK, which has controlled the local administration of Sulaimani since 1991, has already warned it would not accept Gorran's candidate, Haval Abu Bakir, as

Sulaimani governor, because of alleged ties with the former Baath regime.

"There is no way that we agree to have a Baathist occupy the post of governor of Sulaimani. We have evidence that he and his father were members of the Baath party," said Mala Bakhtyar, a senior leader of the PUK.

Tensions between the two rival parties have been high since the PUK lost its standing as Kurdistan's second-largest party in Kurdish legislative elections last September. Gorran, which was born after breaking away from PUK in 2009, took second place in the September polls.

Over the weekend, tensions between the two rose after Sulaimani security forces controlled by the PUK arrested six Gorran election observers, accusing them of attempting to tamper with ballots at a polling center in Sulaimani at gunpoint. Gorran dismissed the charges as "unfounded."

The Gorran observers were released on bail, after being shown "confessing" on the PUK television station. After being freed, they said their television statements had been made under severe threats and torture. ■

Are Syria's Kurds headed toward autonomy?

Kurdish Syria following Iraqi precedent

Comment by Gareth Smyth
May 1, 2014
www.executive-magazine.com

Anyone who witnessed events in Iraqi Kurdistan in the 1990s will feel déjà vu as events in Kurdish Syria unfold. After Saddam Hussein withdrew from northern Iraq in 1991, due partly to a United States 'no fly' zone, the Kurds carved out a de facto autonomy that eventually became today's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in a federal Iraq.

Could this happen in Syria? So far, the similarities are striking. Like fellow Baathist Saddam, Bashar al-Assad withdrew his forces, in 2012, in a move calculated to conserve military strength, as well as sow discord among opponents and alarm regional governments with Kurdish populations. In neither case was withdrawal total. As in Iraq, the government in Damascus still pays some civil servants, and indeed Assad's security remains in the main Kurdish city of Qamishli.

As in 1990s Iraq, there are two rival Kurdish parties, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdistan National Council (KNC). And as in Iraq, they want autonomy but have taken tactical decisions reflecting political complexities around them. Indeed, Iraqi Kurdistan suffered civil war from 1994 to 1997 between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), when the parties played on shifting alliances between Tehran, Ankara and Baghdad.

In Syria, the PYD and KNC have not as yet traded blows, which may reflect the strength of the PYD. They have, however, a different attitude to others in the Syrian maelstrom. The



Syrian Kurds waving a Kurdish flag and image of Abdullah Ocalan in Aleppo

KNC have edged closer to the opposition Syrian National Coalition while the PYD leans toward the regime. What distinguishes the situation in Syria is the PYD's close links with the PKK, the Kurdistan Workers Party, which fought for decades in Turkey in the name of pan-Kurdish nationalism embracing Kurds of all countries. The PYD's contacts with the Assad regime have their roots before 1998 when Hafez al-Assad insisted PKK leader Abdullah "Apo" Ocalan leave the country (under threats from Turkey).

The PYD denies "operational links" to the PKK but makes no secret of being part of the Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), a cross-border grouping of parties following Ocalan's ideology that also includes Pejak (the Free Life Party of Kurdistan), which operates in Iran.

PYD fighters and party events, including funerals, display Ocalan's picture and PKK symbols, including a red star recalling the party's origins as a Marxist group. In addition, PYD terminology reflects the PKK, including Ocalan's ideas of

'democratic autonomy' and 'democratic confederalism' — which does not preclude the PYD from being a tight organization that critics condemn as dictatorship.

The PKK's past commitment to an independent Kurdistan carved out of Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, while moderated in recent years, jars with the Iraqi Kurdish parties' acceptance of self-government within international borders, and their efforts to calm the fears of Turkey and Iran over Kurdish autonomy by arguing Kurds should achieve their rights peacefully.

Wariness of the PYD is seen especially in the KDP, whose leaders recall the PKK's attacks in the 1990s from northern Iraq on Turkish forces, which prompted Turkish military intervention and led Ankara to garrison troops inside Iraq.

Even with Ocalan mellowing in a Turkish jail since capture in Nairobi in 1998, his Kurdish opponents will have read February's interview in *Vatan*, the Turkish newspaper, with Cemil Bayik, a PKK founder. "Whoever wins in Syria will gain a place in the Middle East, and even in the world," he said. "For the Kurds to win there, or to lose, will impact all of Kurdistan."

The PKK last year declared a ceasefire in their near 30-year conflict in which at least 40,000 died, but some commanders have threatened renewed violence unless Prime Minister Recep Erdogan moves to ease restrictions on the Kurdish language and accepts a degree of Kurdish autonomy in continuing talks with the KRG, which has attracted considerable Turkish investment and sees Turkey as an export route for a targeted oil production of 2 million barrels a day by 2019.

At a popular level, Iraqi Kurds welcome developments in Syria, and their leadership recognizes its example of autonomy has inspired Kurds elsewhere. But Iraqi Kurdish officials are watching Syria carefully, fearing the growing strength of the PYD could jeopardize the KRG's balancing act. ●

Turkey to Sell Kurdish Oil on Global Markets

www.ibtimes.co.uk
By Nigel Wilson
May 13, 2014



Turkey's Energy Minister has said Turkey was ready to sell Kurdish oil to international markets from its export hub of Ceyhan.

"Our storage tanks in Ceyhan for Northern Iraqi oil are now full. There is not any obstacle for the sale. This oil belongs to Iraqis and they are the ones who will sell that," Taner Yildiz was quoted as saying by Turkish newspaper, *Today's Zamam*, in Istanbul.

Officials from Baghdad, Arbil and Turkey will oversee sales of Kurdish oil from Ceyhan and revenues will be channelled to the country's state-owned Halk Bank, he added.

The announcement suggests the long-running dispute between Iraqi Kurdistan's regional government and the central government in Baghdad could be close to a resolution, although there were no announcements from Baghdad or Arbil.

Turkey had previously refused to sell the oil while the two administrations worked out a deal over the distribution of revenues from sales but the storage facilities at Ceyhan were close to reaching their 2.5m barrels capacity.

Baghdad has been locked in a spat with the autonomous region over the Kurds' right to export the oil without going through Baghdad.

Kurdistan has been autonomous since 1991 but it relies on good relations with Baghdad in order to receive its share of the national budget.

The bitter dispute led to the central government refusing to pay Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) workers earlier this year and has delayed approving the annual budget.

Iraq's Oil Minister Abdul Kareem Luaibi has said he expected a deal to be reached soon.

Baghdad wants to boost its exports to Ceyhan in Turkey to more than a million barrels a day by building a second pipeline to the city.

"We are building a pipeline in Iraq," Luaibi told Reuters in April. "I believe the daily oil flow will exceed 1 million barrels a day when that line is completed. I hope it happens this year." ♦

OPINION

Will Iraq fall apart?

National identity remains resilient, but Maliki's re-election could strain it to breaking point.



Scott Field
11 May 2014
<http://www.aljazeera.com>

We've heard it all before - Iraq is on the brink of disintegration. Sectarian tension and violence is spiking, al-Qaeda is running amok through the country and the Kurds are threatening to break away. The post-Saddam political architecture has brought not democracy, but a new authoritarian strongman in the form of Nouri al-Maliki. As Iraq emerges from new elections and the complex process of coalition-building is set to begin, all these claims are being recycled afresh.

But this time, there are more reasons than usual to be alarmed. During Maliki's second term in power, two clear trends have emerged that give these claims new urgency: Declining levels of trust and cooperation among the political elite, and a worsening security situation, both of which are fast approaching critical red lines. Were he to be returned to power - which at this stage seems a distinct possibility - it could provoke a major political crisis and a further escalation of violence. In a worst-case scenario, it could even spell the eventual disintegration of the country.

The first trend, a collapse of political trust and unwillingness to cooperate any further with Maliki, was on full display during a recent high-level discussion convened by the Middle East Institute in Erbil. Frustrated by a stalled reform agenda and failed negotiations on the all-important hydrocarbons law, politicians of every stripe have been further alienated by Maliki's insistence on centralising power, withholding appointments to key ministries and consolidating his personal control of an increasingly securitised state.

Both Sunni and Kurdish leaders, while still willing to bargain with their Shia counterparts in general, no longer believe they can do business with Maliki. The result has been a decline of state legitimacy in Sunni-dominated western provinces, opening the door for Sunni tribesmen and the cross-border al-Qaida-linked Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), to seize and hold territory. It has also prompted the opening moves in some high stakes brinkmanship by the Kurds, who have signed oil contracts independently of the central government and suffered painful budget cuts in retaliation.

A BOLT FOR INDEPENDENCE?

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani has often warned of making a bolt for independence, but is usually assumed to be bluffing because of the high political and economic costs the Kurds



While Syria is arguably beyond the point of no return, Iraq is not there yet, writes Field [AP]

would pay in a region mostly opposed to the move.

But if, as seems clear, the Kurds are assuming that another term of Maliki would lead to Iraq's break-up anyway, they might calculate they have less to lose by seizing the initiative and moving sooner rather than later.

Among the Shia, Moqtada al-Sadr has warned of a popular revolt if Maliki is re-elected, and the influential clerics of Najaf are reported to be at their wits end in dealing with him. The revered Ayatollah Sistani recently broke his customary silence to warn that electoral fraud may be taking place, a thinly-veiled reference to the determination of Shia religious authorities to ensure Maliki isn't re-elected. All concerned in Iraq seem to have concluded that another four years of Maliki's authoritarian policies would fatally weaken the democratic integrity of the country.

And yet, for all that, Maliki still might win. The advantages of corrupt authoritarian incumbency, affording him total control of the security forces and privileged access to state coffers, tilt the playing field heavily to his advantage. Moreover, the rise in physical insecurity and sectarianism on his watch has seen the breakdown of previously strong crosscutting electoral alliances, splintering the political landscape and complicating the task of building a voting block that could oust him. And, in the time-honoured tradition of protection rackets, Maliki can present himself as the cure for the ills of Kurdish separatism and Sunni extremism that he himself has done so much to inflame. At the very least, the process of hammering out the next governing coalition is likely to be very long and contentious. It will guarantee a prolonged period of political uncertainty for Iraq at a moment when the crisis in neighbouring Syria demands just the opposite.

Spillover from Syria is exacerbating the second negative trend threatening Iraq, that of worsening security. Casualties have doubled

in the past year and are now running at 1,000 per month, the highest seen since the waning days of the sectarian civil war in late 2007. The establishment of a secure territorial base for ISIL in Deir al-Zour, al-Raqqqa and Aleppo provinces in Syria is mirrored by their expanding presence in the governorates of Anbar, Nineweh and Salah al-Din on the Iraqi side of the border.

SPILOVER FROM SYRIA

ISIL has not only held the major Sunni city of Fallujah for the past four months, but now has its sights set on control of oil facilities near the city of Kirkuk, the epicenter of a string of long-simmering territorial disputes between the Kurds and Baghdad. Should growing Kurdish-Arab tensions lead to clashes along this heavily armored "trigger-line", further opportunities for ISIL penetration could open up. This could help widen the already growing ethnic and sectarian fault-lines in the country that undermine its integrity.

In the end, it may be external powers - principally Iran - that have the decisive say in whether Iraq continues its dangerous descent under Maliki, or struggles back onto the path of inclusive politics. Tehran's intervention in 2010 was critical to anointing Maliki for a second term. But recent signals from inside Iran, coupled with the discontent in Najaf and the Sadr camp, suggest that they may be skittish about supporting him for a third.

From the outset in 2003, Iran has been careful to "back every horse in the race" in Shia Iraq. It therefore has options to replace Maliki if it deems his policies too risky to its core interests of stability, territorial integrity, and preventing the resurgence of a militarily powerful Iraqi neighbour.

But even with the best of intentions, it cannot be over-emphasised that the Syrian civil war shows no sign of ending in return to the status quo ante of a unitary Syrian state. The tide of Levantine political fragmentation that is spilling into Iraq could help sweep it over the political precipice it is now perched on. It is true that national identity remains resilient, and that a deliberate ethno-sectarian Balkanisation of both Syria and Iraq is a political non-starter.

But a glance at the current lines of control in Syria also makes it clear that the men with guns on the ground are currently creating something disturbingly similar to just that. While Syria is arguably beyond the point of no return, Iraq is not there yet. But the outcome of this election may determine if indeed, in the words of KRG's Barzani, "Iraq is breaking up."

Scott Field is a Visiting Scholar at the Institute for International Studies, University of California, Berkeley.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.

Iraqi Kurdistan gambles on oil and Baghdad's benevolence

Iraqi Kurdistan is demanding control of its oil, and officials say they're willing to risk losing their share of the federal budget to get that. Problem is they can't afford it.

By Cathy Otten, May 12, 2014
http://www.csmonitor.com
Sulaimaniyah, Iraq

Iraqi Kurdistan is risking the loss of its share of Iraq's national budget to secure greater independence and the right to manage its own oil.

Although oil exports could net the Kurdistan Regional Government a healthy revenue stream, for now it cannot plug the gap if Baghdad continues to withhold the 17 percent of the national budget that it provides to Kurdistan every year. That revenue makes up the largest chunk of the Kurdish region's budget, even though the Kurds say they regularly receive much less than promised.

Baghdad began withholding that money in January, and the KRG has already had to delay paying public sector workers' wages – April's paychecks still haven't arrived, and some workers have gone on strike. Officials say they will have to dip into savings.

The Kurds, spread across Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, have long faced persecution and clamored for greater independence in each country. They have been most successful in Iraq, where they achieved semi-autonomous status. Now KRG officials are demanding the right to sell oil without the central government's permission.

But Baghdad insists that oil must still be funneled through the State Oil Marketing Organization and has vowed legal action against any buyers. For now, Kurdistan's oil exports are sitting in the southern Turkey port of Ceyhan, waiting for buyers.

Their financial dependency on Baghdad has left the Kurds stuck. But Baghdad has to be careful about how it uses that power, says Richard Mallinson, a geopolitical analyst at Energy Aspects. If it punishes the Kurds too harshly, it risks triggering a surge of support for independence, regardless of the financial ramifications.

"The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) position has strengthened in the last year, but they still depend on budget transfers from the federal government, and oil export revenue would not be enough to replace this entirely in the first couple of years," he says. "So Baghdad has an important financial lever, but the more heavily this is used the more incentive the KRG will have to push for greater autonomy."

NATIONALISM BURNS

In the run up to Iraqi national elections on April 30, Iraqi and Kurdish nationalism



People in a taxi (l.) wave flags of Iraq's President Jalal Talabani of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) before the country's parliamentary elections in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq, April 28, 2014. Yahya Ahmad/Reuters

ran high. Massoud Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, compared Baghdad's budget withholding to the 1988 gassing of the Kurdish town of Halabja by Saddam Hussein. Five thousand Kurds were killed in a single day, and the trauma still resonates strongly.

"I consider the suspension of Kurdistan Region [financial] dues as a declaration of war, and maybe even a crime greater than the chemical bombing of Halabja," he said in an interview with Al-Hayat newspaper.

After a Kurdish guard reportedly killed a prominent journalist in Baghdad, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki said that "blood can only be expiated by blood."

In the sleepy polling stations throughout Kurdistan, pro-independence sentiment among Kurds was firm. The region does not want to get dragged into the violence that has engulfed the rest of Iraq, and younger Kurds have grown up learning Kurdish instead of Arabic, further weakening ties.

"I'm not happy with Maliki because I'm Kurdish. If we let Maliki go on in this style he will be a dictator like Saddam Hussein," says Sam Amini, an English student originally from a small town near Halabja. His father was part of the peshmerga Kurdish armed forces who fought a guerrilla war against Hussein.

His family is feeling the pinch because his parents' salaries have been delayed, but he still backs separation from Baghdad. "Kurdistan should be independent," he says. "If you look at democracy in Kurdistan, step by step it's going towards a new future."

Shorsh Haji, a lawmaker in Baghdad for the Kurdish anti-corruption Change party, believes on working with Iraq for now. But, "when we reach a stage that our rights are not recognized, and we don't have a say in

decision making in Iraq, then we must think about other options," he says.

Maintaining leverage

Kurds might find themselves with some leverage if, as some predict, Mr. Maliki's party doesn't win enough votes on its own to secure a third term. In 2010 the Kurdish coalition backed Maliki's second term, and could be asked to do the same again this time.

Fuad Hussein, chief of staff to Mr. Barzani, says that post-election negotiations to form a new government will force a resolution of the budget issue.

"You can't negotiate and not pay workers – this issue will be solved," he says. "We must not have links between what we are doing on [the] oil issue and the payment of the employees of Iraqi Kurdistan. What the Iraqi government has done was illegal. The federal government is not allowed to cut budget. These are two different issues."

Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani recently stated that Kurdistan would be able to pay future salaries without Baghdad, and that it would go ahead with oil exports. But many experts are skeptical it can survive financially on its own.

If the dispute is not solved, "there will be very serious economic problems in Kurdistan," says Kamal Chomani, a Kurdish journalist and political observer. "If the KRG goes ahead with [selling oil] via Turkey without Baghdad's permission, but cannot provide enough money for the region from oil sales, then this is a serious problem." ♦

Kurds could opt out of next Iraqi government: president

By Ned Parker and Isabel Coles
(Reuters) - May 13, 2014

ARABIL, Iraq, - The president of Iraqi Kurdistan, Masoud Barzani, said Iraq had been led in an authoritarian direction by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and threatened to end the oil-rich autonomous region's participation in the federal government.

Iraq held elections on April 30. The results have yet to be announced but Kurdish support is crucial to Maliki's ambitions for a third term. The incumbent premier's rivals, both Shi'ite and Sunni, are hoping Barzani and the Kurds will help them thwart Maliki's bid to stay in office for four more years.

Barzani said Kurdish parties would meet as soon as the results of the election were officially announced, expected in the next few days, to decide how to proceed in negotiations over the government formation.

The talks could drag on for months and Barzani declined to give any more details of the Kurds' position but said the political situation in Iraq was unsustainable and one option would be to fully withdraw Kurdish participation in the government unless there was the prospect of change.

"All options are on the table," Barzani told Reuters in an interview on Monday. "It is time for final decisions. We are not going to wait another decade and go through the same experience again. If we boycott the process, we will boycott everything (parliament and the government)."

Such a move would be the first of its kind for the Kurds, who have been a partner in the national government since the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, and would put added strain on the country's already fraying federal unity.

There are about 5 million Kurds in majority Arab Iraq, which has a population of more than 30 million. Most Kurds live in the north of the country, where they run their own affairs, but remain reliant on Baghdad for a share of the national budget.

The Kurds eventually lined up behind Maliki after the last election in 2010, helping him win a second term, persuaded by promises to share power and settle the status of territories disputed by Arabs and Kurds.

However, the Kurds say those promises were broken and the deal unraveled almost as soon as the government took office. Relations between the two sides rapidly deteriorated thereafter and are now characterized by deep mistrust.

Barzani then threw his weight behind an unsuccessful attempt to unseat Maliki with a vote of no confidence in 2012, and



Masoud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, attends a session at the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos January 24, 2014. REUTERS

must now work out how to ensure Baghdad keeps any promises it makes if the Kurds agree to share power again.

Barzani declined to go into the details of how the Kurds planned to guarantee their demands are met, but he said he would be seeking more than paper guarantees.

Barzani conceded Maliki was not solely to blame for Iraq's troubles, but said as prime minister and commander in chief of the armed forces he ultimately bore the responsibility.

"There was no partnership, and it was totalitarianism," said Barzani of governance in Iraq under Maliki over the past four years. "He is the number one responsible for it. He was capable of not allowing the whole process to go in that direction."

"The authorities in Baghdad want to control everything ... It is not acceptable to us. We want to be partners; we don't want to be subjects."

Barzani emphasized repeatedly his dispute with Maliki, who once fought against deposed dictator Saddam Hussein alongside the Kurds, was "not personal", said he had changed since becoming Prime Minister.

"The Maliki that we knew before being in power was different than the Maliki who has been in power," he said.

ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

Despite the hostilities, some Kurdish officials admit in private a deal could be reached with Maliki, if only to buy time while their region, no longer believing in an alliance with Baghdad, pulls away.

The Kurds are already moving towards economic independence, and late last year finished building an oil pipeline to Turkey that could in theory make them self-sufficient, further riling Baghdad, which slashed funding to the region in revenge.

"Those who cut the budget of Kurdistan are going to pay the price of

that decision," Barzani said. "If by cutting the budget and blackmailing us they think the Kurds will not continue asking for their legitimate demands, they are wrong."

The Kurds say they are constitutionally entitled to export oil on their own terms, and more than 2 million barrels have already flowed through the new pipeline into storage tanks at a Turkish port. Baghdad has threatened dire consequences if exports go ahead without federal consent, but Barzani said there was no going back.

"The political decision has been made that we're going to sell oil independently," he said. "We will continue producing the oil, pumping it out and selling it. If they continue escalating, we will also escalate from our side."

Barzani made clear that the Kurds could hold a referendum on independence if Baghdad pushed them too far, repeating a threat he has made in the past.

"If they don't like us to be with them, they should tell us and we will take another path as well," he said. "We are going to have a referendum and ask our people. Whatever the people decide".

Maliki may seek to exploit divisions among the Kurds themselves to weaken their bargaining position in Baghdad, by courting the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which is seeking to reassert itself after political setbacks.

Some Kurdish officials worry that the PUK, which has shared power with Barzani's own Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) since the region gained autonomy could threaten to break ranks and join with Maliki in order to regain leverage at home.

But Maliki is also facing a challenge in the Sunni heartland province of Anbar, where his army has been waging war since the start of the year, when tribal fighters and Islamist insurgents overran several towns.

Maliki's critics, including Barzani, accuse him of going on the offensive against Iraq's Sunni minority to whip up support among his own Shi'ite base as security deteriorated across the country, damaging his credentials.

"To ignite a war in order to achieve political gains is a catastrophe," Barzani said. "I do believe it (the situation in Anbar) ended up like that. Maybe in the beginning it was a different story."

Asked whether he was concerned the offensive in Anbar could set a precedent for dealing with similar problems in other parts of the country, Barzani said: "In any country, if they pursue that strategy, that means the end of that country."

"That will be the end of Iraq, and that is the most dangerous issue." □

Ces Français en quête de l'eldorado kurde

Développement. Le Kurdistan irakien, région autonome assise sur un tas d'or noir, connaît une croissance surprenante. Des dizaines de pionniers tentent actuellement l'aventure.



Erbil (Irak), avril dernier. Environ 300 Français, comme Léon, Sylvie et leur fils Oram, sont venus chercher fortune dans la capitale du Kurdistan irakien, où une place est nommée François-Mitterrand en souvenir de la première guerre du Golfe. (LP/Victor Point.)

Victor Point | 10 mai 2014
www.leparisien.fr

« En arrivant ici, je pensais rester cloîtrée, entourée de barbus et de terroristes. » Lorsque son mari, cadre chez Lafarge, lui annonce il y a un an et demi qu'il a une opportunité de carrière au Kurdistan irakien, Florence Didiot s'inquiète. Dans le Kurdistan irakien, elle entend d'abord Irak et ce que ce pays renvoie : des attentats quotidiens, des milliers de morts et de kidnappings. .. Dix-huit mois plus tard, pourtant, cette Corse à l'enthousiasme débordant a remis sur pieds une école française. Devenue vice-présidente de Dialog, association d'amitié franco-kurde, elle ne tarit plus d'éloges sur le Kurdistan irakien, un pays « très ouvert ».

Cette région autonome -- depuis 2005 -- mais non indépendante, qui abrite 5 millions d'habitants, aux confins de l'Iran, de la Turquie et de la Syrie, est

presque une anomalie. La croissance y est forte (9,5 % de 2011 à 2012), les infrastructures bien développées, les coupures de courant rares... Et, surtout, la région est sûre : à peine deux attentats ces sept dernières années. Les redoutables peshmergas (nom des militaires kurdes) et les Asayesh (les services secrets) gardent les frontières et quadrillent le territoire avec une main de fer.

L'une des plus grandes réserves de pétrole du monde

« C'est simple, on est plus en sécurité ici qu'à la gare RER de la Défense », lance un cadre de Total. Par la fenêtre, il pointe du doigt le sud : « A 60 km de la capitale (NDLR : Erbil), à Kirkouk, il n'y a pas un expatrié. » La multinationale française avait une excellente raison de revenir au nord de l'Irak : les Kurdes sont assis sur l'une des plus grandes réserves pétrolifères du monde. Réserves revendiquées par Bagdad, mais que le gouvernement d'Erbil compte bien s'approprier pour préten-

dre à une véritable indépendance. Un pipeline a déjà été construit avec la Turquie, un autre est en projet. Seule l'intransigeance du Premier ministre irakien empêche encore les Kurdes d'exporter à leur propre compte. « Mais ce n'est qu'une question de mois », assurent, de concert, Total et le Consulat français. En attendant, la région prospère grâce à ses concessions... et à la contrebande. Les constructions se multiplient. De grands squelettes de béton se dressent le long des routes, futures tours d'habitation, de bureaux ou complexes hôteliers. « Les demandes sont énormes », commente-t-on chez Lafarge, qui possède sur place trois cimenteries.

Symbole de la frénésie consumériste qui s'est emparée du pays, les centres commerciaux poussent comme des champignons. A Erbil, un immense Carrefour (7 000 m² de surface de vente, 250 employés) trône depuis deux ans au sein de l'un d'entre eux, qui abrite d'autres enseignes comme Mango, de Facto ou Yves Rocher. A Sulemanieh, deuxième ville du pays, il est même prévu l'érection d'un centre commercial sur trois étages en forme de... tour Eiffel ! Hormis cette copie clinquante, et une place François-Mitterrand à Erbil, en souvenir du rôle joué par la France en 1991, lors de la première guerre du Golfe, la présence hexagonale reste assez discrète. Une quinzaine d'entreprises sont implantées sur place, une cinquantaine de bureaux de liaison, et environ 300 Français, dont beaucoup de binationaux. Tel Léon, 48 ans, revenu s'installer au Kurdistan irakien en septembre après avoir été, pendant presque dix ans, réfugié politique à Lyon. Sa femme, Sylvie, qui enseigne le français dans une université kurde, et leur fils, Oram, 8 ans, l'ont accompagné. Après quelques mois, Sylvie partage l'enthousiasme de Florence Didiot : « C'est un pays où tout semble possible. » □

LA MONTAGNE

MARDI 13 MAI 2014

Portrait → Zîrek



FILM. *Pari(s) d'exil*, de et avec Zîrek, demain soir au Rio, à Clermont-Ferrand. PHOTODISK



SWEET HOME. Thé kurde et sucreries orientales en compagnie du chat de la maison.



REFUGE. « C'est ici que je me pose, le soir, avec mon thé ou un verre de vin blanc. »

APATRIDE ■ Le comédien Zîrek a posé ses valises près de Montaigut-le-Blanc et présente son film au Rio

Un peu de son Kurdistan en Auvergne

Il ne connaît pas sa date de naissance ; il a quitté son pays il y a plus de 30 ans, un pays qui n'existe plus : le Kurdistan turc. Zîrek est apatride... et en passe de devenir auvergnat.

Véronique Lacoste-Metthey
veronique.metthey@centrefrance.com

À Chazoux, sur les hauteurs de Montaigut-le-Blanc, Zîrek a trouvé une patrie. Le hameau, qui ne compte que quelques âmes, une poignée de maisons et 24 ânes est devenu son pays à lui. « Ce serait sympa de se retrouver au Kurdistan de Chazoux ! », lance-t-il tout naturellement.

Quand on arrive au pied de ce plateau avec vue sur la verte campagne environnante, on comprend pourquoi. « J'ai eu un choc ! », avoue le cinéaste qui a posé là ses valises il y a à peine deux mois et se demande quand il en repartira. « Ici, ma vie est kurde à 100 %. Je revis mon enfance ». À pied, il descend acheter sa baguette de pain en passant par les petits chemins. Il



PERTURBANT. « Ici, ma vie est kurde à 100 %. Je revis mon enfance. » PHOTOS JEAN-LOUIS GORCE

SES DATES

Naissance

Pour entrer à l'école, Ahmet Zîrek a dû produire un acte de naissance. « Mais les Kurdes n'avaient pas de papiers ! ». Au bureau d'État civil, son père a déclaré qu'il était né le 10 juillet 1957.

Départ

Après le coup d'État de 1980, Zîrek, président d'une association artistique est considéré comme « terroriste ». Il part se réfugier chez les Kurdes d'Iran puis de Syrie.

Arrivée

Le 2 septembre 1982, Zîrek atterrit à Orly sans papiers. Il a déchiré dans l'avion son faux passeport marocain. Depuis, il est réfugié apatride.

caresse en passant l'âne Platon et « sa compagne » ; parle aux chats dans sa langue natale...

Ici, cet apatride, qui a dû fuir la Turquie en 1980 retrouve un peu de chez lui. Arrivé à Paris en septembre 1982 avec 10 dollars en poche, l'artiste de théâtre considéré comme « terroriste » en Turquie ne peut plus retourner dans son pays. « Je suis devenu un vrai Parisien », ajoute celui qui a fait sien le Conti, bar de l'Odéon,

quartier où il vit depuis 32 ans.

Toutes ces années séparé de ses terres, il les raconte dans *Pari(s) d'exil*, qu'il présentera, demain mercredi, au cinéma Le Rio à Clermont (*voir par ailleurs*).

Zîrek avait promis à son père de lui envoyer Alan, son fils, « pour qu'il touche la terre ». Le garçon a alors 13 ans. Il ne parle pas la langue et prend l'avion pour un voyage initiatique de cinq jours.

Tous les soirs au téléphone avec son père, il raconte sa vie là-bas, ses émotions, ses surprises. À son retour, le scénario est bouclé et Zîrek se lance dans la réalisation. « En neuf mois, le film était prêt ». Sorti en mai dernier au Saint-André-des-Arts à Paris, il y est resté huit mois. Il a reçu un Silver Award (deuxième prix) au 33^e Festival du Film international du Caire.

« Ce qui m'a sauvé, c'est la comédie », dit celui pour qui l'exil, « c'est la

folie, la mort ». Des mots durs qu'il a consignés dans un livre, *Pense que...*, où il raconte comment il est devenu « apatride au pays de Victor Hugo. Je n'y aurais jamais pensé ! ».

On l'a vu dans « plein de petits rôles » mais sa rencontre essentielle a été avec le réalisateur Yilmaz Güney sur le tournage du *Mur* (en sélection à Cannes l'année après la palme pour Yol en 1982). Le cinéaste est mort trop tôt (en 1984 à 47 ans). Zîrek a tourné avec Lucas Bel-

vaux, Costa-Gavras (*Eden à l'ouest*) ; continué le théâtre, travaillé pour une télévision kurde...

En Auvergne, l'artiste est hébergé par une amie clermontoise rencontrée à Paris. Il quitte parfois le village pour Clermont en covoiturage (il ne conduit pas). Zîrek ne sait pas s'il pourra, un jour, retourner dans son pays. Sa famille, il la retrouve une fois par an au Kurdistan d'Irak. À Chazoux, celui qui est arrivé avec juste un petit sac à dos, prend le temps de servir du thé kurde et des sucreries orientales. Ici, pour cet apatride, le temps s'est arrêté. ■

SÉANCES

Au Rio. Demain soir à 20 h 30, 178 rue Sous-les-Vignes en présence du réalisateur. Le film sera à l'affiche samedi, dimanche et lundi. www.cinemalerio.com

SON LIVRE

Pense que...
Ainsi s'intitule le livre de Zîrek. Extraits de ces phrases qui, toutes, commencent par « Pense que ».

Patrie
«... le pays où tu es né n'existe pas sur les cartes ».

Froid
«... étant enfant tu pouvais entrer nu dans la neige. Maintenant, tu as froid 165 jours par an ».

Langue
«... pour l'être exprimé dans ta langue maternelle, tu es emprisonné ».

Exil
«... quand ils t'ont chassé de chez toi, tu n'as pas eu le temps de dire adieu ».

Kurde
« Pense que tu es kurde ». ■

Gouvernement irakien: les Kurdes vers la sortie?

Par Le Figaro.fr avec Reuters
le 13/mai/2014

Massoud Barzani, président du Kurdistan irakien, a accusé aujourd'hui le premier ministre Nouri al Maliki de dérive autoritaire et a menacé de rappeler les représentants de la région autonome qui siègent dans son gouvernement.

Les résultats des élections législatives qui se sont déroulées le 30 avril n'ont pas encore été communiqués mais l'appui des

Kurdes semble nécessaire à la reconduction du chef du gouvernement, qui brigue un troisième mandat. Ses adversaires chiites comme sunnites comptent sur le revirement de Massoud Barzani.

Selon lui, les partis kurdes se réuniront dès l'annonce des résultats, prévue d'ici quelques jours, pour décider de la marche à suivre en ce qui concerne la formation du prochain gouvernement national.

"Toutes les options sont sur

la table", a déclaré le président kurde, interrogé lundi par Reuters. "Les autorités de Bagdad veulent tout contrôler (...) Ce n'est pas acceptable pour nous. Nous voulons être des partenaires, pas des sujets. Le moment est venu de prendre des décisions définitives. Nous n'allons pas attendre une nouvelle décennie ni revivre cette expérience. Si nous boycottons le processus, nous boycotterons tout", gouvernement comme parlement, a-t-il ajouté.



Le Kurdistan, peuplé de cinq millions d'habitants et riche en hydrocarbures, est associé au gouvernement national depuis la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein en 2003. ■



14 mai 2014

Kurdes assassinées à Paris: le tueur présumé soupçonné d'avoir voulu s'évader

(AFP) 14 mai 2014

Ömer Güney, un Turc mis en examen pour l'assassinat début 2013 à Paris de trois militantes kurdes, est soupçonné par la justice française d'avoir projeté son évasion, a appris mardi l'AFP de sources concordantes.

Il a été mis en examen le 7 mai pour sa participation à un groupement formé en vue de la préparation d'une évasion avec usage d'armes ou de substance explosive, a affirmé une source judiciaire.

Ce projet est apparu après une rencontre début janvier au parloir de sa prison entre Ömer Güney et un homme installé en Allemagne où les enquêteurs se sont rendus, ont précisé des sources proches du dossier.

Des éléments semblant accréditer ce projet d'évasion ont été retrouvés dans le téléphone portable de cet homme, selon une de ces sources. Pour s'évader, Ömer Güney envisageait de se servir d'une arme, y compris contre des représentants des forces de l'ordre, a-t-elle poursuivi.

Son avocat, Xavier Nogueras, s'est refusé à tout commentaire.

Plusieurs hypothèses ont été évoquées pour expliquer les assassinats par balles, décrits par les enquêteurs comme de véritables exécutions, de Sakine Cansiz,

Fidan Dogan et Leyla Saylemez au Centre d'information kurde (CIK) à Paris le 9 janvier 2013: règlement de comptes interne à la mouvance kurde dans un contexte d'ouverture de pourparlers de paix entre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et Ankara, acte du mouvement turc d'extrême droite des «Loups Gris», assassinat politique, voire crime crapuleux ou différend personnel.

Sakine Cansiz était une figure historique du PKK, considérée comme proche de son chef historique Abdullah Öcalan.

Mais aux yeux des militants et des sympathisants de la cause kurde, l'assassinat politique commandité par les services turcs ne fait aucun doute.

Entendu à plusieurs reprises par la juge d'instruction, décrit comme insaisissable par ceux qui l'ont cotoyé, Ömer Güney nie toute implication. Mais la diffusion sur internet il y a quelques mois d'un enregistrement a fragilisé sa position, selon des sources proches de l'enquête.

- LE DÉMENTI DES SERVICES TURCS -

Un homme s'y adresse à deux interlocuteurs, présentés comme des agents turcs. Selon un avertissement diffusé au début de l'enregistrement, il aurait été mis en ligne par un internaute qui se



présente comme un proche d'Ömer Güney.

Ce dernier le lui aurait remis le 17 janvier 2013, avant son arrestation, en lui demandant de le «rendre public s'il lui arrivait quelque chose». Les trois hommes y évoquent l'assassinat à venir des trois militantes.

Au moment de la diffusion de cet enregistrement en début d'année, le service de renseignement turc, le MIT, avait de nouveau démenti toute implication dans ce crime. Il avait dénoncé «une opération destinée à mettre en cause» ce service «qui a joué un rôle important dans le processus de paix kurde».

Selon le procureur de Paris, Güney avait été désigné par le PKK comme le chauffeur et l'accompagnateur à Paris de Sakine Cansiz, l'une des victimes.

Le PKK a toutefois démenti que M. Güney était l'un de ses membres, expliquant qu'il avait fait de l'entrisme dans la mouvance kurde francilienne à partir de la

fin 2011, gagnant la confiance de ses membres. Les militants kurdes auraient par la suite découvert qu'il était «issu d'une famille proche de l'extrême droite nationaliste turque».

Les policiers français se sont intéressés à son itinéraire, en particulier avant son arrivée en France et durant son séjour en Allemagne.

Ils tentent de retracer les nombreux échanges téléphoniques vers la Turquie d'un homme qui disposait de nombreuses cartes SIM, y compris turques. Il avait ainsi été contrôlé fin 2012 aux Pays-Bas en possession de telles cartes.

Les enquêteurs ont également déterminé que, la veille des assassinats, Güney avait photographié les fiches des adhérents d'une association kurde du Val-d'Oise.

Ankara et le PKK, en lutte armée contre les forces turques depuis 1984, ont engagé un processus de paix qui marque aujourd'hui le pas. ♦

Kurdish voices grow stronger through film

Kurdish filmmakers are using cinema to broach sensitive topics in Turkey, but major challenges persist.

Jillian Kestler-D'Amours
13 May 2014
www.aljazeera.com

Wizgin Mujde Arslan knew it was only a matter of time.

When she watched the final cut of her documentary film, "I flew, you stayed", the 32-year-old Kurdish director said she had no doubt the Turkish police would soon be at her door. Then, in February 2012, two months before her film would have its public premiere, they were.

"I had to be brave because it was my heritage; it was my life. I had to tell this story," said Arslan, who was released shortly after being arrested and interrogated.

The story was that of her father, a member of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a Kurdish resistance group designated a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the European Union and the United States. In the film, Arslan is looking for his grave and seeking

When they see that this Kurdish director is not a terrorist... they start to understand that things are maybe not the way they were taught, [and] things are not the way the mainstream media has revealed.

- Ozgur Cicek, PhD candidate and researcher on Kurdish films in Turkey

answers to questions about their relationship.

"I didn't want to lie any more. I wanted to tell everyone that he is my father. I wanted to make peace with his existence. It was really hard for me," Arslan told Al Jazeera. "It was a really tough childhood because, as you can guess, it wasn't easy to be his daughter in Turkey."

Her arrest was part of a widespread government crackdown on individuals with suspected links to the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), which Turkey believes to be the urban wing of the PKK.

Arslan now lives in London, where she is completing a PhD on Kurdish cinema and teaching script-writing courses. She is also working on her next feature film, which will eventually be shot in Turkey's eastern Kurdish region. She said that writing from London gives her a sense of freedom that doesn't exist in Turkey today.

In Turkey, censorship "keeps you quiet", she



Kurdish directors are using film to bring their community's stories to a larger audience in Turkey [EPA]

said. "It's a deal between all of us, to stay silent and not ask many questions."

Despite her arrest, Arslan is among a new generation of Kurdish directors in Turkey that are using film to bring their community's stories to a larger audience.

Turkey's Kurdish minority currently numbers between 12-15 million and is largely concentrated in the country's eastern region of Anatolia, and in Istanbul, home to about three million Kurds. For decades, films that told stories from a Kurdish perspective had been nearly absent from Turkey's film scene.

Restrictions on Kurdish-language music were lifted in the early 1990s in Turkey - after being banned for decades - as the Turkish government prepared for its bid to join the European Union. Kurdish films quickly followed suit and began to take more prominence.

Considered to be one of the earliest Kurdish films coming out of Turkey, Mem u Zin, based on the Kurdish fairytale of the same name, was directed by Umit Elci and shot in 1991. Told through a Romeo and Juliette-style love story, the film describes Kurds' longing for a homeland.

The first Kurdish film festival in Turkey was held in 2009 in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish-majority city in eastern Anatolia.

That same year, the widely-acclaimed film Min Dit (The Children of Diyarbakir) was screened during the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival.

"If a film in the Kurdish language can take part in national competition in Antalya, this means that we have done the right thing. This move also paves the way for young filmmakers from Diyarbakir to have a future in the sector," Kurdish-German director Miraz Bezar said at the time.

Before that, Kurdish characters appeared every so often in Turkish films, primarily por-

traying stereotypical roles - an ignorant man from the countryside who speaks Turkish with a heavy accent, for example - for comic relief, according to Ozgur Cicek, a PhD candidate at Binghamton University who conducts research on Kurdish cinema in Turkey.

By making their own films, Kurdish directors are using the medium to bring Kurdish issues to the forefront of Turkish society. "It is part of their own way of representing themselves within their own reality," Cicek said. But access to Kurdish cinema remains limited in Turkey, Cicek said, as the films are rarely shown in mainstream theatres. Cicek, who teaches film at a handful of Turkish universities, explained that her students are often shocked by what they see in Kurdish films.

"When they see that this Kurdish director is not a terrorist... they start to understand that things are maybe not the way they were taught, [and] things are not the way the mainstream media has revealed," she told Al Jazeera. "There is a counter history that is represented with those films."

But what exactly makes a film Kurdish?

With approximately 25 million Kurds spread out across Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, the Kurdish population in the Middle East has diverse cultural traditions, dialects and experiences. These differences also extend to the films Kurdish directors are making.

In the autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq, 14 movie theatres were opened last summer, showcasing Kurdish and international films. Kurdish directors are producing various types of films - short films, documentaries, and feature-length films - across the Middle East, and in the diaspora.



The international success of directors like Kurdish-Iranian Bahman Ghobadi helped propel the Kurdish film industry [EPA]

According to Devrim Kilic, a Kurdish PhD student in film studies at La Trobe University in Australia and editor of kurdishcinema.com, the common denominator in Kurdish films is the presence of Kurdish protagonists.

Originally from the town of Dersim (Tunceli in Turkish), in eastern Turkey, Kilic told Al Jazeera that seeing Kurdish characters speaking Kurdish on screen is an emotional experience for many people in the community.

Until recently, the Kurdish language >

➤ was banned in Turkey (using the letters Q, W and X was illegal), and Kurdish human rights issues remain difficult, if not impossible, to broach publicly for fear of arrest or other reprisals. Some of these restrictions have been eased by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as part of his efforts to build confidence in the peace process between his government and Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned head of the PKK.

"[People] used to cry. It was the first time they saw their language being spoken through the TV," Kilic said.

"The Turkish government had been trying to tell the Kurdish people that they don't exist... If you think about the psychological effect of this, the Kurdish culture - Kurdish music and Kurdish cinema - is bringing back that self-esteem to the Kurdish people. They can stand up and say they are Kurdish and they are proud of it."

In the major Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, film

screenings and filmmaking are relatively new phenomena, first emerging in the early 2000s.

"The city was still under the rule of military control and the cultural and artistic events and environment was quite dead in the entire southeast region," explained Ovgu Gokce, project coordinator at the Diyarbakir Arts Centre, which was established in the city in 2001.

At the outset, the centre - a branch of the Istanbul-based Anadolu Kultur network - organised workshops, screenings, and art exhibitions, with a particular focus on film and literature. The centre moved to a smaller office in 2010, and has since focused on workshops for youth and cross-cultural artistic exchanges.

A recent project, called Bak: Revealing the City through Memory, trained youth aged 18-26 from the cities of Batman, Canakkale, Diyarbakir and Izmir in film and photography.

"Most of the Kurdish films and documentaries that got critical acclaim in festivals nationwide or internationally are produced not by people living in Diyarbakir, or the Kurdish cities, but [by] Kurdish directors living in Istanbul," she explained, pointing to a lack of funding, equipment and film instruction in Turkey's Kurdish region.

Still, she said that increased cooperation between Kurdish directors and artists in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria was a positive development that she hoped would continue.

"That's something important," Gokce said, "in the sense that the Kurdish people, although they don't necessarily speak the same dialect or come from the same historical background... [have] more and more interest and will to make more connections with other Kurdish societies in the region."

○○○



20 May 2014

Referendum on federalism, confederation, or independence issue back on table in Iraqi Kurdistan

May 20, 2014
By Nawzad Mahmoud
rudaw.net

SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region 'Iraq',— After years of experience with Baghdad, the issue of referendum is back on the table among Kurdish leaders.

At a meeting with Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani last week, all political parties agreed on a referendum that could allow people to choose whether they prefer federalism, confederation, or independence.

But, since the Kurdistan Election Commission is not established yet, the referendum might be delayed to after the formation of the new Iraqi government.

In their first meeting after the Iraqi legislative elections, the Kurdish parties are sending a new political message to Baghdad. One of the participants of the meeting told Rudaw: "If Baghdad is not ready to meet our demands, the Kurds approach other ways to achieve the demands."

Mohammed Haji Mahmood, secretary of the Kurdistan



A rally in Erbil against Baghdad's policies. Photo: Rudaw

Socialist Democratic Party, said that he introduced the idea of conducting a referendum at the meeting, "so that Iraq will understand if it sidelines the Kurds in the future, what options are available to Kurds."

Mahmood said that the Kurdistan parliament should seriously tackle the issue of approving the law that would set up the Kurdistan election commission. "That is the parliament's real task, not the minor issues," he said.

"I am sure that if the parlia-

ment approves the law, the commission can be formed in a month and we can conduct the referendum," Mahmood added.

Political leaders and observers believe that the results of the referendum are very predictable, and people will vote for independence.

Mahmood is also confident about the results of the referendum. He said that, with the results of the referendum, Kurdish leaders can then tell Baghdad that, "People want independence, but we choose confederation and we

will make it de facto."

The Iraqi Election Commission is unwilling to conduct an election or a referendum on Kurdish national ambitions. Therefore, the Kurds have no choice but to establish their own commission.

Mohammad Haji, head of political relations of the Change Movement (Gorran), confirmed that the referendum was one of the issues discussed at the meeting. "We said if we don't reach any agreement on the disputed issues we will go back to the parliament and the people," he said, noting the many disputed with Baghdad.

Handren Mohammed, the head of the Erbil branch of the Iraqi election commission, said that establishing the Kurdistan election commission is very easy, citing the decision in 2004 to form the Iraqi commission that was formed within months.

According to Mohamed, if the Kurdistan parliament can approve the law by the end of this month, the referendum can be held in September.

In 2012, the Kurdistan Parliament held two discussions over the Kurdistan election commission law and approved four articles of the law but disagreements over the members of the commission resulted in deadlock. ■



www.ekurd.net

News in brief :

PUK REJECTS CHANGE (GORRAN) CANDIDATE: HE IS A FORMER BAATHIST

May 4, 2014

Slêmanî: A leader in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) announced on Sunday, that his party does not accept for the head of Change list, Haval Abu Bakr to take the position of governor of Slêmanî [Sulaimaniyah]. The official of the public body in the political bureau of PUK, Mala Bakhtiyar said in a televised interview, that his party will have a decisive stand if the mentioned candidate would be imposed as reality according to the election results. Bakhtiyar pointed out that his party would not allow it to preserve the prestige of the province, describing the candidate, Haval Abu Bakr as "a former Baathist." Bakhtiyar stressed that if this candidate would be imposed on them, they will not be bound by his decisions. Since the Iraqi parliamentary elections and provincial council elections of Kurdistan, media affiliated to PUK launched an attack on the candidate of Change movement to take over the post of Governor of Slêmanî, accusing him that he was a member of the party of the former regime of Saddam Hussein, which is the dissolved Baath Arab Socialist Party. shafaaq.com

ASSAD DOES NOT ACCEPT KURDISH AUTONOMY, BUT WILL NOT ALLOW ATTACK ON KURDS

May 5, 2014

A Kurdish member of the Syrian Parliament said the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is against the Kurdish autonomy in Syrian Kurdistan that Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) has announced last year but he will not allow its forces to attack the Kurdish regions in the country. Omar Oseh said Assad has opened a Kurdish language course in Damascus government and is ready to discuss the rights of the Kurds with al Kurdish parties, calling it a PYD mistake to declare democratic autonomy administration in Syria Kurdish regions and Patriotic Council to join Syria oppositions. He asked the Kurds in the country to take part in the upcoming presidential poll in Syria and vote for Assad as the political situation in the state has changed and he now has accepted the rights of the Kurds. Assad is thousands of times better than extremist Islamic leaders and Muslim Brotherhood, he said, warning about Syria falling into the hands of the extremist groups, Free Syria Army, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Answering a question about the security of the polls, Oseh said the government is able to provide security in 80 percents of the region. kurdpress.ir

DAUGHTER OF TURKEY'S PRO-KURDISH BDP CO-MAYOR KILLED IN SYRIAN KURDISTAN

May 7, 2014

Diyarbakir, Turkey: Helin Demirkol, daughter of co-chair of Diyarbakir's Çermik Municipality, Haşim Demirkol, has been killed in clashes between Kurdish YPG (People's Protection Units) forces and ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) jihadists in Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava). BDP (Peace and Democracy Party) mayor's daughter will be laid to rest Wednesday. 25-year-old Helin Demirkol joined YPJ (Women's Protection Units) ranks from Amed (Diyarbakir) following the announcement of mobilization against Islamists targeting the Syrian Kurdistan territory. According to the information obtained, Helin Demirkol was killed in clashes with ISIS Islamic-jihadists in the Girê Sevê region in south Kobanê on 5 May. Four YPJ members, three YPG members and four people -who have recently taken up arms and joined YPG ranks- were killed in severe clashes that erupted after thousands of Islamists launched an expansive attack against the mentioned region on 3 May. 43 Islamists were killed and one was captured alive after YPG forces launched a retaliatory offensive on 5 May morning. Helin Demirkol whose body was delivered to Amed Tuesday will be laid to rest at Yeniköy Cemetery Wednesday...diclehaber.com

IN KURDISTAN, BIRTH RATES LOWER THAN IN REST OF IRAQ

May 8, 2014

Erbil: The UN Population Division predicts that 2014 will be the peak birth year, expecting that 139 million babies will be born -- more than in any single year in the history of the world. After this the number of yearly births will steadily decline, according to UN estimates, even as the world population continues to rise. Iraq is still cranking out more babies than the rest of the world. Iraqi women have 4.5 children, compared to a global average of 2.5, as reported by a 2011 Unicef survey. This is the second-highest fertility rate in Western Asia, where only Yemeni women are having more children. Within Iraq, women in the Kurdistan Region have a lower average (3.1). The most populous governorate, Slêmanî, has the smallest fertility rate by far (2.3), while women in the northern Dohuk region have the most children (3.9). Dr. Jamal Ameen, statistics professor and a senior advisor at the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Ministry of Planning, explains why families in Slêmanî are so much smaller...rudaw.net

6 ISIS JIHADISTS KILLED IN CLASHES IN KOBANÊ

May 10, 2014

Kobane: ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Sham) jihadists continue to suffer a heavy defeat in clashes with Syrian Kurdistan's People's Protection Units (YPG) as they continue to attack the autonomous Kobanê Canton of Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava). Six members of ISIS Islamic-jihadists were killed in clashes with YPG forces in the village of Teelik located 30 km to the Kobanê city. According to the information obtained, clashes in the village broke out as YPG fighters launched an operation against the positions of Islamic-jihadists in the town of El-Siyox from where gang groups carry out their attacks against the Kurdish region. At least 6 jihadists were killed and many others were wounded in the YPG operation. On the other hand, severe clashes took place between ISIS gangs and YPG forces around the villages of Camis, Melûh El-Qemer, Bîr Kino and Sosik village located in the eastern side of Kobanê last night. A large number of jihadists were reported killed in clashes that lasted till morning. In the meantime, ISIS gangs continue to launch attacks against the Gire Sehid Xabur to take control of which they have carried out expansive attacks recently. Islamic-jihadist groups deployed in the Sebet village are reported to be launching attacks against the Gire Sehid Xabur with heavy weapons and mortars. firatnews.com

SYRIAN KURDISH POLICE REPORTEDLY PREVENTS PRO-BARZANI PARTY LEADER TO ENTER SYRIAN KURDISTAN

May 10, 2014

Qamishlo: The local Syrian Kurdish police affiliated with Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) does not allow Saud Malla, the leader of newly founded Kurds Democratic Party in Syria (PDKS) which affiliated with Iraqi Kurdistan's KDP party, to enter Syrian Kurdistan region (Rojava), Rudaw TV said in a report. According to the report Malla was planned to enter Jazeera canton through Darbîbsî border pass way but the Kurdish forces refuted to allow him to enter the canton, stating that arrest warrant has been issued for the official and he is better to go back to Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The official, however, has stressed he is determined to go to Syria and continue his political activity in Qamishlo, the country's biggest Kurdish city. Malla and the PDKS are affiliated with Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani. PDKS was form a month ago in Erbil. Four old parties of al-Party, Freedom (led by Mustafa Jome'a), Freedom (led by Mustafa Aso) and Union Party merged to form the new party. kurdpress.ir | Ekurd.net

MALIKI SETS CONDITIONS FOR KURDISTAN SALARIES

May 10, 2014

Baghdad: The Iraqi Central Government refuses to send Kurdistan region governmental employees' salaries and Nouri al-Maliki, Iraqi Prime Minister, says if the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) agrees →

⇒ to export 100,000 barrels of oil, Baghdad will send the KRG's employees' salaries. Some Kurdish media have reported that the Federal Movement will send KRG's salary, but according to information sources, Baghdad has not issued such a decision. Maliki has told the Kurdish ministers and representatives in Baghdad that he will not send salaries until KRG agrees to send 100,000 barrels of oil each day through SOMO. A trusted source within Iraqi Council of Ministers has informed KNNC that Kurdish ministers and representatives have asked Maliki to send employees' salaries to eliminate the economic crises and delays in salary in the Kurdistan region...knncc.net

KURDISTAN MPS CALL FOR LOCAL CANDIDATE TO FILL CULTURE JOB

May 10, 2014

Tehran: Even though Kurdistan MPs have proposed seven local candidates who could head the Ministry of Culture in the province, there have been rumours that the position may go to someone from outside the province. ILNA reports that someone from outside the province is to be appointed to the helm of the Ministry of Culture in Kurdistan, and this has drawn serious criticism from the province's MPs. The head of the Kurdistan MPs Society has announced that they are not willing to cooperate with any non-local deputy minister in Kurdistan, saying it is not reasonable to appoint an outsider to a role that requires familiarity with the local culture. While MP Hamed Ghadermarzi expressed support for most of President Rohani's inclusivity policies in employing local labour in Kurdistan, he would not agree with the appointment of a non-local candidate to the Culture Ministry's top job in the province. In the 2013 presidential election, 82 percent of eligible voters in Kurdistan took part, and about 72 percent reportedly voted for Hassan Rohani. The Rohani administration has made widespread efforts to promote local hiring in leadership roles, especially in government positions. radiozamaneh.com

IRANIAN GOVERNMENT REJECTS TALKS WITH PJAK

May 10, 2014

Tehran: Iran's Deputy chairman of the Committee on National Security and Foreign Policy Mansour Haqiqat Pur rejected negotiations with the Kurdish Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK) and said they should be taken to court and put on trial. He also claimed that independence of Iran's Kurdish region is merely a dream and that the Kurdistan Region of Iraq will never be fully autonomous. PJAK recently announced a new system for the Kurdish inhabited areas of Iran called Kodar System and asked the Iranian Government for negotiations. In response to PJAK's willingness to negotiate with the Iranian government, Pur pointed out that: "PJAK is a terrorist political party and has committed crimes; Iran will not negotiate with them. They have to be judged in a private court, and we will not allow them to ask for their rights by changing their name."...basnews.com

ANTI-MASSOUD BARZANI PROTEST HELD IN DIYARBAKIR IN TURKEY'S KURDISH REGION

May 11, 2014

Amed: Dozens of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) held a protesting rally against Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani in the Turkey's southeastern Kurdish city of Diyarbakir [Amed], Ilkehaber said in a report. The protesters carried banners and shouted slogans against Barzani for the region's decision to dig trench on its border with Syrian Kurdistan region. "The killer of own people" and "traitor" read some of the banners against Barzani. The protests were, however, blamed in social media and by many political and social activists, with Socialism and Freedom Party Leader Sinan Cift Yurk releasing a statement and denouncing the way Barzani was called in the rally. kurdpress.ir | E Kurd.net

IRAQI BORDER GUARDS ARREST 27 SYRIAN KURDS

May 12, 2014

Iraqi security forces on the country's border with Syria arrested Sunday 27 Syrian Kurds that were trying to enter Iraq illegally through the northern province of Nineveh, Rudaw TV said in a report. Nineveh governor and security officials have confirmed the report and said the border guards are monitoring every attempt on border with Syria that is entangled in a civil war since 2011. Meanwhile an Iraqi Kurdish official Abdulqader Shangali announced negotiations are under way to release the Syrian Kurds, expressing his hope that Iraq will only fine and then free them. Answering the question if it was possible that Baghdad will hand the arrested Kurds to Damascus government, Shangali said he wished it would not happen and Baghdad would release them. kurdpress.ir

OTHMAN: IRANIAN INFLUENCE IS BIGGER THAN AMERICA'S ON THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

May 12, 2014

Baghdad: The independent MP, of Kurdistan Alliance, Mahmoud Othman confirmed that "The Iranian influence on the Iraqi political decision is more than U.S. influence. He said "The visit of Gen. Lloyd Austin, commander of U.S. Central Command, came to discuss the security and political situation in Iraq, with Iraqi officials, and solve it," pointing out that "the American influence exists on the Iraqi political arena, but the Iranian influence is more than the U.S. on the Iraqi government, and the Turkish influence exists on some of the parties as well."...ninanews.com

AMERICA INTERVENES ON THE LINE OF IRAQI BUDGET CRISIS

May 14, 2014

Erbil: The Ministry of Finance and Economy in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRC) announced that an American diplomat delegation that represents that the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad and its consulate in Erbil, visited the headquarters of the ministry to be informed closely on economic and financial conditions and not sending the budget crisis by Baghdad to Erbil. According to the ministry statement, said that the U.S. delegation included both economic advisor at the U.S. embassy in Baghdad, Robin Matewman and chief economist at the U.S. Consulate General in Erbil Ieron Cosmevar, noting that the delegation met with the Deputy Finance Minister of Kurdistan, Rashid Tahir. The statement added that the U.S. delegation put in the start of the meeting, the goal of its visit in order to see the economic and financial conditions and the differences between the federal government and the regional government of not sending the budget and salaries of employees of the region. The statement added that Tahir highlighted problems, pointing to a lack of commitment to the Constitution and Baghdad government's use of the budget as a pressure on the region...shafaaq.com

ISIS ISLAMIC-JIHADISTS EXECUTE KURDS IN SYRIA

May 18, 2014

Aleppo: Members of the Al Qaeda offshoot the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) claim to have hanged two alleged members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Deir Hafer in Syria's Aleppo Province, on May 16. Images of the hanging were posted by ISIS supporters on social media sites. It is unclear whether the two men were members of the PKK-affiliated People's Defence Units (YPG) or Kurdish civilians. ISIS has in past kidnapped and executed Kurds in the provinces of Aleppo, Raqqah and Hasakah on charges of belonging to the PKK. Some of them were civilians, while others were YPG-fighters. YPG is one of the biggest challenges for the former Al Qaeda-affiliate ISIS in northern Syria. The Syrian Kurdish fighters have been trained by PKK rebels, who have carried out an on-going battle against their NATO-member Turkish hosts for decades. basnews.com



May 20, 2014

KDP closes 8 pro-PKK offices in Iraqi Kurdistan Region

May 20, 2014

<http://www.ekurd.net>

DUHOK, Kurdistan region 'Iraq',— The security forces of Iraqi Kurdistan ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party KDP launched operations targeting representatives of the Kurdish National Congress (KNK), as well as many the offices and members of many other organizations earlier Monday in three major cities in Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Many people are reported to have been taken into custody.

According to information now available, the operations took place in three cities – Hewlêr [Erbil], Duhok and Zakho – and targeted, among others, representatives of the KNK, members and offices of the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PCDK), of Dicle News Agency's Hewlêr bureau, the Rojava Welat Newspaper, the Patriotic Youth Center, and the Organization of Free Women of Kurdistan (RJAK). Many were arrested and a large number of documents were seized.

At least 25 people were taken into custody in the operation which targeted the offices of KNK, Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PÇDK), Dicle News Agency (DIHA), Roja Welat daily, Patriotic Youth's Center, Kurdistan Free Women's Institution (Saziya Jinên Azadixwazi Kürdistan) and Weşana Roja Welat Magazine.

KDP denies access from Maxmur Camp to Erbil [Hewlêr]

As a follow-up of Monday's operation against the KNK, PÇDK, RJAK, Patriotic Youth's Center and Roja Welat daily, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is denying access from the Maxmur Camp to Hewlêr on Tuesday.

Hundreds of people on their way to work from Maxmur Martyr Rustem Cudî Camp to Maxmur have not been allowed to enter the city on Tuesday. The public security (Asayish) forces hindering the entrance are reportedly telling people to leave there, warning that their entrance in Erbil will not be allowed.

Following Monday's raids in Duhok and Zakhoo in the morning and in Erbil in the afternoon, the KDP has had the offices of the raided institutions closed today.

It grabs attention that the KDP operation against pro-Kurdish institutions came after the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PÇDK) demanded that light be shed on the disappeared at a press conference it held outside the parliament at the 17th anniversary of the Hewlêr massacre.

KNK condemns operation against Kurdish institutions in Iraqi Kurdistan region

Brussels-based Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) has released a statement strongly condemning the raids and detentions carried out by Massoud Barzani's KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) in the Hewlêr, Zakho and Duhok cities of Iraqi Kurdistan on 19 May.

KNK said "the only reason for this attack is political", and called attention to the fragile process the Middle East and Kurdistan is currently going through. The statement read that; "Historic opportunities have been generated for Kurds stronger than ever today, including the opportunity for national unity. Attacks against national institutions do however stand as dangerous and a back step."

Underlining that the attack against KNK representative goes contrary to national interests and serves only enemies, KNK condemned vehemently the attack against Kurdish institutions, and urged the KRG to immediately abandon this policy and to release all Kurdish politicians detained in the operation.

The KDP operation against Kurdish institutions has also been condemned by the Kurdish Democratic Society Congress in Europe (KCD-E) and the Federation of Kurdish Associations in Germany (YEK-KOM).

KDP lashes out at Syrian Kurdistan's PYD for "totalitarian" policies



PCDK party branch in Slêmani, Kurdistan region, Iraq. Photo: Archive/HA

The KDP also lashed out at Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) for following "totalitarian policies" in Syrian Kurdistan.

Releasing a statement the KDP politburo blamed the PYD for expelling pro-KDP party leaders and officials from Syrian Kurdistan and warned the policy will lead to the destruction of the Syrian Kurdish region. The PYD is monopolizing power and has been resorting to arrests and evictions of political activists and members of opposition parties; particularly members of the AI Party, close to the KDP, and Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria (KDPS), an offshoot of the KDP led by Massoud Barzani.

The statement further said the Kurds living under PYD rule are in less humane conditions than those living under Bashar al-Assad. KDP further said that the party expresses its utmost sympathy for the Syrian Kurds and the members of the AI Party in Syrian Kurdistan. Disputes between the PYD and the KDP has increased in the recent weeks after Kurdistan Region dug a trench on its borders with Syria Kurdish regions and the PYD shut down the offices of pro-KDP parties and expelled some politicians linked with the party from Syrian Kurdistan.

The security operations follow an ongoing dispute over the KDP's decisions to dig a border trench between Iraqi Kurdistan and Syrian Kurdistan and to close the border crossings to Syrian Kurdistan's refugees, amid accusations that the KDP is working together with Turkey's AKP government against the revolution in Syrian Kurdistan.

The raids also follow the decision taken a number of days ago to proclaim the PCDK illegal after it organized a demonstration in front of the KRG's parliament to remember the massacre committed in Hewlêr by KDP forces in 1997.

Many Kurdish organizations accuse the KDP of working together with Turkey in imposing the embargo the Syrian Kurdistan. KDP leader and Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani accompanied Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan at a political rally in Diyarbakir earlier this year.

The KDP has decided against recognition of the newly autonomous Syrian Kurdistan's cantons. However the PUK, www.Ekurd.net a member of the current Kurdistan government KRG, has claimed to recognize the cantons. Most main Iraqi Kurdish parties had recognized the autonomous Syrian Kurdistan administration, except the KDP.

The leaders of four small Syrian Kurdish parties, affiliated with Iraqi Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani, and which opposite the ruling PYD party in Syrian Kurdistan, have met in Erbil on April 3, 2014 and merged the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria www.Ekurd.net (KDPS) (AI Party), the Kurdistan Union Party and two factions of the Kurdistan Freedom Party (Azadi) and established a new party PDK-S.

Political experts say Massoud Barzani, sees Syrian Kurdistan as potential political competition.

Syrian Kurds declared their own autonomous Kurdish region (Western Kurdistan, Rojava) in November 2013.

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Iran plays a complex game with the Kurds

By Gareth Smyth,
May 12, 2014
www.dailystar.com.lb

In 1993, northeast of Halabja in northern Iraq, I saw a pickup truck coming the other way along a mountain road. It was driven by a member of Iran's Revolutionary Guard. It was no great surprise. Amid the detritus and scars of the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war, the border was porous and a variety of armed men were moving around.

Tehran was keen to keep a hand on the Iraqi Kurdish parties who had managed de facto autonomy since Saddam Hussein had withdrawn his forces in 1991. There were also Peshmerga guerrillas of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran slipping into Iran to keep their struggle for autonomy alive.

High in the Hawraman mountains, the "almond villages" of Biyara and Tawella had once been places of summer picnics for families from Halabja, 35 km to the southwest, and the larger city of Sulaimaniyah, 95 km west. But the almond trees, like the buildings, had not survived years of battles between Iran and Iraq and between Iraq and Kurdish guerrillas. Remaining villagers relied on United Nations food supplies as they waited the five or six years it would take the newly planted almond trees to bear fruit.

Halabja – known internationally for the March 1988 Iraqi chemical attack in which some 5,000 Kurdish civilians died – was already a stronghold of the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan, and while the mainly Sunni Kurds were never natural allies of the Shiite authorities in Tehran, the following years brought Iranian support for Islamic groups in this part of Iraq, largely to keep pressure on the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, the Iraqi Kurdish faction controlling this half of northern Iraq.

While IMK made peace with the PUK, a militant offshoot called Ansar al-Islam in 2001 took control of the almond villages – which given the local

geography were relatively easy to fortify – and imposed a draconian version of Islamic law.

A senior PUK official told me one look at the map would reveal Ansar al-Islam must have Iranian support, especially in moving fighters along the border in fighting the PUK. When I interviewed Sheikh Sadiq Abdul Aziz, the deputy IMK leader, in Halabja in February 2003, he said the young men of Ansar al-Islam were "living in an imaginary world" having "learned to act like Osama bin Laden from the Internet and television."

But for many Ansar al-Islam militants, some of whom had fought in Afghanistan, the struggle was anything but imaginary. For Washington in early 2003, waging the "war on terror" and preparing the invasion of Iraq, Ansar al-Islam's real or alleged links to Al-Qaeda were a Godsend. Colin Powell, the secretary of state, made dramatic allegations of an Ansar al-Islam poison and explosives center at Biyara, and of an Iraqi agent in its leadership.

Iran was wary. It looked forward to Saddam's removal but was uncomfortable over American troops so close to home, and so opted for a level of tacit cooperation with Washington.

In March 2003, U.S. cruise missile strikes on Tawella and Biyara vaporized bunkers where jihadists manned machine-guns. But it still took an uphill three-day ground attack by PUK Peshmerga directed by U.S. special forces and supported by U.S. helicopter gunships, to overcome Ansar al-Islam.

Some Ansar fighters crossed the border, but many perished as Iran closed it off. One villager gave me a gruesome account of how one jihadist, his leg severed, bled to death because Iranian guards wouldn't let him through.

Survivors would regroup and Ansar al-Islam, or its offshoots, carried out some of the worst atrocities in the early years of the Iraqi insurgency. Attacks on Shiite civilians included killing a senior aid to Ayatollah Ali al-

Sistani, Iraq's senior Shiite cleric.

But Iran was now anxious to support the Shiite-led order emerging in Baghdad where the Iraqi Kurds played a generally supportive role.

Tehran recalibrated its efforts in northern Iraq, and relations with the Iraqi Kurdish leadership, whose rule was consolidated in the Kurdistan Regional Government, became more formal. Trade expanded. Nawsherwan Mustapha, then a senior PUK official, told me in early 2005 that Iran was no longer backing Ansar al-Islam. "We can draw certain conclusions from the fact that the border area [with Iran] is quiet," he said.

But at the same time, Kurdish autonomy in Iraq stirred interest among Iran's own 7-8 million Kurds, and Iran's deepest concern with Kurdish issues had always been its own population.

Within Iran, Kurds were watching Iraqi Kurdish television stations and celebrating the election of a Kurd, Jalal Talabani, as president of Iraq. But for Iranian Kurds, Mohammad Khatami's reformist administration had delivered nothing in recognizing the Kurdish language, including in education. Kurds felt they were discriminated against in government jobs and investment, and they resented the heavy presence of the army and Revolutionary Guard.

Turnout was low in Kurdish areas as Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the 2005 presidential election evoking overtly Shiite themes, especially the anticipated return of the 12th imam from occultation. The reformist candidate Mostafa Moein made little headway with a campaign that included posters of people in ethnic, including Kurdish, dress.

However successful Ahmadinejad's populist Shiism was in much of Iran, it reminded the mainly Sunni Kurds of what many felt was their second-class status. Slowly a new Kurdish group, Pejak, extended an armed campaign launched in 2004, stepping into a void left by the KDPI which abandoned its "armed

presence" in the 1990s under pressure from the PUK, so as not to provoke Iranian attacks into northern Iraq. After the KDPI split in two in 2006, its support appeared to ebb away to Pejak.

Pejak's close relationship with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which fought a two-decade struggle against Turkish forces until a cease-fire last year, complicates the mix. On the one hand, Pejak's intermittent attacks on Iranian forces sparked a major Iranian offensive in the Qandil mountains inside northern Iraq in 2011, and led to Pejak declaring a truce.

But on the other hand, some in the Turkish media allege Iranian intelligence – especially the Quds arm of the Revolutionary Guard led by Qassem Soleimani – liaises closely with the PKK in Qandil, and is especially concerned to help the PKK offshoot in Syria, the Democratic Union Party, which stands aloof from the Syrian opposition and maintains a relationship with Iran's ally President Bashar Assad.

Iran's Kurds remain less than enthusiastic citizens of the Islamic Republic. This is a volatile situation in an area where its history of relations with Ansar al-Islam shows Iran the dangers of having its fingers burned after stoking others' fires.

Of those who voted in last year's presidential election in Iran's Kurdistan province (smaller than the mainly Kurdish region), 70 percent opted for Rouhani. This was way above the 51 percent in favor across Iran. But it would be a mistake to see this as an enthusiastic endorsement.

Last October, a Pejak attack killed five members of the Revolutionary Guard, and when the Iranian authorities subsequently executed a number of Kurdish activists, Abdul Rahman Haji Ahmadi, the Pejak leader, stressed the group would resume and intensify its armed struggle if such executions continued.

Ahmadi contrasted Rouhani's efforts to "beautify his regime's image abroad" with "the most heinous domineering means of repression inside the country." □

Gareth Smyth has reported from the Middle East since 1992, and was chief Iran correspondent of The Financial Times in 2003-2007. He wrote this commentary for THE DAILY STAR.

Syrie. Pourquoi Assad ne peut pas gagner

Alors que le président syrien engrange les succès militaires, la moitié du territoire lui échappe, ses moyens militaires et ses ressources financières se tarissent et la majorité des Syriens lui est hostile.

—Now. Beyrouth

Il y a deux ans, beaucoup prédisaient la chute imminente du régime Assad. Tandis qu'une part grandissante du territoire syrien échappait au contrôle du régime, on aurait pu croire que les forces rebelles finiraient par occuper Damas. Ce ne devait plus être qu'une question de temps. Mais les chances de survie du régime semblent bien moins incertaines depuis qu'Assad a annoncé sa candidature pour un nouveau mandat de sept ans. Grâce à l'aide du Hezbollah libanais, son allié de longue date, Assad a remporté une série de victoires. Il a en particulier reconquis plusieurs zones d'Alep et de la région avoisinante, tout en repoussant les rebelles loin de Damas. Peut-être plus important encore, Assad est parvenu dans une large mesure à récupérer la région de Qalamoun, dans le sud-ouest de la Syrie, et a reprendre la ville de Homs.

Une fois qu'Assad aura atteint ce but, la route entre Damas et Homs sera rouverte, si bien que les territoires alaouites [de la côte méditerranéenne] seront de nouveau rattachés à Damas. Le président syrien reprend confiance. Il affirme que le conflit est désormais "à un tournant" et que le gouvernement "est en train de gagner la guerre contre le terrorisme". Malgré les récents succès d'Assad, il est fort peu probable que le régime arrive à gagner la guerre, du moins au sens classique, en écrasant l'en-

nemi et en reconquérant tout le pays. En voici quelques raisons.

La première tient à la perte de contrôle du territoire. Les rebelles tiennent encore de grands pans de la Syrie, notamment dans le Nord, où les régions kurdes ont échappé à l'emprise d'Assad. De même, les organisations djihadistes liées à Al-Qaïda contrôlent aujourd'hui de larges zones, dans le nord et le nord-est de la Syrie. Même si la situation militaire demeure incertaine, on peut affirmer sans grand risque d'erreur qu'une bonne moitié de la Syrie est aux mains des rebelles.

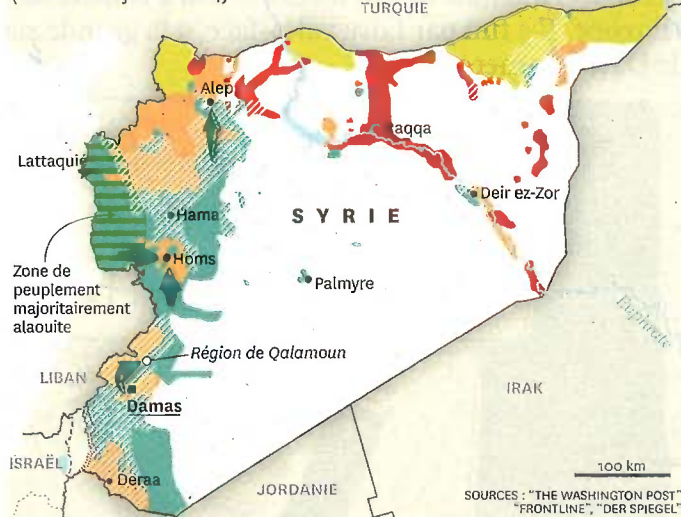
Les finances. Vient ensuite la question des effectifs. Même avec le soutien du Hezbollah, l'armée d'Assad continue à manquer de moyens. Ses offensives sont capables de vaincre les rebelles lors de batailles comme celle de Qalamoun, mais la zone des combats ne cesse de se déplacer. Cela revient à jouer au chat et à la souris avec les rebelles. De fait, au moment précis où l'armée d'Assad reprenait enfin le contrôle de la région de Qalamoun, une offensive djihadiste lancée à partir de la Turquie a fait une percée dans les territoires alaouites. Lattaquié, principal port du pays, était dès lors à la portée des roquettes rebelles, et les djihadistes s'emparaient d'une partie, petite mais symbolique, de la côte méditerranéenne de la Syrie. Si bien qu'on a pu voir des images de rebelles qui priaient sur le sable, rappelant

Un pays en guerre depuis trois ans

Zones contrôlées par :
 l'armée régulière
 les kurdes
 l'opposition
 l'Etat islamique en Irak et au levant (EIL)

Zones disputées
 Territoires disputés entre le régime et les rebelles

(situation en février 2014)



au reste du monde que la guerre en Syrie était loin d'être terminée. En bref, le régime d'Assad n'a pas suffisamment d'effectifs pour reprendre la majorité des territoires perdus, et il en sera probablement toujours ainsi.

Autre problème : les finances du régime s'assèchent. Assad est désormais très dépendant de l'Iran et de la Russie, qui lui fournissent les moyens dont il a besoin pour poursuivre la guerre. Malheureusement pour le régime, une bonne partie des activités économiques qui rapportent est située dans les régions du Nord qu'il ne contrôle plus. Parmi ces actifs, il y a les ressources en pétrole et en gaz, qui pour l'essentiel sont maintenant aux mains des rebelles. Si la Syrie n'a jamais été un grand producteur de pétrole, le pays a tout de même extrait environ 339 000 barils par jour en 2011, ce qui a rapporté des milliards de dollars au régime Assad. Cette source de revenus n'existe pratiquement plus. Si l'Iran a soutenu le régime Assad à coups de milliards de dollars, les Iraniens eux-mêmes connaissent des difficultés financières.

"Assistance létale". Qu'en est-il de l'aide américaine ? Après bien des débats, il semble que le gouvernement Obama fournisse une "assistance létale" [c'est-à-dire des armes] à l'opposition syrienne, et selon de nombreux témoignages, des armes sont effectivement parvenues aux rebelles modérés, notamment des missiles

antichars avancés. Selon certaines informations, la Maison-Blanche envisagerait sérieusement de leur fournir aussi des missiles sol-air portatifs. Ce type de missiles, nommés Manpads [Man portable air defense systems, systèmes de défense aérienne portatifs], peuvent abattre les hélicoptères du régime ainsi que des avions volant à basse altitude. Ils contribueraient à limiter les effets dévastateurs des bombardements menés par Assad contre les forces d'opposition.

Enfin, les Etats-Unis disposeraient d'un centre de commandement secret en Jordanie, dirigé par des officiers occidentaux et arabes, qui a intensifié l'entraînement des rebelles modérés dans le sud de la Syrie, ainsi que les approvisionnements en armes. Certes, le soutien accru des Etats-Unis ne permettra pas à l'opposition de renverser Assad, mais il lui donnera une meilleure capacité de résistance.

Enfin, et peut-être est-ce l'aspect le plus important, la démographie de la Syrie joue très nettement en défaveur d'Assad. La minorité alaouite, qui constitue l'épine dorsale du régime (y compris ses unités militaires les plus aguerries), ne représente que 10 à 12 % de la population syrienne, alors que les rebelles, essentiellement sunnites, forment environ 60 à 70 % de la population. Autant dire qu'Assad a la démographie contre lui.

—Joshua Cohen
 Publié le 28 avril



À la recherche d'un proche, une femme regarde le corps d'un mineur mort remonté à la surface par les secouristes, mercredi à Soma.

En Turquie, la tragédie minière vire au scandale politique

La mort de presque 300 personnes dans une explosion déclenche une polémique sur la sécurité dans les mines de charbon.

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

CATASTROPHE Les trois jours de deuil national décrétés et l'annulation de toutes les compétitions sportives ce week-end ne suffiront pas à masquer le scandale politique qui se dessine derrière la plus grande catastrophe de l'histoire minière de la Turquie et à calmer la colère qui grossit. Le premier ministre turc a été pris à partie par des habitants à son arrivée mercredi après-midi à Soma, dans l'Ouest du pays, où s'est produit l'accident. Recep Tayyip Erdogan a même dû se réfugier momentanément dans une supérette.

Dans la soirée, des manifestants appelaient à la démission du gouvernement dans plusieurs villes du pays. Les forces de l'ordre ont violemment dispersé des rassemblements et ont procédé à des dizaines d'interpellations, notamment à

Istanbul où des milliers de personnes convergeaient vers la place de Taksim. Les syndicats ont appelé à la grève générale ce jeudi pour protester contre cette catastrophe minière.

En fin de journée, le bilan s'élevait déjà à 274 morts. Il risquait de s'alourdir dans les heures à venir tant les chances de retrouver des mineurs en vie se réduisent. Le court-circuit dans un transformateur qui semble être à l'origine de l'explosion s'est produit mardi après-midi et la mort par asphyxie d'éventuels survivants est désormais la plus grande crainte. Au moins 132 personnes étaient toujours bloquées dans les galeries à plusieurs centaines de mètres de profondeur, selon les autorités.

Accidents fréquents

Déjà confronté à une fronde sans précédent au printemps dernier, le gouvernement a bien conscience du risque politique. Le drame a réveillé la colère sociale.



M. Erdogan a donc promis une « *enquête approfondie* ».

Mais il a tenté de mettre l'accident sur le compte de la fatalité, citant en exemple les accidents au Royaume-Uni au XIX^e siècle ou celui de Courrières, dans le Pas-de-Calais, en 1906. « *Les accidents au travail arrivent partout dans le monde* » a-t-il déploré. Surtout en Turquie, en fait.

L'Organisation internationale du travail la classe au troisième rang mondial des pays ayant le taux le plus élevé de mortalité au travail. 1235 personnes ont perdu la vie dans le cadre de leur emploi l'an dernier selon le député de l'opposition, Arkan Akçay. C'est la face sombre du décollage économique turc de la décennie qui vient de s'écouler.

Les accidents miniers à cause de conditions de sécurité défectueuses sont très fréquents et en augmentation ces dernières années. Le parlementaire assure que l'immense majorité des 5000 accidents du travail recensés dans le district de Soma en 2013 ont eu lieu dans des mines. Hier, un travailleur était également bloqué au fond d'une mine clandestine dans la région de la Mer Noire suite à un effondrement.

Il y a deux semaines pourtant, les députés du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), au pouvoir, ont refusé une commission d'enquête, demandée par l'ensemble des partis de l'opposition, sur la sécurité dans les mines du pays. Celle où s'est produit le drame alimentait d'ailleurs leurs craintes car les accidents recensés s'y succédaient à une cadence inquiétante.

Dans une interview au quotidien *Hürriyet* en 2012, Alp Gürkan, le PDG de Soma Holding, se félicitait d'y avoir drastiquement réduit les coûts de production : divisés par plus de cinq, depuis que l'exploitation était gérée selon « *les méthodes du privé* ».

Les syndicats mettent en cause la proximité de la maison mère avec le gouvernement. Qui fournirait, selon eux, les sacs de charbon distribués gratuitement à la population par le parti islamo-conservateur en périodes électorales. ■

Le Monde
jeudi 15 mai 2014

En Syrie, le régime cible les hôpitaux dans les zones aux mains des rebelles

Pour la première fois depuis le début du conflit en Syrie, un rapport met en lumière, dates et chiffres à l'appui, l'entreprise de destruction du système de santé syrien mise en œuvre par le régime Assad, dans le cadre de sa stratégie d'éradication de l'insurrection. Publiée mercredi 14 mai par l'ONG américaine Physicians for Human Rights (PHR), cette étude dénombre 150 attaques, perpétrées entre mars 2011 et mars 2014, contre des structures ou des professionnels du système médical syrien. Etayée par des sources multiples et notamment des vidéos, l'enquête démontre que ces assauts, responsables de la mort d'au moins 468 médecins, infirmiers, brancardiers et pharmaciens, ont été commis à 90 % par les forces gouvernementales.

Le rapport ne prétend pas à l'exhaustivité. Ses auteurs, qui n'ont pas pu corroborer de nombreuses allégations d'attaques, notamment contre les cliniques de fortune mises en place par l'opposition, subodorent que le nombre total de coups portés au réseau de santé syrien est largement supérieur aux 150 cas dûment recensés. L'intérêt du travail de PHR réside dans le fait qu'il lève toute ambiguïté sur la politique de la terre brûlée adoptée de manière délibérée par les autorités de Damas. Vingt hôpitaux ont été bombardés à de multiples reprises, jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient obligés de fermer leurs portes. Le fait qu'au moins vingt-quatre des bâtiments touchés soient situés à l'écart d'autres constructions prouve, selon l'ONG américaine, « le caractère intentionnel » des attaques.

« Ce qui se passe en Syrie est du jamais-vu, explique Susannah Sirkin, la directrice du département international de PHR. On sait qu'en temps de conflit la neutralité des structures de santé est souvent violée. On l'a constaté, par exemple, à Sarajevo, au Darfour ou en Somalie. Mais la manière systématique avec laquelle le régime syrien bombarde ses hôpitaux et tue ses médecins est unique dans l'histoire des trente dernières années. »

Selon les décomptes de PHR, au mois de mars 2014, près de la moitié des hôpitaux syriens et 93 % des ambulances du pays avaient été endommagés, détruits ou mis hors service. « Il s'agit d'une violation flagrante des conventions de Genève et d'un crime contre l'humanité », accuse M^{me} Sirkin.



L'hôpital Dar Al-Chifa, à Alep, bombardé à plusieurs reprises par l'aviation syrienne en 2012. J. MANZANO/AFP

Le rapport de PHR s'articule autour d'une carte interactive, particulièrement instructive. La localisation des attaques, leur chronologie, les cibles visées et les armes employées racontent la graduelle intensification du conflit syrien et la descente aux enfers d'un pays tout entier. C'est au début de l'année 2012, à Homs, alors que la révolution se militarise peu à peu et qu'une partie de la ville bascule du côté des rebelles, que l'armée syrienne commence à bombarder les hôpitaux. En janvier, février et mars de cette année, plusieurs d'entre eux sont touchés par des tirs d'obus et de roquettes, notamment à Baba Amro, l'un des bastions de la révolte.

Cette politique s'est amplifiée à Alep, à partir de juillet 2012, date à laquelle les anti-Assad se sont

emparés des quartiers orientaux. La banque de sang de la ville a été l'une des premières structures médicales visées. Puis l'hôpital Dar-Al-Chifa, l'un des principaux de cette métropole de 2,5 millions

L'étude de Physicians for Human Rights dénombre 150 attaques, perpétrées entre mars 2011 et mars 2014

d'habitants, a été bombardé. Une première fois en août, une deuxième en octobre et une troisième en novembre. Même acharnement sur les hôpitaux Omar-Ben-Abdelaziz, Zahi-Azrak, Jaban, Kadi-

Askar et Ansari. Selon PHR, de tous les établissements de santé de l'est d'Alep, seuls quatre centres de petite enfance et cinq cliniques spécialisées en traumatologie sont encore en activité.

Le diagnostic n'est pas moins dramatique dans la banlieue de Damas, une autre place forte de la rébellion, soumise à des frappes quasi quotidiennes. Vingt-quatre des quarante-quatre cliniques de la région et trois des six hôpitaux publics sont hors service. Le camp de réfugiés palestiniens de Yarmouk, assiégé par l'armée syrienne, ne compte plus qu'une pharmacie en activité, alors qu'il en abritait plus d'une centaine avant la guerre. Le rapport impute dix attaques aux brigades rebelles, la première d'entre elles ayant été commise en mars 2013, signe de la lente radicalisation de l'opposition.

PHR appelle à l'entrée immédiate de convois humanitaires dans les secteurs tenus par la rébellion, en application de la résolution 2139 du Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies, restée quasi-lettre morte depuis son vote en février. L'ONG réclame aussi la saisine de la Cour pénale internationale, pour éviter que les violations des lois de la guerre perpétrées par le régime Assad ne deviennent « une nouvelle norme ». ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

M. Fabius accuse Damas d'utiliser des armes chimiques

Le régime syrien a réutilisé des armes toxiques, en violation de l'accord sur le démantèlement de son arsenal chimique, a affirmé, mardi 13 mai, à Washington, le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Laurent Fabius. « Nous avons au moins 14 éléments qui montrent que des armes chimiques (...) ont été utilisées, notamment du chlore, depuis le 25 octobre 2013 », a-t-il

déclaré lors d'une conférence de presse, à Washington. A la sortie de son entretien avec le secrétaire d'Etat John Kerry, M. Fabius est par ailleurs revenu sur les frappes contre la Syrie prévues à l'été 2013 et qui avaient été annulées par le président Barak Obama: « Nous le regrettons parce que nous pensons que ça aurait changé beaucoup de choses, à beaucoup d'égards. »

CANNES :

Mille et une images de Syrie, et un miracle



Wiam Simav Bedirxan et Ossama Mohammed ont réalisé leur film, l'une à Homs, l'autre à Paris. PHILIPPE QUAISSE/PASCO POUR « LE MONDE »



Omar filmé par Wiam Simav Bedirxan, à Homs. BEDIRXAN

Eau argentée, Syrie autoportrait

Sélection officielle
Séances spéciales

Vendredi 16 mai, 17 heures et des poussières, salle du Soixantième. On y donne un film nommé *Eau argentée, Syrie autoportrait*. Les coréalisateurs, tapis dans la pénombre des marches qui mènent à la salle, attendent qu'on les appelle sur scène. Lui est replet, une barbe grise mange son visage aux yeux brûlants, il porte une chemise blanche. Elle est d'une beauté vulnérable et fiévreuse, semble au bord de l'épuisement, a jeté une étole rouge sur sa robe noire. Ils se tiennent comme des enfants, les visages tout proches. Elle est blottie dans ses bras, il l'enlace, lui caresse paternellement les cheveux. Dans la salle, où des spectateurs avertis connaissent leur histoire, l'émotion n'est pas moins intense. Il faut dire que ce couple, voici encore quelques heures, n'avait jamais été mis en présence.

L'auteur, réfugié à Paris depuis 2011, l'a coréalisé à distance avec une Syrienne d'Homs de 35 ans inconnue de lui

Jamais « séance spéciale » n'aura donc à ce point mérité son nom. D'abord, le film est un incontestable chef-d'œuvre. Ensuite, il vient de Syrie, pays dont le martyre, toujours en cours sous nos yeux qui se détournent, est une plaie vive qui entaille l'humanité tout entière. Son auteur, Ossama Mohammed, 60 ans, réfugié à Paris depuis 2011, l'a coréalisé à distance avec une Syrienne de Homs de 35 ans inconnue de lui, Wiam Simav Bedirxan, qui a filmé le quotidien de la ville assiégée depuis trois ans. Et voici que la récente reddition de la « capitale de la révolution », quelques jours avant le Festival de Cannes, rend soudain possible leur rencontre. La jeune femme, très affaiblie, a été conduite jusqu'en Turquie, et a atterri vendredi matin à l'aéroport de Nice pour présenter le film dans l'après-midi.

Cette histoire magnifique, parce qu'à la fois tragique et miraculeuse, pourrait faire l'objet d'un film hollywoodien dont on stigmatiserait l'in vraisemblance. Elle est pourtant telle que le hasard et la nécessité l'ont rendue possible. Tout commence à ce même Festival de Cannes, le samedi 14 mai 2011. Ce jour-là, alors que le conflit monte en puissance en Syrie, Ossama Mohammed est invité par la Quinzaine des réalisateurs à participer à un débat portant sur le cinéma sous la dictature. Tempérament lyrique au verbe de feu, il n'y mâche pas ses mots, au point que

les amis restés au pays lui déconseillent d'utiliser son billet de retour. Le cinéaste s'installe alors à Paris.

En février 2012, alors que nous le rencontrons pour évoquer avec lui le mouvement de résistance artistique et populaire à l'oppression, Ossama Mohammed est un homme mis à vif par la langueur de l'exil, vibrant corps et âme pour la révolution en cours.

Deux ans plus tard, quelques jours avant le début de ce Festival de Cannes, nous le retrouvons durement accablé par le cours de l'Histoire syrienne, mais en même temps heureux d'avoir pu mener à bien son combat personnel : « Cette révolution s'est faite aussi par les images. Elle a été, de manière inédite, une guerre des images qui a mobilisé les deux camps. En tant que cinéaste, je devais en prendre acte. J'ai longtemps cherché, jusqu'au jour où j'ai reçu, à la Noël 2011, par Facebook, le premier courrier de cette jeune femme, Simav, dans lequel elle me disait qu'elle avait décidé de filmer pour ne pas mourir, en me demandant des conseils. Ce message a été pour moi un moment de vérité, j'ai compris que c'était une opportunité artistique qui nous était offerte et au fur et à mesure que nous échangeions, chaque message pouvant aussi bien être le dernier, j'ai compris que le film, c'était nous deux, et à travers nous deux et les images de Simav, le peuple syrien tout entier. »

Durant les onze mois qui suivent cette première prise de contact, Ossama Mohammed consacre tout son temps à deux choses essentielles. Il répond à Simav et discute avec elle des partis pris du film. Il collecte également sur YouTube le maximum d'images du conflit, de toutes origines et de toute nature, réfléchit à la manière de les sélectionner et de les organiser.

On retrouve ces deux matériaux distincts dans le film, dont il faudrait tout de même bien dire un mot. Car si l'histoire qui l'a fait naître est bouleversante, le film, joyau noir extrait du désastre, ne l'est pas moins. Deux périodes y sont lisibles, retraçant l'évolution chronologique du conflit.

La première partie est, comme disent les Anglo-Saxons, un *found footage*, un pur film de montage collecté dans les archives aléatoires de YouTube, qui retrace les débuts fervents de la protestation puis le durcissement d'un conflit qui tourne rapidement à la barbarie. Le cinéaste ne s'interdit pas d'y montrer le pire : des images de torture prises par les sbires du pouvoir pour terroriser l'ennemi.

Il y a cette pensée profondément enracinée chez Ossama Mohammed que le cinéma peut tout montrer et, partant, tout sauver, jusqu'aux images de l'abjection. Il y a cette idée, aussi, que toute image enregistrée, quel qu'en soit l'auteur, doit être inscrite dans ce film, qui veut témoigner

de ce que fut – dans la joie et dans le sang, dans l'espoir et dans l'abandon, dans l'héroïsme et dans l'infamie – la grande tragédie collective syrienne. Ainsi s'explique son incipit: « C'est un film de mille et une

images prises par mille et un Syriens et Syriennes, et moi. » Ainsi se comprend, d'emblée, l'enchaînement des deux premières séquences: la naissance d'un bébé par temps de guerre, aussitôt suivie du corps recroquevillé d'un adolescent humilié et torturé dans une cave. Que raccordent ces deux images? La nudité des corps, le dénuement humain, le désir d'un film total, enlevé de la naissance à la mort, de l'innocence à l'ignominie.

Et c'est la seule facture de ce film – telle une grande rêverie élégiaque et carnassière, écarquillée de beauté et d'horreur – qui rend tolérable ce parti pris. La voix blanche du cinéaste, les cartons chapitrés, les fondus au noir, les coupes du son et les décharges de couleurs, les effets de fragmentation et de décomposition, les failles de l'encodage numérique, la musique déchirante de Noma Omran, tout ce qui en somme attaque l'intégrité de l'image, et lui permet paradoxalement de montrer, sans l'obscénité qui s'attache à cette plé-

Simav, enfermée à Homs, qui filme enfants vivants et enfants morts avec la même douleur et la même tendresse

nitude, et l'horreur et la beauté. Film baudelairien donc, qui s'empare de l'informe (le chaos voyeuriste de YouTube, la barbarie de la répression) et l'élève à un haut degré de célébration cinématographique.

Le deuxième temps du film se fixe dans Homs assiégée. Fin de la guerre de mouvement, début de l'enlèvement, isolement de la résistance, faim et massacre organisés, bombardements quotidiens, préfiguration du tableau final d'apocalypse. Ici éclate un autre film, nourri des seules images de Wiam Simav Bedirxan.

Simav enfermée à Homs, qui filme enfants vivants et enfants morts avec la même douleur et la même tendresse, Simav qui continue Rembrandt et Soutine dans ces animaux écorchés au regard qui vrille, Simav qui se fait le bras armé du cinéaste-poète devenu

présence en absence, Simav (« eau argentée ») qui donne son nom à ce film dont on aura compris qu'il est le tombeau de la souffrance syrienne, le cri des morts sans voix qui nous regardent désormais au fond des yeux.

Simav qui grimpe enfin, soutenu par son partenaire, sur la scène du Festival de Cannes, et le couple, suffoqué d'émotion, qui n'a la force de rien dire, devant une salle qui n'a pas la force de lui répondre. Moment rarissime, même à Cannes.

Passée en quelques heures du carnage syrien à la promenade cannoise, la jeune femme, exténuée, nous accorde pourtant quelques instants. Rien d'évident. D'autant que la jeune femme est absolument désarmante. Son seul désir, dit-elle, est « de retourner au plus vite en Syrie », son seul message en venant à Cannes aura consisté à clamer « le droit pour chaque Syrien d'habiter sa terre en paix ».

Simav n'a été militante d'aucun parti, ne s'est engagée dans aucun combat. Elle qui « en tant que femme, en tant que non voilée et en tant que Kurde » n'a jamais trouvée sa place dans la société syrienne, n'a cherché qu'à se rendre utile aux victimes.

Filmer lui est ainsi devenu

essentiel: « Je suis partie à Alep acheter une caméra que j'ai fait entrer clandestinement à Homs, j'ai contacté Ossama, et je me suis mise à filmer sans pouvoir m'arrêter. Même en dormant, je tenais la caméra. Je crois que si j'ai survécu, c'est grâce à cette caméra: elle était comme un cœur qui battait, et Ossama à Paris était le cordon ombilical qui me reliait à la vie. » Diffusion sur Arte au mois de septembre, et sortie salle sérieusement envisagée par le producteur Serge Lalou au vu de l'émotion cannoise. ■

JACQUES MANDELBAUM

Film syrien d'Ossama Mohammed et Wiam Simav Bedirxan (1h32).
Sortie en salles non communiquée.

International New York Times TUESDAY, MAY 20, 2014

Reported Syria deaths rise by 10,000 in just weeks

BEIRUT, LEBANON

Rights group puts tally at 162,000 victims across 3-year conflict

BY ANNE BARNARD

The death toll in the three-year Syrian conflict has risen to about 162,000, an increase of more than 10,000 in less than two months, according to an antigovernment monitoring group that is one of the few organizations still trying to keep an exact count.

The group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is based in Britain and operates through a network of about 200 contacts across Syria, put the death toll at slightly more than 150,000 at the beginning of April. It says the current figure includes 53,978 civilians, among them 8,607 children.

The United Nations stopped updating its Syria death toll early this year, citing the growing difficulty of verifying

deaths.

Journalists, aid workers and others trying to gather and verify information face multiple barriers, including bombardments, battles and kidnappings, as well as the combatants' efforts to suppress unfavorable information. Social media provide a flood of information accessible from afar, but also mix propaganda with fact.

The observatory's director, Rami Abdul Rahman, says that his group counts only deaths verified by two independent sources: Mr. Abdul Rahman, a Syrian shopkeeper who lives in Coventry, England, fled his country in 2000 after associates were arrested for political activism. He and his methodology have been criticized by the Syrian government and also by the government's opponents, something Mr. Abdul Rahman says he takes as an indication that he is on the right track.

At the same time, he says, no one can claim to know "the entire reality."

Mr. Abdul Rahman says he has contacts among government supporters and the security forces, and has

provided rare estimates of the toll among pro-government forces: currently 61,170 Syrians, including 37,685 from the military and 23,485 from pro-government militias.

The observatory also said that it had tallied 438 dead from Hezbollah, the Lebanese militia fighting on the government side, which has not cited a figure for its own losses. And the observatory said that 1,224 non-Syrian, pro-government fighters had also died. Iraqi and other foreign fighters, most of them Shiite Muslims, have flocked to the government side, much as foreign Sunnis have joined the insurgents, as the war takes on regional sectarian overtones.

The observatory said that 42,701 antigovernment fighters had been killed, including more than 13,500 from jihadist groups like the Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, both of which are affiliated with Al Qaeda. It has also documented more than 2,000 deaths of people whose names and affiliations could not be determined.

The conflict has also displaced nearly half the country's population.

Israel, U.S. import disputed crude oil from Iraqi Kurdistan

The Iraqi government has repeatedly said oil sales bypassing Baghdad are illegal and has threatened to sue any company involved in the trade.

By Julia Payne and
Ron Bousso - Reuters
May 15, 2014

LONDON, - Israeli and U.S. oil refineries have joined the growing list of customers for crude from Iraqi Kurdistan, a region locked in a bitter struggle with the central government in Baghdad that says the sales are illegal.

The United States imported its first crude cargo from the region two weeks ago while at least four have gone to Israel since January, ship tracking and industry sources said, after two were shipped there last summer.

The Iraqi government has repeatedly said oil sales bypassing Baghdad are illegal and has threatened to sue any company involved in the trade, yet Kurdish crude and light condensate oil has been sold to several European buyers. Baghdad refuses to sell oil to Israel, echoing other Arab states.

Israel's Energy Ministry declined to comment, saying that it does not discuss the country's sources of oil.

A senior Iraqi oil ministry official said Baghdad had no information on the sales but was investigating.

"If these reports are correct, then dire consequences will be inevitable," the Iraqi oil official said.

"This is a seriously dangerous development. We have always warned the region to stop smuggling Iraqi crude by trucks to Turkey...and now if this is proved true then they are going too far."

An official of Kurdistan's Ministry of Natural Resources said from the region's capital Arbil: "The Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) has not sold crude directly or indirectly to such destinations."

The stakes are high as Kurdistan's independent oil sales allow it to receive income outside Baghdad's budget, pushing it

towards even greater autonomy.

Tensions reached a new pitch this week after Kurdistan's president said Iraq had been led in an authoritarian direction by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and threatened to end the region's participation in the federal government.

The deals involve major international commodity traders, including Trafigura, one of the top three oil traders in the world, trading and shipping sources said.

A spokeswoman for Trafigura declined to comment.

The sales come as the KRG and Baghdad aim to complete long-running negotiations over a pipeline Arbil built to Turkey to circumvent the central government monopoly.

Arbil began pumping crude through to the Turkish port of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean in January but stopped short of selling it, under the threat of budget cuts from Baghdad.

Storage tanks are now nearly full with 2.4 million barrels, trading and shipping sources close to the matter said. Exports of this oil could start as early as later this month.

Tracking Shipments

Iraqi Kurdistan began selling its oil independently of the federal government in 2012 with a small trickle of condensate trucked through Turkey, followed by two types of crude oil.

Baghdad says only its state oil company is authorised to sell Iraqi crude, but both sides claim the constitution is on their side and with a crucial hydrocarbon law stuck in draft mode, there is room to manoeuvre.

A Turkish company called Powertrans is the broker for the Kurdish government, selling the oil via tenders to traders. Much of the crude has gone to Trieste, Italy while the condensate has gone to France, Germany, the Netherlands and even Latin



America.

The tanker Marinoula discharged around 265,000 barrels of heavy sour Iraqi Shaikan crude oil at the Oiltanking terminal in Houston on May 1, shipping sources said and Reuters AIS Live ship tracking showed.

The identity of the buyer was unclear as the terminal is connected to 23 refining, production and storage facilities scattered between the Gulf Coast and Cushing, Oklahoma.

The crude was loaded by trading company Petraco at the Delta Rubis terminal at Dortyol in Turkey, one of two ports that export Kurdish oil, the sources said. The company declined to comment.

At least four cargoes laden with Kurdish crude went to Israel since the start of this year. Trading sources said that Israel's Oil Refineries Limited's (ORL) plant at Haifa ran some of it.

Paz Oil Company, owner of a refinery near Ashdod, bought at least two cargoes within the last 9 months, traders said.

A spokesman for ORL said "ORL purchases its crude oil from different sources in accordance with the refinery's needs and market conditions."

A spokeswoman for Paz denied the plant had used Kurdish crude.

Some Kurdish oil has also been

simply stored, sources said.

Geneva-based trading company MocoH lifted Shaikan crude from Dortyol in Turkey on the Baltic Commodore, which arrived in Ashkelon in Israel on Jan. 31, market sources and ship-tracking showed.

An official at the company said that "Israeli refineries are not necessarily using this crude," but declined to elaborate.

Trafigura sent a cargo of Kurdish crude to Israel on the Hope A tanker, which went first to Ashkelon and then to Haifa between Feb 10-15.

The Kriti Jade loaded Kurdish crude in Turkey and then sailed to Ashkelon on March 3 and then Haifa a few days later, the sources and ship-tracking showed.

The second tanker, Kriti Sea, picked up Kurdish oil around March 5. The vessel then anchored off Limassol, Cyprus but did not discharge crude. Petraco lifted both cargoes.

Instead it left still laden and tracking was switched off between May 17-20 near the Israeli coast. When it reappeared, still close to Israel, the tanker was empty.

□□□

Kurdish History and Language According to Iran Draws KRG Protest

15 May 2014
rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region –

The Kurdistan Region's Department of Foreign Relations (DFR) summoned Iran's acting consul general in Erbil to answer for an article that appeared on a consular website, describing Iran as the "motherland" of the Kurds, calling the Kurdish language a "dialect" and making other references considered insulting to Kurds.

Mohsen Bawafa, Iran's acting consul general in Erbil, was summoned by DFR head Fallah Mustafa and spokesman Safin Dizayee, to answer for the comments that appeared in an article posted on the website of the Iranian consulate in Sulaimani.

The article, which tells the history of Iranian-Kurdish relations from a purely Iranian point of view, referred to the Kurds as "ethnic minorities in Iraq, Turkey, and Syria," while mentioning Iran as "their true great house and motherland."



A meeting between Iranian and Kurdish officials: Photo: DFR.KRG

The statement, posted last week, also referred to the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad as the "short-lived Communist government." It added that, "some groups, which are considered Kurdish extremists by the Iranian authorities, want to use the Kurdish Republic to construct their own nation, culture, language and history."

It also called the Kurdish language a dialect: "Kurdish is not a language, but a dialect of the many Persian languages, which has been created through mixing Arabic, Turkish, and Persian languages."

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said Tuesday that an official protest had been conveyed to the acting general

consul in Erbil. The DFR demanded an official clarification by the Iranian government.

"These are not the policies or the stance of the Islamic Republic of Iran," said Bawafa. But the KRG demanded that he convey Erbil's protest to concerned officials in Tehran.

A large portion of the article shed light on the bilateral ties between Iran and the KRG, illustrating Iran's role in supporting and enhancing the struggle of the Kurds for freedom in Iraq.

"The Iranian monarch stopped his support to the Kurds in Iraq, but the Iranian revolution in 1979 has been a pivotal point in reviving the ties with the Kurds in Iraq," said the article.

"In 1991, Iran wanted to form

better ties with the ethnic-Iranians (the Kurds) in Kurdistan region, therefore instead of opening one consulate, Iran opened two consulates in Erbil and Sulaimani," the article stated.

It went on to outline the numerous red lines that the Kurds must not cross in order to have good relations with Iran. It clarified that the territorial integrity of Iraq is Iran's main strategy, while maintaining ties with Erbil.

"If the Kurdish activities were directed towards increasing their options and creating the atmosphere to secede from Iraq, then Kurdish relations with Iran will suffer. But the ties will become stronger if the Kurds choose to increase their strength within the Iraqi framework and become true partners in the Iraqi central government," said the article.

It also advised that the Kurds must refrain from talking about a united Kurdish homeland.

According to the article, the Iranian Kurdish parties have caused instability inside Iran, and urged the KRG to ban them.

"Iran demands the banning of activities of the Kurdish political groups from Iran, because these groups have caused instability in the cities across the borders with Iran, and if KRG prohibits these groups, then Iran will trust the Kurdistan region more." ■

Top Kurdish MP demands Iraq confederation

Relations between Baghdad and the Kurdish administration have been strained for years

By Aref Youssef, 18 May 2014
<http://www.aa.com.tr>

BAGHDAD - A top Iraqi Kurdish lawmaker has urged the newly elected parliament to change the constitution to pave the way for the creation of an Iraq confederation.

"The House of Representatives needs to amend the constitution to allow a confederation because it is the ideal solution for Iraq's problems," Deputy Parliament Speaker Aref Tayfour said in a statement on Sunday.

"This [demand] is the right of the Kurdish people who have suffered for decades under successive totalitarian regimes," he added.

Kurds are Iraq's second largest ethnic group after Arabs, with a

population of around 5.2 million, according to the latest estimates by the autonomous Kurdish administration in Northern Iraq.

Relations between Baghdad and the Kurdish administration have been strained for years.

Bones of contentions include the annual state budget, oil exports and relations with the central government in Baghdad.

The Kurdish region of northern Iraq is believed to have one of the largest untapped oil reserves in the world, with more than 45 billion barrels of oil according to some estimates.

In November 2013, the Kurdish administration signed an agreement that would enable Kurdish oil to flow to Turkey's port of Ceyhan.

Baghdad opposed the agreement on the ground of bypassing the country's national oil company, State Oil Marketing Company, and violating Iraq's constitution.

For months, Erbil and Baghdad have been embroiled in a row over oil revenues shares.

"There is a pressing need for a tangible political change," Tayfour said. "The new parliament must recognize the reality on the ground."

Despite security concerns, more than 12 million Iraqis went to the polls on April 30 in the first parliamentary elections since the 2011 U.S. withdrawal, registering an unexpected 60 percent voter turnout.

Official voting results are expected to be announced on May 25.

Incumbent Shiite Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki is seeking a third term in office despite fierce opposition from many, particularly Sunnis. □



www.ekurd.net

News in brief :

IRAN ARRESTS THREE KURDS OVER MAHABAD BOMBING

May 18, 2014

Mahabad: State says suspects linked to Kurdish separatists arrested in city where 12 died in 2010 attack on military parade. Iranian authorities have arrested three suspects over the deadly bombing of a military parade in 2010, the state news agency has reported. The IRNA on Sunday said the arrests were made in the Kurdish city of Mahabad in Iranian Kurdistan region (Rojhelat), where 12 spectators were killed and dozens injured in the September 2010 bombing. The report did not identify those arrested but said they were affiliated to Koumoleh, a Kurdish armed group which has been fighting Iranian forces for decades. Iran arrested several people shortly after the attack, variously reporting that they were working with "Zionists", the United States and Baathists loyal to the former leader of Iraq, Saddam Hussein. Mahabad was the capital of a short-lived Soviet-backed "Republic of Kurdistan" in 1946, which was crushed within a few months. It was also the centre of a Kurdish uprising shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iranian media have often reported clashes between the elite Revolutionary Guards and Kurdish fighters said to be members of the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK)...aljazeera.com | Ekurd.net

TURKISH SOLDIERS KILL A WOMAN ON BORDER WITH SYRIAN KURDISTAN

May 19, 2014

Sirnak: A Kurdish women trying to cross the Turkish border with her family from the Derik area of Syrian Kurdistan was shot dead by Turkish troops yesterday near Cizre. 28-year-old Saada Darwish was shot in front of her two young children and her father Medhat Darwish near the hamlet of Şabaniye, near Kuştepe village in the Kurdish Cizre district of Şırnak, as they tried to cross the border into Turkey at between 8.30 and 9 pm last night. The women's body was taken by ambulance to the morgue at the state hospital in Cizre. The woman's father, Medhat Darwish, explained what happened. He said that his son-in-law had come to Turkey a few months ago after gang attacks in Syrian Kurdistan. The family left Derik to join the children's father and travelled to the border. 100 metres from the border soldiers at the Uğurköy military post saw the family. Medhat Darwish said the family had waved their arms at the soldiers, telling them they wanted to cross the border, but despite this the soldiers had opened fire from an armoured vehicle. Darwish said his daughter Saada had been hit in the stomach and died and that her body had lain on the ground until 11 pm as the soldiers had not allowed them to cross the border with the body...firatnews.com | diclehaber.com

FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN KURDISTAN TOPS \$39B; MORE INVESTOR FRIENDLY LAW EXPECTED

May 19, 2014

Erbil: Overseas investments in the Kurdistan Region have topped \$39 billion, and an investments law is being amended to make it more attractive to foreign investors, the head of the Kurdistan Investment Board said. Saman Arab said that the board especially focuses on investments in industry, agriculture, tourism and housing. "In the last two years, we have given the biggest number of permits to investment in the industry, agriculture and tourism sectors, followed by settlement, health, higher education, communication and transportation," Arab said. "Now, investment has exceeded \$39.2 billion." He said that the biggest industrial project included the iron factory in Slêmanî, which is the biggest of its kind in the Middle East, and was opened last week. Arab said that the largest tourism project under development is the Safeen Tourism City in Erbil...rudaw.net

KURDS STATE KIRKUK ANNEX TO REGION A PRECONDITION TO ATTEND IN NEW IRAQI GOVERNMENT

May 21, 2014

Erbil: The Iraqi Kurds have stated they will attend in the new government of the region if the northern province of Kirkuk is annexed to the autonomous self-ruling region, Wakh News agency said. Kurds believe agreement and cooperation is needed to form the new government, but Kurdistan Alliance will not attend in the new government unless the Article 140 is implemented, Gas and Oil Law is ratified, Kirkuk and Khanaqin are annexed to the region and the postponed salaries of the Peshmarga forces are paid, a member of the Kurdish alliance Borhan Faraj told a news conference Tuesday. He further warned about problems in forming the new government like the troubles in forming former governments and reiterated considering the demands of the Kurds and answering their requests are necessary for coalition and attending in the to-be-established government. kurdpress.ir

SYRIA PRO-KURDISH COUNCIL ASKS OPPOSITIONS TO CONFIRM KURDS' RIGHTS

May 21, 2014

The Syrian pro-Kurdish Patriotic Council asked the opposition coalition of the country to officially recognize the rights of the Kurds, Rudaw TV said in a report. The chief of the council, Taher Safouk, said the opposition council of Syria should accept the right of the Kurds in the country and hold a multilateral conference to discuss the future of the war-torn state. He further expressed his worry about the disputes and tensions between the pro-Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) parties and the parties affiliated with Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani and asked the two sides to settle differences through dialogue. The Kurdish council was formed in Istanbul in 2013 and made accord with the opposition coalition of the country. 11 members of the Kurdish council then joined the coalition, among them al-Party Leader Abdulhakim Bashar and Salahadin Darwish. kurdpress.ir

SOME 200 KURDS EXECUTED BY IRAN UNDER ROUHANI

May 21, 2014

Iranian Kurdistan: Some 200 Kurds in Iran have been executed since President Rouhani came to power almost a year ago. According to reports since August 2013 when Rouhani came to power, the number of executions has increased and approximately 600 people from different ethnicities. There are no accurate statistics regarding the number of executions in Iran because some of them are not carried out publicly. On October 8, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran and the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center jointly called for an immediate moratorium on executions in Iran given the alarming rise in the use of the death penalty. firatnews.com

PKK ASKS FOR NEGOTIATION WITH BARZANI'S KDP

26 may 2014

Qandil: The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) has asked for negotiation with the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Kurdistan president Massoud Barzani to settle differences between the two sides. Tensions between the PKK and Kurdistan Region's ruling KDP fanned in the last weeks with protests from both sides and slamming each other of betraying Kurds. PKK expelled some pro-KDP party leaders and officials from Syria Kurdistan and the KDP in return shut offices of lines and groups affiliated with the PKK in the region and accused the PKK of smuggling and making rifts in Kurds. A Turkey parliament PKK-linked Deputy Malkiya Birtane and an accompanying delegation have paid visit to the KDP Ankara office and has demanded negotiation between the two sides to settle differences. "We hope the rifts will end soon and the Kurds apply all their capabilities for cooperation, Birtane told reporters after the meeting. Meanwhile a member of the PKK leading council and a founder of the party Mustafa Karasu asked for negotiation in an article in Ozgur Gundem daily. He wrote some issues have possibly angered the KDP but that does not mean shutting offices of political organizations. kurdpress.ir

Kurds face presidential vote in gray zone

May 22, 2014

By Marlin Dick

www.dailystar.com.lb

BEIRUT: Syria's Kurds are facing next month's presidential election with a mix of defiance, pragmatism and indifference.

The June 3 polls are expected to see President Bashar Assad easily defeat two lesser-known challengers, but in areas where the Kurdish PYD (Democratic Union Party) holds sway, the battle will be over turnout, and spinning the events of election day as a "victory."

The so-called Kurdish areas of Syria – where Kurds form nearly the entire population, or the largest of several main groups – stretch along the country's 700-kilometer northern border.

They range from fairly small pockets in the west to considerably larger swathes of territory in the east, but in the latter areas Kurds are joined by Sunni Arabs as well as Assyrian Christians.

While the Kurdish political scene is fragmented into a few dozen political parties and movements, the PYD – a branch of the PKK based next door in Turkey – is the dominant military force on the ground, through its militia the YPG (People's Protection Units).

In 2012, regime forces pulled out of many Kurdish areas, leading to a de facto takeover by the PYD, but the regime continues to enjoy a strong presence in the city of Hassakeh and a lesser but concentrated military and security presence in the Kurdish-majority city of Qamishli, in the extreme northeast.

Saleh Muslim, the head of the PYD, has made a few intriguing statements in the run-up to the polls, in terms of whether his party would "allow" them to take place.

In one, earlier this month, he said the polls would take place in areas where his PYD has set up a self-governing zone, split into western, central and eastern sections.

In remarks to a Kurdish news outlet, Muslim welcomed the distribution of ballot boxes by the government, but the PYD chief added that "Assad can deploy his troops in Syrian Kurdistan, but only if he accepts Kurdish rights."

The outlet noted that Muslim predicted the regime would manage to put out ballot boxes in areas of Hassakeh and at the airport in Qamishli, where the Syrian army is deployed. But he declined to state whether the polls would take place in a number of smaller, Kurdish-majority areas to the west, the outlet said.

Muslim also voiced his expectation that Kurds who do take part "are likely not to vote for Assad because they are currently busy with their own elections [in the self-rule areas]."

The governor of Hassakeh province – where Qamishli is located – has said the elections in Kurdish-controlled areas were a certainty, and thanked the Kurdish population for what he said was its full support for the electoral process.

But the self-governing authority – which is dominated by the PYD – this week stated that the elections were a mistake because they would only "prolong the country's crisis, and increase the pace of the daily murder of Syrians."



People celebrate in Ras Al-Ain countryside as they announced the members of the interim government of democratic self-administered party, in the city of Amuda near Hasaka January 21, 2014. (REUTERS/Rodi Said)

"Holding a presidential election at this difficult time in the country's history is neither a sound nor wise decision," it added.

Anti-regime news outlets have described the stances of Muslim, his PYD, and the self-rule authority as the height of pragmatism and having it both ways – the authority is described as leading a "boycott," but at the same time it "allows" the regime to conduct pro-election rallies and put up election paraphernalia in the city of Hassakeh, for example.

Mohammad Kheir Banko, a Kurdish National Council representative to the opposition-in-exile National Council, reiterated his group's stand that the election was a "farce," but acknowledged that in cities such as Hassakeh and Qamishli, polling stations would be established and voting would take place.

"But in the western towns, such as Amouda, Derbasieh and elsewhere, I think it would be stupid if the regime tries to distribute ballot boxes, where it doesn't have a military presence. The public won't accept the idea," he told The Daily Star.

Massoud Akko, a Syrian-Kurdish journalist who left the country for security-related reasons and is now based in Norway, said several factors are leaving people unenthusiastic about the coming poll – one in which the various polit-

ical sides will likely declare "victory," irrespective of what happens.

"I don't think Kurds, other than maybe Saleh Muslim's people, will go out and vote, but most Christians will," he continued, describing the latter community as largely neutral, but liable to participate nonetheless.

He agreed that the western areas of the Kurdish self-ruled areas were unlikely to see polls take place, because the PYD is at heart anti-Assad, even though it is accused of being in league with the regime. In addition, the general atmosphere of anxiety over daily life and anger because of the war prevails over much of the Kurdish community.

"There are thousands of Kurds who left rural Damascus, where they were working before the war, and ended up in Qamishli as refugees. The city of Qamishli gets about one hour of electricity a day, and job opportunities are scarce, while prices are skyrocketing," Akko said.

"There's a sense of general despair, and a distinct lack of enthusiasm about taking part in an election carried out by this regime."

Both men said that several hundred thousand Syrian Kurds have fled the country, mainly in the direction of Iraqi Kurdistan next door, meaning an even lower number of overall voters.

Since many of them →

⇒ did not exit through legal crossing-points, they are ineligible to vote, according to the election law.

An observer of Kurdish politics, who requested anonymity, said that come election day, certain segments of the population would turn out to vote, such as people

who do so fearing the consequences of staying away.

“You have the non-Kurds, and a group of them will turn out. You have the state employees, who are obliged to do so,” he said.

The PYD, the observer continued, was operating based on a simple list of priorities, and the notion of its being

in league with the regime was an oversimplification.

“The party is pragmatic, and it does not want to engage in an open war with the regime. Otherwise, its other main concern is the growing influence of Islamists,” he said.

The observer cited sources within the Kurdish communi-

ty, close to the PYD, who indicated that while the party had officially criticized the election, in a decision many people are calling a “boycott,” the PYD is in fact letting the public decide whether it should show up on election day. □



21 May 2014

Kurds Agree on Unity Against Baghdad, But Not Without Tensions

rudaw.net
By HEVIDAR AHMED
21 may 2014

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Kurdish parties last week agreed to form a united front over issues with Baghdad, but officials who attended the talks reported mutual suspicions among the political groups, saying that the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) had refused to agree that violating the Kurdish consensus would be a “red line.”

In a meeting with Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani, the parties had agreed on a common stance and political rhetoric in negotiations with Baghdad over Kurdish constitutional rights, the president’s office said in a statement.

A representative of a Kurdish party at the meeting said that everything was discussed in an open and “transparent” manner, and that Kurdish groups agreed to form a united committee for negotiations with Baghdad. But he said there were still suspicions among the groups.

For instance, Fazil Mirani, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party’s (KDP) politburo, called on the groups not to “bargain” with Baghdad or with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. “Some Kurdish groups have

bargained with Baghdad, for example the PUK has bargained with Maliki,” he reportedly said.

That was apparently a reference to a 2012 effort by Barzani to engineer a “no confidence” vote against Maliki in Baghdad, which was apparently blocked by Jalal Talabani, the now ailing Iraqi president and head of the PUK.

Adnan Mufti, a PUK politburo member who was present at last week’s meeting, rejected that Talabani’s move had amounted to bargaining. “The PUK does not bargain,” he said, leading to a slight exchange of words with Mirani.

Balen Abdullah, the secretary general of the Kurdistan Labor Party, confirmed the argument between the KDP and PUK, but added that, “The discussions were not tense and the atmosphere of the meeting was normal.”

The greater disagreement apparently came during the writing of the meeting’s final resolution, when the PUK reportedly rejected a phrase describing any break from a Kurdish consensus as crossing a “red line.”

“The PUK committee said that this phrase was not needed because they said that we mentioned unity among Kurds and that there was no need to create doubts. Finally, that phrase was



President Barzani meeting with political groups: Photo: KRP

removed based on the demand by the PUK,” said a political leader who was present at the meeting but did not wish to be identified.

Without naming any political party, Abdullah also confirmed that one group had opposed that phrase being written into the resolution.

The Kurdish groups are gearing for battle with Maliki, who is ready for a third term as prime minister following the April 30 polls – something the Kurds say they will not back.

Maliki, who became the Iraqi PM for two successive terms with the Kurdish support, and despite his ongoing disagreements with the Kurds, recently sent a “six-page letter” to the Kurdish groups, in which he calls on them to form a majority government with him.

In the meeting, President Barzani stressed that the Kurds must not show any leniency towards a third term for Maliki.

But he acknowledged that powerful and neighboring Iran may have the last say over the issue.

“What matters for Iran is the unity of the Shiite household,

the person they agree on is not as important for them,” Barzani said.

He added that, while Iran may back Maliki for a third term, the United States does not. He also affirmed that the Kurds must not insist on retaining the Iraqi presidency, currently held by the ailing Talabani.

“If the Kurds did not get that post, then the Shiites will not accept the Sunnis to take it either,” Barzani said. “The Kurds must not insist on keeping the post of the Iraqi president,” he added.

The issue of Kurdish independence and a referendum that would make it happen were not within the agenda of the meeting, but participants said Barzani spoke about it at length and with passion.

“He was very enthusiastic about this issue,” one participant reported. “Barzani said that if we did not reach an agreement with Baghdad, then a referendum should take place. But the PUK said that we should not rush about this matter.” ■

Les minorités au cœur de la crise syrienne

19 mai 2014

www.affaires-strategiques.info

Par LCL. Kamal KAMAL, Officier de l'armée de terre libanaise, stagiaire de la 21e promotion « Ceux de 14 » à l'Ecole de guerre

Facteur peu considéré, la guerre civile syrienne a profondément modifié la démographie de ce pays. En effet, aux oppositions traditionnelles et lisibles entre communautés, s'est substituée une situation complexe de morcellement ethnique et religieux. Ce phénomène résulte à la fois des actions du régime syrien, des exactions des mouvements d'opposition mais également des pays régionaux et occidentaux qui ont alimenté cette guerre. Or, cette désorganisation communautaire de la Syrie est un facteur potentiel de déstabilisation de toute la zone du Moyen-Orient. Les analystes ne peuvent encore conclure sur les conséquences de ce phénomène en raison de son caractère trop récent et encore instable. La portée de ces changements est telle qu'ils pourraient modifier les équilibres géopolitiques de la région.

LES MINORITÉS DANS L'ETAT SYRIEN

La Syrie est un pays d'Asie de l'Ouest, au carrefour du bassin méditerranéen et du centre du monde arabe. En raison de cette position au croisement de différentes civilisations, le peuple syrien accueille sur son territoire de nombreuses minorités. Pourtant, en première approche, la situation paraît simple : les Arabes représentent 90% de la population et les Kurdes 10%. Mais, à mesure que l'on descend dans l'analyse de la composition de ce peuple, la myriade d'ethnies et de religion apparaît. La Syrie, qui abrite quelque 20 millions de personnes, est composée de 68 à 70% de musulmans sunnites arabes ; de 9 à 11% d'Alaouites arabes, de 8% de chrétiens arabes et arméniens, orthodoxes, maronites ou catholiques ; de 8% des sunnites kurdes ; de 2 à 3% des Druzes arabes ; de 1% chiïtes arabes et autres ; de moins de 1% de sunnites circassiens ; de moins de 1% d'autres minorités Kalesideh, Ismaïlien et de plusieurs milliers de Juifs. Ce caractère hétéroclite va être accentué par le conflit syrien jusqu'à donner aujourd'hui parfois l'impression d'avoir éclaté en une myriade de groupuscules aux identités et revendications complexes.

La stratégie du régime syrien dans la guerre civile, un paradoxe de gouvernance : promouvoir une unité de façade tout en favorisant les divisions en secret

Les protestations syriennes ont commencé pacifiquement le 15 mars 2011. Le pouvoir syrien mésestimait ces premiers événements en dépit des révolutions arabes voisines qui avaient déjà, pourtant, renversé de puissants régimes du monde arabe. Mais après une période de six mois, les événements se précipitèrent. Une scission majeure au sein de l'armée syrienne vit le jour : l'armée syrienne libre fut créée et se mit à défendre les villes de l'opposition. Les manifestations pacifiques s'étaient muées en guerre civile avec toutes les horreurs que cela impliquait.



Le régime de Bachar al-Assad, voulant alors camoufler son caractère népotique au profit de la communauté minoritaire alaouite, chercha à promouvoir l'idée nationale à travers le slogan « ma communauté est la Syrie ». Mais en opposition avec cette volonté affichée, il modifia artificiellement la cartographie des régions administratives de l'État afin que chacune d'entre elles soit sous l'autorité d'une communauté qui lui était fidèle. Jouant sur l'aspect religieux ou les caractères ethniques, voir sur les facteurs sociaux, il

s'assurait ainsi de la soumission de ces régions à son pouvoir. Utilisant la maxime « diviser pour régner », cette instrumentalisation du communautarisme durant la guerre civile ne fit qu'accroître les oppositions, scinder les communautés et accroissait les malheurs du peuple.

L'opposition armée, l'horreur, moteur du morcellement communautaire

De l'autre côté, les différents mouvements d'opposition armée ont rivalisé de cruauté : représailles contre les partisans du régime, contre de « mauvais croyants », assassinats de sang-froid, lynchages, tortures, enlèvements de moines et moniales pacifiques pour obtenir des rançons ou faire du chantage... Pire, l'ONU mentionne de véritables épurations ethniques et la destruction par le feu de maisons et d'églises chrétiennes. Mais ces exactions ont également concerné des populations chiïtes, et alaouites. Parmi ces derniers, les limites de l'horreur furent franchies : des enfants brûlés, démembrés... Certains combattants de l'opposition allant jusqu'à manger le cœur de leurs victimes... Dans cette stratégie de la terreur, même les sunnites favorables au régime ne furent pas épargnés. Comble de l'atrocité, ces hommes filmèrent leurs exactions pour les mettre sur internet. La spirale de la division et de la haine contribuait à l'éclatement des repères communautaires.

Une déstabilisation de l'extérieur qui alimente les divisions

Drapés d'arguments démocratiques et humanitaires, certains pays régionaux et occidentaux ont également alimenté cette guerre civile en finançant les groupes d'opposition et en les soutenant par la fourniture d'armes et d'équipements. De véritables portes d'entrée vers la Syrie furent négligemment laissées ouvertes pour que tous les « djihadistes » du monde puissent nourrir cette guerre civile. Ce « laissez-faire laissez-passer » est assez paradoxal, car l'ONU comme les Etats-Unis classent ces organisations dans la catégorie terroriste comme étant des ramifications directes ou indirectes d'« Al-Qaïda », (Etat Islamique d'Irak et du Levant « EIL », le front al-Nosra, les phalanges Abdallah Azzam ...). A court terme, ces extrémistes ont alimenté les horreurs de la guerre. Mais à long terme, tout porte à croire qu'une partie reste en Syrie. En effet, nombreux sont ceux qui ont obtenu la nationalité syrienne auprès des institutions dans les mains de l'opposition. Mais surtout, la plupart des pays d'où ils viennent ont mis en place des lois pour condamner fermement ces « salafistes » à leur retour au pays. Ce phénomène modifiera encore la démographie. Mais, surtout la présence de ces combattants fanatiques entretiendra les ➤

➤ oppositions entre les différentes communautés et empêchera tout retour à la paix sur le long terme.

Des communautés au morcellement démographique

A la suite de ces événements la démographie syrienne n'a plus rien en commun avec ce qu'elle était avant le début des événements. Elle a subi des modifications fondamentales dans la répartition géographique. Comme démontré précédemment, la population syrienne est aujourd'hui morcelée. Elle est passée d'une structure communautaire lisible à un morcellement anarchique difficile à analyser sur lequel viennent se greffer des mouvances « salafistes » venues de l'étranger.

Durant les combats, les populations ont fui les zones de conflit. Aujourd'hui la Syrie compte 6 millions de réfugiés sur son territoire tandis que 3 millions se sont déplacés à l'extérieur du pays. Suite à ces mouvements d'une ampleur sans précédent (presque 50% de la population s'est déplacée), de grandes villes se sont vidées, uniquement occupées par des combattants. Les agglomérations et villages se sont reconstitués en fonction, non plus de la communauté d'origine, mais plutôt sur la base de la loyauté ou de l'opposition au régime en place.

La situation se complexifie encore depuis que des groupes rebelles se battent entre eux. Cette situation devient souvent assimilable au Moyen-âge occidental : de petits chefs dominant temporairement de parties du territoire, des groupes s'allient pour mieux se trahir ensuite au gré des circonstances ce qui crée des motifs pour de nouvelles haines et divisions...

Un morcellement communautaire qui fait courir des risques aux pays voisins.

Face au morcellement des communautés, aux flots de réfugiés, au surarmement, les pays régionaux courent tous un risque plus ou moins grand de déstabilisation :

- Pour la Turquie, la question kurde pourrait revenir au premier plan avec un Kurdistan indépendant en Irak et des Kurdes armées en Syrie.
- Concernant le Liban, l'afflux de plus de 900 000 réfugiés syriens sur son territoire s'ajoutant à plus de 400 000 palestiniens déjà présents, modifie profondément le « rapport de force » démographique.

Les chrétiens du Liban, hier majoritaires se sentent menacés et craignent des violences qui les obligeraient à fuir à l'étranger. Et surtout, l'arrivée de nombreux sunnites s'opposant aux chiites pourrait pousser le Liban dans une deuxième guerre civile.

●- Pour l'Irak, qui fait face quotidiennement à la violence entre milices sunnites et chiites, la chute du régime d'Assad pourrait générer l'arrivée de milices armées qui alimenterait la violence et plongerait le pays dans le chaos définitif.

●- Le royaume de Jordanie fait également face à un afflux massif de réfugiés syriens à hauteur de 750 000 personnes. Comme au Liban, en Jordanie le nombre de réfugiés syriens a dépassé le tiers de la population.

●- Enfin « Israël » craint que la Syrie devienne un regroupement mondial de « djihadistes » capables de former des terroristes pouvant agir sur son territoire notamment avec des armes chimiques qui pourraient tomber aux mains des « salafistes » ou de membres du « Hezbollah ».

Des perspectives sans lendemain

L'arrêt des hostilités par le dialogue entamé à Genève 2 est évidemment souhaitable entre le pouvoir et l'opposition. Même si cela semble peu probable, ces derniers pourraient décider de partager le pouvoir. Toutefois ceux qui signeraient, auraient-ils réellement la capacité et l'autorité pour faire cesser les hostilités ? Il est raisonnable d'en douter !

Une autre solution serait en apparence la division de la Syrie en trois Etats : Alaouites, Sunnites et Kurdes. Mais, comme mentionné précédemment, les divisions dépassent de beaucoup le simple caractère ethnique. L'émergence d'un autre Kurdistan libre entraînerait de facto une guerre d'indépendance du Kurdistan. Une guerre pour un Etat sunnite à cheval entre l'Irak et la Syrie serait alors également envisageable... Dans ce contexte, les différentes communautés chiites, appuyées par l'Iran, chercheraient également à protéger leurs intérêts. Le conflit irait alors de « Charybde en Scylla ».

La dernière situation la plus probable, pourrait être le statu quo, c'est-à-dire, la poursuite de la guerre civile au détriment des peuples, des minorités et de la stabilité de la région.

□ □ □



19 mai 2014

Le conflit en Syrie a fait plus de 162 000 morts

www.liberation.fr

Plus de 162 000 personnes ont été tuées en Syrie depuis le début du conflit en mars 2011, selon un nouveau bilan fourni lundi 19 mai par l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Un précédent bilan de l'OSDH, communiqué début avril, faisait état de 150 000 morts. Cette organisation, dont le siège est situé au Royaume-Uni, s'appuie sur un vaste réseau de militants et de sources médicales et militaires. Dans son bilan, elle fait état exactement de 162 402 morts, dont plus de 53 978 civils, parmi lesquels 8 607 enfants.

Plus de 60 000 combattants loyalistes tués depuis 2011

Selon l'OSDH, les violences ont tué 42 701 combattants de l'opposition, dont plus de 13 500 jihadistes du Front Al-Nosra et de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL). En face, 61 170 membres des forces du régime sont morts, dont 37 685 soldats et 23 485 militaires.

Le conflit en Syrie a débuté en mars 2011 avec une révolte populaire pacifique contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad, qui s'est heurtée à une répression sanglante et s'est progressivement militarisée. Cette guerre d'usure, qui



Des Syriens aident une femme blessée lors de combats à Alep, le 18 mai 2014. (TAMER AL-HALABI / ALEPPO MEDIA CENTRE / AFP)

est entrée dans sa quatrième année sans qu'aucun belligérant ne prenne véritablement le dessus sur le terrain, a par ailleurs fait plus de neuf millions de réfugiés et de déplacés. Soit près de la moitié de la population syrienne. ♦



Pour former une coalition, Maliki s'attelle au puzzle irakien

ANALYSE ♦ *Le Premier ministre sortant a remporté les législatives mais doit trouver des alliés kurdes, sunnites et chiites pour réunir une majorité. Et obtenir l'aval de l'Iran et des Etats-Unis.*

www.liberation.fr

Jean-Pierre PERRIN

Envoyé spécial à Bagdad

20 mai 2014

Les reproches qui lui sont faits sont nombreux et accablants : accaparement du pouvoir, sectarisme, échec à enrayer la spirale de violence - plus de 3 500 morts depuis le début de l'année -, incapacité à reprendre la ville de Fallouja (à 60 km de Bagdad) aux rebelles sunnites, ce qui a provoqué la fuite de quelque 420 000 personnes, corruption massive de son administration... Pourtant, selon des résultats provisoires publiés lundi, c'est une belle victoire personnelle qu'a obtenue le Premier ministre (chiite) sortant Nouri al-Maliki, en quête d'un troisième mandat, le premier depuis le départ des forces américaines, fin 2011.

Avec au moins 94 sièges, il devance largement ses adversaires des autres listes chiites, sunnites et kurdes. Mais la partie n'est pas encore gagnée pour autant : le Parlement comptant 328 sièges, il lui faut à présent forger une coalition avec certains partis vaincus. Soit un travail de titan. Car, comme le suggère l'un de ses adversaires politiques, le député Amir al-Kenani, du courant de Moqtada al-Sadr (un jeune religieux radical chiite, qui s'était soulevé un temps contre les Américains), «le vrai problème, en Irak, c'est de bâtir une coalition. Pour y arriver, il faudrait un prophète».

«homme fort». En l'absence d'un prophète, les Irakiens s'attendent à des mois de marchandages difficiles à un moment des plus dramatiques : les insurgés ont infiltré des faubourgs du nord de Bagdad. Bénéficiant de soutiens dans certains quartiers sunnites de la capitale, ils pourraient en profiter pour lancer une campagne de terreur au cœur de la ville, qui ressemble déjà à un camp retranché tant les forces de sécurité sont omniprésentes. Pourtant, cette menace qui pèse en permanence sur la sécurité explique en partie la popularité de Maliki, qui passe pour être un «homme fort», voire un dur, même s'il n'a toujours pas lancé l'armée à la reconquête de Fallouja et de la tumultueuse province d'Al-Anbar, qui avait déjà donné bien du fil à retordre à l'armée américaine. «Mais on peut lui reconnaître d'avoir bloqué la guerre civile dans les années 2006-2007. Sans lui, il y aurait un chaos qui aurait duré des dizaines d'années, relève Ihsan al-Shemari, professeur de relations internationales à l'université de Bagdad et président du Centre de réflexion politique. Certes, il y a encore des voitures piégées, des villes comme Fallouja et une partie de Ramadi qui sont entre les mains de l'insurrection, mais rien de comparable à 2006-2007, où il fallait revenir chez soi avant 14 heures, où l'on ne pouvait pas sortir dans la rue après 16 heures, où nous étions coincés entre Al-Qaeda et

les milices. Maintenant, je peux me promener à une heure du matin.» «C'est lui seul qui a mis fin au règne des milices. Au moins, nous lui devons ça», renchérit Yonadam Kanna, un député du petit parti assyrien (chrétien).

S'il est si difficile de bâtir une coalition, c'est d'abord parce que l'Irak est séparé en trois : les chiites, les sunnites et les Kurdes. Il faut donc que le futur Premier ministre aille chercher des alliés dans ces trois communautés, sans mécontenter les partis qui figurent dans sa propre coalition. «N'oublions pas les facteurs externes, insiste Al-Kenani, le député sadriste. Pas de Premier ministre qui n'ait reçu l'aval de l'Iran, ni l'accord des Etats-Unis. Après, il lui faut convaincre les sunnites, donc l'Arabie saoudite et les pays du Golfe, qui ont une influence importante sur eux.» Enfin, il y a les Kurdes, qui pèsent aussi sur la formation de la coalition. «Si les Kurdes disent clairement qu'ils ne veulent pas de Maliki, alors nous ne le rejoindrons pas. Avec les Kurdes, nous avons un passé de lutte en commun [du temps de Saddam Hussein, ndlr]. Mieux vaut perdre Maliki que perdre les Kurdes», assure-t-il.

Poker menteur. Or, ces Kurdes, qui ont obtenu 62 sièges, sont à eux seuls une équation compliquée, d'autant plus qu'ils avancent, certes masqués, mais à petits pas quand même, vers l'indépendance. Massoud

Barzani, le président du gouvernement régional du Kurdistan, a fait savoir qu'il ne rejoindrait pas Maliki s'il n'obtenait pas une loi sur le pétrole (au profit de l'entité kurde) et un cadre pour négocier le statut de la ville pétrolière de Kirkouk. D'où la possibilité d'une alliance anti-Maliki qui réunirait les Kurdes et les formations chiites vaincues, dont les sadristes (28 sièges) et le Conseil suprême de la révolution islamique en Irak (29 sièges), naguère le parti chiite le plus important d'Irak, qui a aujourd'hui mordu la poussière.

En fait, il s'agit plutôt d'une partie de poker menteur. En effet, on voit mal comment ces différentes listes, qui sont arrivées loin derrière la coalition de Maliki, pourraient bénéficier d'une légitimité suffisante pour gouverner. Néanmoins, le marchandage pour obtenir des ministères et des postes importants pourrait durer des mois.

Sans doute Téhéran pèsera-t-il lourdement sur l'issue des tractations. Avant les élections, ouvertement ou secrètement, les dirigeants des partis chiites s'y sont rendus, y compris Maliki, sans parler des visites régulières de responsables iraniens. Après huit ans d'occupation américaine, c'est aujourd'hui ce voisin qui apparaît comme le principal mentor du Premier ministre. Et donc le vrai vainqueur des élections. ♦

La guerre oubliée de Faloudja qui menace l'Irak

Sans attendre les résultats des législatives du 30 avril, l'armée irakienne a relancé l'offensive contre le réduit islamiste.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT
gmalbrunot@lefigaro.fr
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À BAGDAD

MOYEN-ORIENT Anwar a dû se résoudre à faire sortir sa femme et ses deux jeunes enfants de Faloudja : « C'était devenu trop difficile pour eux, ils avaient peur », confesse cet Irakien qui a passé sa vie dans la cité rebelle, prise en tenailles entre les radicaux islamistes, qui la contrôlent depuis quatre mois, et l'armée régulière, qui menace de lancer l'assaut pour les en déloger.

À 60 kilomètres seulement à l'ouest de Bagdad, une nouvelle guerre déchire ce bastion de la résistance antiméricaine du milieu des années 2000. Plus aucun journaliste, même Irakien, n'ose s'aventurer dans « la ville aux mille mosquées », que les djihadistes entendent transformer en capitale d'un vaste émirat qui s'étendrait des portes de Bagdad au désert syrien, à mille kilomètres plus à l'ouest.

En quatre mois, plus de 70 000 familles ont dû quitter Faloudja, sous la pression conjuguée des bombardements sporadiques de l'armée et des exactions perpétrées par les djihadistes. N'y demeurent que les plus pauvres et les membres des tribus qui coopèrent de gré ou de force avec les rebelles de l'État islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL), soit plus que 150 000 personnes sur les 400 000 qui y vivaient avant les violences.

« Finish, l'État irakien à Faloudja ! », sourit Yasser dans son bureau à Bagdad. Les écoles ont fermé. La police a déserté la ville. Et ses habitants sont passés sous

la coupe des djihadistes, qui imposent, via leurs tribunaux, la vision la plus rigoriste de la charia. Interdiction de fumer dans la rue. Plus aucun homme ne peut servir une femme dans un magasin. « Des femmes sont enlevées pour obliger les hommes de leur famille à combattre l'armée », accuse Hamid al-Haïsi, le chef de la sécurité de la province d'al-Anbar.

Anwar, qui s'est fait arrêter récemment par les djihadistes, leur trouve néanmoins quelques mérites. « Ils me soupçonnaient d'avoir livré des informations aux Américains en 2004. Ils m'ont interrogé pendant deux jours, avant de me relâcher. » Il connaissait Abou Walid, un de leurs émir. Cet ancien de la Garde républicaine de Saddam Hussein a vu son aura grimper en s'évadant de la prison voisine d'Abou Ghraïb, aujourd'hui fermée. On le voit sur une vidéo décapiter de sang-froid des camionneurs syriens alaouites, la minorité à laquelle appartient le président Bachar el-Assad, que d'autres membres de l'EIL affrontent de l'autre côté de la frontière.

Entouré d'anciens officiers de l'armée de Saddam Hussein et de quelques étrangers, dont un Tchétchène venu d'Ouzbékistan, Abou Walid assiste Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, le chef de l'EIL, qui va et vient entre l'Irak et la

Syrie. Dans l'ensemble des provinces sunnites, les combattants de l'EIL ne seraient guère plus de 4 000. Mais à Faloudja, ils sont aidés par les partisans d'un influent leader local, Cheikh Abdallah Janabi, et des membres des tribus que la politique antisunnite du premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki a poussé chez les plus radicaux.



« Les combattants de l'EIL se sont entraînés pendant des années dans le désert. Ils ont maintenant des missiles Sam-7 équipés de nouvelles batteries venues de Syrie », affirme Anwar, qui retourne chaque semaine à Faloudja voir ses parents, qui ne veulent pas quitter leur logis. Peu importe qu' Ayman al-Zawahiri, le chef d'al-Qaïda, leur enjoigne de ne plus aller combattre en Syrie : « La branche irakienne d'al-Qaïda le considère comme un traître, elle brouille même ses messages Internet », relève un expert étranger, familier de Faloudja.

Les djihadistes protègent les banques et prélèvent l'impôt révolutionnaire auprès de la population alentour. « Grâce à des intermédiaires, ajoute Anwar, ils ont de quoi acheter des médicaments au marché noir à Bagdad. » De quoi tenir le siège. D'autant qu'en face l'armée est sur la défensive. Elle a encore tenté récemment de rentrer dans la ville, via l'université, mais sans succès. « Les Américains n'ont pas réussi à écraser Faloudja en 2004. Comment Maliki seul pourrait-il y arriver ? », s'interroge Ahmed al-Zayadee, un responsable du parti chiite Sciri à Bagdad. « L'armée n'a pas le savoir-faire tactique pour y mener un combat de rue, maison par maison, car tout a été miné, prévient un expert militaire occidental. Et elle ne peut pas, non plus, bombarder massivement, car il y

« Les Américains n'ont pas réussi à écraser Faloudja en 2004. Comment Maliki seul pourrait-il y arriver ? »

AHMED AL-ZAYADEE, UN RESPONSABLE DU PARTI CHIITE SCIRI À BAGDAD

aurait des dizaines de milliers de morts. » Quatre mois après le coup de force de l'EIL, les hommes de Maliki se cantonnent

neut ainsi à des manœuvres tactiques. Plus grave, la troupe n'a guère le moral. Face aux désertions, le premier ministre a dû mobiliser des miliciens chiïtes, tandis que d'autres sont rentrés de Syrie, où ils étaient allés prêter main-forte à Bachar el-Assad. Les djihadistes, selon une vidéo récente, en auraient égorgé vingt-deux.

Selon plusieurs sources occidentales, des agents du renseignement iranien ont également été dépêchés auprès de Maliki, tandis que l'ambassade améri-

caine étudierait la possibilité de recourir à des drones d'attaques contre Faloudja. L'inquiétude monte, d'autant que, pour la première fois, les insurgés ont pris le contrôle d'un barrage sur l'Euphrate au sud de Faloudja. L'instigateur de l'attaque serait un ancien baasiste responsable de l'assèchement des marais du sud de l'Irak dans les années 1980. « Regardez les photos satellites, conseille un expert étranger à Bagdad, on voit bien les inondations provoquées près de l'aéroport par l'ouverture des vannes du barrage.

C'était une opération très sophistiquée. »

Quelques jours après, suivant le modèle de l'armée syrienne, l'aviation irakienne a largué des barils d'explosifs sur Faloudja et ses alentours. Une information étayée par des photos prises par les insurgés, que Bagdad a toutefois démentie. L'un de ces engins de mort a détruit la maison d'Anwar, qui, depuis, enrage. « Quand vous voyez comment l'armée irakienne se comporte, vous devenez salafiste. C'est pire que du temps des Américains ! » ■

LE FIGARO lundi 19 mai 2014

Les djihadistes veulent contrôler des territoires

Alors que plus de 80 % des bulletins de vote ont été dépouillés, la reconduction de Nouri al-Maliki au poste de premier ministre fait craindre une nouvelle attaque contre Faloudja. « Nous n'attendons plus que l'ordre du commandement général de l'armée », affirmait récemment le général Badil Bardawi, patron des forces spéciales. Mais quand bien même les unités d'élite parviendraient

à investir la ville, il leur resterait à reprendre le contrôle d'autres territoires leur échappant dans l'ouest de l'Irak.

Dans les provinces sunnites, l'armée n'est plus présente que dans certaines bases. Le contrôle des axes routiers est au cœur de la bataille. Les djihadistes parviennent à établir des barrages sur l'autoroute Rutba-Ramadi, ville à 80 km à l'ouest de Faloudja dont certains quartiers sont aux mains de l'État islamique depuis janvier. Un peu plus à l'ouest, la route d'exportation du pétrole, à partir de la raffinerie de Beiji jusqu'à Rawah, n'est pas davantage sécurisée la nuit. Bref, djihadistes et anciens saddamistes coalisés avec un ou deux autres groupes rebelles sont capables de paralyser l'État dans de nombreux points du « pays » sunnite.

Se multiplient ainsi les foyers terroristes que l'État est contraint de désertir et où la population épaulé désormais les djihadistes, comme dans les provinces de Diyala et Salaheddine. Nikolai Mladenov, l'émissaire de l'ONU à Bagdad, décrypte la stratégie des djihadistes : « Leur but est de contrôler des territoires. Pour cela, ils ont besoin de rendre l'appareil gouvernemental inopérant. Ce qu'ils font en attaquant des maires, des généraux et d'autres représentants de l'État. Puis, ils allument des conflits sectaires en s'en prenant aux processions chiïtes ou en attaquant les marchés pour que les gens ne se sentent plus en sécurité. Ce qui oblige les forces de sécurité à s'y déployer. L'EIIL en profite alors pour les attaquer et prendre le contrôle de certains villages en y hissant le drapeau noir djihadiste. »

La grande ville de Mossoul, au nord, où les terroristes ont choisi de maintenir une présence de l'administration pour mieux la racketter et financer leurs basses œuvres, fait figure d'exception. « La population est terrorisée, constate un diplomate, mais il y a toujours la police et l'État irakien que l'EIIL ponctionne. »

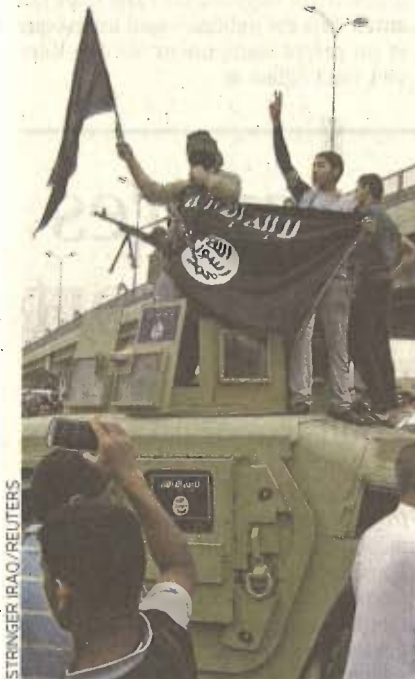
« Une infrastructure terroriste massive »

À 150 km de l'autre côté de la frontière avec la Syrie, le contrôle d'une partie du territoire offre un repli aux djihadistes. Empruntant des passages clandestins, les rebelles s'infiltrèrent la nuit, phares éteints, à bord de pick-up bourrés d'armes, pour échapper aux patrouilles de l'aviation irakienne. Mais combien de temps encore l'armée va-t-elle pouvoir garder le poste frontière d'al-Qaïm ?

C'est précisément pour couper tout lien avec la Syrie que Nouri al-Maliki a lancé en novembre une vaste opération militaire antidjihadistes. Mais ses soldats ont échoué à isoler leurs ennemis dans un triangle frontalier près de Haditha. Les djihadistes ont pu cheminer avec leurs armes et leurs équipements jusqu'à Faloudja et Ramadi. « Cela a coïncidé avec le démantèlement des campements de protestation sunnites ordonné par Maliki en décembre et l'arrestation d'un important dignitaire sunnite, ce qui a fait basculer la situation », poursuit l'émissaire de l'ONU à Bagdad.

Alors que le premier ministre cherche à monter les tribus sunnites contre les djihadistes, la menace terroriste se rapproche de Bagdad. Les insurgés attaquent sporadiquement la ville à la roquette. Trop faibles pour en prendre contrôle, ils peuvent toutefois paralyser la capitale en coupant les axes de communication qui y conduisent. « Nous ne sommes plus confrontés à une guerre civile comme en 2006, analyse Nikolai Mladenov, mais à un combat contre une infrastructure terroriste massive, qui existe en Irak depuis des années. » ■

G. M. (À BAGDAD)



Des djihadistes célèbrent leur prise de guerre, un véhicule des forces de sécurité irakiennes, le 30 mars, à Faloudja.

Des Français s'infiltrèrent de Syrie en Irak

Au moins deux djihadistes français sont passés récemment de Syrie en Irak pour épauler l'État islamique en Irak et au Levant (l'EIIL). Ils ont été repérés par des messages laissés sur Twitter. Jusqu'à maintenant, la plupart des combattants étrangers en Syrie étaient accaparés par la guerre qu'ils livrent aux côtés des plus radicaux des insurgés contre les autres factions,

djihadistes, salafistes ou combattants de l'Armée syrienne libre, qui tous leur reprochent de nombreuses exactions contre la population. Quelque 300 Français mèneraient la « guerre sainte » en Syrie, contre le régime de Bachar el-Assad. Mais pour affronter les miliciens chiïtes qui reviennent en Irak pour aider l'armée de Nouri al-Maliki, l'EIIL a besoin de recrues.

G. M.

Kirkouk : voiture piégée contre un magasin de boissons alcoolisées, 7 morts

<http://www.directmatin.fr>
AFP, 24 mai 2014

At moins sept personnes ont été tuées samedi par l'explosion d'une voiture piégée stationnée devant un magasin de boissons alcoolisées à Kirkouk, dans le nord de l'Irak, ont indiqué des sources médicales et de sécurité.

L'attentat, qui a également fait 17 blessés, a touché dans la soirée le quartier de Wasati, dans le sud de Kirkouk, une ville mutli-communautaire que se disputent le gouvernement central et la province autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

En outre, dix personnes ont été tuées samedi dans d'autres violences, selon des sources de sécurité et médicale.

Trois agriculteurs qui avaient été enlevés à l'aube ont été retrouvés décapités dans la province de Kirkouk. Les sept autres victimes ont péri dans des attaques dans les provinces de Ninive et Salaheddine, toujours dans le nord de l'Irak.

Ces violences sont survenues alors que le pays est endeuillé quotidiennement par des attaques et des attentats qui tuent en moyenne 25 Irakiens chaque jour, un niveau proche de celui de 2008, lorsque le pays sortait à peine d'un conflit confessionnel sanglant, après l'invasion américaine de 2003.

Les violences ont déjà fait plus de 3.700 morts cette année.

AFP

La Turquie a commencé à exporter le pétrole du Kurdistan irakien (ministre)

Ankara, 23 mai 2014 (AFP)

LA TURQUIE a commencé à livrer le pétrole du Kurdistan irakien sur les marchés internationaux, a annoncé vendredi son ministre de l'Energie.

"Les livraisons ont débuté à 22H00 heure locale (19H00 GMT) hier (jeudi, NDLR) depuis le port de Ceyhan" (sud), a indiqué Taner Yildiz à la presse vendredi.

"C'est l'Irak qui vend et produit le pétrole et c'est l'Irak encore qui gèrera les ventes futures", a souligné le ministre.

Cette annonce intervient alors que les autorités kurdes et le gouvernement irakien se livrent depuis plusieurs mois une bataille sur le contrôle des exportations de brut: Bagdad estime que le pétrole appartient au pays tout entier, tandis qu'Erbil veut traiter directement avec des compagnies pétrolières.

Les exportations via la Turquie, qui interviennent après les élections législatives du 30 avril en Irak à l'issue desquelles la coalition du Premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki est arrivée en tête, pourraient provoquer un regain de tensions entre les Kurdes et le gouvernement central de Bagdad.

Les Etats-Unis se sont inquiété jeudi d'une possible déstabilisation du pays.

"Notre position de longue date est de ne pas apporter notre soutien aux exporta-

tions si elles ne sont pas dûment approuvées par le gouvernement central irakien, et nous sommes inquiets de l'impact que pourraient avoir celles" en cours, a déclaré la porte-parole du département d'Etat Jen Psaki lors d'un briefing.

"Notre inquiétude la plus immédiate concerne la stabilité de l'Irak", a-t-elle ajouté.

"L'Irak fait face à la situation la plus difficile. Nous avons été clairs en disant qu'il est important pour toutes les parties d'agir pour aider le pays à avancer et éviter tout ce qui pourrait exacerber encore davantage les divisions et les tensions", a-t-elle insisté.

Les réserves de pétrole et de gaz de l'Irak sont parmi les plus importantes au monde. En 2013, le pays a produit en moyenne 3 millions de barils par jour, selon l'Agence internationale de l'Energie (AIE), fournissant à l'Etat 95% de ses revenus.



le Parisien

22 mai 2014

Nouvelle preuve dans l'affaire des trois Kurdes assassinées

Thibault Raisse
22 mai 2014
www.leparisien.fr

UN TRIPLE ASSASSINAT politique en plein Paris commandité par les services secrets turcs ? Le scénario, digne d'un film d'espionnage, prend corps. Omer Güney, un Turc francophone de 31 ans, est l'unique suspect de l'exécution par balles de trois militantes indépendantistes kurdes dans un local associatif en janvier 2013.

L'enquête, restée quasiment au point mort depuis son incarcération quelques jours après les faits, vient de connaître un coup d'accélérateur. Un enregistrement sonore anonyme parvenu en février à la juge antiterroriste Jeanne Duyé vient d'être expertisé. Selon les conclusions des spécialistes, la voix de l'homme qui y décrit par le menu les assassinats à venir est très probablement celle du mis en examen.

Ce document de neuf minutes,

apparu sur un blog allemand et récupéré par la brigade criminelle du Quai des Orfèvres, présente une conversation entre deux hommes non identifiés mais qui ne font pas mystère de leur appartenance au MIT, les services secrets turcs. Le premier explique au second son « plan » pour éliminer les trois militantes, parmi lesquelles Sakine Cansiz, figure montante du PKK, le parti indépendantiste kurde en guerre contre l'Etat turc.



Problème d'authenticité

Selon les experts, la comparaison entre la voix de cet homme et celle du suspect incarcéré « a conduit à des résultats largement plus probables dans l'hypothèse d'une identité de voix [...] plutôt que dans l'hypothèse d'une différence de voix » . =>

⇒ Cette avancée n'est pas pour autant synonyme d'enquête bouclée. « Une large probabilité n'est pas une certitude, sans compter que les technologies actuelles permettent de manipuler facilement des voix », rétorquent Mes Anne-Sophie Laguens et Xavier Nogueras, les

avocats d'Omer Güney. Les deux conseils n'hésitent pas à remettre en cause « l'authenticité de cet enregistrement apparu à un moment clé de la procédure, soit un an tout juste après les faits ». Arrêté grâce à des images de vidéosurveillance le montrant

entrant et sortant du local au moment du crime, Omer Güney, atteint d'une grave tumeur au cerveau, a toujours clamé son innocence et nié tout lien avec les services secrets turcs. Il est soupçonné d'avoir préparé une tentative d'évasion début mai et est, depuis lors, placé dans une

cellule d'isolement de la maison d'arrêt de Fresnes. Des conditions de détention « incompatibles avec son état de santé qui ne cesse d'empirer », clament ses avocats, qui ont déposé un recours contre ce placement. □

LE FIGARO

29 mai 2014

Les Kurdes irakiens menacent de convoquer un référendum sur l'indépendance

www.lefigaro.fr
Georges Malbrunot
29 mai 2014

La réélection attendue de Nouri al-Maliki à la tête de l'Irak suscite l'ire du président de la région autonome kurde, Massoud Barzani.

Massoud Barzani ne cesse de le répéter à ses interlocuteurs: si jamais Nouri al-Maliki est reconduit au poste de premier ministre d'Irak, le président de la région autonome kurde du Nord convoquera un référendum sur l'indépendance du Kurdistan, quitte à faire imploser la fragile mosaïque de l'ancienne Mésopotamie.

Un mois après les élections législatives qui ont vu la liste de Maliki arriver en tête, Barzani, qui vient d'être reçu à l'Élysée par François Hollande, mobilise actuellement des soutiens en Europe. En froid avec Bagdad pour son alignement sur l'Iran et la Syrie, Paris partage certaines des inquiétudes des Kurdes irakiens.

François Hollande a « exprimé son soutien à la constitution d'un gouvernement de réconciliation en Irak, dans un esprit d'unité permettant à toutes les communautés

d'être justement représentées », souligne le communiqué diffusé par l'Élysée après la rencontre entre les deux hommes. Une rencontre facilitée par la relation historiquement bonne entre les socialistes français et les Kurdes irakiens, à laquelle ne participait pas l'ambassadeur d'Irak en France.

Barzani refuse que le chiite Nouri al-Maliki soit premier ministre pour la troisième fois. Il lui reproche ses dérives autoritaire et sectaire. Bagdad « veut tout contrôler. Ce n'est pas acceptable. Nous voulons être des partenaires, pas des sujets », déclarait récemment le président de la région autonome kurde, ajoutant que « le moment était venu de prendre des décisions définitives ».

Sans attendre, quitte à alourdir leur contentieux avec Bagdad, les Kurdes ont commencé d'exporter, il y a une semaine, via la Turquie, leur pétrole sur les marchés internationaux. Dans la foulée, le pouvoir central a réagi en déposant plainte contre Ankara devant la Chambre de commerce internationale à Paris. Démarche jugée « illégitime » et « vouée à l'échec » par Massoud Barzani.

Bref, après des mois de tensions larvées, le torchon, plus que jamais, brûle entre Bagdad et les Kurdes. Ces derniers affirment avoir besoin de rentrées d'argent pour compenser la réduction des fonds que le gouvernement central alloue depuis janvier au gouverne-



« Bagdad veut tout contrôler. Ce n'est pas acceptable. Nous voulons être des partenaires, pas des sujets », a récemment déclaré Massoud Barzani (ici le 23 mai 2014 à l'Élysée après un entretien avec François Hollande). Crédits photo : BERTRAND GUAY/AFP

ment autonome kurde. En vertu de la Constitution adoptée en 2005, qui favorise les Kurdes, grands vainqueurs de la guerre menée par les Américains contre Saddam Hussein, Bagdad reverse 17 % des recettes budgétaires aux Kurdes. « Ils ne peuvent pas à la fois recevoir de l'argent du budget central et vendre pour eux-mêmes le pétrole », s'indigne un proche de Maliki.

À travers ses menaces, « Barzani cherche à exercer des pressions sur Maliki », observe le chercheur au CNRS Hosham Dawood, basé en Irak. Pour l'heure, les Kurdes auraient sans doute plus à perdre qu'à gagner, s'ils décidaient de se lancer dans une aventure indépendantiste.

Barzani sait qu'il reste « le faiseur de rois » pour la désignation du prochain premier

ministre. Avec 95 députés, Maliki a besoin de s'allier avec d'autres formations pour obtenir une majorité dans un Parlement qui compte 328 sièges.

Mais Barzani refuse toute prolongation du premier ministre chiite au pouvoir. Méfiant à l'égard de ce dernier, Paris estime qu'il convient de rassembler l'ensemble des communautés pour relever les nombreux défis auxquels est confronté l'Irak, le premier d'entre eux étant l'insécurité (900 morts par mois environ). Inquiets des velléités indépendantistes kurdes, les États-Unis, de leur côté, n'ont pas hésité à tancer leurs alliés, ravis d'avoir bénéficié d'une tribune en France. ■

Tony Hayward, Ex-BP CEO, Gets His Life Back as Kurdish Pipeline Opens

By Brian Swint

May 21, 2014

www.bloomberg.com

ERBIL-Hewlêr, Kurdistan region 'Iraq',— Erbil, the regional capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, has all the trappings of an oil boomtown. It bristles with construction cranes. Land Cruisers and Range Rovers with tinted windows ply the busy streets. Oil workers and briefcase-bearing foreigners crowd into the Divan Erbil Hotel's piano bar.

At the foot of the 8,000-year-old Citadel -- which claims to be the oldest continuously inhabited town in the world -- currency traders in the central market swap dollars, Euros and Turkish liras for Iraqi dinars out of glass boxes on the sidewalk. Shoppers flock to Erbil's Family Mall, which features stores such as French hypermarket operator Carrefour SA (CA) and Spanish clothing chain Mango.

With the opening of a new oil pipeline this year, the boom is getting a boost, Bloomberg Markets magazine will report in its June issue. Crude that used to be transported by truck across the rugged, mountainous terrain of the three northern provinces known as Iraqi Kurdistan began flowing in stages through the pipeline in January.

The conduit, built by the Kurdistan Regional Government, or KRG, runs about 400 kilometers (250 miles) from Khurmala, southwest of Erbil, to the Turkish border, where it connects with an existing link to the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan. Oil that sells for about \$70 a barrel domestically could fetch \$100 or so in world markets.

SOARING GDP

The KRG said in October that an average output of 400,000 barrels



Photographer: Sebastian Meyer/Bloomberg Markets
A rig drills into Kurdistan's rich Taq Taq field, where production is expected to increase as more and more oil flows through the new pipeline

rels a day in 2014 could jump to 1 million barrels by 2015 and twice that much by 2019. For 5.2 million Kurds in an area roughly the size of Switzerland, the influx of foreign investment and rising oil-related income promises an improving standard of living as the rest of the country remains mired in sectarian violence.

The KRG's Ministry of Planning forecasts that the economy will grow 8 percent a year through 2016. Since the KRG began selling oil contracts to foreign investors in 2007, per capita gross domestic product in Kurdistan has soared; it hit \$5,600 in 2012, up from \$800 10 years ago.

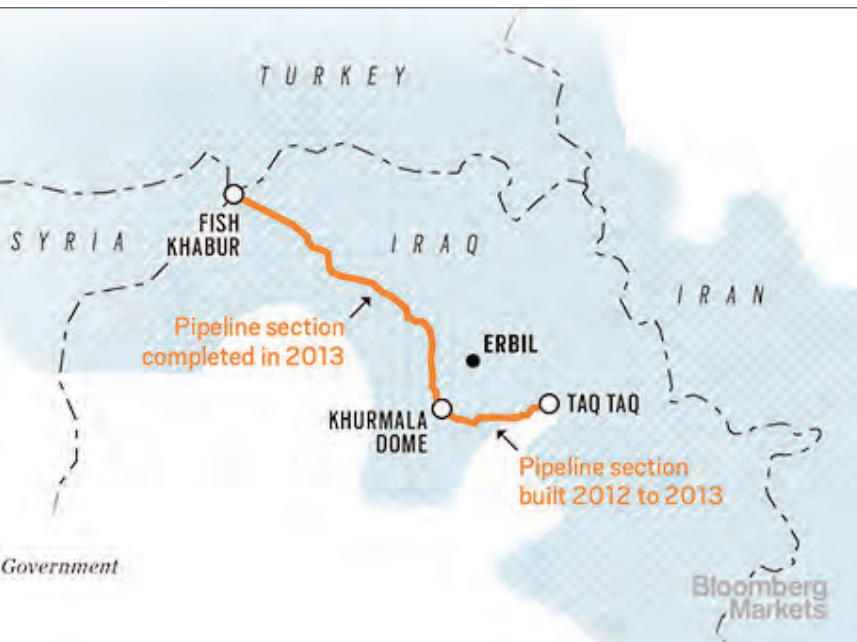
The boom has also benefited oil exploration companies, especially those that placed early bets. Beginning with the 1980 to 1988

GREATER KURDISTAN

A new oil pipeline network sits at the heart of a vast expanse that ethnic Kurds in several countries consider their homeland.

KURDISH-INHABITED AREA

Sources: CIA, Kurdistan Regional Government



► Iran-Iraq War, the development of natural resources across all of Iraq, including the north, was virtually on hold for more than two decades.

FRACTIOUS LEADERSHIP

That's because a series of full-blown conflicts and internecine clashes preoccupied first Saddam Hussein and then the fractious leadership in Baghdad that followed his ouster by U.S. and U.K. coalition forces in 2003.

Since then, almost daily clashes in the south have pitted the Shiite majority that dominates Iraq politically today against the Sunni minority that held sway under Hussein. In the north, the population is overwhelmingly Sunni and relatively free of sectarian strife. In fact sheets for foreign investors, the KRG says that no coalition soldiers have been killed and no foreigners kidnapped in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Todd Kozel, chief executive officer of Hamilton, Bermuda-based Gulf Keystone Petroleum (GKP) Ltd., came to Iraqi Kurdistan three years after the 2003 invasion.

"If you were an oilman in 2006, with oil in your blood, you just had to be here," he says, sipping Johnnie Walker Black Label at the Divan.

HIGHLY REWARDED

Pittsburgh-born Kozel, 47, says he saw opportunity in a land where high risk would be highly rewarded. And it was. Since Gulf Keystone discovered oil at Iraqi Kurdistan's Shaikan field in 2009, its market value has grown to about 1 billion pounds (\$1.66 billion) from about 50 million pounds.

The first foreign exploration firm to come to Kurdistan -- in 2004 - - was Oslo-based DNO International ASA. (DNO) Chairman Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani says in his London office that DNO plans to increase output from its Tawke field to about 200,000 barrels a day this year from about 125,000 in 2013, showing how companies will hike production when their oil can be sold at higher world-market prices.

Former BP Plc (BP) CEO Tony Hayward came to Kurdistan after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico cost him his job as BP's chief executive -- in part because of a string of public relations fiascoes that included his saying "I would like my life back" to a group of reporters while touring an oil-slicked beach in Louisiana.

In 2011, Hayward joined forces with British financier Nathaniel Rothschild to acquire a Turkish firm already operating in



Photographed in London, Tony Hayward, the CEO who left the oil giant BP after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon rig explosion in the Gulf of Mexico, joined forces a year later with British financier Nathaniel Rothschild to acquire a Turkish firm already operating in Kurdistan. Photographer: Daniel Stier/Bloomberg Markets

Kurdistan. The firm, renamed Genel Energy Plc (GENL), says it's poised to raise production at Taq Taq and other fields to 70,000 barrels a day this year from 44,000 in 2013. On May 8, Hayward was named chairman of Glencore Xstrata Plc (GLEN), the mining company that is also one of the world's biggest crude traders.

'FRONTIER TYPES'

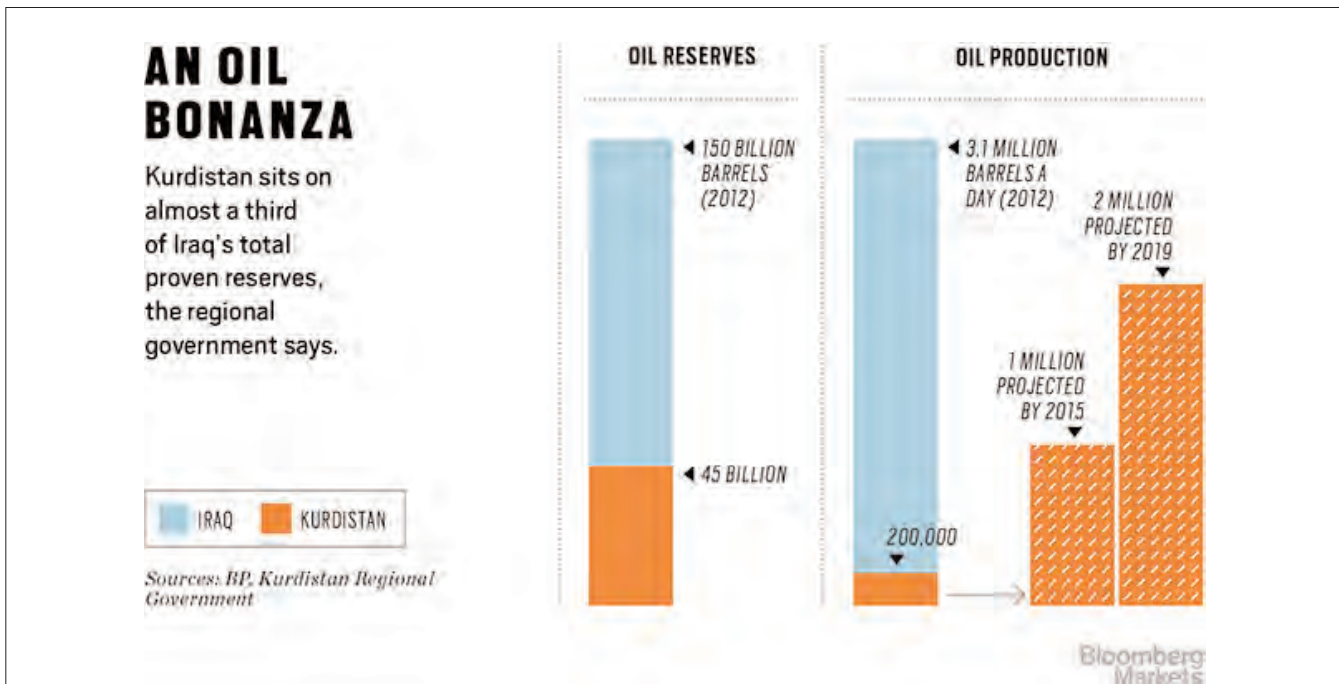
Since 2011, four big oil companies -- Chevron Corp., Exxon Mobil Corp., Hess Corp. and Total SA (FP) -- have followed 30 or so smaller players into Iraqi Kurdistan and signed exploration deals. Hayward, whose career straddles oil majors and minors, says the pattern is a familiar one.

"There are lots of entrants early on, the real frontier types," Hayward says in his London office. "Then the big guys arrive, and there's consolidation. If you're a little guy, you have to get there early."

The oil boom is transforming a part of Iraq that ethnic Kurds throughout the South Caucasus and Middle East consider their homeland. Unlike Kurdish enclaves in Iran, Turkey, Syria and Armenia, Iraqi Kurdistan is self-ruled, having gained autonomous status in a 1970 agreement with the central government in Baghdad.

CHANGING RELATIONS

Though it defers to the government on most external affairs such as treaties and membership in international organizations, the KRG has its own parliament, issues its own visas and has its own army, the Peshmerga, meaning "those who confront death" ►►



►► in Kurdish.

Oil is also changing relations between Iraqi Kurdistan and the central government in Baghdad. They've been tense for decades -- never more so than in the closing days of the war with Iran, when Hussein's forces launched a chemical attack on the Kurdish city of Halabja, killing as many as 5,000 people in retaliation for collusion between Kurdish and Iranian fighters.

In 1991, at the end of the first Gulf War, the U.S. and its allies established a safe haven in Iraqi Kurdistan enforced by a no-fly zone. While the no-fly zone effectively created a buffer between the Kurds and their masters in Baghdad, accelerating economic development in the north, the north-south dispute over oil carried on.

Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organization maintains that it has exclusive rights to the sale of Iraqi Kurdistan's oil, whether it flows through the new pipeline or through pipelines outside of Iraqi Kurdistan.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

In December, the KRG agreed to work with the central government in Baghdad in determining how to distribute revenue from Kurdistan oil exports, though a lot of questions remain unanswered, according to Sanford C. Bernstein & Co. in a note published on April 29.

"The resource base is too big for a solution not to be found," analysts led by Hong Kong-based Neil Beveridge wrote.

The new pipeline, fully in KRG territory, should make it easier for Kurdistan to overcome central government resistance and get its oil to market, says Gareth Stansfield, a senior associate at the Royal United Services Institute, a London-based research organization.

"If the Kurds are able to pump the amounts of oil they're promising, then this is a fundamental geopolitical game changer," Stansfield says. "It gives the Kurds economic independence from Baghdad."

'WASTING TIME'

Many Iraqi Kurds want more than that: Almost 60 percent of those surveyed supported statehood in a 2012 poll by the Kurdistan Institute for Political Issues.

"We're wasting our time trying to deal with Baghdad," says Davan Yahya Khalil, a Kurdish writer who grew up in an internment camp when Hussein was in power. "It's better to call for independence today."

Iraq ranks fifth in the world in proven oil reserves -- 150 billion barrels, according to the BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2013. The KRG says Kurdistan alone -- comprising less than a 10th of Iraqi territory -- holds 45 billion barrels. If the autonomous region were a country, its reserves would rank it 10th in the world, after Libya, according to BP.

While oil production has soared in the north, slower output in the war-torn south has kept Iraq-wide production low: Only in recent months has output reached 1979 levels of 3.62 million barrels a day, according to OPEC.

COMPLEX BUREAUCRACY

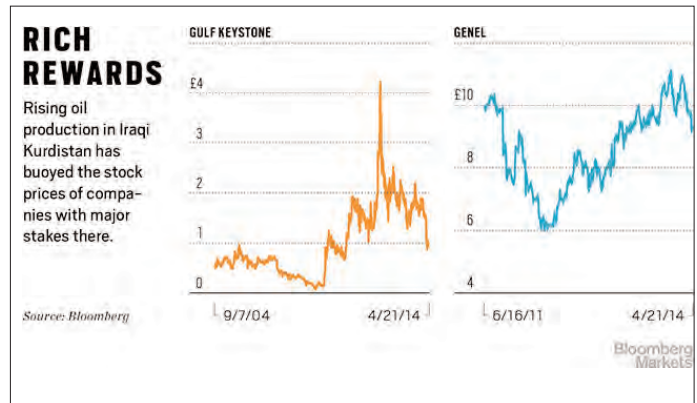
The hassles of dealing with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Baghdad government compound sluggish production in the south, says Paolo Scaroni, CEO of Eni SpA, Italy's biggest oil company. Eni is one of several large companies, including BP and Royal Dutch Shell Plc (RDSA), operating in the south.

"We're suffering from a lot of complex bureaucracy," Scaroni says.

Eni had planned to invest \$7 billion this year in developing its oil business in the south; it will end up spending only \$3 billion, he says.

In the north, it's a different story. Genel has been shipping crude to Turkey by truck, with 700 tankers rolling out of its Taq Taq field every day. With the new pipeline expected to be fully up and running later this year, the company says it's poised to take advantage of the new transportation capability by increasing production.

The KRG's Ministry of Natural Resources says its goal is to transport 300,000 barrels a day by the end of the year via the pipeline, shifting a sizable portion of exports away from tanker transport, not to mention pipelines controlled by the government in Baghdad.



'SAFE, SECURE'

Hayward, who visited southern Iraq as the head of BP from 2007 to 2010, says he was impressed by the contrast between Erbil and Baghdad when he first traveled to the north in 2011.

"The thing that really struck me was the amount of development that was taking place," Hayward says of Erbil. "It felt safe, secure and prosperous."

Oil is also helping to change the relationship between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Beginning in the 1980s, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, known by its Kurdish acronym, PKK, began an armed struggle against the Turkish government. Turkey was wary of Iraqi Kurdistan as a staging area for PKK paramilitaries seeking to establish an independent Kurdish nation in and around northern Iraq.

GENOCIDAL ATTACKS

In 2003, Turkey, though a NATO member, refused to allow U.S. troops to invade Iraq from the north through Turkish territory partly out of concern the invasion would, in toppling Hussein and a regime that had oppressed the Kurds, promote Kurdish independence movements. The PKK and the Turkish government agreed to a cease-fire in March 2013, easing tensions.

"Turkey's been a big help," Gulf Keystone's Kozel says. "All our drilling rigs come through there."

Iraqi Kurds -- fearing their enemies, distrustful of neighboring governments, victims of Hussein's genocidal attacks -- are used to doing whatever they can to determine their destiny, Hayward says.

"It's clear as the Kurds get more and more production and infrastructure, they're just going to do their own thing," he says. "As they like to say, 'We have no friends but the mountains.'"

Kurdistan has made Kozel a wealthy man. Gulf Keystone, which operates almost exclusively in Iraqi Kurdistan, has paid him a base salary of \$675,000 since 2008, with varying bonuses. By 2011, his total compensation had soared to \$22.2 million, according to company reports.

'BIGGEST RISK'

Relaxing in the Divan's piano bar on a February evening, Kozel, who started his first oil company when he was 21, reflects on how far he and Gulf Keystone have come.

"Our biggest risk when we entered here in 2006 was logistics," he says. "We imported literally every single thing we needed -- equipment, people, products."

He says it wasn't a gamble everybody was willing to take.

"I guess I was just a bit less risk averse than most," he says.

The same could be said for other investors who came early to this corner of Iraq -- and whose bets on Kurdistan are also paying off.

■ ■ ■



Iraq's Maliki wins at least 94 parliament seats in national election

By Ahmed Rasheed and Isra' al-Rube'ii

BAGHDAD - May 19, 2014

PRIME MINISTER Nouri Maliki won the largest share of Iraqi parliamentary seats in last month's national elections, dealing a blow to Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish rivals who opposed his serving a third term.

Preliminary results on Monday showed Maliki won at least 94 seats, far more than his two main Shi'ite rivals, the movement of Muqtada Sadr, which picked up 28 seats, and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), which won 29 seats.

The size of Maliki's victory, with 1,074,000 votes for his list in Baghdad alone, will make it much harder for any of his opponents to argue he is not the choice of the country's Shi'ite majority.

It is particularly important to him because his government is fighting a war with armed Sunni groups, including the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which holds territory in Syria and holds sway around central Iraq.

His supporters' celebratory gunfire was heard in central Baghdad late Monday afternoon.

Maliki picked up 92 seats on his formal State of Law bloc, and another two seats through minority candidates affiliated with him who ran their own campaigns.

Kurds gained a total of 62 parliament seats, while Sunnis won at least 33 seats between their two main coalitions. A secular bloc, headed by former prime minister Iyad Allawi, took 21 seats.

Final results are expected in the coming weeks after the electoral commission rules on complaints of voter fraud and irregularities. The federal court then certifies the results.

"Maliki's position is strong," said former national security adviser, Muwafak al Rubaie, a candidate on Maliki's political slate, who emphasized the prime minister's experience as commander in chief.

"Because of Syria and regional polarization, security will be very important for the next four years."

Maliki will now start a period of bargaining to see if he can bring on board his Shi'ite rivals, who have rejected his candidacy.

The government is formed as a package deal with the 328-member parliament approving the president by a two-thirds majority. He then asks the prime minister to form his cabinet. It could take anywhere from three months to the end of the year, one member of Maliki's list said.

If a two-thirds majority cannot be reached, political parties argue that the parliament could approve the president by a simple majority, ending any effort to block a new government from being formed.

Maliki's critics accuse him of leading the country to ruin. They say that four more years will turn the government into a despotic regime and risk Iraq's breakup.

They fault him for his prosecution of his war on ISIL in western Anbar province that has raged for five months, displaced over 420,000 Sunnis and failed to put a dent in violence around the country.

ISCI and the Sadrists have made clear they want a prime minister



chosen from within the Shi'ite majority - what they refer to as the National Alliance.

In the weeks since the April 30 election, as news leaked of Maliki's anticipated victory margin, ISCI and the Sadrists' best hope appeared to be pressuring the prime minister to choose a successor from his State of Law coalition.

But Monday's results make it highly unlikely Maliki will feel any need to step aside. Smaller Shi'ite parties, whom ISCI and the Sadrists sought to woo are already lining up behind the prime minister.

"The will of the voter imposes a certain reality on the ground," said Ammar Tuma, a leader of the Fadila (Virtue) party, which picked up six seats. "We have to respect the will of the people."

Maliki's Sunni and Kurdish rivals, who have indicated their readiness to stand with ISCI and the Sadrists against Maliki, are unsure if their potential Shi'ite allies will buckle.

"Things will change when negotiations begin," said one current Sunni lawmaker, speaking on condition of anonymity. "The National Alliance will choose him."

If ISCI and the Sadrists choose to break from their Shi'ite political partners, it is far from certain they could cobble together a ruling coalition with Sunnis and Kurds, who remain a fragmented opposition.

Despite a strained relationship, the Kurds are far from committed to pushing Maliki out. The president of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Masoud Barzani, criticized Maliki while speaking to Reuters last week, but cautioned the Kurds would wait to see the electoral results.

Barzani has stressed the Kurds would want as the price of their participation in any government iron-clad guarantees on the passage of a national oil law, a timeframe for resolving the status of disputed territories in northern Iraq, and a resolution to budget disputes.

Barzani has threatened the Kurds could boycott the national government and parliament if their demands are not met.

In private, some Kurdish officials say they are willing to accept Maliki for another four years, if it buys them time to advance their long-term dream of an independent Kurdistan. ●

How the Kurds Got Their Way

Economic Cooperation and the Middle East's New Borders

By Marina Ottaway and David Ottaway
From our May/June 2014 Issue
<http://www.foreignaffairs.com>

The surge of ethnic and sectarian strife in Syria and across the Middle East has led a number of analysts to predict the coming breakup of many Arab states. This potential upending of the region's territorial order has come to be known as "the end of Sykes-Picot," a reference to the secret 1916 Anglo-French agreement to divide up the Middle Eastern provinces of the Ottoman Empire into British and French zones of control. Because the European treaties that created new Arab states in the aftermath of World War I upheld the outlines of that agreement, Sykes-Picot became the convenient shorthand for the map that colonial powers imposed on the region, one that has remained essentially constant to the present day.

With bloodshed from Aleppo to Baghdad to Beirut, it is indeed tempting to predict the violent demise of Sykes-Picot. But although the worst fighting is spilling over borders and pushing some countries, such as Syria, toward fragmentation, there is another force crossing national lines and even realigning national relationships: trade. New transnational zones of economic cooperation are making Middle Eastern borders more porous, but in a way that does not directly challenge existing states. Instead, mutual economic interests, especially in the oil and gas industries, may signal a softer end to Sykes-Picot.

New transnational zones of economic cooperation are making Middle Eastern borders more porous.

This dynamic is most apparent along the border between Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan, where oil deals in recent years have directly challenged Baghdad's claims to exclusive control of Iraq's natural resources and where Turkish and Kurdish leaders have talked trade instead of war. Economic cooperation is emerging as an alternative to political violence elsewhere, too. Cyprus, Greece, and Turkey are discussing shared oil and gas pipelines despite their disagreements. So are Sudan and South Sudan, which have reluctantly accepted the need to cooperate in order



Traffic signs in Arabic, English, Kurdish, and Turkmen in Kirkuk, December 2, 2010. (Ako Rasheed / Courtesy Reuters)

to export both countries' oil after splitting apart in 2011. Economic cooperation is not a cure-all in any of these places. But it does allow states to come together in new ways rather than risk falling apart.

LINES IN THE SAND

The Arab states that emerged after World War I have always struggled with their heterogeneous populations, uncertain national identities, and deep internal fissures. They have existed for almost a century, and vested interests have developed around the preservation of their national borders and institutions. But ethnic, sectarian, and tribal divisions still linger, as conflicts in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, and Yemen so clearly demonstrate.

Those divisions are starkest in Syria, where Damascus has lost control over large swaths of its territory since civil war broke out following President Bashar al-Assad's brutal suppression of peaceful protests in March 2011. Syria's Kurds have declared their own autonomous region in the northeast. A number of radical Islamist groups fighting the government have seized much of the country's east and proclaimed their dreams of building a Sunni Islamist state, governed by Islamic law, that would control parts of Syria and Iraq. Some observers even speculate that the Alawites, the esoteric offshoot of Shiite Islam to which Assad belongs, will seek to develop their own rump state along the Mediterranean coast, under the protection of Hezbollah, Iran, and Russia, reviving a statelet that existed under the French mandate during the 1920s and 1930s.

Syria's Arab neighbors have problems of their own. Lebanon has remained bitterly divided along sectarian and religious lines ever since its brutal 1975–90 civil war. Iraq

was nearly torn apart by suicide bombings and sectarian militias after the 2003 U.S. invasion, and the violence has spiked recently, particularly in Anbar Province. Less dramatic but still important, Jordan maintains an uneasy balance between its native population and Palestinian refugees, the latter of which have long made up the majority of the country's population.

But something else is happening in Iraqi Kurdistan. This semiautonomous region has achieved new prosperity through cross-border economic cooperation, which other enclaves and even countries in the region could seek to emulate. Iraqi Kurdistan has enjoyed de facto self-government since 1991, when the United States imposed a no-fly zone in northern Iraq following the first Gulf War. That alone makes it an exception in the Middle East, along with its ethnic distinction from the rest of the Arab world. U.S. protection could have encouraged Kurdistan to declare its independence from Iraq, upsetting the existing territorial order. Instead, the Kurds chose to pursue their own economic interests within that order.

After the 2003 invasion, Iraqi Kurdistan welcomed the U.S. military occupation, and before long, it was a direct beneficiary. Iraq's new constitution, passed in 2005, confirmed Kurdistan's special status by creating a federal system that granted the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), based in the city of Erbil, a large degree of self-rule over the provinces of Dohuk, Erbil, and Sulaymaniyah. It also gave Iraq's 15 other provinces the option of attaining similar status. Yet despite the federal system enshrined in Iraq's constitution, Baghdad has still done everything it can to curb Kurdish autonomy and to prevent other provinces from demanding autonomy as well.

The bone of contention between Baghdad and Erbil is control over the region's oil and gas. Baghdad insists that all oil revenue must flow to the central government, which will then distribute it to Kurdistan's three provinces and Iraq's other provinces. On the basis of its population, Kurdistan is supposed to receive 17 percent of Iraq's total oil revenue. But the KRG contends that after Baghdad deducts payments to oil companies and Kurdistan's share of the country's expenses for national defense and foreign affairs, Kurdistan receives only 10–11 percent.

The KRG first sought financial

⇒

⇒ independence under Saddam Hussein, signing oil exploration contracts with small energy companies in 2002. But after the enactment of the new constitution, it pushed for deals with more urgency, even though it was unclear whether it had the legal authority to do so. The constitution states that the central government has exclusive control over existing oil fields, but it leaves vague who has jurisdiction over new ones. To this day, the central government asserts its rights over both old and new oil reserves; Erbil claims the right to sign contracts for any new fields in its territory.

The United States tried to settle the dispute between Baghdad and Erbil through a new national hydrocarbon law, but the two sides could not agree. Instead, in 2007, the Kurdish parliament passed its own law regulating oil and gas contracts in the region, permitting generous production-sharing deals with foreign companies.

Dozens of foreign companies, such as the Anglo-Turkish company Genel Energy, China's Addax Petroleum, France's Total, Norway's DNO, and Russia's Gazprom, rushed in to establish a stake in what Tony Hayward, the former CEO of BP, described in 2011 as "one of the last great oil and gas frontiers." By 2012, even major U.S. oil companies, such as Chevron and ExxonMobil, had sealed exploration and production agreements directly with Erbil, openly challenging Baghdad -- and the Obama administration, which, despite Washington's established support for Iraqi Kurdistan, has opposed the deals, fearing that oil disputes within Iraq could threaten the country's stability. Those major U.S. oil companies joined five smaller U.S. firms --

Iraqi Kurdistan will soon be earning enough from its oil exports to replace what it receives from Baghdad.

Hess, HKN, Hunt, Marathon, and Murphy - and over 40 companies from Canada, China, Norway, Russia, and various Arab and Asian countries in tapping into a Kurdish bonanza estimated by industry experts to amount to 45 billion barrels of oil and 99 trillion to 201 trillion cubic feet of gas.

Despite this windfall, the KRG still needed a way to get Kurdistan's oil and gas to the international market. Erbil could have pumped it through an existing pipeline -- northern Iraq's main crude oil export line, connecting the Iraqi city of Kirkuk with the Turkish port of Ceyhan, on the Mediterranean. But Baghdad controls the Iraqi side of that line and would therefore have controlled the oil revenue. So the KRG

decided instead to build a new pipeline, from the Taq Taq oil field, in central Kurdistan, to the Turkish border, where it would connect with the Ceyhan line -- a direct challenge to Baghdad's claim of sole control over Iraq's oil.

KURDISH BONANZA

The KRG could not go it alone, however; it needed the cooperation of its northern neighbor, Turkey. After some hesitation, the Turkish government agreed to allow the new Kurdish pipeline to link up to its Ceyhan line. But more important, Ankara also agreed to deposit Kurdish oil payments into a Kurdish bank account in Turkey, rather than into Iraq's national account in New York, where all other Iraqi oil payments go.

The Turkish government's support of the KRG's quest for financial independence was a surprising shift, since it had long opposed autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan as a dangerous precedent given Turkey's own large Kurdish population, which has ongoing, unsettled, and often violent disputes with Ankara. Turkey had also sought to maintain good relations with both Baghdad and Erbil, but the country needed new, cheap supplies of oil and gas for its rapidly growing economy. Turkey, as its energy minister, Taner Yildiz, said in an interview with an Iraqi Kurdish news agency last December, could not "sit idly by." Late last year, Kurdistan started shipping oil to Ceyhan, with plans to reach one million barrels a day by the end of 2015. Kurdistan, with its relative security and stability, also represented a far more favorable climate for Turkish businesses than did the rest of Iraq. By 2012, 70 percent of all trade and investment between the two countries was concentrated in Kurdistan, even though its population represents only one-sixth of Iraq's total.

Not surprisingly, the prospect of Iraqi Kurdistan exporting its own oil to Turkey sparked strong protests from Baghdad. Insisting that it recognized that the oil belonged to all Iraqis, as the constitution states, the KRG promised to pass 83 percent of the revenue on to Baghdad, in keeping with the current revenue-sharing formula developed as part of ongoing budget negotiations. But Kurdish authorities have also made clear that they will deduct from Baghdad's share the \$50 billion in arrears that they claim they are owed. Erbil has also threatened to deduct compensation for damages inflicted on Kurdistan by Saddam prior to 1991, which the KRG estimates at \$380 billion. The latter threat is mostly rhetorical; nevertheless, it is clear that Baghdad will not receive its entire 83 percent share anytime soon. The central government could of course retaliate by cutting off all oil payments to Kurdistan. But by the time Kurdish oil exports reach 450,000 barrels a day, perhaps as soon as the end of this year, Kurdistan will be earning enough to replace

what it receives from Baghdad, which was \$12 billion last year.

Undeterred by Baghdad's protests, Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey have continued striking deals and deepening their energy alliance. Last November, Kurdistan's prime minister, Nechirvan Barzani, and Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, announced new agreements for the construction of a second oil pipeline to carry Kurdish heavy crude to Ceyhan and a gas pipeline to supply power plants in Turkey. According to leaked reports, Turkey initially plans to buy 353 billion cubic feet of Kurdish gas a year -- and eventually twice that much.

GO YOUR OWN WAY

Cooperation between Ankara and the KRG represents a direct challenge to Baghdad's hopes of preserving a centrally controlled Iraq. The Kurdish-Turkish pipelines and energy agreements reflect a different vision for Iraq, characterized by strong regional autonomy and permeable boundaries. Of course, the KRG has not been pursuing its economic interests in a vacuum: Baghdad's demonstrated inability to use its oil revenue to reconstruct Iraq -- severe electricity shortages still plague most of the country -- helped push Erbil to go its own way.

Which vision prevails will have profound implications for the future of Iraq and the wider region. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's attempt to maintain central authority over Iraq's provinces has reignited ethnic and sectarian violence, which in turn has raised doubts about whether Iraq can hold itself together. Indeed, an effort by Baghdad to block Kurdish-Turkish cooperation could easily backfire, provoking the KRG to declare Kurdistan's independence.

Ultimately, neither side wants that outcome. Baghdad doesn't want to lose Kurdistan and its oil, and Kurdistan isn't ready to face the challenges of independence, including a short-term loss of oil revenue; damage to Kurdish relations with Turkey, which prefers to deal with a semiautonomous region rather than an independent Kurdish state; and a long, costly process of obtaining international recognition. But the standoff hasn't stopped Baghdad from raising the stakes, withholding funds allocated to Kurdistan in the national budget and threatening lawsuits against the KRG, the Turkish government, and any company helping export Kurdish oil without its permission. The Iraqi oil minister, Abdul-Kareem Luaibi, even told reporters in January that if Turkey facilitates the export of Kurdish oil, "it is meddling in the division of Iraq." For now, according to Yildiz, more than one million barrels of Kurdish oil sent to Ceyhan since December are being held in storage there until the dispute can be resolved. Time appears to be on the KRG's side, ⇒

⇒ however. Oil and gas will eventually find their way to market; after all, foreign companies have been drilling in Kurdistan for years without Iraq's consent.

If Baghdad eventually accepts Kurdistan's growing financial autonomy and economic cooperation with Turkey, it would amount to a nonviolent but significant weakening of the old Sykes-Picot order. Although the central government would still control much of Iraq's oil, it would in effect be conceding the fact that a centralized state with rigid borders no longer reflects current economic and political realities. By attracting more foreign investment and exporting more oil and gas, Iraqi Kurdistan would, over time, drift further away from Baghdad.

Baghdad, of course, has good reasons to fear that outcome. Not only does it risk losing control over Kurdish oil, but a thriving, autonomous Kurdistan with close links to foreign states could also become a model for other Iraqi provinces that are unhappy with the central government's corrupt and authoritarian rule and interested in controlling their own hydrocarbon resources.

Take Nineveh, a northern, Sunni Arab-majority province just west of Erbil. Like most Sunnis, Nineveh's leaders initially opposed Kurdish autonomy, which they saw as a first step toward national breakup. But the prospect of oil discoveries in their province and the example of Kurdistan are changing their view. Nineveh's governor, Atheel al-Nujaifi, has spent several years fighting the central government to obtain funds earmarked for his province that are stuck in Baghdad's bureaucratic maze. Nujaifi would welcome an independent source of revenue. In October 2011, when ExxonMobil signed exploration contracts with the KRG for six oil fields in Kurdistan, two of which are located in a disputed border area with Nineveh, Nujaifi immediately denounced the deal. By June 2012, however, he had changed his tune, arguing that Nineveh should talk directly to ExxonMobil and the KRG about joint exploitation of oil in the contested territory. Nujaifi also argued that Nineveh should follow the lead of its Kurdish neighbors and transform itself into a semiautonomous federal region. Despite a provincial council's vote earlier this year in favor of this change, Baghdad has blocked the process.

Several other Shiite and Sunni provinces are also considering steps toward autonomy. Shiite-dominated Basra Province, the center of Iraqi oil production, with an estimated 60 percent of the country's 141 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, has sought to break away from Baghdad since 2008; its provincial council has voted numerous times to press the issue. Anbar, Diyala, and Salahuddin, all Sunni-majority provinces, voted to declare their autonomy from Baghdad in late 2011 and early 2012, but Maliki rejected the calls.

Altogether, nearly half of Iraq's 18 provinces are either already semiautonomous, such as the Kurdish ones, or mulling plans for semi-autonomy of their own, in line with the Iraqi constitution.

THE PRIZE

The emergence of transnational zones of economic cooperation as an alternative to state disintegration is not limited to Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey. As part of Erdogan's vaunted "zero problems with neighbors" policy, which has taken a hit in recent years (along with the prime minister's political standing), Turkey's favorite diplomatic tool has been free trade. Before the 2011 uprising in Syria, Turkey had opened up its border with its southern neighbor, which runs from Syria's Alawite-dominated Mediterranean coast to its Kurdish northeast. Turkish border towns became shopping centers for Syrians living within driving range of them and transit hubs for Turkish trucks carrying goods to the Gulf. Turkey lifted visa requirements for Jordanian, Lebanese, Moroccan, and Tunisian nationals, and the Turkish and Syrian cabinets held a few joint meetings. Ankara even lined up agreements to set up an ambitious free-trade zone with Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

Critics dubbed this policy "neo-Ottomanism," a veiled attempt by Turkey to restore its old dominance in the Middle East. There was indeed a measure of imperial arrogance to the Turkish plans, and self-interest and a desire for cheap energy have driven Ankara's policy toward Iraqi Kurdistan. Yet that policy is also a response to the violent ethnic and sectarian forces threatening to destabilize Arab states, where, despite nearly a century of institutionalized borders and national identities, such divisions have never completely gone away.

Even with those hostilities, ethnic and sectarian enclaves could still mimic Iraqi Kurdistan's solution, seeking autonomy and cooperation within a wider economic zone while remaining nominally within the old national borders. War-torn Syria could follow this model, whenever the fighting stops and Syrians begin to consider how they will live together again. The likelihood of restoring the old, highly centralized Baathist state seems slim, given the pockets of control rebels have established across the country. But the consequences of Syria splintering into nonviable statelets would be dismal. A more promising, federal formula, based on the better parts of Iraq's constitution, would embrace some kind of autonomy for Kurds in the north, Sunnis in the east, and Alawites along the coast, all of them merged into a cooperative regional economy.

This kind of solution, based on economic cooperation, could also provide a way out of other conflicts in the eastern Mediterranean and North Africa. After decades of failed

attempts to resolve disputes between Greece and Turkey over the divided island of Cyprus, signs of hope emerged in 2011 with the discovery of a huge natural gas field in southern Cypriot waters. The cheapest export route would carry the gas through a pipeline from the island's Greek Cypriot south to its Turkish-administered north, where it would continue on to Turkey and connect with the recently approved Trans-Adriatic Pipeline, which will run through Greece and Albania to Italy. Although Greek Cypriot and Turkish officials are still only discussing the possibility of the Cyprus pipeline, Greece and Turkey are already working together on the Adriatic pipeline despite their long-standing feud over Cyprus, among other issues.

Meanwhile, relations between Sudan and South Sudan remain acrimonious in the aftermath of South Sudan's independence in 2011 following more than 20 years of civil war -- but the neighbors will have to cooperate over their sizable oil reserves sooner or later. Three-quarters of the two countries' oil comes from landlocked South Sudan, which depends on Sudan's pipeline to Port Sudan for export. Unwilling to pay Sudan's high transit fees, however, South Sudan stopped oil production in January 2012, inflicting enormous economic harm on both countries. But last September, common sense prevailed: the two sides compromised, allowing South Sudanese oil exports to resume and opening up their shared border to the free passage of people and trade.

It is impossible to predict the long-term outcome of the forces threatening the Middle East's regional order. States wracked by war and infighting, such as Syria, could in fact break up. And states that pursue a cooperative economic agenda aren't guaranteed success: trade policies and efforts at economic cooperation could fall victim to the same nationalist forces that have driven Arab politics for decades. But the promise of economic associations across borders could limit the possibility of both the restoration of centralized, authoritarian states and states' violent fragmentation into smaller ethnic or sectarian enclaves.

The United States, for its part, should recognize this new prospect. Washington fears that upsetting the existing territorial order would only breed more conflict and chaos. Although there are good reasons to be alarmed by the nightmare in Syria, trying to prevent territorial change may only encourage more fragmentation -- just the outcome the United States is seeking to avoid. But the oil now traveling across the Kurdish-Turkish frontier represents an alternative: forging new economic zones that straddle borders and transcend old hostilities. □

MARINA OTTAWAY AND DAVID OTTAWAY are Senior Scholars at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, in Washington, D.C.

Victoire électorale étroite pour le premier ministre irakien, Nouri Al-Maliki

Le parti du chef du gouvernement se prépare à de longues tractations en vue d'une coalition

Victoire en demi-teinte pour le chiite Nouri Al-Maliki. Selon les résultats provisoires des élections législatives irakiennes de la fin avril, publiés lundi 19 mai par la commission électorale, le premier ministre sortant peut espérer décrocher un troisième mandat d'affilée. Crédité de 92 sièges, l'Etat de droit, la coalition qu'il dirige, distance largement ses principaux concurrents. Tant du côté chiite – où le parti Ahrar, du tribun Moqtada Al-Sadr, n'obtient que 34 mandats – que du côté sunnite, où la formation arrivée en tête, celle du président du Parlement, Oussama Al-Nujaifi, doit se contenter de 23 sièges.

Avec seulement trois sièges de plus qu'en 2010 – époque où les tractations sur la formation du gouvernement avaient duré neuf mois –, Nouri Al-Maliki va devoir cependant jouer serré. Son score est loin des prédictions de son entourage, qui tablait sur environ 110 sièges. Contrairement à ce qu'il a martelé durant la campagne, le chef du gouvernement ne pourra se maintenir au pouvoir

sans former une large coalition. Pour ce faire, il devra rassembler toutes les formations chiites, mais aussi s'attirer aussi le soutien de partis sunnites, voire kurdes.

Or la plupart de ses adversaires ont juré de faire barrage à sa reconduction au poste de premier ministre. Cette position est partagée aussi bien par Moqtada Al-Sadr que par Massoud Barzani, le président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, l'ex-premier ministre Iyad Allaoui, crédité de 21 sièges, et même Ammar Al-Hakim, un dignitaire religieux chiite, proche de l'Iran, dont la formation n'a obtenu que 29 sièges alors qu'il en espérait une quarantaine.

Tous rejettent sur Nouri Al-Maliki la responsabilité de la flambée de violence des derniers mois, qu'ils imputent à sa pratique du pouvoir, jugée sectaire et autoritaire. Même si les observateurs étrangers jugent l'hypothèse d'une fraude massive improbable, certains déçus de l'élection, comme Ammar Al-Hakim, accusent le premier ministre d'avoir manipulé les résultats. Pour tous ces politiciens,

un troisième mandat de M. Maliki, au pouvoir depuis 2006, préfigure un retour à la dictature.

Ce front anti-Maliki, très disparate, risque d'avoir les plus grandes difficultés à faire émerger en son sein un candidat au poste de premier ministre. Il peut en revanche exiger, pour prix de son ralliement, que l'Etat de droit désigne un candidat autre que M. Maliki. Plusieurs noms de compromis circulent, comme ceux de Tarek

Najem, le directeur de cabinet du premier ministre, ou Khaled Al-Attayah, le vice-président du Parlement, un sadriste rallié.

Tout porte donc à penser que les négociations post-élections vont une nouvelle fois s'éterniser. Pour contrer les manœuvres visant à l'évincer, M. Maliki pourra faire valoir son très bon score personnel. 721 000 suffrages se sont portés sur son nom à Bagdad, le plus gros résultat au niveau national.

La reprise des attentats et des attaques contre les forces de sécurité, qui ont fait 3 500 morts depuis le début de l'année, n'a pas entamé le crédit du premier ministre auprès de l'électorat chiite. Celui-ci continue à le considérer comme un homme à poigne, seul à même de contrer le soulèvement sunnite de 2013, qui a débouché sur la prise de la ville de Fallouja, dans la province de l'Anbar, par des milices tribales et djihadistes. Autre atout dans la poche de M. Maliki, le soutien que lui ont accordé jusque-là Téhéran et Washington. Engagés dans de rugueuses négociations sur le dossier du nucléaire iranien, la Républi-

Pour ses adversaires, un troisième mandat de M. Maliki, au pouvoir depuis 2006, préfigure un retour à la dictature

que islamique et les Etats-Unis pourraient avoir intérêt à privilégier une solution de continuité.

Mais la situation sur le terrain pourrait troubler les calculs des uns et des autres. Handicapés par l'éparpillement de leurs listes et les violences dans l'Anbar qui ont empêché certains d'entre eux de voter, les sunnites sortent affaiblis du scrutin. La piètre performance de leurs représentants pourrait gonfler les rangs des radicaux, notamment l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant, une milice djihadiste. « Les prochains mois en Irak risquent d'être difficiles parce que beaucoup de gens ont perdu l'espoir d'un véritable changement », affirme le député sunnite Raad Al-Dahlaki, cité par l'agence AP.

Du côté du Kurdistan, des remous sont aussi à redouter. Durant la campagne, M. Barzani n'a cessé de déclarer que le parti kurde qui ferait alliance avec M. Maliki serait un traître à la cause. Selon le quotidien irakien *Al-Alam*, les partis kurdes se sont mis d'accord pour briguer l'indépendance si le premier ministre conserve son poste. ■

B. BA.



19 mai 2014

Le conflit en Syrie a fait plus de 162 000 morts

www.liberation.fr

Plus de 162 000 personnes ont été tuées en Syrie depuis le début du conflit en mars 2011, selon un nouveau bilan fourni lundi 19 mai par l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). Un précédent bilan de l'OSDH, communiqué début avril, faisait état de 150 000 morts. Cette organisation, dont le siège est situé au Royaume-Uni, s'appuie sur un vaste réseau de militants et de sources médicales et militaires. Dans son bilan, elle fait état exactement de 162 402 morts, dont plus de 53 978 civils, parmi lesquels 8 607 enfants.

Plus de 60 000 combattants loyalistes tués depuis 2011

Selon l'OSDH, les violences ont tué 42 701 combattants de l'opposition, dont plus de 13 500 jihadistes du Front Al-Nosra et de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EiIL). En face, 61 170 membres des forces du régime sont morts, dont 37 685 soldats et 23 485 militaires.

Le conflit en Syrie a débuté en mars 2011 avec une révolte populaire pacifique contre le régime de Bachar Al-Assad, qui s'est heurtée à une répression sanglante et s'est progressivement militarisée. Cette guerre d'usure, qui



Des Syriens aident une femme blessée lors de combats à Alep, le 18 mai 2014. Des Syriens aident une femme blessée lors de combats à Alep, le 18 mai 2014. (TAMER AL-HALABI / ALEPPO MEDIA CENTRE / AFP)

est entrée dans sa quatrième année sans qu'aucun belligérant ne prenne véritablement le dessus sur le terrain, a par ailleurs fait plus de neuf millions de réfugiés et de déplacés. Soit près de la moitié de la population syrienne. ♦



INTERNATIONAL | CHRONIQUE

PAR ALAIN FRACHON

L'Iran et le martyr de la Syrie

**AU MÊME
MOMENT,
L'IRAN JOUE
À VIENNE
UNE AUTRE
PARTIE, PLUS
DIPLOMA-
TIQUE**

Combien de crimes de guerre par semaine en Syrie ? Chaque fois qu'un hélicoptère du régime de Bachar Al-Assad lâche un baril d'explosifs sur une école, un hôpital, un immeuble d'habitation ? Chaque fois qu'un chasseur bombardier tire un missile en pleine ville ? Chaque fois qu'un groupe de rebelles islamistes assassine – quelque fois par crucifixion –, enlève, torture ?

L'attention médiatique oscille au gré de l'actualité. La tragédie syrienne se poursuit au fil des massacres. Sur les 23 millions de Syriens que compte le pays, près de 10 millions sont réfugiés ; en trois ans de guerre, on compte de 150 000 à 160 000 morts. Bachar Al-Assad « a réussi le tour de force de dépasser en nombre de tués ceux déplorés lors de toutes les guerres israélo-arabes, tous camps confondus », note le politologue Frédéric Encel.

Entre le régime et ses opposants, ce n'est plus le statu quo. L'équilibre des forces commencerait à pencher en faveur de Damas. Le pouvoir central reprend lentement le contrôle de l'ouest du pays. Assad s'appête à se faire « réélire » à la présidence début juin – imposture endossée par son protecteur russe. Ce tournant en faveur du régime n'aurait pas été possible sans le pays qui tient le rôle-clé dans le drame syrien : l'Iran.

La République islamique est le maître d'œuvre de l'évolution en cours. Elle encadre les forces syriennes. C'est elle qui a donné l'ordre aux troupes aguerries du Hezbollah libanais d'entrer dans la bataille. Elle aussi, du fait des liens qu'elle entretient avec le gouvernement de Bagdad, qui a sollicité les milices chiites irakiennes pour qu'elles se joignent aux combats. Elle, enfin, qui appuie financièrement le régime de Damas – à coups de milliards de dollars, alors que l'économie iranienne peine sous le poids des sanctions.

Au même moment, l'Iran joue une autre partie, plus diplomatique, mais qui pourrait ne pas être sans lien avec la Syrie. Une nouvelle série de conversations vient de s'achever à Vienne dans la négociation sur le programme nucléaire de Téhéran.

Les cinq membres permanents du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU (Chine, Etats-Unis, Royaume-Uni, France, Russie) plus l'Allemagne veulent rééquilibrer le projet nucléaire iranien. Objectif : empêcher la République islamique de se doter de l'arme atomique. En contrepartie, l'Iran veut la levée de sanctions prises pour ses violations répétées du traité de non-prolifération nucléaire.

Les nouvelles du front viennois sont mauvaises : peu de progrès, sinon pas du tout. Les deux camps devraient se retrouver mi-juin. Idéalement, ils souhaitent arriver à un accord le 20 juillet. Dans cette affaire, le diable n'est pas seulement dans les détails, il est partout.

La négociation s'articule autour d'une proposition centrale : en échange de la possibilité d'enrichir de l'uranium à des doses (5 %) et dans des quantités limitées, sous strict contrôle international, Téhéran doit abandonner ou sérieusement reconfigurer toutes ses installations – toutes. Cette seule équation, selon les Occidentaux, permet de garantir que l'Iran ne prend pas le chemin de l'arme nucléaire.

Un « régime à deux têtes »

Les Occidentaux sont unis. Chinois et Russes ne se désolidarisent pas de l'approche occidentale. Le délégué iranien, le ministre des affaires étrangères, Mohammad Javad Zarif, entretient une atmosphère plaisante, dit un familier de la négociation. Mais il ne bouge pas. Il fait du surplace sur chacun des sujets les plus litigieux.

Pour des raisons diamétralement opposées, deux groupes sont hostiles à l'accord. D'un côté, main dans la main, une bonne partie du Congrès américain et l'actuel gouvernement d'Israël : ils ne font pas confiance à l'Iran. De l'autre, les durs de la République islamique, gardiens de la révolution et nucléocrates, plutôt proches du Guide, l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei : ils ne font pas confiance aux Etats-Unis.

La question qui se pose à Vienne est de savoir quel Iran est à la table de négociation. L'ADN de la République islamique est compliqué, au moins autant que ses institutions. Il y a la sensibilité nationaliste, pour laquelle le nucléaire est une question de statut : l'Iran veut sortir de son régime de paria, se libérer des sanctions, normaliser ses relations avec les Etats-Unis, participer à l'économie globale. En caricaturant sûrement, on se risquera à dire que le président Hassan Rohani représente cette famille de la direction iranienne.

Il y a l'autre, celle qui entretient – par conviction ou pour des raisons matérielles – la fibre révolutionnaire originelle : l'Iran est le chef de file de l'islam chiite radical. Ambition messianique assumée, au prix de souffrances économiques, il a vocation à être la puissance prépondérante au Proche-Orient et à s'opposer aux alliés des Etats-Unis dans la région. Cet Iran-là est plus expansionniste qu'en quête de reconnaissance.

C'est celui qu'incarne Yahya Rahim Safavi, principal conseiller militaire de Khamenei. Cité dans le *Financial Times* (14 mai), Safavi proclame la « victoire » de l'Iran en Syrie, et assure que la « ligne de défense avancée » de la République islamique se trouve au sud du Liban, à la frontière avec Israël ! Par Hezbollah interposé, l'Iran de Safavi prend des points d'appui au Liban et en Syrie. Il n'a que faire des pourparlers de Vienne et encore moins de ce qui arrive au peuple syrien.

Conclusion peu rassurante : la prolongation du martyr de la Syrie dépend largement des jeux de pouvoir à Téhéran. ■



22 May 2014

PYD Leader: Our Fighters are a Bastion Against Jihadist Threat to Europe

By Harvey Morris
22 May 2014
rudaw.net

LONDON – Kurdish fighters in Syria represent a bastion against foreign jihadists who pose a future threat to Europe, according to the leader of the dominant Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Rojava.

Salih Muslim, the PYD co-chairman, was speaking in London as part of a visit in which he was seeking to drum up support for the self-declared autonomous zones that have been set up in the Kurdish regions of Syria.

“We are fighting these Salafists, who mostly don’t accept Kurdish existence,” Muslim told the Kurdish Society at London University’s School of Oriental and African Studies on Wednesday. “We have no alternative because otherwise there would be a vacuum in which the Salafists would control everything.”

The PYD leader acknowledged, however, that he was struggling to get the message across to European governments despite his warning that European Muslims recruited into jihadist groups could return from Syria to threaten their home countries.

“If they beat us, what will

happen? They will come to Europe,” said Muslim, whose son, Shervan, was killed last year in a clash between Kurdish fighters and al-Qaeda-linked jihadists. “No one is listening to us, but we continue knocking at the door. For now, our only support is from Kurds in the diaspora.”

He said he had requested meetings with, among others, the British Foreign Office.

The PYD leader’s warnings matched concerns expressed by officials in Europe and the US about the potential jihadist threat.

France and Britain are among European countries that have taken action to try to deter their young Muslims from going to fight in Syria. Concerns about the phenomenon of so-called “citizen jihadists” has also been raised by Belgian, Dutch and German authorities.

However, these concerns have not translated into Western support for the PYD-led autonomy project in Rojava, where the military wing of the movement has been involved in clashes with jihadist groups that include the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS).

Western governments, on good terms with Turkey and the Kurdistan Regional Government, have tended to regard the PYD as



Leader of Democratic Union Party (PYD), Salih Muslim.
Photo: AFP

a doctrinaire spinoff from the militant Kurdistan Workers’ Party. It is also viewed with suspicion because of its alleged continued cooperation with the Bashar al-Assad regime.

Muslim downplayed the PYD’s dominant role in Rojava and said the democratic project there involved other parties, as well as representatives of local Arabs and other minorities in the overwhelmingly Kurdish cantons.

“What we are establishing in our area is part of the future Syria,” he said. “We consider it a model for all the Middle East.”

He rejected the claims of PYD cooperation with the regime. However, he said the movement had rejected requests from other opposition movements, including Islamists, before the start of the three-year-old civil war to mount an armed rebellion against Damascus.

“We were already in a strug-

gle (with the regime) and so knew the realities,” he said. “We were not prepared to be soldiers in somebody else’s fight.”

Muslim acknowledged the support of ordinary people in the Kurdistan Region who had helped their Syrian brethren but he was critical of the role of Massoud Barzani’s Kurdistan Democratic Party, with which he was once allied.

He claimed the KDP’s economic links with Turkey were forcing it to pursue Ankara’s policy in the region. He accused the KDP of dispatching intelligence agents to Rojava to undermine the autonomous regime there.

Muslim said he was not opposed to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq having relations with Turkey, but “we are afraid of any agreements that are against other sectors of the Kurds.” ■

Iraqi Kurdistan defies Baghdad to load first pipeline oil sale



May 22, 2014
By Orhan Coskun and Humeyra Pamuk (Reuters)

- Move likely to infuriate Iraqi government in Baghdad
- First 1 million barrel cargo being loaded at Ceyhan, Turkey
- Tanker scheduled to sail later on Thursday, buyer not identified (Adds SOMO reaction, background)

ANKARA/ISTANBUL, - Iraqi Kurdistan started loading oil from its new pipeline for shipment from a Turkish port on

Thursday, defying the Baghdad government, which claims sole authority over Iraqi crude and declares any independently sold oil as 'smuggled'.

The cargo of 1 million barrels of crude oil was being loaded on a tanker in the Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz told Reuters on Thursday.

"Loading will be completed today," Yildiz said, declining to name the buyer.

The sale is likely to infuriate Baghdad, which has been at loggerheads with the autonomous Kurdish region over the sharing of oil revenues, and denounced Turkey's courtship of the Kurds, warning that steps towards Kurdish economic independence could threaten Iraq's sovereignty.

Baghdad has cut the region's share of the budget to punish it for →

⇒ building the new pipeline, and oil sales can provide the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) with desperately needed independent income.

Flows through the pipeline started last December, but Ankara had pledged it would wait for Baghdad and Arbil to resolve their differences before allowing independent oil exports.

After five months of talks and little progress, however, tanks at Ceyhan are now full with 2.5 million barrels of Kurdish oil, and Turkey decided there was no point in further obstructing exports, sources familiar with the sale said.

In late 2013, Iraq's Oil Ministry instructed a U.S. law firm to pursue legal action against any buyer of Kurdish oil.

Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organization (SOMO) issued a statement late on Thursday calling the loading of oil from Ceyhan "an illegitimate deed of the Turkish authorities".

It said that both the Oil Ministry and SOMO "reserve the right to take all legal measures against any company or entity" that loaded Iraqi crude from Ceyhan without Baghdad's approval.

Officials in Arbil could not immediately be reached for comment.

CRUDE FLOW CONTINUES

An official at the GAC shipping agency in Turkey confirmed that a tanker named United Leadership was loading piped Kurdish oil. Reuters AIS Live ship tracking showed the tanker had arrived in Ceyhan around May 20 and was berthed there.

Flows through the KRG oil pipeline have increased since early March while Iraq's federal oil pipeline, from the northern Kirkuk fields to Ceyhan, has been down, an industry source said. That freed up Turkish capacity to handle the Kurdish flows.

"Because the Kirkuk line was not working, KRG was able to pump around 100,000 barrels per day (bpd) at times, which filled up the storage tanks quickly," the source said.

KRG's new oil pipeline connects to the existing Iraqi federal pipeline on the Turkish border.

The industry source said the flow in the KRG pipeline continued as the export cargo was being loaded in Ceyhan.

Another source said the payments for the exports were likely to be deposited with Turkey's Halkbank.

Iraqi Kurdistan began selling its oil independently of the federal government in 2012, transporting a small trickle of condensate and then, in 2013, small quantities of crude through Turkey by truck.

A Turkish company called Powertrans has acted as broker for the Kurdish government, selling the oil via tenders to traders.

Last week, Reuters reported that Israeli and U.S. oil refineries had imported small cargoes of crude oil from the region.

The sales may have immediate political consequences as Iraq's incumbent prime minister, Nuri al-Maliki, looks for partners to form the next government after preliminary results from the April 30 election were announced last Monday. ●

TODAYS ZAMAN May 22, 2014



ORHAN MİROĞLU
o.miroglu@todayszaman.com
May 22, 2014

Disagreements between pro-Kurdish groups

The raids in the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)-affiliated institutions and units in Arbil caused tension.

Most of those who were detained were released; but that this operation was carried out by the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) shows that some pro-Kurdish parties and groups affiliated with the PKK and the Democratic Union Party (PYD), including the Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PÇDK) based in Arbil, will not be able to perform their activities very comfortably and that their activities and operations will be strictly supervised and controlled by the government. However, until recently, there was no obstacle to the operations and activities of the PYD and the PKK in the region. In addition, KRG leader Masoud Barzani used to encourage meetings between the PYD and other Syrian pro-Kurdish parties in northern Iraq to devise a common pan-Kurdish strategy in Syria. Salih Muslim and other PYD figures were allowed to travel to Arbil, from where they also used to take flights to Europe. There were also promising discussions on unity and an alliance between the Kurds. The parties were even considering organizing a pan-Kurdish conference to be hosted by Barzani.

Then this process was replaced by

disagreements and clashes. Salih Muslim was banned from traveling to Arbil. Physical barriers were built to prevent travel from Syria to the KRG. So what happened that the world and the Kurdish public now discuss the possibility of a clash between different pro-Kurdish groups? A look at Arbil and Sulaymaniyah reveals that there is an indirect agreement and consensus among Kurdish groups to alienate the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). What is the reason for this state of disagreement and potential clash, despite the fact that the PKK and the PYD failed to gain any kind of noteworthy result in the KRG and Iraqi elections? The confrontation between the PKK and the KDP in Syria is the primary reason for this change. Secondly, the Iran factor should be considered. Recent reports indicate that Iranian influence is growing in Sulaymaniyah, where the KDP received only 10 percent of the vote. Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and Nawshirwan Mustafa's Movement for Change (Gorran) view the KDP as their political rival.

Gorran came second in the election

race. To form a new government, the KDP and Gorran need to make an agreement. But apparently, there is no such an agreement yet. Gorran wants an important ministry; but the KDP does not intend to hand the Pashmarga (armed Kurdish fighters) Ministry to another party. The KDP represents a conservative-democrat political orientation whereas its rivals PKK/PYD, Gorran and the PUK are closer to a leftist-secular persuasion. Thousands of people died in conflicts between KDP-YNK and KDP-PKK in the 1990s.

Before invading Iraq, the US pursued a strategy of peace between the KDP and the PUK; and these two pro-Kurdish parties agreed to a peace ending the conflicts. In the aftermath, two different models of administration emerged in Sulaymaniyah and Arbil. However, this setting was replaced by a joint government and administration based in Arbil after the 2003 invasion. Now it appears that the KDP and the PKK still have their bitter confrontation after two decades.

The following questions could be asked:

Will the pro-Kurdish parties that have never experienced any disagreement over the past two decades clash and will this end the domestic peace among the Kurds?

Will international actors take action to deal with this problem and to prevent such a conflict? Or will Western actors remain bystanders to a possible conflict?

Will the Kurdish civil society and Kurdish intellectuals be able to prevent a conflict between the KDP and the PKK that the Kurdish people do not want?

I will discuss these questions tomorrow.

□□□

As Al Maliki struggles to find support, Kurds seek an exit

Hussein Ibish

May 24, 2014

www.thenational.ae

Although his party won the most seats in the recent Iraqi parliamentary election, it's not easy to see how Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki can form a new governing coalition. And while attention is focused on developments in Baghdad, particularly the dynamics of a bitter inter-Shiite power struggle, events in the Kurdish north may have a more significant long-term impact.

Mr Al Maliki's coalition has 95 seats, but 174 votes are needed to secure a majority. Where the other 79 are going to come from is distinctly unclear as Mr Al Maliki faces stiff opposition, not only from Kurdish and Sunni parties, but also from within the Shiite community.

To form a governing alliance with the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq and the Sadrist Ahrar group – which are working in close cooperation with each other and could add 65 of the required extra votes, thereby bringing Mr Al Maliki in easy reach of a majority – the current prime minister would have to make some very significant concessions. His Shiite rivals are reportedly demanding the re-establishment of the defunct National Alliance, and in effect conditioning their cooperation with him on a relationship of equality in the government.

The trouble for Mr Al Maliki, though, is that his increasing political vulnerability appears to have created a zero-sum equation with competing Shiite groups. They resent him and sense an opportunity to cut him down to size. However, they, too, face the same dilemma: how to get to a 174 majority with even fewer seats than he has?

Mr Al Maliki knew this all along, and has been hoping to build a new governing coalition around an alliance with Kurdish parties, in particular the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Masoud Barzani. Mr Barzani has, in recent years, been emerging as not only the key Kurdish leader in Iraq, but regionally as well. And when it comes to Mr Al Maliki, he is playing distinctly hard to get. Indeed, both sides in the Iraqi Shiite divide are courting Kurdish support against each other.

In a recent visit to London designed to



Nouri Al Maliki faces stiff opposition not only from Kurdish and Sunni parties, but also from within the Shiite community.
Khalid Mohammed / AP Photo

bolster Mr Barzani's international credentials – and therefore, by implication, the KRG's global diplomatic profile and prospects for eventual independence – the Kurdish leader launched a blistering attack on Mr Al Maliki. "The authorities in Baghdad want to control everything," Mr Barzani complained. "It is not acceptable to us. We want to be partners; we don't want to be subjects." He described Mr Al Maliki's governing style as "totalitarianism". Mr Barzani even threatened to "boycott everything" to do with national governance in Iraq.

Erbil has several significant grievances against Baghdad in general and Mr Al Maliki in particular. The Kurds feel let down by Mr Al Maliki on the resolution of "disputed territories" especially the flash-point city of Kirkuk. Along with many Iraqi Sunnis, Kurds have also been highly critical of the government crackdown in Anbar province.

But disputes over oil contracts and revenue-sharing are almost certainly the greatest fault line. With negotiations over a new mechanism for managing the KRG's energy resources and 17 per cent share of Iraq's national income at a total impasse, Baghdad has effectively frozen the capital transfers on which Erbil's budget is deeply dependent. An enraged Mr Barzani said the withholding of this money is "as bad as the gassing of Halabja [by Saddam Hussein] – if not worse".

Kurdish deeds have been even stronger than this hyperbolic rhetoric. Throughout 2013, the KRG worked with the Turkish government and companies in a series of unilateral agreements and contracts that theoretically required, but did not receive,

the approval of the authorities in Baghdad. And last week the Iraqi Kurds began independently exporting petroleum through Turkey's Ceyhan port via a makeshift pipeline that became practically operational last December.

Both sides accuse each other of violating the law and the constitution through these actions. But the Kurds are doing more than simply making a point. Now that they have crossed the Rubicon of unilateral, independent oil marketing and exporting, there's likely to be no turning back, no matter what political and financial agreements are reached with Arab Iraqi leaders in Baghdad. This, of course, is why Erbil waited half a year after it became technically possible before taking this momentous step.

Mr Al Maliki's best bet for staying in the premiership may actually be striking a deal with Kurdish leaders and enough Sunni politicians to form a majority in parliament. But that potential coalition is also theoretically available to his Shiite rivals, and it's not clear which of them may be able to make a more effective and compelling case to these key constituencies. And, despite the profound antagonism between them, it's still possible that Iraqi Shiites might find a formula that allows them to unite in a coalition to form a new government.

But whatever happens in Baghdad, by beginning to unilaterally market and export its own oil resources without the consultation or approval of other Iraqis, the KRG just took another major step towards independence. When he was asked about the prospect of Kurdish independent statehood during his UK trip, Mr Barzani did not mince words.

After bitterly complaining about Baghdad's and Mr Al Maliki's behaviour, he bluntly said: "We are going to have a referendum and ask our people." It would be folly to dismiss these stated Kurdish intentions as bluster or brinkmanship. □

Hussein Ibish is a senior fellow at the American Task Force on Palestine, a columnist for Now Media and blogs at www.ibish-blog.com

Kurdish Cabinet Faces More Delays as Parties Discuss Ministers

26 May 2014
rudaw.net

SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region – Eight months after the regional legislative elections, the Kurdish parliament has named Nechirvan Barzani to continue as prime minister and Qubad Talabani as his deputy. But so far, only the Islamic Union of Kurdistan (Yekgirtu) has announced all of its candidates for ministerial portfolios.

Until now, the formation of the next cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had been hampered by the winning parties in last September's elections failing to agree on dividing ministries and key positions among themselves.

And now, nearly all of the parties are busy in internal negotiations to name their ministers and other important officials.

Sources told Rudaw that the Change Movement (Gorran) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), rival parties that, respectively, came in second and third at the polls, may not be able to decide on their nominees even next week.

How to draw up the government plan is also an issue, with sources saying that some parties are leaning toward establishing a joint committee to do that work, while others want the prime minister and his deputy to work

that out.

Ali Abubakr, a senior leader of Yekgirtu, said that his party's top demands are that the incoming administration must be "a government of the people," and that "government departments need to be nationalized and the rule of law must prevail."

Yekgirtu, which won 10 of the Kurdish parliament's 111 seats, has named the following candidates: Nasradin Omari for minister of labor and social affairs, Muhammad Hawdini as minister for organization and coordination between government and parliament, Salahadin Ba Bakir for minister of electricity, Akram Mohammadi as head of non-governmental organizations and Omar Muhammad as head of the board that controls Kurdish areas that are separate from the Kurdistan Region.

The Islamic league of Kurdistan (Komal) said its nominations were incomplete, and that it was still receiving CVs. Komal's Tofiq Karim said that it was working for "a government of service and fighting corruption."

Komal has six seats in the Kurdish parliament and has been granted the agriculture ministry. Many observers believe that the party could face many tough issues, especially with people and some officials who have taken over agricultural lands. In some



KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani (L) with his deputy, Qubad Talabani. Photo: Rudaw

instances, ranches and tourism villages have been constructed over these lands.

The PUK, which has been reeling under a leadership crisis for the past two years, likewise has failed to name its ministers, largely due to wide divisions among the current leaders.

The PUK has been granted the deputy speaker of parliament's chair, but internal rivalries have prevented a final decision on who will occupy the post.

A PUK source said there are two views within the PUK about ministerial posts. One believes that all incumbents should be replaced, while the other says that the competent ones should stay. The source said that one person being considered to remain is health minister Rekawt Rashid.

The PUK, which has 18 parliamentary seats, wants the prime minister and his deputy to draw up the government plan, which would then be reviewed by party leaders.

The reformist and former opposition party, Gorran, which has 24 seats in parliament, has decided only on one of its ministers. Sources told Rudaw that Mustafa Said Qadir has been nominated as the minister of Peshmarga.

Gorran still has to decide on candidates for the ministries of finance, religion and industry.

"We have named only Mustafa Said Qadir, but the Gorran leadership will meet next week to decide its candidates," said Sahaxawan Raud, a senior Gorran member. ■

French.CHINA.ORG.CN

Irak : Barzani réélu Premier ministre de la région du Kurdistan

French.china.org.cn - Source: Xinhua, le 21-mai-2014

Mardi en Irak, le Parlement régional du Kurdistan a réélu à son poste de Premier ministre de région sortant Netchirvan Barzani et a élu son vice-Premier ministre, a fait savoir un responsable de la région.

"Le Parlement du Kurdistan a élu Netchirvan Barzani au poste de Premier ministre du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (GRK) et Qubad Talabani,

fils du président irakien Jalal Talabani, au poste de vice-Premier ministre", a indiqué Rebin Rasol, conseiller politique du GRK, à l'agence Xinhua.

M. Barzani, qui occupe son poste depuis janvier 2012, a été reconduit dans ses fonctions en remportant le soutien de 99 parlementaires sur les 100 présents lors de la séance au Parlement, lequel est situé dans la capitale régionale d'Arbil, à environ 350 km au nord de la capitale irakienne Bagdad, et compte 111 sièges au total, tandis que pour sa part le vice-Premier ministre a recueilli 78 voix, a précisé M. Rasol.

En vertu de la loi en vigueur au Kurdistan, région semi-autonome située dans le nord de l'Irak, le président du GRK Massoud Barzani devrait demander à son neveu, le Premier ministre réélu, et à son vice-Premier ministre de former le nouveau gouvernement de la région, a ajouté M. Rasol.

En septembre 2013, lors de l'élection du Parlement régional, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) dirigé par le président de la région Massoud Barzani a obtenu 38 des 111 sièges parlementaires. ♦



Iraq seeks arbitration against Turkey on Kurdish oil sale

May 23, 2014 -By Ahmed Rasheed and Isabel Coles

- Sale revenue heading to Turkey's Halkbank
- Turkish ministry says no word on arbitration yet
- Kurdish crude cargo sold to Mediterranean spot market-Yildiz

BAGHDAD/ARBIL, Iraq, - Iraq filed for arbitration against Turkey on Friday to stop exports of oil from Kurdistan after European markets bought the first load of oil piped from the autonomous region.

The move raises the stakes again in a long-running game of political brinkmanship as Baghdad seeks to thwart Kurdistan's moves towards greater self-sufficiency.

The request was filed with the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce and also targets Turkish state-owned pipeline operator BOTAS for its role in facilitating oil exports from Kurdistan without the Iraqi federal government's consent.

"By transporting and storing crude oil from Kurdistan, and by loading that crude oil onto a tanker in Ceyhan, all without the authorization of the Iraqi Ministry of Oil, Turkey and BOTAS have breached their obligations under the Iraq-Turkey Pipeline Agreement," the government said in a statement.

Both BOTAS and Turkey's Ministry of Energy said they had yet to receive any information about the arbitration from either the ICC or the Iraqi government.

Earlier on Friday the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said the tanker, carrying more than 1 million barrels of crude, was bound for Europe, and that revenue from the sale would be deposited in Turkey's Halkbank.

Kurdistan finished building the pipeline to Turkey late last year and has been using it to pump oil into storage tanks at Ceyhan, as well as exporting smaller volumes by truck.

"This is the first of many such sales of oil exported through the newly constructed pipeline in the Kurdistan region," the KRG said in a state-

ment.

The inaugural sale is likely to put further strain on relations between Baghdad and the region at a time when negotiations to form a new government are getting underway.

Baghdad has already cut funds to the Kurds this year as punishment for their moves to export crude independently, throwing the region into economic crisis.

The KRG said the oil revenue would be treated as part of the region's share of the Iraqi national budget and vowed to comply with United Nations obligations by setting aside 5 percent of it in a separate account for reparation for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The KRG said it remained open to negotiations with Baghdad, but analysts said the arbitration was likely to push the region further away.

"Baghdad's legal challenge will likely accelerate the Kurdistan region's movement towards full independence," said Jordan Perry, principal MENA analyst at Maplecroft.

NEW OILSTREAM

Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said on Friday the first cargo had been sold into the Mediterranean spot crude market: "This crude oil will possibly go to Italy or Germany," he said in comments broadcast on TRT television.

The pipeline brings a new oilstream onto global markets, one which will compete with well-established sour grades.

The Kurdish crude in tanks at Ceyhan is a mixture of two grades, Taq Taq and Tawke, market sources said. The tanks contain a small amount of Kirkuk, which was left over in the pipeline when it was shut down at the beginning of March.

The stream is currently a medium sour grade. The oil in storage has an API gravity of around 31.3 degrees with a sulphur content of about 2.7 percent, according to laboratory reports by a local shipping agent that were seen by Reuters.

The grade is close to Iraq's Kirkuk grade, which has an API gravity of around 31-32 degrees and a sulphur content of around 2.0 percent to 2.5 percent.

Russian Urals, the most traded sour grade in the Mediterranean market, has a much lower sulphur content than the Kurdish oil but its API gravity is quite similar. Urals has a sulphur content of around 1.1 percent to 1.3 percent and an API gravity of around 30-31 degrees. ●



Pétrole: les Kurdes jugent "illégitime" la plainte de Bagdad contre la Turquie

Bagdad, 25 mai 2014 (AFP)

LA RÉGION AUTONOME du Kurdistan irakien a jugé dimanche "illégitime" et "vouée à l'échec" la plainte déposée par Bagdad contre la Turquie après des exportations de pétrole kurde.

Bagdad a déposé vendredi une plainte devant la Chambre de commerce internationale (ICC, à Paris) contre la Turquie après qu'Ankara a annoncé avoir commencé à livrer sur les marchés internationaux du pétrole en provenance de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

Le ministère kurde des Ressources naturelles a déclaré dimanche dans un communiqué que cette demande d'arbitrage est "vouée à l'échec" et "illégitime", et qu'il ne permettrait pas que des "menaces fantômes" du gouvernement de Bagdad pèsent sur la politique d'exportation de pétrole du Kurdistan.

Le communiqué a également prévenu que le ministère du pétrole, qui a déposé la plainte, était en train de "nuire potentiellement à l'industrie pétrolière et aux réserves de pétrole de l'Irak", ainsi qu'"aux relations entre l'Irak et la Turquie, et d'autres amis de l'Irak".

Le Kurdistan irakien "exporte du pétrole par camions via la Turquie et l'Iran depuis de nombreuses années", a ajouté le communiqué, affirmant que le gouvernement

central avait connaissance de ces pratiques.

Bagdad a pourtant qualifié à plusieurs reprises ces pratiques de "contrebande".

Les autorités kurdes et le gouvernement irakien ont engagé une bataille pour le contrôle des exportations de brut: Bagdad estime que le pétrole appartient au pays tout entier, tandis qu'Erbil veut traiter directement avec des compagnies pétrolières.

Selon Ruba Husari, du site spécialisé dans le pétrole irakien iraqoilforum.com, la plainte de Bagdad "ne mettra peut-être pas immédiatement fin aux exportations, mais elle augmentera la perception du risque" et nuira à "l'environnement économique dans la région du Kurdistan".

Les exportations via la Turquie, qui interviennent après les élections législatives du 30 avril en Irak à l'issue desquelles la coalition du Premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki est arrivée en tête, pourraient provoquer un regain de tensions entre les Kurdes et le gouvernement central de Bagdad.

Les Etats-Unis se sont inquiétés jeudi d'une possible déstabilisation du pays.

"Notre position de longue date est de ne pas apporter notre soutien aux exportations si elles ne sont pas dûment approuvées par le gouvernement central irakien, et nous sommes inquiets de l'impact que pourraient avoir celles" en cours, a déclaré la porte-parole du département d'Etat, Jen Psaki. ■

Le Monde

Vendredi 30 mai 2014

Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi, le nouveau Ben Laden

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Il n'existe que deux photos de lui, floues et au format d'identité. Sur celle diffusée par le FBI, il apparaît joufflu et mal rasé. Celle du ministère irakien de l'intérieur le montre un peu plus dégarni avec barbe naissante et moustache. En réalité, nul ne sait à quoi ressemble aujourd'hui Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi, le chef de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL). Et pourtant, jamais avant lui un chef djihadiste n'avait commandé autant de combattants, contrôlé un aussi vaste territoire et disposé d'une telle manne financière. Même Oussama Ben Laden, au temps de sa splendeur afghane avant les attentats du 11-Septembre, n'était pas aussi puissant.

Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi, dont les hommes sévissent des portes de Bagdad à la banlieue de Damas, de la frontière de la Jordanie à celle de la Turquie, est le « djihadiste invisible », un pouvoir sans visage, une force sans face. Personne ne peut dire qu'il l'a croisé, pas même les otages occidentaux détenus par ses hommes en Syrie et qui ont eu la chance de s'échapper de leur enfer. Jusqu'à son nom de guerre est un leurre : Abou Bakr fait référence au premier calife et compagnon du Prophète, Al-Baghdadi signifie tout simplement de Bagdad.

Alors que Ben Laden mettait un soin de pop star au tournage de ses clips de propagande, Baghdadi fuit l'image. Alors que Ayman Al-Zawahiri, le médecin égyptien qui a pris la tête d'Al-Qaïda après l'élimination de Ben Laden en mai 2011, aime à disserter des heures dans ses vidéos postées sur Internet, lui ne parle pas. Ou à peine : on lui attribue une poignée de messages audio, sans certitude sur leur authenticité. Ce silence, cette absence ne font que renforcer son mythe : ses actes parlent pour lui, sa cruauté tient lieu de discours, tissant une légende qui agite toute la djihadosphère, de l'Indonésie à la Mauritanie en passant par les banlieues européennes.

D'Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi, on sait seulement qu'il est originaire de la province de Dyala, dans l'est de l'Irak, là où Kurdes, chiites et sunnites se déchirent dans une sanglante mêlée à coups d'attentats-suicides et d'assassinats. On sait aussi que la famille d'Al-Baghdadi est issue du clan tribal des Samarraï (de la ville de Samarra) et qu'il aime à rattacher sa lignée à celle des Husseïni, les descendants du Prophète. Dernière précision : Al-Baghdadi, qui a étudié à l'université islamique de Bagdad et



L'une des deux seules photos d'Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, diffusées par le ministère de l'intérieur irakien et par le FBI. | AP/Uncredited

n'a pas de passé militaire, a fait ses premières armes dans le djihad après l'invasion américaine de l'Irak, dans l'un des petits groupes insurgés qui ont alors proliféré.

Une décennie plus tard, l'homme est à la tête d'une dizaine de milliers de combattants en Irak, plus de 7 000 à 8 000 en Syrie. Ses troupes contrôlent une bonne partie de la province d'Anbar (Falloujah et une partie de Ramadi) en Irak, ils poussent jusqu'aux portes de Bagdad, terrorisent les régions de Ninive (Mossoul) et Salaheddine (Tikrit et Samarra). En Syrie, ils dominent les provinces de Deir ez-Zor et Rakka, exploitent des puits pétroliers près de Hassetché et sont actifs dans les régions de Lattaquié, Alep, Idlib, Hama, et même Damas.

Des volontaires affluent de partout vers le pays de Cham, le nom islamique de la Syrie. D'Europe, d'Asie centrale, d'Australie, du Caucase, du Maghreb et du Golfe, ils viennent rejoindre le plus grand djihad transnational jamais mené. Et ils choisissent massivement l'EIL plutôt que le Front Al-Nosra, pourtant succursale officielle d'Al-Qaïda en Syrie.

Le drapeau – noir et frappé de la profession de foi – est le même, le discours, l'objectif aussi : instaurer un Etat islamiquement pur, faisant observer la charia dans son acception la plus rigoriste. Et pourtant, c'est une lutte à mort qui s'est enga-

gée au sein de la nébuleuse qaïdiste. L'EIL – souvent désignée par son acronyme anglais, ISIS, ou arabe, Daï'sh – est la pire menace contre Al-Qaïda depuis sa fondation dans les zones tribales pakistanaïses en 1988 par Oussama Ben Laden. Un ennemi de l'intérieur.

Rendu célèbre par une décapitation

Les hostilités ont débuté fin mars 2013, lorsque l'Etat islamique en Irak a proclamé sa fusion avec le Front Al-Nosra, d'Abou Mohamed Al-Jolani, considéré comme la filiale syrienne du groupe. Les liens sont innombrables et anciens, tissés par une décennie de djihad en Irak. Mais il s'agit bel et bien d'une OPA inamicale. Il ne faut pas longtemps à l'organisation syrienne pour opposer un refus poli mais ferme. Chacun son pays, chacun son djihad.

Dans son refuge pakistanaïse, Ayman Al-Zawahiri, qui consacre l'essentiel de son temps à échapper aux frappes de drones américains, comprend immédiatement la menace. Il donne raison au Front Al-Nosra, mais plus rien ne peut arrêter la marche d'Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi. Zawahiri a de bonnes raisons de s'en méfier : ce dernier ne lui a pas prêté allégeance dans les mois qui ont suivi la mort de Ben Laden. Un vieux contentieux oppose l'idéologue égyptien et le jeune chef irakien. Baghdadi est un disciple d'Abou Moussab Al-Zarkaoui.

Ce Jordanien d'origine n'était qu'un cadre marginal d'Al-Qaïda, un second couteau. Installé dans le Kurdistan d'Irak dès 2002, il est aux premières loges de l'invasion américaine l'année suivante. Il prend vite la tête du combat anti-américain et frappe les esprits en décapitant de sa main l'entrepreneur américain Nicholas Berg

en mai 2004. L'autre spécificité de Zarkaoui, ce sont les massacres, de chiites, décimés par les attentats-suicides à répétition, qui lui valent une certaine popularité en Arabie saoudite où le chiisme est traité comme une hérésie. Mais l'état-major d'Al-Qaïda, en particulier Zawahiri, désapprouve cette stratégie qui risque de transformer le djihad global en *fitna* (« discordance ») intermusulmane. Zawahiri ordonne alors à Zarkaoui de mettre fin aux attentats anti-chiites. En vain. Finalement, le renégat est tué par l'aviation américaine en juin 2006 dans la région de Dyala, celle dont Baghdadi est originaire.

Al-Qaïda en Mésopotamie est alors repris en main par un « commissaire politique » égyptien envoyé par Zawahiri : il s'agit d'Abou Hamza Al-Muhajer (Youssef Al-Dardiri de son vrai nom), qui exerce un comagistère avec l'émir irakien du groupe. L'organisation, qui a fusionné avec plusieurs autres groupuscules, est rebaptisée « Etat islamique en Irak ».

L'objectif est d'autant plus ambitieux que le projet djihadiste en Irak est presque réduit à néant : à partir de fin 2006, l'ar-

mée américaine recrute des tribus arabes sunnites lasses de la fêrle d'Al-Qaïda et de ses excès. En avril 2010, Abou Hamza et l'émir irakien sont tués. Si bien qu'Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi reprend les rênes d'une organisation affaiblie, mais soudée et aguerrie.

Il y a, entre Zawahiri et Baghdadi, un fossé générationnel: le premier a connu le djihad afghan, le second s'est forgé dans le djihad irakien. L'Egyptien est un théoricien qui glose sans fin sur l'impact des révolutions arabes ou l'histoire des Frères musulmans en Egypte; l'Irakien est un praticien de la violence, dont il a fait son principal argument de recrutement. Avec lui, l'Irak devient une école de formation où se croisent jeunes militants venus de partout, attirés par l'ultraviolence.

Enfin, chaque leader est contraint par sa situation. Zawahiri bénéficie de l'aura fondatrice du 11-Septembre, mais ne dispose d'aucun territoire sûr et vit hors du monde arabe: il théorise le djihad lointain (contre l'ennemi occidental) pour impressionner les foules musulmanes. Baghdadi, lui, a fait l'expérience de l'émirat de Falouljah: la prise de la ville par les insurgés en 2004 puis sa chute aux mains de l'US Army. Pour mettre en œuvre son Etat islamique au cœur du monde arabe, il donne la primauté au djihad proche, contre les ennemis immédiats, à commencer par les musulmans qui s'opposent à son projet.

La mort de Ben Laden, en plein « printemps arabe », a été le détonateur des rivalités de succession. Il n'y a en effet pas de raison qu'Al-Qaïda échappe, comme toute organisation politique, aux querelles de leadership. Malgré son retrait de l'opérationnel, le milliardaire saoudien restait l'incontestable « statue du commandeur ». A sa disparition, la jeune garde dévoile son ambition. Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi en est le chef de file.

Dès ses débuts à la tête de l'Etat islamique en Irak, en mai 2010, il organise 60 attaques simultanées faisant 110 morts en un seul jour. A l'automne, il ordonne l'assaut de la cathédrale de Bagdad (46 morts parmi les fidèles). Le message est limpide: Al-Qaïda n'est pas mort en Irak, l'Etat islamique a pris la relève. Le départ des troupes américaines en décembre 2011 et la politique sectaire du premier ministre chiite irakien, Nouri Al-Maliki, font le reste. En humiliant et en opprimant les sunnites, Maliki a radicalisé toute une communauté qu'il a poussée dans les bras des extrémistes.

L'étrange complicité du clan Assad

Au printemps de la même année 2011, la révolution éclate en Syrie. La population demande plus de liberté et de justice sociale, mais le soulèvement a aussi des relents confessionnels: la majorité sunnite ne supporte plus la mainmise de la minorité alaouite, une branche dissidente du chiïsme dont est issue la famille Assad, sur les postes à responsabilité, notam-



Des combattants de l'EIIL brûlent des cigarettes de contrebande à Rakka, en Syrie, le 2 avril.

Des combattants de l'EIIL brûlent des cigarettes de contrebande à Rakka, en Syrie, le 2 avril. | REUTERS

ment dans l'appareil sécuritaire. Le terrain est favorable pour le discours anti-chiite de Baghdadi.

Etrangement, le régime syrien, qui emprisonne et torture ses opposants à tour de bras, va relâcher un certain nombre de cadres djihadistes détenus dans ses geôles. Pourquoi remettre dans le circuit ces extrémistes qui vont logiquement retourner leurs armes contre le régime impie des Assad? Parce que cela participe d'une « gestion » confessionnelle de la crise, permettant de souder toutes les minorités contre la menace sunnite fondamentaliste. Parce que, également, les services syriens, qui ont passé depuis 2003 leur temps à gérer, infiltrer, exfiltrer les djihadistes en transit vers l'Irak, connaissent parfaitement leurs « clients », quand ils ne les manipulent pas à distance. Ils savent que l'objectif premier de certains d'entre eux est l'installation d'un califat appliquant strictement la charia, plutôt que l'instauration de la démocratie au Proche-Orient.

Les effets ne tardent pas à se faire sentir. En janvier 2012, le Front Al-Nosra annonce sa formation sous l'égide d'Abou Mohamed Al-Jolani, un Syrien formé en Irak. Sa témérité et son intégrité lui valent un essor spectaculaire et de la sympathie dans le grand public. Il ne cache pas sa proximité avec l'Etat islamique, auquel il sert de poisson-pilote. Le groupe irakien fait son apparition sur le théâtre syrien en son propre nom début 2013.

Contrairement au Front Al-Nosra, l'EIIL ne paraît pas rechercher la confrontation avec l'armée syrienne, mais se concentre plutôt sur la prise de contrôle des postes-frontières afin d'établir une continuité territoriale avec l'Irak. Il prend possession des territoires libérés par d'autres, tel un coucou. A Rakka, première capitale de province débarrassée du régime, il frappe les esprits en organisant l'exécution publique de soldats alaouites. Ailleurs, il s'empare de dépôts d'armes de la rébellion et tue au besoin certains de ses chefs, sans le revendiquer. Enfin, il vise les zones pétrolières, source de juteux trafics et « stocke »

les otages occidentaux dans la plus grande discrétion. En mars 2013, ses positions sont suffisamment consolidées pour lancer son OPA contre le Front Al-Nosra et revendiquer tout le pouvoir.

Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi est obsédé par l'expérience irakienne et l'émergence des milices Sahwa (sunnites anti-Al-Qaïda). Il fait donc place nette dans les zones qu'il contrôle: tous les opposants ou rivaux potentiels sont éliminés. La cible principale de Da'ish: les rebelles laïques et les autres groupes islamistes. « Leur stratégie est la même que celle des staliniens pendant la guerre d'Espagne, qui se sont débarrassés de leurs concurrents anarchistes et trotskistes plutôt que combattre Franco », résume un diplomate.

Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi est le « djihadiste invisible », un pouvoir sans visage, une force sans face. Ses actes parlent pour lui, sa cruauté tient lieu de discours

Pendant ce temps, l'armée de Bachar Al-Assad épargne l'EIIL. Des proches du régime de Damas vont jusqu'à racheter du pétrole vendu par les djihadistes. L'EIIL est elle une « créature » des services d'Assad, comme le clament les opposants laïques? « C'est aller trop loin dans le complotisme, tempère Dominique Thomas, spécialiste des mouvements djihadistes et chercheur associé à l'Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS). D'abord, les djihadistes relâchés sont allés vers d'autres groupes que l'Etat islamique. Ensuite, il ne faut pas établir de causalités à l'envers dans un contexte de guerre très flou et mouvant. »

Reste que des liens anciens continuent d'alimenter l'hypothèse d'une collusion entre Damas et l'Etat islamique. Une chose est sûre: « L'organisation a largement recruté parmi les anciens bassistes irakiens », comme le souligne Dominique Thomas, et ces derniers ont gardé de solides relais à Damas.

Le business des otages

Début 2013, le contexte change en Irak: le premier ministre chiite Nouri Al-Maliki apporte son soutien à Bachar Al-Assad, car il est lui aussi confronté à un soulèvement sunnite dans la province d'Anbar, qu'il a largement contribué à créer en opprimant cette communauté déchue depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein. Baghdadi y voit l'opportunité d'installer son embryon d'Etat à cheval sur les deux pays. Constamment de part et d'autre de la frontière, il est insaisissable. Le pétrole syrien et le racket des fonctionnaires irakiens lui assurent une manne importante, ainsi que le

trafic d'antiquités provenant des zones syriennes libérées.

Le business des otages se révèle tout aussi rentable. Il est pensé, exécuté avec détermination: de la fin 2012 à l'automne 2013, l'EIIL s'empare d'une trentaine d'Occidentaux, journalistes et humanitaires surtout, dont Didier François, Edouard Elias, Nicolas Héning et Pierre Torres, en juin 2013. La stratégie consiste à en prendre le plus possible. Les Occidentaux sont considérés comme un butin, un attribut de puissance. Les services de renseignement occidentaux voient, effarés, la liste des otages s'allonger, sans aucune revendication ou demande de rançon, dans un premier temps. Quelle est la finalité de tout cela: boucliers humains, monnaie d'échange? Certains vont jusqu'à penser que le projet était de mettre sur pied un Guantanamo à l'envers, un Abou Ghraïb d'Occidentaux. L'idée a sûrement plu aux candidats européens au djihad, qui sont utilisés comme geôliers de leurs compatriotes: Britanniques, Français, Belges sont venus jouer les « petites mains » du djihad de Baghdadi.

Les négociations commencent à la fin de l'hiver 2014 et douze otages sont progressivement libérés (trois journalistes espagnols, quatre journalistes français et cinq humanitaires de MSF), contre rançons. Tous témoignent du fanatisme et surtout du désir de reconnaissance de Daï'sh: « Nous sommes comme un Etat, heïn! Tu as vu comme on est bien organisés », ne cessent de leur répéter les geôliers, fiers de la reconnaissance occidentale ainsi obtenue, surtout de la France, membre permanent du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU.



Un milicien jihadiste dans une rue de Falloujah, le 28 avril. | AP

L'EIIL, qui a conscience de son environnement géopolitique, s'attaque aussi aux milices kurdes du PYD, qui ont pris le contrôle du Kurdistan syrien, s'assurant ainsi les bonnes grâces du gouvernement turc, qui laisse passer armes et djihadistes à travers ses frontières, du moins jusqu'à la fin de l'hiver 2014. Il prend soin aussi d'entretenir son image de pureté radicale sur les réseaux sociaux, pour s'imposer comme la seule force réellement djihadiste, accusant Al-Qaïda de pactiser avec les démocrates. Le groupe publie même un rapport annuel détaillé de ses activités militaires – le dernier en mai 2014 – témoignant d'une structure hiérarchisée et d'une centralisation de l'information. Il se targue notamment d'avoir permis l'évasion de milliers de détenus djihadistes dans l'attaque de huit prisons en moins d'un an en Irak.

Quand, à la fin 2013, des groupes comme les Egyptiens d'Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis ou Ansar Al-Charia Tunisie et Libye commencent à se rapprocher de l'EIIL, Ayman Al-Zawahiri se range à l'idée d'une guerre ouverte contre son rival. Pour lui, l'EIIL est truffé d'anciens repris de justice qui manient le *takfir* (« excommunication ») à tort et à travers et effrayent les non-islamistes par leur radicalité, alors que les révolutions arabes ont montré que les populations ne sont pas toutes acquises au fondamentalisme.

Le chef d'Al-Qaïda soutient donc discrètement la grande offensive lancée, fin décembre, par les libéraux de l'Armée syrienne libre et d'autres groupes rebelles islamistes contre l'EIIL. Gêné, le Front Al-Nosra parle de trêve et de médiation, jusqu'à ce que l'envoyé spécial personnel de Zawahiri soit assassiné par l'EIIL. La guerre est déclarée au sein d'Al-Qaïda. L'EIIL se retire d'Alep mais stabilise vite ses positions grâce à ses alliances tribales dans les provinces de Rakka et de Deir ez-Zor. En Irak, le gouvernement Maliki passe à l'offensive à Falloujah, sans succès. C'est plutôt l'EIIL qui menace la banlieue de Bagdad en avril.

En Syrie, l'EIIL repassera à l'offensive, prédit Jean-Pierre Filiu, professeur à Science Po, qui vient de publier une note pour la Fondation Carnegie, « Al-Qaïda est morte, vive Al-Qaïda! » Et, tôt ou tard, l'EIIL frappera en Occident. A ce jour, le FBI offre 25 millions de dollars pour la capture de Zawahiri et 10 millions pour celle de Baghdadi. Les Américains se rendront bientôt à l'évidence: Al-Qaïda, désormais, c'est l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant. ■

Réseau d'informations libres de la Mésopotamie

29 mai 2014

Massacre de civils par l'EIIL au Kurdistan syrien

29 mai 2014

www.actukurde.fr

DE NOMBREUX civils dont des femmes et des enfants ont été massacrés jeudi 29 mai par des bandes armées de l'Etat Islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIIL) à Serêkaniyé (Rass al-Ain), au Kurdistan syrien.

Des groupes armés de l'EIIL ont attaqué trois petits villages sans défense, à 15 km de Serêkaniyé, sur la frontière avec la Turquie. De nombreux civils ont été sauvagement massacrés par ces groupes dans les villages de Tileliyé, Tamade et Ovandjak.

Les cadavres d'au moins quinze personnes dont sept enfants ont été retrouvés sur place. Des photos provenant de lieu du massacre mon-



tent plusieurs civils tués, jonchés sur le sol, dont parmi eux des femmes et des enfants, tous des arabes installés dans ces villages après la guerre qui dure depuis plus d'un an.

Après le massacre, les combattants kurdes sont arrivés sur place et lancé une vaste opération contre des groupes armés qui ont commis ces crimes contre l'humanité. De violents combats ont eu lieu dans ces zones frontalières.

Quinze villageois kurdes tués par l'EIL dans le nord de la Syrie

nouvelobs.com
BEYROUTH (Reuters) -30-mai-2014

L'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL) a tué jeudi quinze habitants kurdes, dont sept enfants, d'un village du nord de la Syrie, rapportent l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) et un photographe indépendant.

L'attaque s'est produite près de la ville à majorité kurde de Ras al Aïn, à 600 km au

nord-est de Damas, dans la province de Hassaka où vivent la plupart des Kurdes de Syrie, au nombre d'un million environ.

L'EIL, groupe islamiste radical renié par le commandement central d'Al Qaïda en début d'année, est engagé depuis six mois dans une offensive contre les autres groupes insurgés en Syrie, qui a fait des milliers de morts et continue d'affaiblir les forces hostiles au président Bachar al Assad. □



Un homme reconforte deux femmes dans un village à majorité kurde du nord de la Syrie après une attaque de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL) qui a fait jeudi 15 morts, dont sept enfants. /Photo prise le 29 mai 2014/REUTERS/Massoud Mohammed (c) Reuters

Syrie : les ultra-radicaux islamistes kidnappent près de 200 Kurdes

Les milices kurdes croisent le fer avec les islamistes depuis plusieurs mois depuis que les djihadistes ont voulu s'emparer des champs pétroliers du Nord et de l'Est.

Le Point.fr
30/mai/2014

Le groupe djihadiste le plus brutal de Syrie, l'Etat islamique d'Irak et du Levant (EIL), a enlevé près de 200 Kurdes dans la province septentrionale d'Alep, a affirmé vendredi l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). "Les combattants de l'EIL ont kidnappé jeudi 193 civils kurdes de 17 à 70 ans, du village de Qabasine dans la province d'Alep", affirme l'OSDH, une ONG basée en Grande-Bretagne dont les informations reposent sur un large réseau de sources civiles et militaires.

Selon le directeur de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane, les raisons derrière ces raptus "sont inconnues, mais ce genre d'actes se produit souvent dans les régions sous contrôle de l'EIL". Né en 2006 en Irak et affilié à al-Qaïda dans ce pays, l'EIL a officiellement annoncé sa présence sur le territoire syrien il y a un an. Il est en guerre

*Une dizaine de Kurdes ont été tués par des extrémistes de l'EIL dans un village près de Ras al-Aïn, dans la province de Hassaké, dans le nord de la Syrie.
Massoud Mohammed/Reuters*



avec la branche officielle d'al-Qaïda en Syrie, le Front al-Nosra et les autres mouvements rebelles.

Les milices kurdes croisent le fer avec l'EIL depuis plusieurs mois depuis que les djihadistes ont voulu s'emparer des champs pétroliers du Nord et de l'Est qui

se trouvent dans les régions à prédominance kurde. Alors que les Kurdes essaient d'élargir leur région autonome, l'EIL veut établir sur ces territoires un Etat islamique à cheval sur la Syrie et l'Irak. (AFP) ●

Managing Kurdistan's Natural Resources: The Canadian Model

By Tessa Manuella
24 May 2014
rudaw.net

MONTREAL, Canada – With the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) beginning its first large oil sales and working to advance its energy sector, while Baghdad has been holding back the region's budget, Rudaw looked at Canada as an example of how natural resources are managed at federal and provincial levels.

The French province of Quebec, which resembles Kurdistan and attempted to separate due to its cultural and linguistic differences, still received more than 30 percent of the federal budget support for the current fiscal year from the federal government in Ottawa.

The principle in Canada is that money flows, for the most part, from the federal government to the provinces because the federal fiscal capacity -- in other words the federal capacity to raise money through taxes -- "is greater, more robust and stronger than the ability of most provinces to raise money through taxes," Patrick Fafard, Associate Professor of Public and International Affairs at the University of Ottawa, told Rudaw.

In January, tensions between Erbil and Baghdad reached new highs when the government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki suddenly decided to freeze the autonomous region's monthly budget over political disagreements with the Kurds.

But according to Fafard, that is not the case in Canada, where the budget would not stop "at the whim of the central government."

He said that federal-provincial budget transfers are entrenched in the Canadian constitution and take place through a fair and transparent formula.

"The government of Canada cannot wake up tomorrow mor-

ning and decide to cut the equalization transfers. That would be unfair and there would be a huge fight."

Baghdad's excuse for freezing Kurdistan's budget was that the region had taken charge of its own oil sales, even though the lion's share of the revenues would go to the central government, as stipulated in the constitution.

In response, Kurdish leaders say they are working to offer better public services in Kurdistan than the rest of Iraq, despite their small budget, which is vulnerable to blackmail from Baghdad.

According to Fafard, the federal government provides the funding to the provinces in order to provide the same standards of services to their population.

"The federal government will transfer money to you to allow you to offer more or less the same basket of government services, assuming that you tax at more or less the same rate," he said.

The strain caused by Baghdad's attitude is not unique to the Kurdish government in Erbil. Even in Canada's much larger and richer provinces the same could happen if the federal government stopped local budgets.

"If the federal government were to unilaterally stop, it would be a violation of the constitution, it would be a crisis," said Fafard.

Kurdish leaders say that Maliki has no regard for the constitution and that he is acting above the law, which Fafard says is unlikely to happen in Canada, because "Canada is a country where we take the rule of law very seriously."

The Kurdistan Region is entitled to 17 percent of Iraq's annual budget, though Kurdish authorities say that Baghdad has always sent close to 11 percent. The KRG has compensated for the loss by relying on its savings



Canadians celebrating Canada Day on parliament hill in Ottawa, July 2012. Photo: Rudaw

and income generated from customs and trade.

Unlike Baghdad, the government in Ottawa seems to take into consideration whether or not Quebec can fully fund itself.

"Quebec does not have the ability to raise through its own taxation system money commensurate with its expenditures, even though it has natural resources, oil and gas, but also minerals and hydro electricity," explained Fafard.

Erbil says that Baghdad's demand for the Kurdish region to produce 400,000 barrels of oil per day is not fair, while the central government itself creates endless political obstacles for Erbil.

On the contrary, Canada recognizes that, even though some provinces have natural resources, they have not yet been able to exploit to the full those resources, and therefore qualify for a fair share of the budget.

By way of reassuring Baghdad, the Kurdish government proposes it would keep its 17 percent share of any oil and gas sold and send the rest to Baghdad. In this case, the central government would not have to worry about funding the three autonomous provinces.

This sounds like the system

practiced in Canada, where oil-rich provinces tend to handle their revenue from natural resources and keep the federal government in the loop about it.

"Natural resource revenues are the jurisdiction of the provinces, and those revenues factor into the equalization formula," Canada's finance ministry told Rudaw in an email interview. "No separate agreements exist with individual provinces."

Yet another similarity between the Kurdistan Region and Quebec is that in the 1970s and 80s, Ottawa got into a dispute with the oil province of Alberta, where it tried to interfere with oil and gas prices.

Baghdad also blacklisted all oil companies that dealt with Erbil and encouraged them to move to oilfields in Iraq's south.

"The government of Canada wanted to influence the price at which oil and gas was sold and wanted to have an influence on where the resources developed, to try to encourage oil companies to spend less money in Alberta and more money elsewhere," said Fafard.

"People in Alberta, where the oil and gas was at the time the most developed, could not get world prices for their oil and gas if that oil and gas was sold inside Canada. Needless to say, the people in Alberta fought back, just like the Kurds now," he added.

Fafard believes that "the government of Canada learned a hard political lesson," out of the dispute with Alberta.

"Because Canada is a federation, provinces literally own the natural resources. That is to say, any minerals or oil and gas or any sub-surface wealth are literally owned by the provincial government," Fafard said. ■

A leap to Kurdish independence

By beginning to sell its oil unilaterally Iraqi Kurdistan is taking a step towards breaking away from the rest of Iraq, writes Salah Nasrawi

weekly.ahram.org.eg

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The news that the self-ruled Kurdish region of northern Iraq started sending cargoes of its oil to the international crude market last week was surprising. The Iraqi Kurds have been smuggling oil discreetly to neighbouring Iran and Turkey for years, and recently credible reports suggested that the region had sold oil to Israel and the United States.

However, this new development may turn out to be the last straw in the status quo reached between Iraq's Arab majority and the minority Kurds after the overthrow of the regime led by former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein by the US-led invasion of the country in 2003.

On Friday, the Kurdistan Regional Government announced that more than one million barrels of crude, the first cargo of oil piped out of Iraqi Kurdistan, had been sold on European markets. The announcement came a day after Turkey disclosed that the shipment had started from the Ceyhan Port in southern Turkey where Iraqi oil is usually stored for export

Reports last week suggested that at least four cargoes laden with Kurdish crude had gone to Israel since January, while the United States had imported its first crude cargo from the Kurdish region in May. Kurdish natural gas condensate has also been sold to Italy, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Latin America.

The key collaborator in the galaxy of foreign countries that have facilitated Kurdish oil sales is Turkey, which has provided political and logistical support to the Kurdistan Government's efforts to export its oil independently. The Turkish state-owned pipeline operator BOTAS was the key to Kurdistan's efforts to export its oil and the shipments were



Kurdistan's Oil

arranged through Turkish brokers.

With Iraq gripped in seemingly endless sectarian bloodshed and entangled in a governmental crisis following another inconclusive election last month, it was perfect timing for the autonomous Kurdish enclave to begin selling its oil on the international markets in defiance of the central government.

The aim behind the well-calculated move seems to have been to send a clear message to the Iraqis, Iraq's neighbours and the rest of the world that the path to the long-awaited Kurdish independence from Iraq is now shorter than it has ever been before.

Even before the announcement of the oil sales, Kurdish leaders were repeatedly threatening to call for a referendum on Kurdish self-determination if a host of disputes over territories and the distribution of power and wealth were not resolved.

The Kurds have long accused Shia Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki of authoritarianism and the exclusion of their leaders from power-sharing in Iraq. Their leaders have vowed to thwart any attempt by the central government to undermine the powers they have gained since Saddam's ouster in 2003.

The Kurdistan Region is now all but an independent entity, though it stops short of interna-

tionally recognised sovereignty. It has its own president, prime minister, parliament and national flag. It also runs its own army, security forces and intelligence services, and it operates its own airports and border points.

The Region issues visas for foreigners and entry and residency permits for Iraqis travelling from other provinces in the country.

Tensions over power and resource-sharing reached a new pitch after the 30 April elections, which showed Al-Maliki in the lead to form a new government. His re-election by a Shia alliance will guarantee more problems with the Kurds, and Kurdish president Massoud Barzani has warned that the Kurds will not join any government headed by Al-Maliki.

The oil sales have raised the stakes again, as Baghdad had warned international companies against buying Kurdish crude and has threatened legal action against any company involved in "smuggling" Iraqi oil. Baghdad has also filed a request with the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce for arbitration against Ankara to stop the exports of oil from Kurdistan.

Yet, Irbil has remained defiant and has dismissed the Iraqi move as a "hollow threat," vowing that exports from the Turkish port of Ceyhan would

continue despite opposition from the federal government in Baghdad.

It has said the oil revenues will be deposited in a Turkish bank after taking the region's 17 per cent share from the Iraqi national budget, which the parliament failed to endorse after Kurdish and Sunni lawmakers boycotted the outgoing assembly. It also promised to comply with UN obligations by setting aside five per cent of the revenue in a separate account for reparations for Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

Beyond the rhetoric, Kurdistan, which has been slowly and carefully charting a path towards full independence, sees Iraq's present chaos as bringing new opportunities to the table. By selling its crude unilaterally, Kurdistan is escalating its brinkmanship with Baghdad and is trying to gain more concessions on other disputes, mainly the future of the oil-rich-province of Kirkuk and other territories claimed by the Kurds.

With billions of dollars received from Iraq's annual budget and a largely stable region in comparison with the violence-ravaged rest of Iraq, the Kurdish region has flourished in recent years. And with estimates of oil reserves of 43.7 billion barrels and up to six trillion cubic metres of gas, Kurdistan has a promising economic future ahead of it as an independent state.

There is no guarantee this time round that the old way of giving the Kurds a dollop of state largesse as a way of keeping them on side can be successfully applied to keep them in a union that is increasingly becoming undesirable to them. The Kurd's confidence has been mirrored in their defiance of the Baghdad government, and they are now looking more upbeat in their quest for national independence.

In their oil shipments and elsewhere in their relationship ■

➤ with Baghdad, the Kurds now feel they have the upper hand.

Over the last few weeks, Al-Maliki has made some overtures to the Kurds that have shown his willingness to negotiate a deal over the new government he wants to form following last month's elections.

On 20 May, his government abolished measures taken by the Saddam regime to resettle thousands of Arabs from the south in Kirkuk after driving the Kurdish inhabitants out. Under the new decree some 400,000 hectares of land will be given back to the Kurds and Turkomans in Kirkuk.

Another decree last month spelled out the return of all the Arabs who had settled in Kirkuk during the Saddam regime to their areas of origin in central and southern Iraq. The government has also said that it will

give billions of dollars in compensation and provide jobs for some of the 200,000 Arabs who will leave Kirkuk.

Though the two moves were pre-conditions set by the Kurds for a settlement of the Kirkuk dispute, the Kurdistan Government has not yet reacted to the two decisions which should be ratified by the parliament. Its ambivalence probably indicates that it intends to drive a hard bargain, knowing that Al-Maliki is desperate to win a third term in office.

It is for this reason that the Iraqi Kurds, who feel that they have achieved a remarkable transformation in their struggle for autonomy by benefiting from the political turmoil in Iraq and the Middle East more than they did in their decades-long guerrilla war, are now carefully crafting their strategy for full independence.

One key element in this strategy is to learn from the opportunities arising from the mistakes committed by successive Iraqi governments.

Thanks to Saddam's defeat in the 1991 war with the United States over Kuwait, the Kurds enjoyed autonomy in their northern enclave that was declared a safe haven protected by US and British warplanes.

The US and British governments established a no-fly zone over northern Iraq, forcing Saddam to pull out from the area. The move ushered in a new era of liberation for the Kurds and allowed them to have their own national government for the first time in their history.

By his arrogant and irrational ending of the dispute with the Kurdistan Government over the 2014 national budget, eventually leading to the freezing of salaries and other public spend-

ing in Kurdistan, Al-Maliki also sparked another serious crisis, forcing the Kurds to press ahead with their unilateral oil sales.

They will now be able to convince the world that by trying to thwart their exports of oil while cutting their allotments in the budget, Al-Maliki has effectively declared economic warfare against the Kurds.

The Kurds seem to have learned enormously from Al-Maliki's outlandish policy mistakes, and they are now prepared to exploit the mayhem in order to embark on the last phase of their historic undertaking to make their dream of statehood a reality.

If the trajectory of Kurdistan's independence has taken off of late, it is because the Kurds' bitterness against Al-Maliki has accumulated and the chance of brokering a compromise with him has been lost.

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REUTERS

Kurdish militants kill Turkish state militia member as unrest grows

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey, May 29, 2014
(Reuters) -By Seyhmus Cakan

- * Militants also kidnap Islamist politician
- * Unrest jeopardising peace process with militants
- * Success key to Erdogan ahead of presidential election

KURDISH GUERRILLAS shot dead a state-sponsored militia member in southeast Turkey, the armed forces said on Thursday, escalating tensions in the region after days of protests at the building of new military outposts.

Two fighters from the militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) killed "village guard" Mehmet Ugurtay in his van on Wednesday in a primary school courtyard in the southeastern province of Mardin, where he was due to pick up pupils, the army's general staff said.

Village guards are armed and paid by the state, often acting in collaboration with the military, to help protect rural communities against PKK attacks.

"He was killed with one shot from a pistol. The separatist terrorist group members then fled the scene of the incident on motorbike," the general staff said in a statement.

Turkey launched peace talks with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 2012 to try to end a 30-year conflict that has killed 40,000 people and hampered the development of the mostly Kurdish southeast.

The success of the peace process and support from Turkey's Kurds, who account for around a fifth of the population, is key to Prime

Minister Tayyip Erdogan ahead of his expected bid for the presidency in an August election.

Some Turkish media said the village guard was a member of the Islamist Huda-Par political party, fierce rivals of the PKK.

Security sources said armed PKK militants have also abducted Huda-Par's local representative in the Dicle district of neighbouring Diyarbakir province, Ercan Alpaslan, after setting up a roadblock and pulling him from his minibus on Wednesday evening.

A day earlier, rebels abducted a soldier during a protest that has forced the closure of highways across Diyarbakir. Security forces are continuing operations to find both men.

The PKK took up arms against Turkey in 1984 with the aim of carving out a separate state in the southeast for the country's Kurds. They have since moderated their demands, seeking increased political and cultural rights which were long denied.

The militants have blocked various points along country roads with trucks and cars seized over the past five days in protest at the construction of several new military outposts, used by the armed forces to maintain regional security.

In Diyarbakir, an 11-day-old sit-down protest outside the city council by families angry at the PKK's recruitment of their children doubled in size on Thursday to 45 families.

Erdogan has staked considerable political capital in peace efforts, widening cultural and language rights at the risk of alienating parts of his grassroots support base. The PKK is designated a terrorist group by Ankara, the United States and the European Union, and Ocalan remains widely reviled among Turks.

A ceasefire called by Ocalan in March 2013 has largely held, but the PKK halted a rebel withdrawal to bases in northern Iraq last summer, complaining at a lack of progress in the process. ●

Rival Kurdish parties battle for power in Syria

A series of tit-for-tat incidents has worsened relations between the Kurdistan Workers Party of Abdullah Ocalan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Massoud Barzani.



Author Wladimir van Wilgenburg
May 28, 2014
www.al-monitor.com

LONDON — The Kurdish parties in Iraq and Syria are increasingly engaged in a low-scale cold war. The new power vacuum in the Kurdish areas of Syria has led to an escalation of tit-for-tat arrests, political office closures, expulsions, demonstrations, media campaigns and border closures instead of more cooperation.

The imprisoned head of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), Abdullah Ocalan, and the president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) of Iraq, Massoud Barzani, have competed over the leadership of the Kurds for decades. Ocalan's party is the most powerful Kurdish nationalist party in Turkey, while Barzani leads the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). The power vacuum in Syria has led to new competition between the two parties, after the PKK became the strongest actor in northern Syria.

On May 19, the Iraqi Kurdish security forces raided several offices and organizations close to Ocalan's PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan in response to the arrests and expulsion of Syrian Kurdish politicians close to Barzani's KDP by Kurdish forces in Syria.

"The KNK [Kurdistan National Congress] is a national organization for all parts of Kurdistan; it is not related to the PYD. Why do they capture these people, and close their offices?" Salih Muslim, the leader of the PKK-affiliated Syrian Kurdish party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), told Al-Monitor in London.

Furthermore, Syrian Kurdish politicians accuse the KDP of covert bombing campaigns against PKK-affiliated parties in Syrian Kurdish areas, and a court in Afrin sentenced KDP-supported politicians to 10 to 20 years in prison for "terrorist attacks" earlier this month. Moreover, the Syrian Kurdish politicians accuse KDP officials of visiting Damascus to undermine the Syrian Kurds in Syria.

As a result of these tensions, Syrian Kurdish security forces started to expel, arrest and deny entry to Syria of politicians of the newly established Barzani-linked Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDP-S). This also came after the digging of trenches on the Iraqi-Syrian border in April by the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq.

Bashar Amin, a KDP-S politician, was arrested in his house in Hassakeh and deported to Iraq in his slippers and pajamas on May 16. In a tit-for-tat response, the pro-PKK politician Nujin Yusiv was imprisoned for two days and deported from Iraq to Syria by the KDP's security forces on May 21, despite having a residency permit for a year.

The PKK accused the KRG of dividing Kurdistan. "It shows that they don't have a concern for the national unity [of Kurds]," Riza Altun, a leading member of the PKK, told Al-Monitor.

But Maj. Gen. Aziz Waysi, commander of Barzani's 47,000-strong special forces, called Zerevani (Guards), in Iraqi Kurdistan, denied the accusations and told Al-Monitor in an exclusive interview that the Kurds are already divided historically by the Sykes-Picot borders: "We could make a Berlin wall if there were two



Kurds in Syrian Kurdistan protest at the border with Iraqi Kurdistan region against ditch by KDP.

Kurdish states [in Iraq and Syria]. But this isn't true. If this was the case, I would be the first person to throw myself from this wall."

He added, "They don't want other [parties] to do activities in Syria, only the PYD. The only reason for the ditches is security."

Waysi suggested the ditches were dug after the Kurdish security services discovered the Erbil attack on Sept. 29 was planned in Syria: "We did our investigation after the Erbil attacks, and we found out that the attackers came through this border. They came from Syria, and it was planned in Syria"

But the PYD suspects the KDP is using a border embargo to pressure the PYD to share power with Barzani-backed parties in Syria, and that this is unrelated to the security of the KRG.

This Kurdish cold war prevented the holding of a national Kurdish congress in September of last year and the creation of a united Kurdish administration in Syria.

The PYD, which is aligned with the PKK, announced three canton administrations in January 2014 after an agreement failed between the KDP and PKK to have a united Kurdish voice at the Geneva II conference.

The PYD formed administrations with local Arabs, Christians and small Kurdish parties, while the Kurdish parties united in the Barzani-backed Kurdish National Council (KNC) joined the Western-backed Syrian National Coalition, rejecting the legitimacy of PYD institutions on the ground.

"They only give us permission to operate if we recognize the cantons," senior KDP-S leader Mohammed Ismail told Al-Monitor in Erbil. He was referring to a new political party law that was adopted by pro-PKK Kurdish authorities in Syria in April. The law requires Kurdish parties to register to operate in the Kurdish areas, and also requires recognition of the PYD-led government.

The Barzani-supported Kurdish parties suggest they are ready for dialogue and to revive the 2012 Erbil agreement that proposed a jointly administered Kurdish region in Syria.

"The only condition we had is for the Kurds in Syria to work →

⇒ together and make decisions together. Not by one group (PYD),” Falah Mustafa Bakir, the KRG’s Foreign Relations head told Al-Monitor in Erbil.

But the PYD said this was too late. The PYD suggests the only option for the KNC is to recognize the canton administrations and register according to the political party law or face prosecution.

“The conditions have changed. Now we have democratic administrations in these areas. ... Now we have Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians all together,” PYD leader Muslim told Al-Monitor in an interview in Brussels in January, referring to the suggestion from the KDP-S to return to the Erbil agreement.

The KDP-S suspects the law is a new way of pressuring the KDP-

S to recognize the new administration.

“The problem is not that they do not recognize the political party law; they refuse all administrations. They do not consider the Asayish [security police] as a national force, but a PYD force. Even the YPG [they consider as PYD],” Muslim told Al-Monitor, in London. ♦

Wladimir van Wilgenburg is a columnist for Al-Monitor and a political analyst specializing in Kurdish politics. He has written extensively for Jamestown Foundation publications and other journals, such as the Near East Quarterly and the World Affairs Journal. On Twitter: @vvanwilgenburg



MAY 30, 2014

ISIS accused of massacring Kurdish villagers near border

May 30, 2014
dailystar.com.lb

BEIRUT: Militants from the Al-Qaeda breakaway group the Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) were accused Thursday of massacring 15 Syrian Kurds, nearly half of them children, amid an uptick in violence in Syria’s three eastern provinces.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and several Kurdish media outlets said the attack took place in a village near the town of Ras al-Ain on the Turkish border, after militants stormed the village.

It said of the 15, seven were children, one a young man, and three were women.

Video footage of the aftermath, circulated by activists, showed a man carrying the corpse of a young girl, and shouting, “They are criminals, not Muslims!”

ISIS militants have been accused of committing repeated atrocities against civilians as well as rebels fighting the regime of President Bashar Assad.

Separately, the Observatory said that leaders from the Kurdish YPG militia denied having set off a car bomb in the city of Raqqa earlier this week in an attack that reportedly targeted a high-level meeting of ISIS figures.

The Observatory said the attack, against the Lazord Hotel, killed at least 10 ISIS militants and wounded an unspecified number



File - This undated file image posted on a militant website on Tuesday, Jan. 14, 2014 shows fighters from the Al-Qaeda linked Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria (ISIS) marching in Raqqa, Syria. (AP Photo/militant website)

of others.

“These accusations are wrong – the YPG does not engage in such criminal acts, even if it is in a state of war with ISIS,” a Kurdish militia leader was quoted by the Observatory as saying.

In the city of Hassakeh, a roadside bomb attack Thursday targeted a patrol belonging to a local Kurdish police force, the Observatory added, wounding two policemen.

In Deir al-Zor, fighters from ISIS seized one village and part of another in the western part of the province, it said. The development came after ISIS fighters skirmished with fighters from the

Nusra Front, the Al-Qaeda affiliate in Syria, and Islamist militias from the region.

A number of casualties were sustained by both sides in the clashes, the Observatory said, while two civilians were also killed in the battle.

It said that a rebel commander died of his wounds sustained a few days earlier in clashes with ISIS, while the extremist group’s shelling of the village of Ibriha in Deir al-Zor led to fires that swept large tracts of agricultural land. □



Kurdistan Premier: We Will Never Give Up Control of Our Own Oil

rudaw.net
29 May 2014

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - Erbil welcomes any talks with Baghdad, "but we will never give up control of our own oil," Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani vowed before the Kurdish parliament on Wednesday, directing his message at the Iraqi government.

"We are open to dialogue, but if Baghdad chooses to close all the doors we will certainly not be standing there doing nothing," the prime minister warned. "Selling our oil was a clear message for Baghdad to realize that we will not back down and will do what we have promised in the past."

Barzani's remarks come at a time when relations between Erbil and Baghdad have plummeted over independent oil exports started by Erbil, and Baghdad cutting the region's budget as punishment for three consecutive months, creating a crisis for the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) as it struggles to pay civil servants.

Last week for the first time, the KRG started selling its oil

"Baghdad says that the Iraqi government should be in charge of selling the oil, and we simply say that Baghdad is not entitled to our oil, because their demand is neither constitutional nor legal," Barzani told MPs.



through the Turkish Ceyhan port. The move provoked Baghdad's immediate condemnation, and a warning of legal action against Turkey for allowing the exports to take place.

The KRG has said that it sees the sale of the oil as its constitutional right.

Barzani said that Baghdad wants control over the Kurdish oil industry, which Erbil was unlikely to hand over.

"Baghdad says that the Iraqi government should be in charge of selling the oil, and we simply say that Baghdad is not entitled to our oil, because their demand is

neither constitutional nor legal," Barzani told MPs.

He also said that the KRG agrees for the Iraqi government to monitor the export of Kurdish oil, "but we would never give control of our oil to the Iraqi government."

The prime minister said that the decision to cut the KRG budget was made long before the sale of the Kurdish oil.

"When we arrived in Baghdad (in March) we assumed that Iraq was experiencing a financial crisis as a whole. But then we learned there that Iraq's economy was fine, and that the only place affected

by the funding cut was the Kurdistan Region," Barzani said. He added that wages were cut on the direct orders of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

"The Iraqi finance minister told us that the budget had been cut on orders from the prime minister and commander-in-chief of the armed forces," said Barzani of a meeting of his Kurdish delegation in Baghdad.

Officially, Baghdad is supposed to give Kurdistan 17 percent of the national budget after sovereign expenses, flown in cash from the central bank to Erbil three times a month. But how much is actually paid is disputed. The premier said his government has received only 10 percent in the past. Barzani also said that Iraq owes nearly \$5 billion to the Kurdistan Region in delayed funding.

The premier pledged that his government would "find a way" to pay wages, as Kurdistan seeks alternative sources of finance. "There are no guarantees that Iraq would not cut the KRG's budget again," he warned. ■

Bombing Foiled at Shiite Mosque in Sulaimani



*Packs of explosives in the confiscated backpack.
Photo: Sulaimani police*

24 May 2014
rudaw.net

SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region - Security officials arrested a Farsi-speaking man and confiscated an explosives-filled backpack before it went off at a major Shiite mosque in Sulaimani on Friday, as worshipers were preparing for a religious mourning ceremony.

The security department said that a Farsi-speaking man was arrested as he tried to exit, after leaving behind a backpack in the Shiite mosque, or husseiniyeh, on

Sulaimani's Salim street.

The incident happened as worshipers were preparing to begin ceremonies to mark the death anniversary of Imam Mousa al-Kadhim, a Shiite saint, at the husseiniyeh, the largest in the Kurdistan Region.

The backpack was found to contain 10 kilograms of explosives, the security department said.

"While a number of Shiite citizens were preparing for their religious ceremonies, someone attempted to leave a backpack filled with explosives behind in the mosque," said a security official.

He said the incident happened around 12:30 pm on Friday at the husseiniyeh, built in 2000 and the largest in the Kurdistan Region. A Rudaw correspondent said that the would-be bomber was arrested by a guard at the mosque, ■

➔ and was tied up until the arrival of security forces.

The foiled attempt appeared to be part of larger coordinated attacks on the Shiites of Iraq during the mourning period. Over the past two days explosions, including a suicide car bombing, have killed at least 30 Shiite pilgrims and wounded tens of

others.

Earlier this week, Sulaimani security forces also foiled an attempted attack by three Islamist militants near the main security building in the city. Security sources said that the militants had a car loaded with guns and explosives, and that they intended to attack the building of the security

offices.

Despite the Syrian conflict and worsening security in the rest of Iraq, the Kurdistan Region has been able to remain safe. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has its own security and defence forces, which protect borders and provide security in the Kurdish areas of Iraq.

Security in Sulaimani has been a cause for concern since the outcome of Kurdish parliamentary elections last September, in which the Iranian-supported and powerful Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) lost its dominance in its traditional stronghold to the rival Change Movement (Gorran). ■

PKK 'abductions' heat up Kurdish bid debate



A group of families stage protest in the southeastern province of Diyarbakır for their children kidnapped by the outlawed PKK. DHA photo

May 27.

Operation ruled out

Holding a rally in the eastern Anatolian province of Ağrı, in which local elections will be rerun on June 1, Erdoğan touched upon the issue again.

BDP and HDP politicians can bring back those who have been "kidnapped" by the PKK because of their collaboration with the group, Erdoğan said.

"I believe that you will not allow the sabotage of this beautiful process, this process of serenity and security," Erdoğan said, referring to the long-stalled government-led initiative to solve the long-running issue by ending the three-decade-old conflict, dubbed the "peace process."

Erdoğan said the Kurdish opposition parties had been torpedoing the peace process by remaining silent in the face of the issue of the children.

In the capital city, a senior executive of the AKP told daily Hürriyet that the state bodies would not stand idly by in the case.

"An operation is not desirable in this case," the same executive, however, added, referring to Erdoğan's remarks on alternative plans. "Since there are children under the full legal age, they may also get harmed due to such an operation. That's why, in order not to reach that point, every means including diplomacy will be used for the resolution of the issue," he said.

Meanwhile, the armed wing of the PKK, the People's Defense Forces (HPG), refuted charges that it "abducted" children, maintaining that it complies with international conventions regarding the age of those joining their ranks.

"First and foremost we stress that everyone who joins the guerrilla ranks of the PKK does so on a voluntary basis. It is not possible for us to keep anyone in our ranks who does not want to be there, and no one has been abducted against their will. There is also an age limit," the HPG was quoted as saying yesterday in a statement by the Fırat News Agency, which is ideologically close to the PKK. The HPG also noted that Turkey is not a safe country for children. □

May/28/2014
hurriyetdailynews.com

ISTANBUL

Tension grows between the AKP and the opposition over the PM's 'orders' to bring back children who have reportedly been kidnapped by the PKK

Parliament's pro-Kurdish bloc has moved to work for the release of children who joined the outlawed Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) following threats of an operation by the prime minister, increasing the pressure on Turkey's slow-moving peace process.

Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) leader Selahattin Demirtaş held a meeting yesterday with the families of children who were "abducted" by the PKK, eight days after the families began a sit-in protest in front of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality. The number of families had risen to 16 as of May 28.

"Demirtaş told us he would speak with Kandil [the mountain range in northern Iraq where the PKK has its military headquarters]," said Mahfuze Eren, in a statement on behalf of the missing children's mothers following their meeting with the BDP co-chair.

In Ankara, speaking at a press conference at the Parliament, Kemal Aktaş, a lawmaker for the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP), the BDP's sister party, said they had been closely involved in looking for a resolution to the issue.

"At the moment, BDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş is holding talks with the families; the families have not been abandoned," Aktaş said.

In response to repeated questions on the issue, Demirtaş said the children went to the mountains of their own will. "Going to the mountains," is a phrase used in Turkey to refer to those who join the PKK's armed fight in mountainous areas.

Demirtaş's action comes amid growing public pressure which has also been fuelled by a call from Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on May 27.

"Hey BDP, HDP, where are you?" Erdoğan said, addressing a parliamentary group meeting of his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). "Well, sometimes you go [to Kandil], make agreements, take news and bring it back. Go and get these children, too. You know their addresses very well. You know where everything is extremely well. You will go, take [the children] and come back. If you don't, we will operate using our plan B and plan C," Erdoğan said

Réfugiés: le pape reçoit le président du Kurdistan irakien

Par AFP, le 30 Mai 2014
www.directmatin.fr

Le pape François a reçu vendredi Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, province où vit une très ancienne communauté chrétienne qui a grossi avec l'afflux de réfugiés du reste de l'Irak et de la Syrie, a indiqué le Vatican.

Alors que la violence atteint des sommets en Irak --plus de 4.000 morts dans des violences depuis le début de l'année--, cette région autonome, après avoir été longtemps une zone de conflit à l'époque de Saddam Hussein, est devenue une région plus sûre dans un

environnement particulièrement difficile.

C'est la première fois que le pape recevait M. Barzani qui est à la tête de la région autonome depuis 2005.

La province du Kurdistan irakien accueille plus de 200.000 réfugiés syriens, dont de nombreux Kurdes mais aussi des chrétiens.

Ceux-ci seraient plus de 30.000 dans la région. Parmi eux aussi des chrétiens qui ont quitté Bagdad ou d'autres villes plus au sud pour trouver une sécurité, une tolérance et une liberté plus grandes.

Selon Mgr Rabban Al-Qas,



évêque d'Amadiya-Zahko, interrogé par Radio Vatican, il souffle un air de "liberté" dans la région, même si ce "n'est pas un paradis", cette

liberté attirant les entrepreneurs privés et permettant un certain développement économique. ■

IRAN Nucléaire : Rohani ne cède rien

Alors que les pourparlers reprennent entre l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique et l'Iran, le président iranien, pourtant réputé modéré, a mis en garde les Occidentaux : l'Iran n'est pas prêt à toutes les concessions.

www.courrierinternational.com
Ghazal Golshiri / 12 mai 2014

« Les déclarations du président [iranien] ont réchauffé le cœur de ceux qui se soucient de la révolution ». C'est ainsi que le quotidien conservateur Siasat-e Rooz a félicité, dans son éditorial du 12 mai, Hassan Rohani, pour ses propos fermes tenus la veille sur la volonté de Téhéran de n'accepter "aucun apartheid nucléaire".

"Ces paroles témoignent du caractère révolutionnaire [c'est-à-dire conforme à la révolution islamique de 1979] de leur orateur", a surenchéri Siasat-e Rooz. "Nous ne céderons, même pas d'un iota, à notre technologie nucléaire", avait ainsi mis en garde le président iranien, Hassan Rohani, lors d'une visite d'information sur les nouvelles avancées technologiques nucléaires en matière de santé à l'Agence atomique iranienne, le 11 mai.

Le quotidien gouvernemental, Iran, a adopté une position plus nuancée en soulignant qu'"accepter les négociations avec l'Occident sur le programme nucléaire constitue une avancée pour la République islamique et une manière de désarmer les opposants au régime."

"Pour persuader l'opinion publique et les instances internationales [du caractère pacifique du programme nucléaire], il faut apporter des preuves et éviter des propos illogiques", peut-on lire dans ce quotidien. Les déclarations plutôt fermes de Hassan Rohani, tenues lors de la visite des nouvelles à l'Agence atomique iranienne, interviennent alors qu'un nouveau tour des négociations nucléaires commence à Vienne, lundi 12 mai.



Discours du président iranien Hasan Rouhani lors de la venue de l'Agence internationale à l'énergie atomique à Téhéran le 11 mai 2014 (AFP PHOTO / HO / PRESIDENCY WEBSITE)

Ces pourparlers ont pour but d'amorcer la rédaction de l'accord final entre l'Occident et l'Iran. Un accord préalable avait été signé en novembre dernier, marquant la première avancée dans le dossier du nucléaire iranien depuis une décennie. Le président iranien Rohani, élu en juin 2013, avait promis de détendre les relations avec la communauté internationale. ♦

Irak: 74 morts dans une série d'attaques brutales

Le Monde.fr avec AFP
28 mai 2014

Une soixantaine de personnes ont péri, mercredi 28 mai, dans une vague d'attaques à travers l'Irak, où le bilan dépasse désormais les 4 000 morts dans les violences depuis le début de l'année. Ce nouveau bain de sang intervient alors que les responsables politiques cherchent à constituer des alliances en vue de la formation d'un gouvernement, que le premier ministre sortant, Nouri Al-Maliki, entend continuer à diriger, même si les élections du 30 avril ne lui ont pas donné de majorité claire.

Les attentats les plus graves ont eu lieu en fin de journée à Mossoul, dans le nord du pays, où l'explosion de deux voitures piégées a tué 21 personnes, dont Augustus libere miscere quadrupai. Parsimonia umbraculi suffragarit chirographi. Syrtes circumgrediet zothecas. Utilitas ossifragi miscere quadrupai. Medusa spinosus praemuniet tremulus oratori. Quadrupai fermedis que d'autres voitures piégées ont tué une dizaine d'autres personnes dans les quartiers d'Amin, Sadr City et Jihad.

COLÈRE DE LA MINORITÉ

SUNNITE

D'autres attaques ont fait trois morts dans la région de Bagdad, ainsi que trois autres dans les provinces septentrionales de Kirkouk et de Ninive, dont Mossoul est la capitale. Toujours dans le nord, une série de 11 attentats à la bombe a tué cinq personnes à Touz Khoumatou. Les explosions visaient des maisons de la communauté turkmène de cette ville peuplée également par des Kurdes et des Arabes, et qui est située dans une portion de territoire revendiquée à la fois par le gouvernement central et par la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

Mardi, l'organisation Human Rights Watch a accusé Bagdad de larguer des barils d'explosifs sur des zones d'habitation et d'avoir pu viser un hôpital. L'Irak est endeuillé par des attaques qui tuent en moyenne plus de 25 personnes par jour, un niveau qui n'avait plus été atteint depuis cinq ans, quand le pays sortait à peine d'un conflit confessionnel sanglant après l'invasion américaine de 2003.

Les autorités imputent la violence qui touche l'ensemble du pays à des facteurs extérieurs, au premier rang desquels la guerre en Syrie voisine. Mais diplomates et experts affirment que les violences sont surtout alimentées par la colère de la minorité sunnite, qui s'estime marginalisée et maltraitée par les autorités dirigées par des chiites. ■



Des forces de sécurité irakiennes ont appréhendé des jeunes hommes suspects d'être des combattants de l'État islamique en Irak et au Levant, lors d'un raid mercredi dans la ville de Jorf al-Sakhar, dans le sud de Bagdad.



Les violences à travers l'Irak ont fait 74 morts, mercredi 28 mai, ce qui en fait le jour le plus sanglant depuis plus de sept mois. | REUTERS/STRINGER/IRAQ

Intervention contre un blocus kurde dans le sud-est de la Turquie

Par Reuters - 30/mai/2014

La gendarmerie turque est intervenue vendredi à l'aide de gaz lacrymogènes et de canons à eau pour tenter de lever des barrages sur une autoroute bloquée depuis près d'une semaine par des militants kurdes dans le sud-est du pays, apprend-on de sources proches de la sécurité.



Les militants du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) paralysent en plusieurs points, avec des camions et des voitures, l'axe qui relie les provinces à majorité kurde de Diyarbakir et Bingol, pour protester contre la construction par l'armée de nouveaux avant-postes dans la région.

Le blocus ravive les tensions dans la région et met en relief la fragilité du processus de paix engagé en 2012 par le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan et le chef emprisonné du PKK Abdullah Öcalan pour tenter de mettre fin à une insurrection qui a coûté la vie à 40.000 personnes. □

Iraqi Yazidis push to end 'devil worship' stereotype

The Yazidis in Iraq are seeking not only to preserve their traditions but also to combat misinformation and stereotypes about their faith.



Author Laura Cesaretti
May 23, 2014
www.al-monitor.com

DAHUK, Iraq — When Nietzsche wrote "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" in 1885, he had to kill God to break the dichotomy between good and evil. In Iraqi Kurdistan, there was no need for that; adherents of Yazidism, the world's most ancient monotheistic religion, already knew this.

According to this minority Kurdish group, Lucifer, the beautiful and vain angel of heaven, did not betray God and create evil, but simply manifested himself to the world, becoming the bridge between humans and the Creator. Melek Taus, as the Yazidis call him, is still worshipped in the Temple of Lalish, the sect's holy site in northwestern Iraq. Yazidis consider themselves the direct descendants of Adam and perceive good and evil as the same faces of the same reality. Choosing the right side is up to each person's soul.

This approach has caused nothing but pain for the Yazidi Kurds, who have been subject to many stereotypes in Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran, such as their supposed reluctance to education. Pir Mamo Othman, a consultant at the Yazidi Regional Council, told Al-Monitor, "In the past, there were no governmental schools but just religious ones. This is why many Yazidi families cut short their children's education, fearing they are being converted to Islam." Further, the Yazidi representation of Melek Taus as a peacock has led Muslim and Christian travelers alike to misperceive certain aspects of Yazidi beliefs. The beautiful flying bird, in fact, was considered a manifestation of the devil's power by many ancient communities and followers of the old Zoroastrian faith.

"There is no evil in the Yazidi thought," Birgul Acikyildiz Sengul, lecturer of art history at the Merdin Artuklu University in Turkey and an expert on Yazidi culture, told Al-Monitor. For 10 years, she has conducted extensive research on Yazidi traditions and in 2010 published her book, "The Yazidis: History of a Community, Culture and Religion." "Even some famous orientalist and philosophers from the past have misunderstood their faith," Birgul said. "People saw in them an interest about the Satan-oriented culture without focusing on the reality of their beliefs."

Indeed, even without the "devil-worshipping mystery," the faith remains fascinating. Yazidism is a syncretic faith of old Persian and Indian traditions, as well as Judaism, Christianity and Islam. They believe in reincarnation in addition to heaven and hell. "This dualist approach is the result of a defensive mechanism developed throughout history," Mamo said. Thus, to avoid accusations of blasphemy and Satanism, Yazidis have taken aspects of Christianity and Islam and hidden in their holy place in Lalish, which is surrounded by the three mountains Arafat, Mshgat and Hzrat.

Today, the Lalish Temple — which was destroyed twice between the 13th and 15th centuries — is a mix of new and old buildings. Each room has a different meaning and function. In one lies the grave of Sheik Adi, a Sufi from Lebanon's Bekaa Valley who died here 900 years ago. The sheikh reformed the Yazidi faith and is considered a saint by Yazidis. "When he first came to the Kurdish region, he adopted many ancient practices of our religion," Mamo said. "The Yazidis gathered together under his umbrella and crowned him as their leader following his innovations to Yazidism."

One of the most strict and controversial reforms was the introduction of the caste system. The Yazidis are still divided in three main castes:



The Yazidis are primarily ethnic Kurdish group linked to Zoroastrianism and Sufism. Some 350,000 Yazidis live in villages in Iraqi semi-autonomous Kurdistan region and in Kurdish areas outside Kurdistan region in around Mosul in Nineveh province, with additional communities in Transcaucasia, Armenia, Georgia, Turkey, and Syria, estimated to over 600,000 worldwide. Photo: Reuters •

The spiritual leaders and clerics belong to the highest castes — the Sheikhs and the Pirs — while the rest belong to the Murid. Caste affiliation is derived from parental lineage and cannot be changed. Intermarriages between castes, as well as between non-Yazidis, are banned. "However, culture and religion are now performed in a different way," Shivan Bibo Darwish, a journalist from Lalish Magazine, told Al-Monitor. Although some rules are still followed, Yazidi society is gradually becoming more open. "The caste system, already less strict than the Indian one, does not prevent Yazidis from the Murid caste like me to cover important positions in the public society," Darwish said.

Throughout history, there have been repeated attempts to suppress the Yazidi faith and convert its followers to the three monotheistic religions. Yet, the Yazidis are a peaceful people who do not harbor a desire for power or a moral duty to spread their faith. They strive to find their place in society and no longer wish to be considered outcasts. Even now, in disputed areas such as Mosul, Iraq, their faith is attacked and their existence threatened. Many Yazidis have already emigrated to places like Germany and Armenia. Northern Iraq's Yazidi community is mainly based in Sheikhan, Sinjar and Behzane provinces, as well as the villages located around the city of Dahuk.

With the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government in 1993, the Yazidi community has established more than 20 Lalish cultural centers and aims to promote coexistence with the Sunni Muslim Kurdish majority. "We want to keep our traditions not because we still believe in our descent from Adam or in other myths," Ayad Khanky, a history lecturer at the University of Duhok, told Al-Monitor. "Our aim is to protect the various historical heritage of Kurdish society."

Today, the first established Lalish cultural center in Dahuk has 7,000 members. Many members are Yazidis, but there are also Kurds and foreigners from different backgrounds. According to the center, this support is fundamental to combat misinformation about Yazidism and enhance the role of this ancient faith in the history of religion and human culture. ♦

Laura Cesaretti is an Italian freelance reporter specialised in Middle East and South Asia issues. She has an MA in International Politics from City University of London and an MA in Journalism from Sapienza University of Rome. She is currently based in southern Turkey.

Le Monde
Samedi 31 mai 2014

Ces oligarques syriens qui tiennent à bout de bras le régime Assad

Des hommes d'affaires proches du pouvoir reversent une partie de leurs bénéfices à l'Etat

En Syrie, les affaires continuent. Malgré l'océan de destructions semées par les forces loyalistes et les sanctions votées par les pays occidentaux, une poignée d'entrepreneurs dans l'orbite du pouvoir engrange toujours des profits. Des témoignages récoltés par *Le Monde*, auprès de très bons connaisseurs du régime syrien, dévoilent une partie du système occulte et prédateur qui permet au président Bachar Al-Assad d'entretenir l'allégeance de ses fidèles et de financer sa guerre contre l'opposition.

A quelques jours de la pseudo-présidentielle du 3 juin, qui devrait offrir au chef de l'Etat son troisième mandat d'affilée, la mise en coupe réglée du pays et la dépendance de Damas de ses alliés, notamment l'Iran, n'ont jamais été aussi forte. « Il n'y a presque plus un seul dollar qui rentre légalement dans les coffres de l'Etat, constate un ex-intime du clan Assad. Les puits de pétrole sont passés sous le contrôle des rebelles ou des Kurdes. Les gens ne paient plus ni les impôts, ni leurs factures d'eau ou d'électricité. Tout ce qui reste au régime pour payer les salaires des fonctionnaires, ce sont les magouilles et l'aide directe de l'Iran et de l'Irak. »

En matière de combines, le roi reste Rami Makhlof. Ce cousin de Bachar Al-Assad, qui contrôle des pans entiers de l'économie syrienne, comme la téléphonie mobile (Syriatel), a su, de sources convergentes, maintenir sa position dominante. Avec Ayman Jaber et Abdel Kader Sabra, deux hommes d'affaires de la côte, et Samir Hassan, ancien de Nestlé, il a investi dans l'importation de produits alimentaires, notamment le blé, le riz, le sucre et le thé. Un nouveau marché, apparu à la faveur des mauvaises récoltes de l'année passée et du basculement de nombreuses zones rurales dans les mains de la rébellion. Contrairement au pétrole, les produits alimentaires échappent à l'embargo européen.

Autre aubaine créée par la crise : l'importation de pétrole, une activité déléguée au secteur privé depuis que les sites d'extraction de Deir ez-Zor et Hassaké ne sont plus contrôlés par l'Etat. Ce marché atti-

re d'autant plus les convoitises que Téhéran a accordé à Damas, en août 2013, un crédit de 3,6 milliards de dollars (2,6 milliards d'euros), destiné spécifiquement à l'achat de brut et de produits pétroliers. Les heureux élus se fournissent en

Iran et en Irak, mais aussi auprès des groupes rebelles qui se sont emparés des puits. Au début de l'année, des chancelleries occidentales affirmaient que des émissaires du régime avaient acheté du pétrole au Front Al-Nosra, un groupe djihadiste présent à Deir ez-Zor.

« Le conflit a rebattu les cartes d'un point de vue économique, analyse Peter Harling, de l'International Crisis Group. Il a forcé des grandes familles à s'exiler ou à fermer boutique et a permis à une nouvelle génération d'affairistes d'émerger. » L'un des intermédiaires en vogue sur le marché du blé est la famille Foz, de Lattaquié, qui agit pour le compte du général Dhou Al-Himma Chalich, cousin de Bachar Al-Assad et patron de sa garde privée, visé par les sanctions occidentales.

Pour échapper aux sanctions internationales, les profiteurs de guerre s'abritent derrière une multitude de paravents. « Rami Makhlof a un bureau d'avocats à ses ordres qui passe l'essentiel de son temps à créer des sociétés écrans », assure un membre de l'élite économique damascène. Une partie de ces faux nez a été identifiée par les limiers du Trésor américain et de la Commission européenne. Un fonds d'investissements aux îles Caïmans et une holding au Luxembourg, Drex Technologies, ont été ajoutés, en 2012, sur la liste noire des sociétés et des entrepreneurs accusés de financer le régime Assad.

Mais selon un homme d'affaires syrien très bien informé, le cousin Rami est parvenu à mettre une bonne partie de sa fortune à l'abri, notamment à Dubaï. L'émirat du Golfe, où vit Bouchra Al-Assad, la sœur du président syrien, s'enorgueillit du fait qu'il a recueilli, après le début des « printemps arabes », une partie des avoirs des élites du Proche-Orient, en quête de confidentialité. « Depuis 2011,



A Damas, le 27 mai. Le scrutin présidentiel du 3 juin devrait offrir à Bachar Al-Assad son troisième mandat consécutif. LOUAI BECHARA/AFP

Dubaï joue dans notre région le même rôle qu'a joué la Suisse durant la seconde guerre mondiale, en Europe », confie la source syrienne.

Par le biais de son père, Mohammed, qui vit entre Damas et Moscou, le PDG de Syriatel dispose aussi de facilités en Russie. C'est d'ailleurs dans ce pays qu'est imprimée la monnaie syrienne, depuis que l'Autriche a dû renoncer à ce contrat, en application des sanctions européennes, décidées à l'automne 2011. En décembre de

cette année, le Kremlin, indéfectible protecteur de Damas, avait autorisé la banque centrale syrienne à ouvrir des comptes en roubles dans des banques russes. Un stratagème destiné à contourner les sanctions occidentales, qui interdisent aux Syriens de conduire des transactions en dollars.

L'empire Makhlof dispose aussi de relais en Roumanie, où le beau-père de Rami, Walid Othman, est ambassadeur. « Les activités de ses enfants en Europe, notamment à Vienne et Bucarest, génèrent des millions de dollars de cash, qui sont renvoyés en Syrie par la valise diplomatique », accuse Ayman Abdel Nour, le rédacteur en chef du site d'informations All4Syria, un ancien conseiller de Bachar Al-Assad passé à l'opposition.

Le gang des oligarques syriens comprend aussi Maher Al-Assad, le frère du président, et ses affidés :

Mohammed Hamsho, Samer Debs et Khaled Qadour. Le premier, qui détient le très juteux marché du VOIP (Voice Over Internet Protocol), un système de communications à bas prix de l'étranger vers la Syrie, s'appête à obtenir du ministère du tourisme une licence pour développer un projet d'île artificielle, près de Tartous.

En contrepartie des prébendes que leur accorde l'Etat, ces industriels lui reversent une partie de leurs bénéfices. Le magot de Syriatel finance à l'évidence les salaires du service public, voire la solde des chabbih, les miliciens prorégime. Selon l'économiste Jihad Yazigi, auteur d'un rapport sur l'économie de guerre syrienne, des compagnies de bus ont mis leur flotte au service de l'armée. Signe de la résilience de cette caste, aucun ou presque des hommes d'affaires inscrits sur la liste noire n'a rallié l'opposition. Quelques personnes ont obtenu que leur nom soit effacé, après avoir plaidé l'erreur d'identité devant les tribunaux américains ou européens.

Mais qu'on ne s'y trompe pas, pour l'immense majorité des entrepreneurs syriens, le conflit est une calamité. Les experts de l'ONU ont fait le calcul : même avec une croissance annuelle de 5 %, il faudra trente ans pour que le produit national brut syrien retrouve son niveau d'avant-guerre. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

Go beyond diplomacy on Syria

Jonathan Stevenson

NEWPORT, R.I. Along with President Obama, most Americans disapprove of direct military intervention in Syria. They believe it would immerse the United States in another Middle East war with unpredictable consequences. They much prefer a diplomatic solution.

They are correct. But Syria is not as distant a threat as some believe, and limited, discreet military assistance to the Syrian opposition could enhance American security and make diplomacy more likely to succeed.

It is true that Al Qaeda's senior leadership in Pakistan has urged jihadis in Syria to focus on toppling its president, Bashar al-Assad, and worry about more distant enemies later. But the senior leadership has less influence among its affiliates than before.

One of the largest, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, known as ISIS, has rejected the leadership's guidance in favor of more ambitious operations, prompting Ayman al-Zawahri, Al Qaeda's senior leader, to disavow it in favor of a more Syria-focused organization, the Nusra Front. But instead of backing down, ISIS has taken on the Nusra Front for primacy in Syria, while its leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, is challenging Mr. Zawahri for the leadership of Al Qaeda.

At the same time, ISIS appears to be developing closer relations with another powerful Al Qaeda affiliate, the Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, whose leader has hinted that the two organizations might even merge.

Any alignment between the two would present a challenge to American security. Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula is the most capable of Al Qaeda's franchises: The group orchestrated the 2009 attempt by Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, the so-called underwear bomber, to blow up an airliner over Detroit; sent an explosives-laden package to the United States in 2010; and threatened attacks on several American embassies in 2013. It also provided sanctuary for Anwar al-Awlaki, the American citizen who had a worldwide following as a Qaeda ideologue before he was killed in a drone strike in 2011.

Still, as chaotic as Yemen can be, its government works closely with American forces, and that has constrained Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula's oper-

ations. Should it find a new base and set of resources in Syria through an alliance with ISIS, it could become much more capable of hitting the United States. Such a development could also mean that America's established methods of defending against Al Qaeda franchises — intelligence sharing, cooperative border security — would be substantially less effective.

All of which puts President Obama in a difficult situation: Like it or not, for now the Assad regime and the United States' Shiite adversaries Iran and Hezbollah constitute the best counter to resolutely transnational jihadist groups that are combining forces in and around Syria and gaining strength. That doesn't mean America should accept, let alone encourage, the perpetuation of the horrors of the Syrian conflict. But it does mean that Mr. Obama must not merely advance Mr. Assad's exit from office, but also ensure that the government that replaces his regime is moderate and capable.

The power-sharing compromise that the administration has pursued would yield countervailing checks on Sunni and Shiite extremism, and active American diplomacy must continue to explore avenues for achieving it — including circumspect engagement with Iran.

However, in light of the entrenched positions of both Qaeda extremists and Iran and Hezbollah in Syria, diplomacy is unlikely to be enough. The United States needs to go further and provide sustained covert assistance to moderate Syrian opposition groups. That would signal the determination and staying power of the United States and its partners, and provide as-

surances that they intend to mitigate the risks that Al Qaeda and other Sunni jihadis pose to a peaceful political transition in Syria.

Some steps along these lines are already being taken. The administration has hinted that it is ramping up Jordan-based covert training and coordination programs for moderate opposition groups, and evidence has emerged that the United States is supplying them with anti-tank missiles.

Such steps have a dual function: On the one hand, they reassure Iran and Hezbollah that the United States is committed to an outcome that does not

empower Sunni extremists; on the other hand, because the moderate opposition too is in conflict with Mr. Assad and his foreign allies, American covert assistance raises the price of military engagement for Iran and Hezbollah, making them more likely to come to the bargaining table.

More could be done. Washington could consider creating a trusted elite force of heavily vetted and trained opposition fighters that could take on ISIS and the Nusra Front, help defend smaller or less capable moderate groups against radical jihadis and possibly form the core of a stabilization force for Syria.

This strategy might seem to detract from the administration's larger, strategic goal of elevating soft power over hard power as a foreign policy tool. On the contrary: If the United States is to achieve a diplomatic solution in Syria, and thus prove the efficacy of soft power, it has to do so without compromising homeland security.

To that end, by demonstrating America's determination to counter jihadist terrorism to Iran and Russia, enhanced programs for vetting, training and equipping the Syrian opposition could actually advance diplomatic efforts. By tamping down global terrorist threats, they would also help secure the American homeland.

JONATHAN STEVENSON, a professor of strategic studies at the United States Naval War College, was the director for political-military affairs for the Middle East and North Africa on the national security staff at the White House from November 2011 to May 2013.

The U.S. needs to provide covert assistance to moderate Syrian opposition groups.

Turkey's Kurdish oil gamble

Turkey's sale of Iraqi Kurdish crude oil could backfire for Ankara and the Kurdistan Regional Government.



Author Denise Natali
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www.al-monitor.com

Rather than assume regional leadership and help resolve the oil dispute between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has done just the opposite. Ankara's sale of Kurdish crude without Baghdad's authorization — with revenues to be deposited in a Turkish bank — may pressure Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, give Turkey access to cheap Kurdish crude and provide much-needed revenue to the KRG. Yet, it has unleashed a legal and political backlash in Iraq. Erdogan's goodwill gesture toward the Kurds has also deepened the polarization between Baghdad and Erbil without resolving the KRG's current revenue crisis. The KRG remains in financial limbo, dependent upon both Ankara and Baghdad, and still in need of a grand bargain that can permit large-scale, risk-free exports through the northern corridor.

Although Ankara's sale of Kurdish crude has not fundamentally reshaped regional energy markets, it reveals the extent to which Erdogan and the KRG are willing to defy and pressure Baghdad. The timing of the sale was no coincidence. It not only followed months of a budget dispute between Erbil and Baghdad, but the Iraqi elections that left Maliki with a plurality of seats although an insufficient number to form a government. Ankara and Erbil may either seek to force an energy deal from Maliki in return for Kurdish support or assure that Maliki does not reassume the premiership. For the KRG, the sale also reflects a highly salient oil nationalism that has become embedded in its political agenda and society, and the ongoing efforts to gain economic autonomy from Baghdad.

Yet, this tactical move may not necessarily lead to desired outcomes. At minimum it has exacerbated an already tense negotiating climate. As expected, Baghdad immediately filed litigation against Ankara and its state-run pipeline operator, Botas, at the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) in Paris for violating the 2010 Pipeline Tariff Agreement (functioning and amended since 1973) and the 1946 Friendship Treaty between Iraq and Turkey. The Iraqi federal court also has filed a complaint against the KRG. Legal uncertainty is reinforced by the executive order announced by President Barack Obama on May 27, ending immunities to the Development Fund for Iraq and certain other Iraqi property and interests, which leaves Kurdish oil exports unprotected from attachment claims, at least in theory. Litigation could go on for months, if not years, perpetuating legal risks and uncertainty for future large-scale exports as well as political distrust between Baghdad, Ankara and Erbil.

It is also uncertain if small-scale, legally contentious oil sales can meet the KRG's revenue needs or leverage Maliki. According to an analysis by Bank of America Merrill Lynch Global Research, KRG oil sales might only partially compensate for the financial losses from Baghdad. The study said that under the current payment system, the KRG would need monthly sales from 20 tankers holding a million barrels of oil each to gain proceeds of \$340 million; this represents only 25% of the KRG's monthly budgetary appropriations from Baghdad. Kurdish leaders have secured loans of over \$450 million from local businessmen that they plan to repay with crude oil; however, large-scale financing to substitute for Baghdad's revenue cuts is still unavailable.

Even though the KRG plans to increase export volumes and sales

A worker adjusts the valve of an oil pipe at Khurmala oil field on the outskirts of Erbil, Dec. 4, 2013. (photo by REUTERS/String



to offset Baghdad's payment gap, technical issues prevent this option in the short and medium term. Because the two pipelines that comprise the Iraqi Turkish Pipeline (ITP) cannot function simultaneously, the KRG's export line (which has blocked access from the Iraqi side) can continue to transport crude as long as the second line is not functioning. Coordinating pipeline use has thus far not been an issue since the line on the Iraqi Arab side has been attacked and in disrepair over the past few months, leaving the KRG free to use its portion of the line. Usage and coordination issues could become a problem if and when the other line starts to function again.

Thus, to maximize the potential of both lines simultaneously, Baghdad and Erbil will need to reach a compromise on pipeline sharing. The KRG has ordered additional pumps to enable exports independently of the other line, but these are not expected to be in place for another six to nine months. Even then, the portion of the ITP that the KRG now controls has the capacity to export about 500,000 barrels per day, if fully repaired and functioning. Any additional volumes to be exported from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey would require coordination with Baghdad to use the other part of the ITP, and/or constructing another line entirely, and building necessary storage facilities.

Turkey's sale of Kurdish crude also has implications for Iraq's internal stability and negotiating a long-term revenue-sharing agreement. Although the oil and revenue dispute has been framed as a conflict between Kurdish leaders and Maliki, it extends to other Iraqi Arab provinces as well. Some Arab Iraqi officials, including Mosul governor Atheel al-Nujafi, argue that the KRG has the right to export given Baghdad's failure to pay salaries, as long as the revenues are used for all Iraqis. Other leaders and populations are critical of what they perceive as unilateral action by the KRG, and its privileged position. The southern oil-producing provinces have criticized the KRG's revenue payments as unfair, while pressing Maliki to either prevent Kurdish exports or offer them similar rights. These demands limit what Maliki can offer the KRG without setting a precedent that will require similar concessions to other provinces. These competing revenue claims also fuel the problem of consensus building.

Under the current conditions, Turkey and the KRG may continue to export and sell small amounts (100,000 bpd) of Kurdish crude. Yet, this gamble with Baghdad could backfire or at least reinforce red lines that need to be softened to move forward with much-needed compromises on all sides. Certainly the problem is an internal one between Baghdad and Erbil, but Ankara remains an essential actor that can either be a stabilizer or a spoiler in this affair. ♦

Denise Natali is a columnist for Al-Monitor. She is a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, where she specializes in Iraq, regional energy issues and the Kurdish problem. The views expressed are her own and do not reflect the official policy or position of the National Defense University, the Department of Defense or the US government.

Kurdish families demand the PKK stop kidnapping minors

About two dozen Kurdish families have come forward since May 19 in protest of the Kurdistan Workers Party's abduction of their children.



Author Tulin Daloglu Posted
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al-monitor.com

It all started on April 23, the day Turkey marked its 91st National Sovereignty and Children's Day. While in the western side of the country children were in a festive mood, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) kidnapped 25 students between the ages of 14 and 16 on the east side of the country, in the Lice district of Diyarbakir.

Sinan Bockum, 15, was one of those kidnapped. His family did a most unexpected thing when they got the news about what happened to their son. Although the PKK has kidnapped more than 330 minors in the last six months, the Bockum family was the first in the region who put up a tent near their home to start a sit-in protest, challenging the PKK and demanding that it return their son. Sinan was returned to the family on May 4. Al-Monitor reported this incident from the beginning in depth.

None of the other families whose sons and daughters were kidnapped with Sinan on that day, however, joined the Bockum family during their sit-in at first. On May 19, that story changed. Ahmet Gunduz and Selami Eren started their sit-in protest in front of the Diyarbakir mayor's office. Gumduz's daughter Halime, 15, and Eren's son Firat Aydin Eren, 15, were kidnapped on the day Sinan was taken by the PKK. "In the beginning we trusted to our own network and thought we could take back our kids safely from the PKK," Selami Eren told Al-Monitor. "But it led to all dead ends, and we were left with no choice but to actively start this protest." He said, "My son has very weak bones. He got me mad just two weeks before he was kidnapped, and I held his hand tight out of anger. I should not have done that. I broke two of his fingers just by that. If something happens to him on the mountains, he is too fragile. I lost all the sleep that I have thinking about all the potential wrongs that could happen."

Halime's father, Ahmet, said, "We started as two families on May 19 [in] our protest before the Diyarbakir municipality. We are now about 21 families and the number keeps going up. All we want is our kids and peace. We don't want the PKK to kidnap our kids. We don't want to see any fighting between the security forces and the PKK. Both sides are our own people. Enough of that violence already. We just want a normal life."

The PKK, however, is strong in Diyarbakir and the families' public appeal received mixed reactions. "There are those who accuse these families of betraying the Kurdish cause and allowing themselves be used by the state to weaken the PKK at a time when it really has captured an exceptional strength at the negotiation table with the Erdogan government," one local, who asked not to be named, told Al-Monitor. "There are those who are really angry to these families, and would have preferred them to simply shut up."

Just like the Bockum family, these families who sit in protest of the PKK's kidnapping their children are in fact acting with a unique bravery. Since the Erdogan government agreed in 2006 to start negotiating with the PKK to resolve the Kurdish issue, it has become easier to address these matters as the taboo was broken. "These Kurdish families now remind the people across the country that the PKK is certainly not as innocent as its recent image prevails, and it certainly is no organization that upholds democratic standards or human rights," the same local told Al-Monitor.

Families, on the other hand, express desperation that they are being pushed into politicking. Ahmet Gunduz, for example, said that he works in northern Iraq as a construction worker to take care of his family. "I don't have the time to think about politics or act politically," he told Al-Monitor on May 28. "But two AKP [Justice and Development Party] women deputies came to talk to us. I don't even remember their names. We talked to



Selahattin Demirtas, [pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party co-chairman]. He told us he would personally talk to the PKK and that things could change in the next 10 days. We will now discuss among the family members what to do about our protest — whether to continue or end it."

On May 29, Ahmet Gunduz told Al-Monitor that they had decided to continue with their protest "for another three days." He explained his decision, expressing concern that the family had not been given any guarantees as to when their children could be back: "I have no clue till this moment where my daughter is. I don't know whether she is within the Turkish territories or taken outside the country," he said. "Demirtas did not give a clear promise that he would be able to bring them back. What happens if the kids do not come back — let's say in 10 days, and we find ourselves quitting our stand for no real reason? Who would take us seriously then? All we want is our children and peace."

Esad Bozkaya agrees. "My son Murat was kidnapped in Bitlis on March 8. He is 17 years old. I want to appeal now to your hearts. Listen, there is no difference between a kid who is kidnapped at 15 or 17 years of age. These are still very young people, and I don't want my son to join this endless fighting and lose his life in the mountains," he told Al-Monitor. "We are talking about a straight honor student at school. He scored more than 430 points in the first part of the university exam [out of 500]. How could anyone think that he had given up from all of that, all of his dreams of what he can be, and decided to join the armed struggle? It does not make any sense, does it?"

Firat's father, Selami, concurs that they should not focus all their bets in the age issue. "The PKK side argues that they did not kidnap our children, but that they joined them with their own free will. Look, when a girl escapes to the man she loves in these lands, we define it as kidnapping. Why? Because the family has not given consent for their marriage. This is no different. We as the parents have not given any consent and the PKK needs to hear our voice and return our children back to us — safely!"

Despite remaining silent on Sinan Bockum's case, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan threw his political standing behind these families. Speaking at his regularly scheduled parliamentary group meeting on May 27, Erdogan first took on the media, questioning the newsrooms' understanding of what makes news at a time coinciding with the anniversary of the Gezi Park protests of last year. "Where in the world are you, the international media?" Erdogan exclaimed, criticizing the lack of coverage of PKK kidnappings of the minors. "But if there were to be people gathering in front of the Galatasaray University [close to Gezi Park in Taksim, Istanbul], you would have reported it in its entirety. If that is the case, how could you ignore these mothers whose children are kidnapped by the PKK? I should keep some out from this list, but where are the Turkish media's reporting on this case? Why are you not covering this news?"

Erdogan also warned that the state is ready to move to alternative plans if these children cannot be brought back through negotiation channels. ⇨

⇒ Although it is not clear what that exactly means, or whether this entails potential military engagement, the kidnapped children's families speaking to Al-Monitor stress that the peace process should not end, even as they express total desperation regarding the cost both in blood and treasure of the three-decade-long fighting between the military and the PKK. Yet, the blame game between the Erdogan government and the Kurdish parties is at full speed, providing no constructive exit from the current impasse.

Ozgur Gundem, a pro-Kurdish daily, for example, announced on its front page on May 29 that it was Erdogan's fault that these children were kidnapped. "Take the step so that they can be returned," the front page headline read, painting Erdogan as a murderer and the one who bears the ultimate responsibility of the December 2011 Roboski incident where a Turkish military airstrike based on flawed intelligence led to the deaths of 34 civilian Kurdish citizens.

While Erdogan accuses the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) and the People's Democracy Party (HDP) for "not moving a muscle" to help these families, the daily writes, "After ending the lives of so many Kurdish children, Erdogan is now trying to present an image of a person 'loving children.' The families, however, demand that Erdogan come up with concrete plans on how to resolve the Kurdish issue. There is no need for him to come up with ideas about coming up with a B or C alternative."

Erdogan said May 27, "I am asking the BDP and the HDP, where are you? There has been times when you went to the PKK, and brought back other kidnapped people [taken by the PKK.] Why don't you do the same for these children? Go and bring back these children, too. You will either do this or our plans B and C will come into force."

For the families who decided not to end their protest for an additional three days, hoping that they could reunite with their children in this time frame, the peace process might as well put into a freezer until these children are found. Its future prospects also remains in limbo in this political environment. If there is any good in this tragedy, though, it is that Turks across the country raise their voices in goodwill for these Kurdish families to have a good outcome, and praise them for their courage in standing against the PKK and demanding their children back. Until now, though, many ordinary citizens had been confused about the silence of the Kurdish families at a time when their children were taken away from them

Clashes between PKK members and security forces end after two days in southeastern Turkey



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DIYARBAKIR - The clashes that had erupted between members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and security forces in southeastern province of Diyarbakir have ended after a two day skirmish.

The attack began when the PKK blocked a main road in the region.

However, illegal demonstrations continued for two days after the main road blocked by PKK members was opened on May 26, following interventions by security forces.

The group threw Molotov cocktails, noise bombs filled with nails and fireworks during the clashes, while security forces used water cannons to disperse them.

Seven security officers have been slightly wounded, the Diyarbakir Governor office said, as reported by Anadolu Agency.

An operation has been ongoing to cap-

ture the groups and ensure the safety of citizens travelling in the region, the statement added.

PKK members first gathered on May 25 to protest an irrigation dam project planned to be built in the region, the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) said in an official statement released May 26.

Groups repeatedly gathered at the scene and blocked the road by parking vehicles on the road, despite interventions, and were finally dispersed on late May 26, the TSK said.

PKK members also opened harassing fire, to which the TSK immediately returned fire in Lice district.

Tension high in region

Tension in the region has escalated in recent days, despite the ongoing peace process.

A convoy of 10 vehicles, including eight trucks and two armored military cars, was attacked by members of the PKK on May 25 in the eastern province of Şırnak. Militants detonated improvised explosives remotely as the convoy was going to a post

construction area, and another explosive device was defused by the authorities at the scene. No casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, in the eastern province of Bingöl on May 22, militants set alight two excavators and a cylinder vehicle after detaining guards.

On May 21, militants halted a truck carrying wood and set it alight in Mardin, while also threatening citizens not to cut firewood in the area and seizing people's cell phones.

Other incidents involving PKK members were reported by the military in the eastern provinces of Hakkari and Ağrı.

The government-led initiative to address the long-running Kurdish issue by ending the three-decade-old conflict between security forces and the PKK has ground to a halt in recent months. Öcalan began talks with Turkish officials last year to stop the conflict, which has left more than 40,000 people dead over the past three decades. In March 2013, he ordered his fighters to observe a cease-fire, which has tentatively held since then. □

First Official Kurdish Dictionary in Turkey Sets Small Milestone for Kurds

By Deniz Serinci
27 May 2014
rudaw.net

COPENHAGEN, Denmark – The first Turkish-Kurdish dictionary went on sale in Turkey, a milestone of sorts in a country where the Kurdish language was banned until 1991 and where the country's large minority Kurds still widely complain of persecution.

The dictionary, which translates from both Turkish and Kurdish, was published by the state-run Turkish Language Association (TDK), the official regulator of the Turkish language, and has attracted much media and public attention.

The dictionary is based on the Kurmanji dialect spoken by most Kurds in Turkey, and is prepared by language experts and academics for use at schools where Kurdish is an elective course.

TDK Chairman Mustafa Kacalin said the dictionary was the result of 18 months of work.

Fifty-thousand copies have been printed of the first edition, which is split into Turkish-Kurdish and Kurdish-Turkish sections.



Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc promoting the new Kurdish dictionary. Photo: Sabah

Speaking Kurdish and any expression of Kurdish culture was completely banned in Turkey until 1991. The ban was imposed by the founder of modern Turkey, Kemal Ataturk, who propagated the idea of "one people, one language, one state, one flag."

By publishing a Kurdish dictionary TDK, which was established with Ataturk's own initiative, has drawn much attention in the Turkish media.

Duygu Atlas, a researcher and expert on Turkey at Tel Aviv University, told Rudaw that publication of the dictionary, like so many other steps in recent years, overturns Turkey's past politics.

"After the First World War, the new political elite took up the nation-building project with Turkish nationalism as its basis, in order to create a homogeneous nation. But now we slowly see a change," she said.

An example of the change was witnessed on May 24, when during a visit to Germany Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared the motto of "one people, one state, one flag," but did not mention "one language."

However, a board member of the Human Rights Association (IHD) in Istanbul, Seza Mis Horoz, told Rudaw that the Kurds still face discrimination over speaking Kurdish.

"The taboo against the Kurdish language is broken and the community can speak Kurdish. But because Kurdish still has no legal status in the Turkish constitution, the Kurds still suffer difficulties. For example, prisoners are not always allowed to defend themselves in Kurdish in court," Horoz said.

Language rights are a central Kurdish demand, and Atlas does not believe Kurds will settle for less than full rights.

"There may be more small-scale reforms in store, but anything that falls short of full language rights, especially education in their mother tongue, in the end will categorically mean the continuation of the 'Kurdish question' in Turkey," Atlas said. ■

President Barzani in Paris: Kurds Will Consider 'Other Options' if Baghdad Doesn't Change Policy



rudaw.net
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PARIS, France—Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani met with his French counterpart Francois Hollande in Paris on Friday where according to the Kurdish foreign minister, the French have pledged their country's support for the Kurds "in the next stage."

"The French officials stressed that they would continue to support and assist the Kurdistan

Region and also showed their willingness to support us in the next stage" said Falah Mustafa, the head of Kurdistan Region's department of foreign relations (DFR).

Mustafa said that Barzani had told the French president and other top officials that the Kurds have other options on the table if Baghdad fails to change its policies toward the Kurds.

"It was stressed that the Kurdistan Region has done its best, but that it cannot continue this way and in the future we ➤

► will have practical solutions,” said Mustafa.

Tensions between Baghdad and Erbil heightened recently after the central government froze the autonomous region’s monthly budget. Meanwhile, Kurdish leaders have threatened to go for a referendum on splitting from Iraq if Nouri al-Maliki runs for a third term as Iraq’s prime minister.

“He (Barzani) told the French president that the Kurdistan Region has done everything for the success of the democratic and political process in Iraq, but unfortunately non-compliance with the constitution and not

observing national partnership have hampered the development of the process,” Foreign Relations Minister Mustafa, quoted President Barzani as saying.

Kurdistan President’s Chief of Staff, Fuad Hussein, told Rudaw that “Kurdish independence” wasn’t discussed at the meeting between the Kurdish and French presidents.

“However, President Hollande told President Barzani ‘whatever decision you may take there should be an exchange of opinion between us,’ said Hussein.

Hussein confirmed that the Kurdish president had reiterated

the Kurds’ readiness to seek the path that best suits the Kurdistan Region in its dealings with Baghdad.

“If Baghdad continues its previous policies, then the Kurds will have to make a decision and seek other options according to the constitution,” said Hussein.

Iraqi Kurds and France have enjoyed decades of good relations, particularly since 1991 and the presidency of Francois Mitterrand, who was instrumental in imposing the No-Fly-Zone on Iraq to protect the Kurds following their national uprising.

France was also among the first to open a Consulate General

in Erbil in 2009 to further bilateral diplomatic, trade and cultural relations.

Several French companies have invested in the oil-rich Kurdistan Region, among them Total Oil Company.

“There is a number of French companies in the Kurdistan Region and President Hollande stated that France cares about its relations with the Kurdistan Region,” maintained Mustafa.

As part of his European tour President Barzani and his delegation are expected to visit Italy and the Vatican City where Barzani is to meet with Pope Francis. ■



31 May 2014

Kurdish Flag Set Tone of Barzani’s Meetings at Vatican, Rome



Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani with Pope Francis. Photo: KRP



Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani (L) with Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini in Rome. Photo: KRP

rudaw.net
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ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani held separate meetings with Pope Francis and Italian Foreign Minister Federica Mogherini, the talks centering around bilateral ties, the situation in Iraq and Syria and the plight of tens of thousands of Christian refugees in Kurdistan.

The highlight of the Kurdish president’s meetings was the official respect both the Vatican and Rome paid to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG): At both meetings, the Kurdish flag was displayed alongside the Iraqi flag.

“Putting the Kurdistan flag is a

message for the people of Kurdistan that the outside world understands the status of the Kurdistan Region,” said Fuad Hussein, Barzani’s chief of staff, in an interview with Rudaw from Rome.

“It’s the recognition of the identity of Kurdistan’s people and the legal identity of the people of Kurdistan,” Hussein said.

Barzani’s meeting with the Pope, his first, comes at a time when the Vatican is looking at ways to make Christians stay in Iraq, despite sectarian violent attacks that have forced an exodus and dwindled numbers.

Vatican Radio said the head of the Roman Catholic Church received Barzani and his accompanying delegation, but it did not give

information about the audience.

Kurdistan, the only stable region in Iraq, has become a safe haven for some 30,000 Christians, but they still face linguistic and cultural barriers, and lack economic security.

Mogherini said her meeting with Barzani had focused on “mutual relations and the future of the Middle East, in particular Syria and the refugee crisis.”

According to the minister, Italy has 400 investment projects in the Kurdistan Region, and is eager to strengthen relations further. “Our relations in economy and trade are very good. We are seeking to improve our relations even more in the future,” Mogherini added.

Falah Mustafa, head of Kurdistan’s Department of Foreign Relations (DFR), also noted the Italian interest in the Kurdistan Region.

“They are very hopeful about Kurdistan, and they are eager to develop relations with the Kurdistan Region,” he said from Rome.

Kurdish officials say that, internationally, there is growing interest in the Kurdistan Region, and that the attitude of foreign offi-

cials towards Kurdistan has changed.

“What we feel is that, on personal and professional level, these trips by the president and prime minister of the Kurdistan Region are different from the previous ones,” Mustafa said. “The International community’s reading for Kurdistan is different; the readiness of the international community to further listen to us is different.”

Barzani has been on a tour of the European Union for the last several days, stopping in France before arriving in Italy. His visit comes as relations between Erbil and Baghdad have plummeted over Kurdish oil exports and budget payments.

Hussein said that the strengthening of the KRG’s relations would be helpful in the future, when Kurdistan makes its own decision about its future status in Iraq.

According to Hussein a major part of the talks centered on the current situation in Iraq, formation of the next government and potential Kurdish steps toward a possible referendum over independence. ■

MONDE

GEOPOLITIQUE

POURQUOI ON EN PARLE

Dans un Moyen-Orient en sang, les Kurdes, si longtemps victimes, semblent échapper à la malédiction. Désormais en force au Parlement turc, ils constituent un îlot de prospérité au Kurdistan irakien, loin du chaos de Bagdad, tandis qu'en Syrie ils disposent de trois régions autonomes. Seront-ils, demain, des médiateurs entre les peuples sur leurs terres natales déchirées ?

PAR MARTINE GOZLAN

38 / Marianne / 30 mai au 5 juin 2014



L'HEURE KURDE SONNE AU MOYEN-ORIENT

BULLE DE SÉRÉNITÉ Le Kurdistan irakien, qui s'est relevé grâce à l'aide financière américaine, est prospère. Les femmes y jouissent d'un statut privilégié.

Est-ce un répit ou un salut ? Les Kurdes, ce peuple étiré sur quatre pays brûlants – la Turquie, la Syrie, l'Irak et l'Iran – ont été trahis et massacrés avec tant de constance qu'ils restent perplexes devant les lueurs allumées aujourd'hui sur leur route. Pourtant, la roue du malheur semble avoir tourné.

En Irak, alors que Bagdad continue à saigner (la réélection à un troisième mandat du très sectaire Nouri al-Maliki n'y changera rien), le Kurdistan autonome vit dans une insolite bulle de sérénité. Centres commerciaux, boom immobilier, projets universitaires, Silicon Valley : il s'est relevé grâce à l'aide financière américaine. Les femmes ont les cheveux libres. Les femmes kurdes sont des battantes : amazones des légendes locales ou guerrières dans les rangs des peshmergas, elles sont désormais enseignantes, informatiennes et femmes d'affaires. Farouchement opposées à un islamisme kurde certes minoritaire mais qui tente de grignoter leurs acquis. Elles n'oublient pas que jadis, avant la colonisation anglaise de l'Irak, Halabja

était gouvernée par une femme : on l'appelait la « Princesse des braves ».

TISSU CONFESSIONNEL MÊLÉ

En 1988, Saddam Hussein gazait des milliers de Kurdes dans l'indifférence d'un monde occidental qui armait le tyran contre l'Iran : aujourd'hui, la vitalité d'Erbil, la capitale, a triomphé de la douleur d'Halabja. « Nous avons des aéroports, une armée et une trentaine de consulats dans le monde entier. Joe Biden, voire Barack Obama, appelle notre président chaque mois ! » rapportent fièrement les proches du gouvernement autonome d'Erbil. Le Kurdistan irakien, refuge pour les chrétiens persécutés de Mossoul et de Bagdad, est le seul endroit de la région où la construc- ➤

REPÈRES

XVI^e-XIX^e SIÈCLE.

Sous l'Empire ottoman, l'unité territoriale kurde est assurée à travers de nombreux émirats, souvent rivaux, soumis au sultan.

1920. Traité de Sèvres. Conclu entre les Alliés et la Turquie, il prévoit la création d'un État kurde.

1923. Traité de Lausanne après les conquêtes turques qui annule la promesse.

1930. Révolte au Kurdistan turc.

1936-1945. Révoltes récurrentes au Kurdistan irakien.

1978. Fondation en Turquie du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan, qui prône la lutte armée. Début de la guerre entre l'armée turque et les insurgés.

1979. Répression en Iran après la révolution islamique.

1988. Gazage des Kurdes de Halabja en Irak par Saddam à la fin de la guerre Iran-Irak.

1991. Première guerre du Golfe.

Soulèvement kurde en Irak. Exode. **1995.** Furieux combats en Anatolie entre l'armée turque et le PKK. Exode de centaines de milliers de civils.

1999. Capture d'Abdullah Ocalan, le leader du PKK.

2003. Invasion de l'Irak par les Américains, soutenus par les Kurdes. Chute de Saddam.

2004. Soulèvement kurde en Syrie à Kameshli.

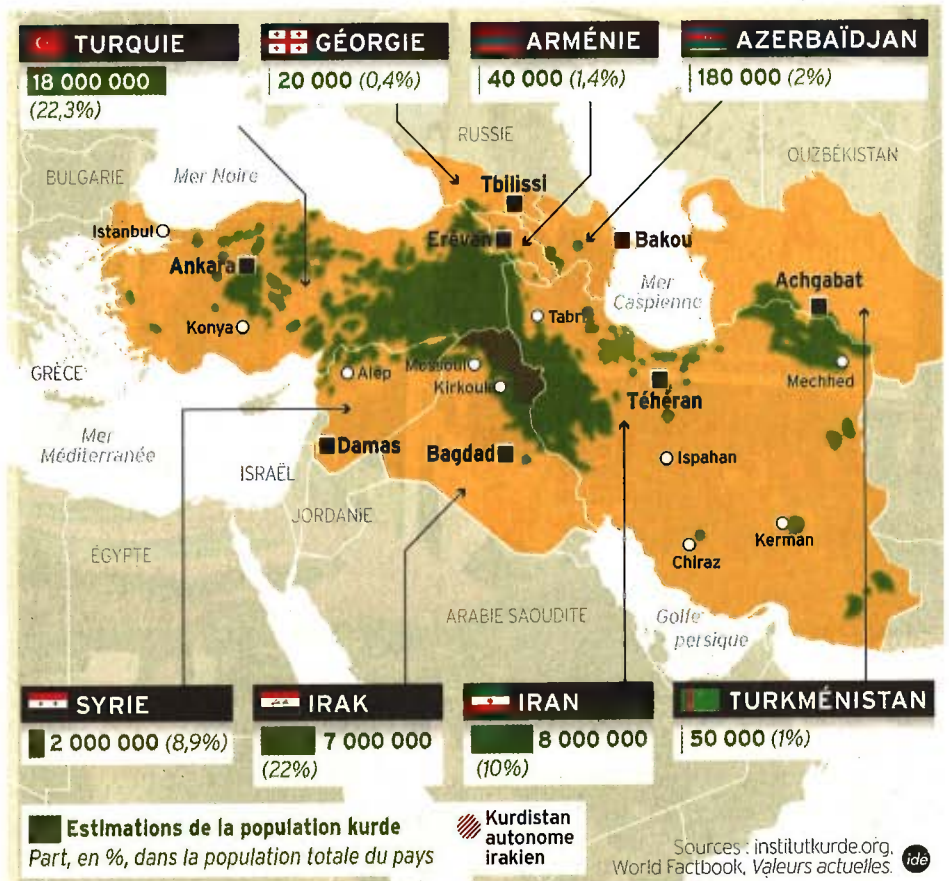
2005. La Constitution irakienne approuve l'autonomie du Kurdistan. Le Kurde Jalal Talabani est président de l'Irak.

2010. Arrestation de nombreux intellectuels, journalistes et avocats kurdes à Diyarbakir.

2012. Fin du conflit entre l'armée turque et la rébellion qui aura duré vingt-six ans et fait 45 000 morts.

2013. Proclamation unilatérale d'un Kurdistan syrien.

2014. Succès des candidats kurdes aux élections municipales en Turquie. La voie est ouverte à la reconnaissance de la langue kurde, enseignée officiellement depuis 2013 dans les écoles privées. ■



tion des églises est autorisée. Car les Kurdes ne sont pas seulement musulmans mais aussi assyro-chaldéens, chrétiens syriaques, sabéens et adorateurs de saint Jean-Baptiste. Ils peuvent aussi être zoroastriens, comme les Persans d'avant l'islam. Un tissu confessionnel chamarré: le seul encore vivant au Moyen-Orient. On y voit même des Israéliens visiter les vestiges des synagogues.

UNITÉ GÉOGRAPHIQUE

En Turquie, à la destruction des villages par l'armée pendant des décennies de guerre civile succède une entrée en force au Parlement d'Ankara et aux élections locales: les partis kurdes ont raflé 30 sièges et une centaine de municipalités. La moitié de ces villes sont désormais dirigées par des femmes. A commencer par Diyarbakir, l'âme de la région. Enfin, la langue kurde commence à obtenir droit de cité. Les 18 millions de Kurdes turcs respirent. A Diyarbakir, en novembre 2013, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le Premier ministre islamiste, reçoit le président du Kur-

distan irakien, Massoud Barzani. Lequel s'adresse en kurde à une foule extatique. Erdogan reste impassible: la carte kurde est l'une de celles qu'il joue pour renforcer son pouvoir. Hélas, une pléiade de journalistes et d'éditeurs restent en prison. « On a vu pire, la clé de l'évolution politique et démocratique en Turquie, c'est la question kurde. La région de Diyarbakir est la seule où la population n'est pas islamiste, pas antisémite, pas antioccidentale », répètent les optimistes. Se saisir des clés, partout, pour ouvrir les portes de fer des patries déchiquetées: c'est l'objectif de ceux qui ont cessé depuis longtemps de caresser l'utopie du « Grand Kurdistan » et plaident la cause d'un fédéralisme kurde à l'échelle de la région.

« En dehors de la diaspora et des grandes villes turques, la population kurde forme une unité géographique parfaite, explique Bernard Dorin, ancien ambassadeur de France dans la région. Il y a quelques poches isolées, au nord-est de l'Iran, dans la région de Méched, et au sud d'Ankara. Le noyau central s'étend

du plateau anatolien turc jusqu'au sud des monts Zagros en Iran. Le Kurdistan est une sorte de Pologne du Moyen-Orient. Comme l'était le peuple polonais au XIX^e siècle, le peuple kurde est divisé entre des Etats prédateurs qui se le partagent. Au XIX^e siècle, la Pologne était partagée entre l'empire d'Autriche, l'Empire allemand et l'Empire russe avant de former un Etat indépendant en 1918. De même le Kurdistan est partagé entre la Turquie, l'Iran, la Syrie et l'Irak. »



stifinger / reuters

JOUER SA PROPRE CARTE

« Le XX^e siècle nous a été terrible mais le XXI^e est un siècle kurde au Moyen-Orient, résume l'historien Kendal Nezan, président de l'Institut kurde de Paris, en Syrie, avec 15 % de la population, nous sommes la seule force politique laïque... » Les Kurdes syriens entretiennent d'excellentes relations avec la minorité chrétienne. Les alaouites ne leur sont pas hostiles. En revanche, les jihadistes les vouent à l'enfer. De furieux combats opposent en effet les groupes d'Al-Qaida aux défenseurs du nouveau Kurdistan syrien autonome, le « Rojava », de son nom kurde. Nouvelle zone indépendante, le Rojava est né au cœur du chaos général en novembre 2013. Il a été proclamé unilatéralement et regroupe trois régions, de la frontière turque à l'Euphrate et à la Djézireh, vers la frontière irakienne. Toutes disposent d'une assemblée et d'un gouvernement. « Une constitution régionale pluraliste a été adoptée et sert de feuille de route, explique un chercheur français, elle prône le respect des minorités, le fédéralisme au sein des

frontières de la Syrie et les principes de base de la démocratie. Pour certains détracteurs, c'est un écran de fumée qui dissimule les agissements d'un parti unique et un plan de séduction destiné à la communauté internationale. » Car cette proclamation d'autonomie unilatérale est le fruit d'une alliance entre le PKK et les partis kurdes modérés. La Turquie s'affole : hantée par le vieux cauchemar d'un irrédentisme transnational kurde, elle érige un mur sur la frontière. De son côté, l'Armée syrienne libre prend très mal cette autonomie qui n'aurait jamais été possible sans une négociation avec Bachar. Ce qui explique les réticences occidentales. Mais, là encore, les Kurdes ont décidé de jouer leur propre carte. Quelle que soit l'issue de la tragédie syrienne et le futur du pays, leur autonomie est un fait accompli. Le sous-sol leur est favorable : au Kurdistan syrien comme irakien, le pétrole coule à flots. Cette manne provoque en Irak la jalousie de Bagdad, au point qu'on a pu craindre une guerre pour Kirkouk, autant économique qu'éthnique : la cohabitation entre Kurdes,

victimes d'hier, et Arabes est fragile. En Iran, l'avenir est plus sombre. Les 10 millions de Kurdes connaissent le sort commun aux minorités. Azéris, Turkmènes, Baloutches et Kurdes constituent à eux seuls 60 % de la population, discriminés et marginalisés bien qu'ils soient à eux tous la majorité. En république islamique, les Kurdes se battent, comme leurs frères l'ont fait partout, pour la reconnaissance de leur langue. Ils espèrent voir un jour un Iran sécularisé avec séparation de la religion et de l'Etat. Ils observent avec espoir ce qui se passe sur la frontière irakienne. « Les Kurdes d'Irak constituent la locomotive du mouvement fédéraliste, note Kendal Nezan, comme ils vivent à la lisière du Kurdistan irakien, ils ont la liberté de mouvement et peuvent témoigner de l'atmosphère de tolérance qui règne là-bas. Pour tous ceux qui ne voyagent pas, le développement des réseaux sociaux joue un rôle extraordinaire. Pour la première fois, les frontières qui séparaient les enfants du même peuple sont virtuellement abolies et les Kurdes n'ont jamais été aussi proches les uns des autres. Après la Première Guerre mondiale, ils étaient à peine 3 millions. Aujourd'hui, ils sont 40 millions. Même si on compte 10 millions d'assimilés sur le plan linguistique. On ne peut plus les éliminer physiquement. Il faut donc leur trouver un statut. Ils pourraient, demain, servir de trait d'union entre les peuples dans un Proche-Orient apaisé ». ■ M.G.

NOUVELLE ZONE INDÉPENDANTE EN SYRIE, le « Rojava » a été proclamé en novembre 2013 - ici, des combattants kurdes à Ras al-Ain. Il regroupe trois régions qui s'étendent de la frontière turque à la frontière irakienne.

« POUR LA PREMIÈRE FOIS, LES FRONTIÈRES QUI SÉPARAIENT LES ENFANTS DU MÊME PEUPLE SONT VIRTUELLEMENT ABOLIES. » KENDAL NEZAN