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CONTENTS

- **TURKEY: 35 VILLAGES KILLED BY THE TURKISH ARMY.**
- **IRAQ: TARIQ AL-HASHEMI ACCUSED OF TERRORISM FLEES TO KURDISTAN.**
- **IRAQI KURDISTAN: ISLAMIST RIOTS AT ZAKHO.**
- **CULTURE: A KURDISH JEW WANTS TO PROMOTE HIS CULTURE IN JERUSALEM.**

TURKEY:

35 VILLAGES KILLED BY THE TURKISH ARMY

An air raid by the Turkish Air Force against a group that had crossed the border with Iraq to engage in smuggling and was returning to Turkey killed 35 men, including 17 adolescents, another was wounded and two escaped unscathed. This occurred near Gulyazi (Bujeh) and Orlasu (Roboski) villages of the Uludere (Qileban) district of Sirnak Province on 28 December 2011 between 9.30 and 10.30 p.m.

The Army at first claimed that they were a group of PKK fighters: *"The area in which the events occurred is that of Sinat-Haftanin, in Northern Iraq, which has no civilian*

population and in which are located bases of the terrorist organisation", i.e. the PKK stated the Armed Forces General Staff, adding that drones had indicated *"movements towards the borders"*.

However, it was soon established that the victims were all inhabitants of the neighbouring villages, mainly from Roboski, who were crossing the border with a loaded mule train. Most of them were youths between the ages of 12 and 20.

Embarrassed, the Turkish Government delayed speaking out while pictures of the blood-soaked bodies and the weeping villagers carrying them home on

donkeys without any aid, civil or military were shown on all Kurdish and later international media. The initial statements admitting a blunder came from the AKP party spokesman not from the government.

"According to the first news we have received, these people who were attacked were smugglers, not terrorists", declared Huseyin Celik, AKP Vice-President, in Ankara. *"I wish to express our consternation and sadness at the death of 35 of our citizens. If a mistake or a blunder has been made, be assured the matter will not be covered up. Turkey is a State of Law"*.

Selaattin Dermirtas, leader of the Kurdish Party for Peace and

Democracy (BDP), immediately denounced it as a “massacre” and the BDP organised a demonstration that rallied 2,000 people in Istanbul and ended up with clashes between young Kurds and the police.

In the end, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan recognised that it was a “mistake” by the Armed Forces and offered “his regrets” to the victims’ families. Nevertheless, no representative of the government, the Sirnak Province administration, or the Army was present at the funeral. However, present were the mayor of Diyarbakir, Osman Baydemir, the mayors of other districts and provinces, the President of the BDP, Selahattin Demirtaş, the Party’s Vice President, the Member of Parliament for Sirnak, Hatip Kaplan, and other BDP M.P.s, the independent M.P. Ahmet Turk, and the CHP M.P. for Istanbul Sezgin Tanrikulu.

A Commission of Enquiry consisting of several Turkish and Kurdish NGOs, including the IHD, MAZLUMDER, the Confederation Civil Servants’ Unions (KESK), the Turkish Medical Association (TTB). The Foundation for Human Rights in Turkey (HRFT), the Association of Modern Advocates, the Assembly for Peace in Turkey and the General Union of Workers Unions (DISK Genel Ish) very rapidly paid an onsite visit to question the families and the survivors, firstly at the Uludere Hospital where the bodies were stored and then in the villages at the time of the funerals at Bujeh and Roboski.

“On 28 December 2011 at 4 p.m. we crossed the Iraqi border with a group of 40 or 50 people and the same number of mules to bring back petrol and food. We did not inform the gendarmerie HQ, deliberately,

but they already knew that we used to come and go. Our aim was to bring back petrol and sugar. In fact, while on the way, we heard the sound of drones but we continued as usual. At 7 p.m. we started back, having loaded our mules. At 9 p.m. we were close to the border. We had reached the plateau on which our village stood. At first there were flares and then bombs fell. We left the loads on the other side of the border. Immediately after the planes arrived and started bombing

We were in two groups. There were about 300 – 400 metres between the first group and the second. Immediately after, there was a volley from the planes. There was no other way to cross the border because the soldiers were occupying our plateau. It was the first air bombardment that annihilated the group of about 20 who were right on the border. Immediately after we fled. The bombs continued to rain down on those who were hiding between the rocks.

The group I was with consisted of 6 people, 3 of whom survived. We were dressed in civilian cloths, no one was armed. Two of us entered a little stream with 3 mules. After waiting an hour we hid under a rock, we could not find out anything about our friends. Somewhere round 11 or 11.30 we knew the villagers were coming because of the lights and noise. The soldiers began to leave the plateau that they were occupying when the villagers began screaming.

We have been doing this kind of work for a long time. Two of us were married, the others students or schoolboys. No one has summoned me to give evidence. I didn’t see any soldiers after these events. The other survivors were Davut (22 years old) and Servet Encu (wounded and in Sirnak hospital)”.

Servet Encü, questioned on 30 December after the funerals,

confirmed his comrade's words on :

“Our fathers and grandfathers also followed this trade (smuggling). We also do it. There’s no factory here. We earn our living by this work. Everyone in this village, along this border, follows this trade. On the night of this incident, 7 or 8 people from each of 2 or 3 villages were doing this, which adds up to almost 40 people, went about 2 kilometres over the border. There we bought petrol, sugar and foodstuff from the Iraqis. We did not go to Haftanin or Sinat. On our way back the soldiers stopped us. They do this every time but they always allow us to cross. This time they did no. They made us wait on the border. And, in the end, they bombed us. 37 people, including students and schoolboys aged 10 to 20 were slaughtered for a job that earned them 50, 60 or 100 Turkish lira (100 lira = 42.5 euros). Salem Encu, one of those killed, was an engineering student. Sivan was 15 years old, Orhan 10, Mehmet 11. None were PKK members — the PKK does not go in for smuggling petrol with 40 or 50 mules. The soldiers stopped us at the border and didn’t say a word to us. No military officials or officers came to help us after the incident. Following the bombing several of the wounded froze to death on the ground because no one came to help them. We are 3 survivors out of 38. They couldn’t see me because I had hidden myself under the snow.

In the past, the soldiers stopped us for a moment then allowed us to cross. This time they didn’t but surrounded us. The soldiers left in their cars as soon as the bombing began. If I had not survived the bodies could have lain there 2 or 3 days. We were in 3 distinct groups — one on the border and two far from it. We thought we could cross leaving our loads behind when they stopped us.

After the bombing I walked about 100 metres and phoned for help.

After 2 -3 hours they came to save us. No soldier or anyone from any official authority came — just our own people. We had left the village at 5 p.m. and were back at the border at 9.30. At 9.40 we were bombed.

The first group told us that the soldiers had taken some measures. We thought we could leave our goods and cross the border because of the cold. We stayed where we were. While waiting to see if the soldiers would let us cross or if we would have to find another way to cross, we were bombed as two separate groups. We were bombed separately, 4 planes came and bombed us for over an hour. The explosions blew me up until the air and then I fell and found myself covered in snow.

We were working the way we have always done. Till now, there were never any clashes on the way. Until today when the soldiers caught us they killed our mules and burnt the saddles and the goods we were carrying. This time they fired at us. I saw some wounded dying losing all their blood and neither the security forces or any ambulance came”.

The villagers quickly expressed suspicion that it was a premeditated attack. One of them, who preferred not to be named, said: “Two days before the incident there was a clash on the crossroads on the Ukudere highway. The soldiers told friends from who used to buy the goods we brought over the border for sale in their shops: Tonight will be the last time. You will no longer be able to do this work again.”

As for the Roboski village headman, he denies that the soldiers could possibly mistake smugglers for the PKK:

“We have been doing cross-border trade on this route, that is to say this trade, ever since the English drew the border. The soldiers and State officials know that we engage in smuggling. I think that this inci-

dent was initiated by a movement like Ergenekon or Balyoz because it occurs just after Bulent Arinç said that they ought to give rights to the Kurds. Moreover, all the villages here voted BDP (the Kurdish party). I think this is why this incident occurred. This region is not on the route used by the PKK because, round here, the Iraqi land is flat. It is impossible to make surprise attacks on Turkey round here. Anyone coming this way would be seen by the Turkish troops. Hitherto there have never been any clashes along this route. In general, during such an operation, the village heads and the temporary village guards are warned so that they can prevent smugglers from coming and going in this region.”

A list of several victims, the youngest and the objectives of their smuggling was drawn up by the brother of one of them, Welat Encu, and sent to several newspapers (source: <http://yollar.blog.lemonde.fr/>).

Serhat Encü, 17 year old, wanted to sent money to two of his older brothers, who were students, since their father was too old to work and so unable to finance their studies.

Cemal Encu, 16 years, in his last year at secondary school wanted to pay the tuition and canteen charges at his school.

Amza Encu ,21, had just finished his military service and wanted to provide financial support for the family.

Seraffettin Encu, 16 years, in his last year in a secondary school, whose mother had died, wanted to earn his own pocket money

Bedran Encü, 14, lower secondary schoolboy. As the eldest of his brothers he had been told by his father to help look after his younger brothers.

Sivan Encü, 16, since his father had left home he wanted to help his mother, left alone.

Aslan Encü, 17, his brother having been injured by a mine six years earlier, wanted to help pay for his treatment, since the father was too old to work.

Calal Encü, 18, did not want, “out of pride” to receive pocket money from his father or older brothers.

Hüseyin Encü, 19, was the eldest son of the family and due to leave to do his military service. His father had debts and Huseyin wanted to help repay them.

Selam Encü, 22, had just completed a university course. He needed to sit a final examination and needed to finance the journey there.

Fadil Encü, 19, was the eldest and wanted to look after his brothers on this expedition.

Apart from the Kurdish and international press, the Turkish media barely reacted to these events, the most nationalist views, as expressed by Devlet Bahçeli, of the MHP (Nationalist Action Party) considering that these blunders were better than having terrorists at large.

One of the few Turkish newspapers to express indignation a publically to take the Prime Minister to task was *Taraf*, with a virulent editorial by its chief editor, Ahmet Altan:

“If you set about running a State for ten years without first cleaning it of its poisons, if you turn your back on you people so as to climb to its highest ranks, if you become an accomplice of this State, its poison will end up by running through your veins. You will become poi-

soned. You will become someone corrupted by a diseased State. You will then start to threaten, to lie, to evade and to slander. Then, when the State that you are running bombs the people at your orders, you will defend the State. You will not even make excuses.

Under your rule, the State has torn to pieces 35 children of this country. Either the State that you manage has set you a trap or you knowingly had them killed. Which? We thought at first that you had been trapped, but, by preferring to defend those who carried out the bombing, to hid the truth from your people, to falsify the facts you have shown us that you had not been misled. So think about the children killed,

instead of getting steamed up saying that the State has not bombed it people.

Who gave the order to kill? Why? You say you were briefed by your Brigadier General — did it ever occur to your Brigadier General to ask the local barracks whether there were any smugglers in the area? If not — why not? Why did he not take any measures before stating the air raid? Did you ask your Brigadier General that?

When you took office you were a man of the people, you rose up against the intrigues of the State, you spoke to your people, you asked its advice, you brought the State's crimes to light. Now that you have become a syco-

phant of this State you only talk to your agents, your generals your Brigadier (...) Explain to us why you killed these children. Why you didn't even apologise (...) If these deaths had been Turks would you have spoken the way you did? You spoke that way because you considered the Army to be superior to the civilians, the Turks superior to the Kurds. Shame on you, look at yourself — you, who were your people's hero have become the State's plaything (...) Was it worth while to humiliate yourself this way to gain access to the Presidential Palace? To swallow the State's poison? You see — you have ended up by being poisoned too".

(blog: <http://sami-kilic.blogspot.com/>)

IRAQ:

TARIQ AL-HASHEMI ACCUSED OF TERRORISM FLEES TO KURDISTAN

On 19 December, just as the US troops had finished completely withdrawing from Iraq, three of the bodyguards of one of the two Iraqi Vice Presidents, Tariq al-Hashimi, were arrested and accused of terrorist activities. On the same day, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki demanded that another Sunni Arab political leader, Saleh al-Mutlak, his assistant, be stripped of office while al-Hashimi and the rest of his bodyguards were forbidden to leave the country.

The Baghdad Security forces spokesman, General Qassim Atta, said that the night before, Tariq al-Hashimi had been intercepted as he was preparing to take a plane for the Kurdish city of Suleimaniah to meet President Jalal Talabani. His private car was confiscated by the secret services of the Iraqi Defence Ministry. The Vice President was only able to take his flight thanks to the personal thanks to the personal intervention of Jalal Talabani.

The Iraqi Security services suspect Taeiq al-Hashimi of having master minded the car bomb attack against the Parliament last November that had caused one death and wounded three other members of Parliament, including a Kurd.

These two politicians are members of the Parliamentary block that rivals Maliiki's, the al-Iraqiya block, whose 82 members of parliament have just ended a boycott of the Iraqi Parliament in protest at the Prime Minister's "monopolisation of power". Saleh al-Mutlak, several times accused by his critics of secretly supporting the former Baath Party, has retorted over his Television channel, Babiliyah, that Nuri al-Maliki was "worse than Saddam Hussein".

The latter has unceasingly affirmed his determination to carry the judicial process through to the end and has indicated, through his spokesman, that no "mediation" (probably

Kurdish) would dissuade him from arresting the Vice President and that his gave him 48 hours in which to prove the innocence of his bodyguards.

The "confessions" of Tariq al-Hashimi's bodyguards, broadcast in some TV channels, are attacked by the Sunni Arab camp as a frame-up cooked up by the Shiite Prime Minister to bring down his powerful al-Iraqiyah rivals who were boycotting Parliament and the coalition government. As for the accused, he let it be known, in a Press conference given in Irbil, that he was "ready to be tried" on condition that his trial took place in Iraqi Kurdistan, where he had found asylum, and not in Iraq itself now dominated by the Shiites.

In addition to having his case transferred to Kurdistan, Tariq al-Hashimi also demanded that representatives of the Arab League be present to supervise the lawfulness of the enquiry and the interrogations.

Nuri al-Maliki's counterattack was not slow in coming. On 21 December, the day after al-Hashimi's press conference, he called on the Kurdistan Regional Government to hand the Sunni Arab Vice-President over to the Iraqi courts, rejecting any allowing the Arab League any role in this case that he described as "criminal".

As the last convoy of US troops was leaving Iraq, the US Government, faced with this unexpected crisis, expressed its "anxiety over the developments" and urged "all parties to work peacefully to resolve their differences by dialogue in a manner that respected the State of Laws and of democratic political procedure".

Following al-Hashimi's "flight" to Kurdistan it is now Massud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Region, rather than Jalal Talabani, President of Iraq, who finds himself in a key position in this mediation, since it is under his "protection" that Tariq al-Hashimi has placed himself demanding to be tied in Irbil, a fact of which Nuri al-Maliki was fully aware in demanding that the Kurds "face up to their responsibilities" by handing the Vice President over to him. Similarly, the United States, which now has only a diplomatic presence in Iraq, needs, more than ever, the Kurds as mediators between the Iraqi Sunnis and Shiites.

Massud Barzani rapidly made a call for dialogue and appeasement by proposing that a "national conference" be held to resolve the political crisis and avoid any worsening of the conflicts. However, Nuri al-Maliki rejected this proposal, judging it "inappropriate" and his spokesman, Ali al-Mussawi, even described as "insulting" to the relatives of the victims of the

bomb attack this proposal of a general conference between Iraqi politicians.

For his part, al-Hashimi's spokesman, Maysun al-Damaluji, affirmed that the Vice President would prove his innocence, adding that the whole case was just a "political ploy" by al-Maliki.

The very tense relations between al-Maliki and the Kurdish government had, nevertheless seen the start of a compromise since the Prime Minister had committed himself, in writing, to a partnership in the political management of Iraq and to working for a new agreement on the management of Kurdish oil revenue. However, the refusal of the Kurds to hand Tariq al-Hashimi over to the Shiites has only embittered relations between Irbil and Baghdad. On 23 December, Fuad Hussein, principal secretary of the Kurdish Presidency, made it perfectly clear that Kurdistan would not send Tariq al-Hashimi (who he described as a "guest") back to Baghdad adding: "We are ready to organise a regular trial for Hashimi in the Kurdistan Region in the Iraqi judicial authorities accept".

Seconding the Kurds in their attempts to calm down the situation, the Americans also insist on the resumption of dialogue between the rival camps. According to the Arabic TV channel al-Hurra, Joe Biden, the US Vice President, appealed personally to al-Maliki to this effect — with no apparent success. He also telephoned Kurdistan President Massud Barzani, to discuss the situation and to reiterate US support for a process of dialogue between the Iraqi leaders.

The first effects of this trial of

strength? A few days later, there was a series of bomb attacks in Baghdad, especially in Shiite areas, resulting in almost 50 deaths and nearly 200 injured, which raised fear of a renewal of civil war in Iraq now that there are no US troops on the spot.

On 26 December it was the turn of the al-Iraqiya parliamentary Group to reject the Council of Minister's invitation to those political leaders still in Baghdad to a meeting to resolve the crisis. The reason for this refusal—the fact that the Sunni members of parliament had been summoned by the government and not by the Shiite M.P.s of the al-Dawa list: "we are not servants of the government", was the way one of the al-Iraqiya M.P.s summed up the situation.

To cap it all, the cleric al-Sadr's party called for early elections, a call taken up by Masud Barzani as a means of unfreezing the situation, at least at political level. Speaking on Al-jazeera, the Kurdistan President considered that Iraq was going through the most dangerous crisis since the fall of the old regime, and that federalism was the only solution for Iraq's survival as increasing numbers of Sunni Arab voices are being raised to demand a status equal to that enjoyed by the Kurds in 3 provinces.

Suddenly barging in on this conflict, Turkey, which is more than ever pursuing an interventionist policy in the Middle East, announced, on 26 December, that it "would not be opposed" to Tariq al-Hashimi's coming to Turkey — an announcement that, so far, has had little success, even on the Sunni side.

However, it is probable that Erdogan's government is carefully watching the increase of power that this situation is giv-

ing Iraqi Kurdistan, which is renewing its position as “king-maker” that had been somewhat reduced by al-Maliki’s increasing authoritarianism and the

concentration of power in his hands, as Gala Riani, an analyst with HIS Global Insight, has noted. Moreover, support from the US, which expects their help

in resolving the crisis, is enabling them to reinforce their demands on the Baghdad authorities at the same time as ending the crisis as arbitrator.

IRAQI KURDISTAN: ISLAMIST RIOTS AT ZAKHO

On 3 December, a riot suddenly broke out in Zakho after an imam had condemned the “alcohol shops” and “Chinese massage centres” in the course of his Friday sermon. On leaving the mosque, a group of agitators called for the destruction of these shops and started to burn down the booths selling alcoholic drinks — a trade mainly practiced by Christians and Yezidis. A massage centre and four hotels were also targeted.

Caught short, the security forces nevertheless kept their heads, thus avoiding a repetition of the mistakes made in Suleimaniah, last spring, when shots were exchanged between the police and demonstrators. Those quarters hit by rioting and pillage were contained, most of the injuries were the suffered by the police and there were no deaths.

Very quickly, the pictures broadcast on the web from mobile telephones often belonging to the rioters themselves, showed a most diverse crowd, in which alongside adults shouting religious slogans, one could be seen some very young boys taking advantage of the situation to help themselves to the alcoholic drinks — which raised doubts as to their religious fervour.

In the evening the attacks moved on to the town of Sumaili, 15 Km from Duhok, where 200 Christian families live and the village of Shiuz (180 Christian families) and the town of

Deraluk where the police finally moved in.

In the opinion of most of the media, it was more a riot against the two parties in power, the KDP and PUK, for social and political reasons than religious ones, even if small Islamist groups do regularly demand that the government forbid the sale of alcoholic drinks.

The reaction was immediate and aimed at several offices of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), immediately accused by members and sympathisers of the KDP, and several members and leaders of the Islamist party were arrested. The KIU had several of its premises in Zakho, Duhok, Simel and Irbil burnt out in “reprisal” by an angry crowd. It then published a communiqué condemning both the riots in Zakho (which it denied having instigated) and the attacks on its premises.

The Minister for the interior, in the course of the evening, published a communiqué condemning all the acts of violence committed and promising that they would be the objects of legal proceedings. The next day the President of Kurdistan, Masud Barzani, visited Zakho and condemned the previous days disturbances that he considered had been “premeditated”.

“I condemn these illegal acts and call on the people of the Kurdistan Region to preserve our traditions of religious and ethnic coexistence. I have ordered that a Commission be

created to conduct enquiries into these disturbances so that those responsible be brought before the courts.”

“Protecting harmony between the Kurdish communities is not just the responsibility of the Government of Kurdistan — it is the responsibility of all of us. We will not allow anyone to threaten this harmony”, stated, for his part, the Duhok Police Chief, Ahmed Doski.

On 4 December it was feared that the riots might spread to Suleimaniah when an Asian massage centre was burnt by unknown demonstrators, without causing any injuries. Zana Hamasalih, the Mayor of Suleimaniah, a city frequently plagued by social and political agitation, unlike Zakho or Duhok, accused “saboteurs” or being the cause of the incident.

Despite this incident, the other provinces, Irbil and Nineveh, affirmed that they were just local agitations and they did not fear any spread. The governor of Irbil even indicated that he had not taken any special security measures and that the situation was “stable”.

The origin of the disturbances has been the subject of a number of versions and comments in the Kurdish media and among foreign observers. Some see it as essentially a social agitation, others seek some foreign instigation recalling the KRG’s support of the Syrian revolution, or else its recurrent clashes with the Baghdad government.

As for the imam, whose sermon sparked off the riots, he denied any responsibility for the attacks. Summoned by the enquiry commission and also speaking to the press, Mala Ismail Osman Sindi defended himself by saying that he was not the only the first or the only cleric to have protested publically against the Chinese massage centres (which seem to be making quite a hit in Kurdistan): *"Everyone is talking about them and I am probably the last to have broached the subject. I merely said that instead of massage centres they ought to build mosques"*.

One resident of Zakho, who was present for the sermon, told the newspaper *Rudaw* that "after the mullah spoke about the massage centres a man rose and shouted: "Since there are "haram" (sinful) things in Zakho we must not accept them, we must destroy them".

Omar Sindi confirmed the scene: "But I told him that if he left to attack the centres before the sermon was over, his prayer would not be accepted by God. This man is a member of the KIU"

The KDP and the KIU have thus

unceasingly accused one another of being the source of the violence, the KDP using this as an excuse for sacking the KIU's premises and accusing the latter of trying to harm the regional government or to serve foreign interests. But all are unanimous in doubting that a single sermon by a Zakho mullah of no great stature could have spontaneously inflamed a crowd to suddenly become so extremist.

The Friday following the riot (Friday being the day of religious sermons and so traditionally the day chosen for demonstrations and protests in the Middle East) there were no disturbances anywhere in the Region even though the Duhok Provincial police was put on a state alert.

As for the Christians of Zakho, they say they do not greatly fear any repetition of these attacks, stressing their long and friendly cohabitation with the Kurdish Moslems, most of them seeing this as manoeuvres by parties opposed to the government.

In an interview given on 15 December to the newspaper *Rudaw*, Amir Goka, a Christian

Member of Parliament and head of the National Council of Assyrians and Chaldeans' block in the Irbil Parliament, explained that these attacks remained totally inexplicable and unforeseen by the inhabitants of Zakho, be they Moslem, Christian or Yezidi. He also thought that it was an attack planned to injure the Kurdistan Region's reputation for religious tolerance.

Commenting on these events, Mahmud Osman, an independent member of parliament and leading member of the Kurdish coalition in the Baghdad Parliament (a coalition that includes both the majority Kurdistan Alliance and the KIU) saw these events as the work of neighbouring states wishing to undermine the political stability of Kurdistan.

"I suspect foreign circles such as Iran, Syria and Turkey, who are not friends of Kurdistan, and who refuse to recognise anything about the Kurdish people, of being behind the events in Zakho and Duhok", the member of parliament stated to the newspaper *Aswat al-Iraq*. *"These States may have had an interest in undermining the situation in the Kurdistan Region"*.

CULTURE:

A KURDISH JEW WANTS TO PROMOTE HIS CULTURE IN JERUSALEM

An Israeli citizen, Drory Yeoshuas, is set on actively promoting the music of his country of origin, Kurdistan, and is, this month, presenting the Judeo-Kurdish traditions at the summit of the Jewish Community Centre and at the Congregation of Artists in residence. His programme includes Kurdish music and dancing as well as Kurdistan traditional cuisine, going from soup to kubbeh, being concerned not to prioritise cultural characteristics.

"Some people may say that these psalms, these melodies, these dishes and dances represent a "proto-culture" which has nothing to do with bookish culture or novels. In my view there are no great and small cultures. The real question is to ask: "What is it that makes your spirit light up and bloom? When you hear Kurdish psalms, when you eat Persian food, when you read a Syrian novel? Your spirit is wherever you feel it bloom".

Yehoshua thinks that this belief in superior and inferior cultures

deepens the gap between those Jews who come from Moslem cultures and those who come from Western societies or Ashkenazis. He also aims at giving back their self-respect to Jews coming from the Moslem world.

"Moslem cultures were very much criticised at the start of this State. My family, for example, had difficulty in expressing its culture in public. However, with the grace of God, things are changing in Israel."

Drory Yehoshua is also particularly fond of the Husseini maqam that comes from Kurdistan. These melodies, to which the Jewish Kurdish psalms are sung, are in fact the result of a mixture of cultures and songs between the Jews and Moslems of Kurdistan.

"We may find most of these melodies sad, indeed nearly all of them but they are, in fact, very interesting. A melody can make your heart heavy and sadden you deeply and then ... a minute later

you find yourself dancing and jumping about".

Living in Jerusalem, he teaches at the Shalom Hartman Institute and the Memizrach Shamash a centre for social research and activity that devoted to the Sephardic (Jews originally from Spain who now come from all Mediterranean and North African countries) and Mizrahi ("oriental" Jews, mainly from Iraq and Kurdistan) heritages, as well as in a Jerusalem synagogue.

His father emigrated from Kurdistan in 1952 and his mother was born in Jerusalem of a family that emigrated to Palestine in 1928. *"I was born in a Kurdish environment, where all the families were like a tribe. Today, this is part of my Jewish identity – I am a Jewish Kurd".*

About 450,000 Israelis define themselves as Jewish Kurds in this way, according to Drory Yeoshua, who thinks that this identity is fluid as it is based upon personal feelings.

En Turquie, l'offensive contre l'« Etat parallèle » kurde

La répression de l'aile politique de la rébellion kurde renforce les militaires du PKK

Reportage

Diyarbakir

Envoyé spécial

Une cohorte de vieilles femmes kurdes entourées d'enfants se fraye un chemin jusqu'à la salle d'audience de la 6^e chambre de la cour d'assises, au sous-sol du tribunal de Diyarbakir, la « capitale » de la région kurde de Turquie. « *Asseyez-vous, plus vite* », aboie un policier turc en les poussant vers les bancs, au fond de la salle, vaste comme un terrain de foot.

Trois étudiants accusés sont amenés devant les juges, pour « *appartenance à une organisation terroriste* », escortés par une vingtaine de soldats. Les familles se bousculent pour échanger un regard, mais les militaires font barrage. Après quelques minutes de procédure, les accusés repartent, menotés, vers la prison de haute sécurité.

Ces jeunes kurdes sont jugés pour avoir manifesté en souvenir de leur camarade Aydin Erdem, un étudiant en mathématiques tué d'une balle dans le dos par un policier sur le campus de Diyarbakir, en décembre 2010. Ses parents sont également poursuivis pour avoir fait « *l'apologie d'un criminel* », en raison de l'hommage qu'ils ont fait inscrire sur la pierre tombale.

A longueur de journée, dans ce tribunal spécial, se succèdent devant les juges des prévenus soupçonnés de crimes politiques. « *La justice joue un scénario écrit à l'avance* », estime Hülya Gülbahar, l'avocate de Büsra Ersanli, une professeure de sciences politiques arrêtée le 1^{er} novembre, à Istanbul, pour avoir donné une conférence à des élus du parti kurde légal BDP (Parti pour la paix et de la démocratie).

Depuis les élections municipales de 2009, où le BDP avait obtenu la majorité dans la région kurde, 9 000 personnes, élus, militants politiques ou associatifs, intellec-

tuels, ont été arrêtés pour des liens supposés avec le KCK (Union des communautés du Kurdistan), une nébuleuse semi-clandestine qui forme la structure civile et politique du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan). Un embryon d'administration autonome, contre laquelle l'indivisible République turque est partie en guerre.

Mais au nom de la lutte antiterroriste, c'est toute la société kurde qui est criminalisée.

« *Vous voyez ! C'est ça la justice turque !* », vocifère une mère dans les couloirs du tribunal. Son mari est en prison depuis neuf mois pour avoir participé à une manifestation légale. « *Ils nous appellent des terroristes. Mais alors, nous sommes tous des terroristes. Nous allons tous le devenir si ça continue* ».

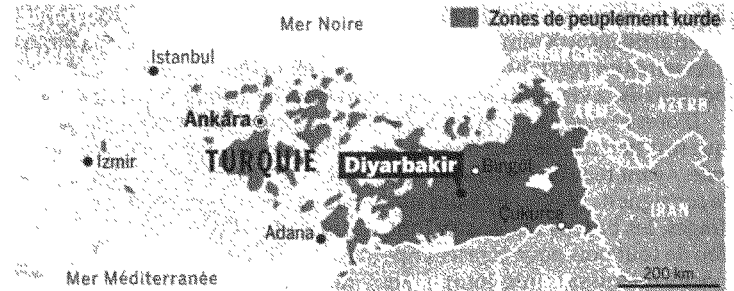
« *Ils n'ont aucune preuve, c'est un procès totalement politique* », lance un jeune homme dont l'oncle a été arrêté. Sur son téléphone portable, il montre la photo de son

« **La justice turque joue un scénario écrit à l'avance** »

Hülya Gülbahar, avocate

cousin. « *Il a été condamné à huit ans, du coup il est parti pour la montagne. Ceux qui n'ont pas la possibilité de partir en Europe rejoignent la guérilla* ».

Le tour de vis judiciaire contre les milieux politiques kurdes a renforcé, par la même occasion, l'aile militaire du mouvement. « *Le gouvernement parle de solution, mais enferme tous les responsables politiques. Aucune arme n'a été trouvée, ils sont arrêtés pour leurs idées. On doit pouvoir être libre de revendiquer un Kurdistan indépendant si ce n'est pas par la violence* », clame Abdullah Demirbas, le maire de l'arrondissement central de Diyarbakir, soupçonné lui aussi



d'être membre du KCK mais laissé libre pour raisons de santé.

Sur son bureau, une nouvelle plainte du procureur vient d'arriver. Visé par plus de 20 procédures judiciaires, M. Demirbas risque deux cent quarante-deux ans de prison pour ses positions politiques ou son engagement pour l'enseignement des langues minoritaires: « *Ces arrestations ont commencé le lendemain d'un cessez-le-feu du PKK. Le message que l'Etat envoie aux Kurdes est qu'il n'y a point de salut dans l'action politique. Depuis 2009, au moins 2 000 jeunes ont rejoint les rangs du PKK. Mon propre fils est l'un d'eux. Je n'ai pas pu l'empêcher de partir* », lâche-t-il.

En retour, les attaques violentes du PKK se sont multipliées depuis juin: des embuscades à la frontière irakienne, comme celle qui a tué 24 soldats à Cukurca, en octobre. Ou des actions terroristes aveugles, comme à Bingöl, où une femme s'est fait exploser devant un bureau de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir. A Istanbul, un ferry a été détourné en mer de Marmara, le 13 novembre, par un militant pro-PKK dont la sœur avait été arrêtée cinq mois plus tôt. Tué par les forces spéciales, son corps a été expédié à Diyarbakir, où sa famille l'a enterré parmi les « martyrs » de la rébellion kurde.

Le KCK, que les autorités turques cherchent à éliminer par la force, serait selon le premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, une tentative de création d'un « Etat parallèle » kurde.

Le prolongement de la stratégie d'« *autonomie démocratique* », décrétée par le chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Ocalan. « *La Turquie ne peut admettre un Etat parallèle. Ceux qui critiquent ces opérations soutiennent et servent le terrorisme. Nous ne baissons pas les armes* », a déclaré le dirigeant turc.

« *Ils disent que c'est une administration locale qui contrôle les meetings et les manifestations, choisit les maires, donne des instructions... Tout cela est vrai ! Mais tous les partis politiques ont cela* », souligne Emin Aktar, le bâtonnier de Diyarbakir et avocat des principaux accusés.

Le KCK forme la base militante et tient sous son contrôle les maires et députés du parti légal, le BDP. C'est aussi lui qui collecte l'impôt révolutionnaire à l'étranger et en Turquie. Selon un audit du ministère des finances, les municipalités kurdes auraient reversé au moins l'équivalent de 12 millions d'euros à la guérilla.

Cette administration parallèle qui gouvernerait Diyarbakir et les provinces de l'Est lance régulièrement des campagnes de boycottage des institutions étatiques: écoles, tribunaux, mosquées. Depuis plusieurs mois, des imams inféodés au PKK conduisent, chaque vendredi, des prières en plein air, en kurde, pour concurrencer les mosquées où prêchent les fonctionnaires envoyés par Ankara. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Syrie

Courrier

du 1^{er} au 7 décembre 2011

Le monde selon Bachar

Acculé ? Le président syrien demeure confiant en son avenir et ne craint ni les Américains ni les Turcs, et encore moins les Arabes du Golfe, qu'il méprise.

Zaman (extraits) Istanbul

Il semble que Bachar El-Assad soit confiant dans sa position. Tout d'abord, il estime que la Maison-Blanche trompe les Américains en annonçant publiquement le gel de ses avoirs et de ceux de sa famille aux Etats-Unis, sans pour autant exercer de véritables pressions sur la Syrie. Par ailleurs, Assad pense qu'Israël souhaite son maintien au pouvoir et ne lancera jamais de campagne virulente contre lui, encore

moins si elle doit aboutir à une Syrie en ruines dirigée par des islamistes.

Troisième point, Assad juge les pressions de la Turquie limitées et se dit convaincu que les réactions vigoureuses affichées par le gouvernement AKP [islamique modéré] ne s'adressent qu'à l'opinion turque. Selon lui, l'armée turque reste la principale détentrice du pouvoir et ne laissera jamais des "islamistes" conduire la Turquie vers la guerre. Le rapprochement entre la Syrie et la Turquie ayant commencé par des relations militaires étroites, Assad conserve une image positive de l'armée turque. Et il est convaincu de posséder avec les Kurdes [Damas est accusé d'aider le PKK kurde] un levier assez puissant pour faire pression sur Ankara.

Quatrième point, Bachar El-Assad reste méfiant à l'égard des grandes puissances arabes de la région. Pour lui, l'Egypte n'est pas vraiment un Etat du Moyen-Orient, mais un pays nord-africain, et elle a beau faire du bruit, elle ne possède pas de vrai pouvoir ni d'influence dans la région. A ses

yeux, les pays du Golfe sont des brigands : tous ces Etats à l'économie florissante, comme les Emirats arabes unis, le Qatar et même l'Arabie Saoudite, sont voués à l'effondrement et à la banqueroute dès lors que la manne pétrolière sera tarie, car ce ne sont pas de "vraies" nations. Assad voit une menace considérable dans l'Arabie Saoudite et dans la source de financement inépuisable des groupes extrémistes qu'elle représente. Le Qatar est, à l'en croire, excessivement ambitieux et dépourvu de substance, tandis que la Jordanie reste une marionnette aux mains des Etats-Unis.

Assad est conscient que les Etats-Unis, l'Union européenne et les pays arabes aimeraient qu'il se rapproche d'eux au détriment de l'Iran, mais ce ne sont pas à ses yeux des partenaires dignes de confiance. Les atouts que sont pour lui l'Iran et l'influence qu'il a sur le Liban semblent solides : c'est pourquoi les menaces de la Ligue arabe ne l'impressionnent pas. **Ziya Meral**

LE FIGARO

1^{er} décembre 2011

La Turquie sanctionne à son tour la Syrie

LAURE MARCHAND
ISTANBUL

MOYEN-ORIENT La Turquie a fini par mettre à exécution les menaces qu'elle brandissait depuis des semaines. S'alignant sur les pays occidentaux et sur la Ligue arabe, qui a pris, dimanche, des sanctions à l'égard de Damas, Ankara a annoncé à son tour une série de mesures contre son ancien allié, qui persiste à réprimer son peuple.

Le ministre des Affaires étrangères turc, Ahmet Davutoglu, a dénoncé, hier, un « régime dans l'impasse » : « Tant qu'un gouvernement légitime, en paix avec la population du pays, ne sera pas en place en Syrie, le mécanisme de la coopération stratégique de haut niveau sera suspendu. » Parmi les neuf dispositions décidées figurent, notamment, le gel des avoirs des dirigeants syriens en Turquie, la suspension des accords commerciaux avec les institutions publiques et des crédits turcs, la fin des relations avec la Banque centrale syrien-

ABDULLAH GÜL
PRÉSIDENT
DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE
DE TURQUIE

« Les besoins vitaux, comme l'eau et l'électricité, ne seront absolument pas inclus dans ces mesures »



Vendredi à Istanbul, des Syriens vivant en Turquie manifestaient contre le régime d'Assad devant le consulat de Syrie. SEZER/REUTERS

ne... Un embargo sur les armes avait déjà été mis en place.

Rencontre secrète

Les échanges commerciaux privés entre les deux pays ont échappé au dispositif turc. L'an dernier, l'ensemble du commerce bilatéral a atteint 2,5 milliards de dollars. Sont également exclus l'arrêt de la livraison d'électricité, un temps évoqué, ainsi qu'une restriction de l'approvisionnement en eau. A plusieurs reprises dans le passé, la Turquie avait déjà menacé de réduire le débit de l'Euphrate, qui prend sa source sur son territoire et poursuit son cours dans le pays voisin, pour faire pression sur Damas. Si

des coupures d'eau et d'électricité présentaient un moyen de pression important, elles avaient l'inconvénient de pénaliser directement la population.

Le gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc a aussi exclu de contourner le territoire syrien, qui sert de voie de transit à l'acheminement des exportations turques vers le Proche et le Moyen-Orient. « Si les conditions se détériorent, a néanmoins précisé Binali Yildirim, le ministre des Transports, nous prévoyons d'orienter les transports via l'Irak, en inaugurant de

nouveaux postes-frontières». Mais cette option est coûteuse en taxes et en assurances pour les sociétés, du fait des problèmes de sécurité en Irak.

Parallèlement à ses mesures de rétorsion économiques, Ankara a de nouveau écarté la possibilité d'une intervention internationale en Syrie à court terme. « Nous espérons qu'elle ne sera jamais nécessaire », a réaffirmé Ahmet Davutoglu. Tout en répétant que la Turquie se préparait cependant à « tous les scénarios » : « Si des milliers de gens fuyaient vers notre fron-

tière, cela créerait une situation difficile. Des mesures pourraient être prises avec la communauté internationale. »

Le chef de la diplomatie faisait référence à l'établissement d'une zone tampon dans le nord de la Syrie. En revanche, Ankara poursuit son soutien actif à la résistance syrienne, notamment à l'Armée syrienne libre, dont le commandement est hébergé dans un de ses camps, dans la province de Hatay, près de la frontière.

Lundi, une rencontre secrète s'y est déroulée entre son chef, le colonel Ryad al-Assad, et le président du Conseil national syrien, Burhan Ghalioun, réfugié en France. L'unification des différentes

branches de l'opposition syrienne était un des sujets abordés par Alain Juppé au cours de sa visite à Ankara il y a quinze jours. Le ministre des Affaires étrangères français, qui défend la mise en place de corridors humanitaires en Syrie, voulait également associer la Turquie aux décisions européennes. Il avait convié son homologue turc au Conseil des affaires étrangères qui se tient à Bruxelles aujourd'hui. Les Vingt-Sept prononceraient des sanctions supplémentaires contre la Syrie. Mais Chypre a mis son veto à la présence d'Ahmet Davutoglu. ■

LE FIGARO 2 décembre 2011

L'Irak affiche sa souveraineté face à l'US Army

Dans un mois, les forces irakiennes seront livrées à elles-mêmes.

FATMA KIZILBOGA
BAGDAD

MOYEN-ORIENT Pari réussi pour les autorités irakiennes, qui souhaitent un manifestement de couverture médiatique minimale de l'événement. Quelques heures avant le début de la cérémonie tenue hier en l'honneur des soldats américains en Irak, en présence du vice-président Joe Biden, le gouvernement irakien a retiré sans explication leur accréditation aux journalistes occidentaux présents à Bagdad. « Pour plus d'informations, merci d'adresser vos questions au gouvernement d'Irak », précisait en bas de son e-mail le colonel Barry Johnson, responsable de la communication de l'US Army en Irak.

Près de neuf ans après le lancement de l'opération « Iraqi Freedom » et à moins d'un mois de la fin de la présence militaire américaine en Irak, le gouvernement de Nouri al-Maliki semble vouloir tourner la page. Dans un discours prononcé devant un parterre de responsables militaires irakiens et américains à Camp Victory, complexe militaire situé au nord de la capitale et considéré comme l'un des symboles de l'invasion américaine en Irak, le premier ministre irakien a salué comme une « victoire historique » le refus de son gouvernement de pro-

longer le mandat des GI, qui arrive à terme le 31 décembre: une victoire « qui restera dans les mémoires après le retrait des troupes américaines de tout le territoire irakien », a-t-il dit.

Reprise des attentats

Si les États-Unis n'ont pas été remerciés explicitement pour leur rôle dans la chute du régime tyrannique de Saddam Hussein, Nouri al-Maliki a salué le président américain Barack Obama pour son respect du calendrier de retrait, ainsi que l'ancien président George W. Bush pour l'accord bilatéral de sécurité signé en 2008, prévoyant notamment la formation des Forces de sécurité ira-

kiennes, totalement démantelées après l'invasion. Le vice-président Joe Biden, pour sa part, a rendu hommage aux militaires présents dans la salle de l'ancien palais présidentiel al-Faw, déclarant: « Nous sommes capables de mettre un terme à cette guerre grâce à tout ce que vous avez fait. » Il a exprimé sa confiance aux militaires irakiens, qui seront bientôt livrés à eux-mêmes face au défi sécuritaire qui les attend.

Difficile, pourtant, de prévoir une amélioration de la situation, au moment où les violences reprennent de plus belle. L'Irak a connu hier l'une des journées les plus violentes de ces derniers mois. Deux attentats à la voiture piégée dans la province à majorité sunnite de Diyala, située au nord de Bagdad, ont provoqué la mort d'au moins 18 personnes, portant le bilan de la semaine à près de 80 morts. Les Irakiens, qui restent traumatisés par les affrontements sectaires,

craignent des affrontements entre milices sunnites et chiïtes, comme cela fut le cas dans les années 2005-2006.

« Les deux parties essaient de s'en sortir la tête haute: les États-Unis ne souhaitent pas afficher leur échec, tandis que le gouvernement irakien à majorité chiïte tente de masquer qu'il agit sous influence iranienne, analyse un diplomate occidental. Mais, au fond, tout le monde appréhende le futur dans ce pays. Les dés en sont jetés. » ■



Hier, l'explosion d'une voiture piégée sur un marché, dans la province de Diyala, au nord de Bagdad, a fait 10 morts. AFP.

TURQUIE • Sortir du négationnisme

En présentant des excuses aux Kurdes alévis pour un massacre commis en 1937, le Premier ministre Erdogan donne l'espoir aux Arméniens et aux autres minorités spoliées de voir leurs droits reconnus.

Ali Bayramoglu | Yeni Safak

Le 23 novembre 2011 est une date qu'il faudra marquer d'une pierre blanche. C'est ce jour-là en effet que, pour la première fois en Turquie, un Premier ministre a dévoilé au nom de l'Etat, en s'appuyant sur des archives, une page sombre de notre histoire qui nous fait honte. Et le plus important, c'est que, en prime, il a demandé pardon pour cela. Même si cet événement s'inscrit dans un contexte de politique politicienne – donnant au parti au pouvoir, l'AKP, l'occasion de mettre le principal parti d'opposition, le CHP, en difficulté –, on peut néanmoins dire qu'avec cette déclaration un seuil très important a été franchi.

Chez nous, en Orient, la formation de bon nombre d'Etats-nations s'est faite sur fond de nettoyage ethnique et religieux, et d'homogénéisation de la société. Les Etats issus de ce processus perpétuent d'ailleurs un système fondé sur une politique négationniste, sur l'oubli et le rejet de tout travail de mémoire. Dans un tel contexte, ces sociétés se retrouvent à stagner et à avoir peur. D'autres sociétés, en revanche, parce qu'elles ont placé l'être humain au centre de leurs valeurs, ont

réussi à ouvrir la porte à la possibilité d'assumer leur passé. Y a-t-il encore quelqu'un chez nous qui ignore ce qui s'est passé en 1937-1938 dans la région du Dersim [est de l'Anatolie] ? Selon les documents officiels, 13 000 personnes y ont été assassinées et 11 000 autres déportées par l'armée, qui appliquait les ordres d'un gouvernement dont l'objectif n'était autre alors que l'anéantissement de ce particularisme local. Cette politique n'était pas une réaction à un quelconque soulèvement local : il s'agissait d'un massacre planifié dès 1926.

Mais il y a d'autres parts d'ombre dans notre histoire pour lesquelles nous devrions également demander pardon et qui concernent la période républicaine [à partir de 1923] : les événements de 1934 qui ont abouti à l'expulsion des Juifs de Thrace [partie européenne de la Turquie], l'impôt sur le revenu [varlik vergisi] en 1942 [discriminatoire à l'égard des non-musulmans], les événements de septembre 1955 [pogroms visant principalement les Grecs, les Arméniens et les Juifs d'Istanbul], la spoliation des biens des Grecs en 1963, la prison de Diyarbakir en 1980 [où la torture fut massivement pratiquée] ou encore les exécutions illégales comman-

■ Contexte

Le Premier ministre turc Erdogan vient de demander officiellement pardon pour les massacres commis par l'armée turque en 1937-1938 dans la région du Dersim, peuplée de Kurdes alévis (chiïtes hétérodoxes anatoliens).

ditées par l'Etat pendant les années 1990... Les occasions de se confronter à un passé douloureux ne manquent donc pas.

La société turque n'ignore pas que ces pages sombres de notre histoire ne sont pas seulement l'apanage de la période républicaine. L'incroyable tragédie qui commence à la fin du XIXe siècle et qui culmine avec un génocide [le génocide arménien] flagrant en 1915 n'a-t-elle pas, de par sa dimension idéologique, rendu possible l'usage d'une brutalité qui a pu être pratiquée aussi après l'instauration de la république et qui nous ramène aujourd'hui à cette époque ? Nous savons désormais ce qui s'est passé, mais nous persistons à le nier. Souhaitons que les excuses présentées par Tayyip Erdogan marquent vraiment le début d'une nouvelle ère. ■

Syrie : Biden somme Assad de partir, salue la Turquie

ANKARA, Turquie - Le vice-président américain Joe Biden, en visite en Turquie, a sommé le président syrien Bachar al-Assad de quitter le pouvoir afin de permettre une «transition pacifique» en Syrie et a salué la fermeté d'Ankara à l'égard du régime de Damas.

«La position des États-Unis sur la Syrie est claire: le régime syrien doit mettre fin à la répression à l'encontre de son propre peuple et le président Assad doit quitter son poste», a-t-il déclaré au journal turc Hürriyet, avant son déplacement dans la capitale turque.

M. Biden, arrivé jeudi soir en Turquie en provenance d'Irak, a affirmé que son gouvernement,

qui a déjà exhorté le président syrien à quitter le pouvoir, souhaitait une «transition pacifique» en Syrie.

«Une stabilité durable ne peut être assurée [en Syrie] qu'avec l'arrivée au pouvoir d'un gouvernement qui écoute et subvient aux besoins de son peuple au lieu de pointer sur lui une arme», a-t-il estimé.

Il a insisté sur la «stabilité» de la Syrie, frontalière de la Turquie, pays allié des États-Unis, qui plus est membre de l'OTAN, et important partenaire régional.

Le vice-président a en outre salué la fermeté dont fait preuve Ankara vis-à-vis de Damas, ancien allié de la Turquie, ainsi



Le vice-président américain Joe Biden, en visite en Turquie

que le dialogue engagé avec l'opposition syrienne.

«Il est temps pour

l'ensemble de la communauté internationale de s'unir pour isoler un régime qui a systématiquement violé les droits de l'Homme et réprimé des manifestations pacifiques», a ajouté M. Biden.

Le premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a demandé à Bachar al-Assad de partir et son gouvernement a rendu publiques mercredi des sanctions contre son régime.

Les États-Unis et la Turquie ont indiqué craindre une guerre civile en Syrie où le mouvement de contestation du régime a fait 4000 morts depuis mars, selon l'ONU.

«La dernière chose que nous souhaitons en Syrie est

une guerre intestine», a indiqué jeudi le chef de l'État turc Abdullah Gül.

Sur le dossier de la lutte contre les rebelles kurdes du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), mouvement considéré comme «terroriste» par la Turquie, les États-Unis et de nombreux autres pays, le responsable américain a souligné que Washington accroîtrait «la pression» sur les rebelles qui ont multiplié les attaques, notamment à partir de leurs bases en Irak.

Les Américains ont récemment fourni aux Turcs des

drones et des hélicoptères de combat à cette fin.

Notre coopération contre le PKK «se poursuivra d'une manière encore plus ferme», a déclaré M. Gül au terme de l'entretien, a écrit l'agence de presse Anatolie.

M. Biden a en outre critiqué le fait qu'un séminaire orthodoxe, élément essentiel du patriarcat oecuménique d'Istanbul, fermé il y a 40 ans, ne soit toujours pas rouvert, parlant d'une «anomalie».

Il doit d'ailleurs rencontrer samedi le patriarche de Constantinople (l'actuelle

Istanbul) Bartholomée Ier, chef spirituel de l'Église orthodoxe, a-t-on souligné de source américaine.

M. Biden a rencontré vendredi le président du Parlement Cemil Çiçek, puis a été reçu par M. Gül.

La rencontre prévue avec M. Erdogan ainsi que leur point de presse ont été annulés, le premier ministre se remettant d'une opération de l'intestin. Mais M. Biden va lui rendre visite samedi à sa résidence stambouliote, selon Anatolie.

M. Biden est passé dans l'après-midi à Istanbul afin d'y

participer samedi à un sommet d'investisseurs placé sous le signe de la libre entreprise.

Le gouvernement islamoconservateur de M. Erdogan entretient des relations cordiales avec le gouvernement du président Barack Obama.

Si les États-Unis ont applaudi le refroidissement des relations entre Ankara et Damas, ils se sont inquiétés de l'éloignement entre la Turquie et Israël, deux de leurs alliés, à la suite d'un abordage par l'armée israélienne d'un bateau turc transportant de l'aide humanitaire destinée à Gaza en 2010. ●

AFP

Trois rebelles kurdes tués par l'armée turque

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 3 décembre 2011 (AFP)

L'ARMÉE TURQUE a tué trois rebelles kurdes au cours d'un échange de tirs nocturne de plusieurs heures dans le sud-est de la Turquie, ont annoncé samedi des sources proches des services de sécurité.

L'affrontement, qui a opposé durant environ quatre heures des soldats à un

groupe de rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), s'est produit dans une zone rurale près de Lice.

Considéré comme une organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays, le PKK lutte depuis 1984 pour l'indépendance, et aujourd'hui l'autonomie, des régions kurdes de Turquie, et le conflit a fait au moins 45.000 morts, selon l'armée.



Kurdish leader: Clerics 'instigated ... acts of sabotage,' wounding 25

From Mohammed Tawfeeq, CNN

At least 25 people were wounded in northern Iraq in alleged "acts of sabotage" carried out by men who had been "instigated" by Muslim clerics, a Kurdish leader and local security officers said.

The incident occurred Friday afternoon in Zakho, which is in Iraq's Kurdistan region near the Turkish border and about 540 kilometers (335 miles) north of Baghdad.

Security officers in the Dohuk Governate, which includes Zakho, said that "dozens of young men" attacked at least 15 liquor stores, two massage parlors and two hotels after Friday noon prayers.

The officers claimed that clerics "instigated" the action. So, too, did Massoud Barzani -- the president of the Iraq's Kurdistan autonomous region -- who blamed "men who were instigated by some clerics to carry out acts of sabotage."

The Kurdish leader said, in his statement Saturday, that the attackers targeted "a number of tourist facilities, especially facilities owned by ... Christians and Yazidis."

Religious minorities, such as Christians and Yazidis, make up less than 5% of Iraq's population, according to the Office of the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

Since 2003, attacks against these minorities by insurgents and religious extremists have driven more than half of these minorities out of the country, according to U.N. statistics.

Yazidis, among Iraq's smallest minorities, are of Kurdish descent, and their religion is considered a pre-Islamic sect that



draws from Christianity, Judaism and Zoroastrianism.

Barzani said that, regrettably, "in response to these riotous actions, ... a group of people attacked a number of headquarters of the (Kurdistan) Islamic Union," a prominent political party.

Authorities "made a major effort" to prevent the "acts of sabotage, but they could not," the Kurdish leader said. Several police were among those wounded, according to security officers.

"I denounce these inhumane and illegal acts, and I call on the people of Kurdistan to respect the national, religious and sectarian coexistence and take it as a basic goal for them to live together peacefully," Barzani said.

A special committee has been formed to investigate the incident "and take legal action" against those involved, the Kurdish leader added. ■

Iraq marks a 'solemn but glorious hour'



President Jalal Talabani with Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III in Baghdad on Thursday as Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. watched.

POOL PHOTO BY KHALID MOHAMMED

CAMP VICTORY, IRAQ

BY MARK LANDLER

With the United States preparing to turn this optimistically named military base over to Iraq, leaders of both countries held a solemn commemoration Thursday of the sacrifices of U.S. and Iraqi troops during eight years of war, marking the moment in a garish marble palace built by Saddam Hussein.

With verses from the Koran and the words of President Harry S. Truman, Iraq's top officials and Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. paid tribute to each other's soldiers, pledged friendship, and celebrated an orderly departure by the United States that many in both countries would not have predicted even a few years ago.

"The tide of war is receding, and the soul of Baghdad remains, the soul of Iraq remains," Mr. Biden said to an audience of about 300 American and Iraqi troops. Citing Mr. Truman's speech after Germany surrendered in 1945, he said the end of war was a "solemn but glorious hour."

In a day of hopeful statements that attempted to cast the war in its most positive light, the Iraqi president, Jalal Talabani, said that in moving beyond dictatorship, Iraq had served as a

beacon for the political upheavals of the Arab Spring. "History will record that the liberation of our country was not only an important turning point in Iraq itself," he said, "but it was an important beginning for the region."

The ceremony was not, strictly speaking, a handover. That will come Friday. And the last U.S. soldier is to leave Iraqi soil in the next few weeks, ending an involvement that has been winding down in phases since 2009.

Still, the ceremony was freighted with the symbolism of a foreign power's leaving and an occupied country's reclaiming its sovereignty. Iraq's red-white-and-black flags were hung from balconies, unfurling grandly as a military band played the national anthem. An Iraqi honor guard, in crimson uniforms, lined the entrance to the palace, which was festooned with yellow and red tinsel, strung on barbed wire.

Mr. Talabani pledged that Iraq would remain a friend of the United States. He bestowed medals on Mr. Biden, Gen. Lloyd J. Austin III and ambassadors from other countries that contributed troops to the U.S.-led coalition.

The vice president portrayed the withdrawal as evidence that the United States keeps its promises. American soldiers, he said peering at those present in the audience, were leaving Iraq, "taking

nothing with you but your experience."

"Because of you," he said, "and because of the work you have done, we are now able to end this war."

Mr. Biden also addressed the criticisms, leveled by Senator John McCain and others, that the United States was abandoning Iraq to a potentially dangerous fate.

Speaking of the criticisms that the United States should have left troops in Iraq longer for security, Mr. Biden said, "In my view, and the president's view, those arguments not only misunderstand Iraqi politics, but they underestimate the Iraqi people."

He talked of the progress he had seen from his earliest trips here, when, he said, bodies piled up daily in Baghdad's morgue and when driving on its highways, riddled with roadside bombs, was a test of faith.

Now, Mr. Biden insisted, Iraq has a thriving, if unruly, political system and well-trained security forces, capable of guarding its borders and putting down its insurgency.

Neither side dwelled on the many challenges facing Iraq, including the lack of a law to split oil riches in a way that minimizes a poisonous ethnic divide, and the lingering sense of disenfranchisement on the part of some Sunnis that is fueling the insurgency.

Even with the pending formal hand-

Turkey imposes sanctions on Syria, tightening noose

ISTANBUL

BY DAN BILEFSKY
AND ANTHONY SHADID

Sharply raising international pressure on Syria in response to its continuing violence against civilians, Turkey acted on Wednesday to freeze Syrian government financial assets, impose a travel ban on senior regime officials and cut off transactions with the central bank.

The latest sanctions, Turkish officials said, are in concert with the broad trade sanctions introduced by the Arab League on Sunday and are part of a concerted international effort to cripple Syria's economy and the ability of its government to do business.

Turkish, European and American officials all said they believed that Syria's economic troubles could prove the undoing of President Bashar al-Assad.

Reiterating his calls for Mr. Assad to relinquish power and to stop his brutal assault on his people, Turkey's foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, said in Ankara that the measures would include an extensive ban on military sales to Syria and a blockade of weapons deliveries from third countries at Turkey's land and sea borders with Syria. Mr. Davutoglu said Turkey would also stop new transactions with the Commercial Bank of Syria and halt all credit to the Syrian government.

"Every bullet fired, every bombed mosque has taken away the legitimacy of the Syrian leadership and has widened the gap between us," he said. "Syria has wasted the last chance that it was given."

Mr. Davutoglu said the list of sanctions was a "first stage" in potential measures against Damascus. The Turkish government also emphasized that the new sanctions would not include vital supplies like water and electricity that could harm the Syrian people.

Turkey is Syria's second-largest export market, after China. Trade between Turkey and Syria more than tripled to \$2.5 billion in 2009 from \$795 million in 2006. Before the recent souring of relations, economists forecast that it would reach \$5 billion by 2013.

The European Union and the United States were first in imposing penalties, and European sanctions, in particular, helped wreck Syria's oil industry, which once contributed as much as a third of government revenue. Though Europe is Syria's biggest trading partner, Turkey and members of the Arab League make up four of its next five biggest, and members of the Syrian leadership, along with those tied to it, have large investments in the Gulf.

The Obama administration commended Turkey for its latest steps.

"The leadership shown by Turkey in response to the brutality and violation of the fundamental rights of the Syrian people will isolate the Assad regime and send a strong message to Assad and his circle that their actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated," a White House statement said.

An Obama administration official in Washington projected that the Syrian government had lost more than 40 percent of its revenue, with the oil industry reeling and tourism devastated. The official said the government was having more trouble than ever supporting the Syrian pound. Residents say the Syrian pound has fallen 12 percent in the black market from its official rate and now trades at 56 pounds to the dollar.

The Arab and Turkish sanctions also carry great symbolic weight. Just a year ago, Turkey was emerging as one of Syria's closest allies, and Syria has long managed to play on inter-Arab rivalries to maintain a profile that outstripped its resources or relative strength. Moves by both the Arab League and Turkey have left it as isolated as any time since

"Every bullet fired, every bombed mosque has taken away the legitimacy of the Syrian leadership."

Mr. Assad's father, Hafez, seized power four decades ago:

In Syria, some people said they feared that the sanctions could embolden supporters of the Assad regime and focus criticism on external forces.

"The sanctions will make the regime supporters even more supportive," said Joelle, a 25 year-old graphic designer from Damascus. "That's the notion I'm getting from people around me. They are blaming Arab nations for what's happening to them, and reminiscing about the old days. They feel that this is an insult to Syria's sovereignty."

The intensification of pressure by Turkey against Syria is part of a radical about-face in relations between the two countries as Turkey seeks to assert leadership in the Muslim world. Only a year ago, the Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and Mr. Assad took vacations together and the countries held joint cabinet sessions.

But as the political crisis has churned in Syria for months, with government forces killing at least 3,500 demonstrators, according to the United Nations, Turkey has severed its ties and cast itself as the voice of regional indignation.

Sebnem Arsu contributed from Istanbul, Neil MacFarquhar from Damascus and Brian Knowlton from Washington.

over of Camp Victory, the sprawling military headquarters in Baghdad that became emblematic of U.S. power, evidence of the new civilian presence of the United States abounded. Mr. Biden's staff and reporters were flown from the huge U.S. Embassy to Camp Victory in helicopters emblazoned with the State Department's seal.

In an interview after the ceremony, Mr. Biden said the pivot from military strategy to forging a political settlement was the Obama administration's major contribution to the war effort.

Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki expressed thanks to George W. Bush, who as president signed the agreement in 2008 that set the timetable for the departure and to President Barack Obama for sticking to that timetable. He also issued what appeared to be an oblique warning to Iran not to destabilize Iraq by backing insurgent groups that carry out deadly attacks.

"The withdrawal operation will take away all the slogans that some countries hide behind in order to interfere in the internal affairs of Iraq," Mr. Maliki said.

In many ways, Mr. Biden embodies the United States' anguished history with the war. As a senator, he voted in 2002 to authorize the invasion of Iraq, a decision he later said he regretted. In 2007, he took a decidedly different stance on engagement, opposing the troop surge and declaring that its architect, Gen. David H. Petraeus, was "dead, flat wrong."

Mr. Biden also wrote a seminal essay in 2005, along with Leslie H. Gelb of the Council on Foreign Relations, that called for decentralizing Iraq to give some autonomy to its Shiites, Kurds and Sunni Arabs. The proposal was dismissed by the Bush administration, and Mr. Biden complained that it had been misconstrued as a plan to partition the country.

Still, Mr. Biden kept at his commitment to Iraq, turning himself into an avid student of the country's tribal politics. He has traveled here 16 times as a senator and vice president, building relationships that have allowed him to act as a go-between with Iraq's ethnic leaders. He relishes, for example, analyzing the rivalry between Mr. Maliki, a Shiite, and Massoud Barzani, the president of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, whom he met with later on Thursday.

Iraq also has deep personal resonance for the vice president. Mr. Biden's son, Joseph R. Biden III, was deployed here as a member of the Delaware National Guard in 2008 while his father was running for vice president. He returned home in 2009, when Mr. Biden was directing Iraq policy at the White House.

The vice president spoke Thursday of his son, as well as to the 4,486 Americans who died in Iraq and whom he called "fallen angels." Many others, he added, bear scars from their experience.

"We owe you," Mr. Biden said, his voice thick with emotion. "We owe you."

Iran Interferes in Iraqi Kurdistan

Stephen Schwartz / The Weekly Standard

Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will travel soon to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) for a discussion of border disputes and trade relations, reports the Iraqi news agency Aswat al-Ira. Ahmadinejad will meet with KRG president Massoud Barzani, who visited Tehran at the end of October with a delegation of KRG ministers and governors. Barzani, as pointed out in THE WEEKLY STANDARD by Frederick W. Kagan, Kim Kagan, and Marisa Cochrane Sullivan, was considered previously “the Kurdish leader most staunchly opposed to Iran.” In Tehran, Barzani and Iranian foreign minister Ali Akbar Salehi announced that Kurdish rebel actions against Iran, along the border with the KRG, had ended.

Iran is looking for auxiliaries to its considerable and menacing influence over the Iraqi central government, perhaps out of mere desire for aggrandizement. But Tehran may also fear that Arab Shias in Baghdad will prove a troublesome partner in its anticipated alliance of Shia-ruled Middle East states, once the U.S. leaves. Iraq’s Shias, a majority of the country’s population, do not accept the political model of the Iranian clerical state, or “vilayet-e faqih” (governance by religious jurists). Hostility between Iranian and Iraqi Arab Shias, as described by Nathaniel Rabkin writing for THE WEEKLY STANDARD in 2007, is reflected in religious literature produced by Iraq’s Shia religious authorities, or marjae. And of course the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-88 has not been forgotten.

An AP report in early November quoted a 36-year-old Iraqi Shia sheep trader, Fouad Karim, who lives in Mandali, a mixed Kurdish and Arab town on the northeastern border with Iran: “We hated the Iranians. And there are still bad feelings. The government should not tolerate any Iranian interference, as our anger against them only gets worse when we hear about their deeds.” Still, as the AP noted, multitudes of Iranian pilgrims have gone to the Shia holy sites at Kerbala and Najaf in Iraq, and Iranian-produced consumer goods are offered for sale widely in Iraq.

While Iran no doubt hopes to aggravate tensions between Iraq’s Kurds and Baghdad, it has a poor history of dealing with its own Kurds, including terrorist attacks on Kurdish leaders abroad, and shelling of Kurds on Iraqi soil in July. But Iran already operates two consulates in the KRG, in Erbil and in Sulaymaniyah. Iran may also want to exploit Kurdish tensions with Turkey, since the latter country entered the NATO anti-missile defense system. Iran has threatened to retaliate against Turkey if the U.S. or Israel act against Iran’s nuclear ambitions.

The new Iranian intrigues in the KRG began just as animosity between the Kurds in Erbil and the government in Baghdad had worsened over petrochemical production, including in Kirkuk, which has prolific oilfields. Baghdad argues that hydrocarbons from the KRG belong to the whole Iraqi nation. The most recent Quarterly Report to Congress by the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction (SIGIR), dated October 30, 2011, counts KRG contracts with more than 40 international oil and gas companies. SIGIR offers a comparison of 45 billion barrels of oil and 100-200 trillion cubic feet of natural gas said by the KRG to be available in its territory with estimates by Baghdad of 143 billion barrels of oil and 112 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in Iraq as a whole.

The largest number of oil and gas agreements with the KRG have

involved investors from Canada (14 licenses) and South Korea (12 licenses), with U.S.-based enterprises accounting for 8 licenses. Other interested parties are based in Kurdistan itself, Turkey, Britain, the United Arab Emirates, Austria, Hungary, Norway, China, Australia, India, France, Russia, Moldova, and Spain. In February 2011, thanks to an interim agreement with Baghdad, the KRG resumed exporting oil, which had stopped in 2009.

Firms investing in the KRG’s energy potential were typically small (except for the Chinese SINOPEC and Spanish Repsol), until ExxonMobil became the first “supermajor” firm to announce, at the end of October, that it had signed accords with the KRG for oil and gas exploration at six locations. The Baghdad government responded angrily, claiming that ExxonMobil acted without the authorization of U.S. authorities. Iraqi second deputy prime minister for energy affairs Hussain Al-Shahristani, who is independent of any party, denounced the ExxonMobil involvement with the KRG as illegal. The latest SIGIR report notes that Hess Corporation, an American energy company, was banned by the Baghdad authorities from a fourth round of licensing for 12 new exploration blocks elsewhere in Iraq after it signed a contract with the KRG.

Baghdad has further warned it would cancel approval of exports by ExxonMobil from its large oilfields near Basra in southern Iraq, as retaliation for the company’s KRG efforts. In mid-November, Royal Dutch Shell withdrew from development talks with the KRG, to protect its assets in southern Iraq, which include a natural gas project worth up to \$17 billion. Baghdad then threatened to hand over ExxonMobil’s southern holdings to Shell. Baghdad has expressed concern that Chevron and the Italian firm ENI may enter Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurdistan has succeeded in attracting such outside investors because of its security. SIGIR reports that no American soldier or civilian has been killed there since 2003, and only two major terrorist bombings have taken place in eight years. The KRG has accomplished an important social advance in adopting legislation prohibiting domestic violence, including the practice of female genital mutilation, which was widespread in Kurdish culture, forced marriage, child marriage, arranged marriage between young women and old men, marriage by trade-off of women between different families, demands for dowries, forced divorce, and marriage as a payment in lieu of money to settle blood feuds.

As SIGIR points out, on August 30, 2011, the KRG became the first Iraqi region to provide its residents with electric power 24 hours daily, and exports electricity to Kirkuk. By contrast, Baghdad, on average, has power only four hours each day. The KRG’s positive example of steady improvement in its people’s lives began when it came under U.S. protection in 1991, during the presidency of George H.W. Bush, and it has achieved more since George W. Bush acted to remove Saddam Hussein in 2003. But according to Kurdish blogger Shwan Zulai, “The KRG was taken by surprise when . . . the scale of the U.S. drawdown became clear.”

The prospect of major U.S. and foreign hydrocarbon enterprises operating under Iranian “protection” in the KRG should indicate that something had gone very wrong. Much remains to be done in extirpating corruption and other abuses in the KRG, but if it falls into Iranian hands, or its resources are usurped by Baghdad, or both, it will be an indictment of Obama’s policy of a rapid and heedless ending of the U.S. presence in Iraq. □

Federalism is the only path for Syrian Kurds

Globe Editorial

By Azad Amin

Kurdistan region President Massoud Barzani's meeting with the Syrian Kurdish National Council (SKNC) in that sense signifies a historic step toward the connection between the two parts of Kurdistan.

Regime change in Syria is unavoidable. One way or another, Beshar Assad's Baath Regime will collapse. The question is what kind of regime will arise from the ruins of Syria's Baath Regime. From a Kurdish point of view, even more burdensome questions are what will be the place of Kurds in the new regime and their role in the Syrian opposition and in the formation of establishing a new one.

Undoubtedly, the regional interests of global political powers and the policies they may pursue to a considerable extent will determine and shape the character of a new Syria; this, however, does not reduce the input of local actors in the process of shaping and determining the future of Syria. Kurdish political actors in Syria thus have a historical responsibility to play their role maximally in order to realize their national-political rights in the aftermath of Baath Syria. Equally crucial is the role and support of Kurdistan region's political support to their brethren in Syria. As the only legitimate political entity recognized by the international community, Kurdistan region's political bodies, Parliament, government and presidency should not shy away from their national duties to lend maximum support and solidarity to Kurds in Syria.

Kurdistan region President Massoud Barzani's meeting with the Syrian Kurdish National Council (SKNC) in that sense signifies a historic step toward the connection between the two parts of Kurdistan. The Syrian Kurdish National Council, which leads the



Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani meets with Syrian Kurdish leaders in Erbil, Nov. 28./ GLOBE PHOTO/Safin Hamed

Kurdish opposition and demonstrations in the Kurdish areas, was formed in a recent conference in the northeastern Syrian Kurdish city of Qamishli; it is composed of 11 political parties and 11 independents, all based inside Syrian Kurdistan.

President Barzani was right to describe the meeting as historical. It sends an explicit message both to Syrian Kurds that Kurdistan region is behind their rightful demand and to regional powers that the Syrian Kurds' national demands should be considered seriously in any policy toward a post-Assad's regime.

Expressing Kurdistan region's full support for the national-democratic aspirations of the Syrian Kurds, Barzani suggested to the SKNC in the meeting: "You must play your role very carefully and ensure that democratic values and Kurdish rights are recognized and guaranteed in the Syrian Constitution. I call on you to work closely with those both inside and outside the country who are prepared to meet your demands."

One fundamental point in this meeting was the explicit and determined support of Kurdistan region toward the Syrian Kurdistan. In that sense Kurdistan region put itself as an actor, as a side in the conflict in Syria along other regional and global powers that have their own interests over Syria.

Strategic Vision

Cooperation and solidarity between Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan should be materialized with a strategic national policy; a new vision is to be developed and fundamental principles to be highlighted as a road map. Any support of Kurdistan region toward Syrian Kurds will be meaningful and productive if there is a common strategic vision for which both sides are united.

For Syrian Kurds, it is essential that they come up with a coherent national policy to pursue for their future in Syria. Their role in the Syrian opposition movement and their regional and international relations must be based on this national policy.

The experience and status of Kurdistan region of Iraq in that sense provides a road map for the Syrian Kurds. Constituting one of the largest national identities in Syria with their own territory, Kurds should develop a policy of federalism for Syria as their basic demands. In other words, a Federal Kurdistan Region of Syria should be the basic of Syrian Kurds, demand. For the Syrian Kurds to realize and secure a bright and peaceful future with other national, religious and ethnic components of Syria, formation of a federal Kurdistan region is categorically imperative.

Requesting federalism as a minimal demand is indispensable for two other reasons: Establishment of a federal political structure in post-Assad Syria will secure and consolidate the political structure

of Iraq and Kurdistan region government. Second, it will set up an irrevocable path for the solution of the Kurdish national question in two other parts of Kurdistan, namely Turkey and Iran.

Up until the formation of Kurdistan federal region in Iraq, the Kurdish national question had been discussed and contemplated within the framework of minority questions as an internal issue of four states that occupied Kurdistan. However, with the First Gulf War in 1991, the region provided opportunity for the Iraqi Kurds to establish their own political body and declared federalism as their minimal demands, and in the aftermath of Saddam's regime they obtained this status. Since then, the dimension and the character of the Kurdish national question altered radically. Discussion and discourse on the Kurdish issue now radiates around the Kurdish political formation in Iraqi Kurdistan or takes it as a reference point.

Formation of another Kurdish political entity in the form of federalism in Syria thus will completely alter the discourse concerning the solution of the Kurdish question, and it will elevate the issue once and forever from a minority issue to a national self-determination issue. Kurdish strategic vision for Syrian Kurdistan thus relates not solely to the future of Syrian Kurds, but inevitably to the future of the entire Kurdish nation in the region. □□□

The Syrian Kurdish political parties and various actors have managed to create a united front apart from the Syrian Democratic Union Party, which has close ties to Kurdistan Workers' Party famously known as PKK. The Syrian Democratic Union Party (PYD) is part of the National Coordination Association for Democracy in Syria, which is close to the Syrian current regime.

PYD's stance is jeopardizing a united position of the Kurdish national front in Syria. Despite the opinion, differences among the Syrian Kurdish parties there is no legitimate explanation of PYD's association with the current regime. All the Kurdish political parties in Syria should unite around a national-strategic policy in order to promote and realize a Kurdish self-determination. Artificial and insignificant issues should not create division amongst

the rank and file of the Kurdish national movement.

KRG to be prepared for its explicit support for Syrian Kurds

As mentioned above, KRG's open position and solidarity with the Syrian Kurds will raise eyebrows in certain regional circles. KRG should prepare itself for the effects of getting involved in this regional fireball of Syria. Iran, one of the most open supporters of Assad's regime, through various channels warned the KRG not to support the Syrian opposition and to remain indifferent if not to support the current regime in Syria. Sustainability of the Syrian regime is vital for the regime in Iran. Iran pressure over the Maliki government not to lend support opposition against Syria resulted Iraq's absent vote in the Arab League decision to place economic sanctions on Syria and dismiss Syrian

membership in the League. When Kurdistan's president met top officials in Iran on an official visit, Iran overtly conveyed its position regarding Syria.

At the time of U.S. troop withdrawal from Iraq, the increasing influence of Iran in Iraq could create problems in Kurdistan. The pending issues between Baghdad and Erbil could be further intensified should Iran decides to antagonize KRG for its unconcealed position against the Syrian regime.

Turkey, which is at the forefront of regime change in Syria and opened its territory to the anti-Assad Syrian opposition, may not like to see the active participation of KRG in Syrian affairs. Despite the fact that Turkey promotes regime change in Syria, it does not want the repetition of Iraq in Syria. Turkey aims to have the upper hand in post-Assad Syria in

order to influence political formation there. What Turkey hopes to achieve is to prevent the formation of a federal Syria. Turkey will use its influence in post-Assad era for a unitary state under the control of Syrian majority of Sunni Muslims.

While KRG may face a powerful neighbor in the east in its involvement in Assad's Syria, KRG would face another powerful neighbor in the north after post-Assad Syria.

Despite all the difficulties, KRG has no other choice but to become involved and lend its experience and full support to the Syrian Kurds for a federal political structure. The future likelihood of Syria and the Kurdish status there in a post-Assad period will determine the political future of Kurds in the entire region. ○



December 3, 2011

Barazani: Kurds appreciate US military sacrifices in Iraq

Alsumaria Iraqi Satellite TV

Kurdistan leader Massoud Barazani assured on Friday that Kurds appreciate and deeply respect US military's sacrifices in Iraq, while US Vice-President Joe Biden indicated that the withdrawal of his country's troops will not end mutual cooperation and support between both countries.

"Kurdistan leader Massoud Barazani, Kurdistan Regional Government Prime Minister Barham Saleh along with his deputy and Kurdish Interior Minister discussed with US Vice-President Joe Biden and US Ambassador to Baghdad the situation in Iraq," Kurdistan presidency said in a press release which Alsumarianews received a copy of.

"Barazani praises Washington's role in supporting Iraq against former Iraqi dictatorship and helping the country set a federal democratic regime," the statement revealed.

"Barazani assured that Kurds deeply appreciate and respect US military's sacrifices," the statement added noting that "Barazani expressed content following US Vice-President's assurance that his country is committed towards Iraq and Kurdistan Region."

"US Vice-President pointed up that USA will always support the



Vice President Biden was received at Erbil International Airport by President Barzani, Prime Minister Barham Salih and Minister Falah Mustafa, the head of the Kurdistan Regional Government's Department of Foreign Relations.

new Iraq," the statement declared. "Biden announced that US troops' withdrawal from Iraq will not end cooperation and support, in contrary, US support for Iraq will be carried out in all fields as well as on the political, administrative and security levels," the statement indicated. The US will also assist in Iraqi military training, support political stability and economic development in the country. □

Le Monde

Vendredi 2 décembre 2011

L'ouverture turque de Nicolas Sarkozy

NATALIE NOUGAYRÈDE

Ces deux-là, assurément, ne s'aiment pas. Tout en se ressemblant un peu. Nicolas Sarkozy et Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, le puissant premier ministre turc, portent la faconde et l'activisme personnel en étendard sur la scène internationale. En interne, ils sont du genre à décider de tout. Erdoğan est « le Sarkozy turc », peut-on lire dans un télégramme diplomatique américain (obtenu par WikiLeaks) daté de 2009 : « Il est l'ultime décideur. »

Avec leurs personnalités à l'emporte-pièce et leur propension à jouer sur les cordes populistes, Sarkozy et Erdoğan n'hésitent pas à pratiquer parfois l'esclandre dans les enceintes internationales. Recep Erdoğan n'a jamais oublié comment il s'était taillé une franche popularité dans le monde arabe grâce à son coup d'éclat face au président israélien, Shimon Pérès, lors du forum de Davos en 2009 après la guerre de Gaza.

Le poids des ego a son importance, à l'heure où la France tente de nouer un dialogue inédit avec le pouvoir d'Erdoğan, pour mieux se coordonner sur de multiples dossiers, du Moyen-Orient à l'Afghanistan. Alain Juppé, le ministre français des affaires étrangères, qui était à la mi-novembre en Turquie, a invité son homologue, Ahmet Davutoglu, à participer à la réunion des ministres européens des affaires étrangères, le 1^{er} décembre, à Bruxelles. Pour évoquer la Syrie.

Le geste, tout symbolique qu'il soit – l'invitation est restée sans suite, la Ligue arabe préférant avoir, ce jour-là, l'exclusivité d'un dialogue avec l'UE – constitue un virage notable pour la diplomatie de Nicolas Sarkozy. Car sur les grands dossiers, tout l'oppose, depuis longtemps, à Recep Erdoğan. Que ce soit le thème de la Turquie en Europe, le nucléaire iranien (le pouvoir turc avait tenté en 2010, aux côtés du Brésil, une médiation jugée inopportune par l'Élysée) ou encore les tensions en Méditerranée orientale, entre la Turquie, Israël et Chypre.

La guerre de Libye n'a rien arrangé. Recep Erdoğan, qui avait accepté en 2010 le surréaliste Prix Mouammar Kadhafi



Nicolas Sarkozy et Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, sous l'œil d'Alain Juppé, au sommet du G20 à Cannes, le 3 novembre. CHRISTIAN HARTMANN/REUTERS

des droits de l'homme, était fondamentalement contre l'intervention armée – qu'il a, encore récemment, taxée d'opération « pour le pétrole ».

Le président français perçoit le premier ministre turc comme un « provocateur, sur tous les sujets ». « Il faut bien que quelqu'un lui tienne tête ! », s'est-il exclamé un jour, en petit comité. En 2009, un câble diplomatique américain relayait que les conseillers de Nicolas Sarkozy redoutaient à tel point sa colère contre Recep Erdoğan qu'ils avaient cherché à dérouter l'avion présidentiel pour qu'il n'aperçoive pas, de son hublot, « la tour Eiffel illuminée aux couleurs de la Turquie ».

Le président français se méfie du discours islamo-conservateur de l'homme fort d'Ankara, et il ne semble guère croire en les vertus d'un « modèle turc » pour les pays du « printemps arabe ». Il fait l'analyse que Recep Erdoğan rêve d'implanter partout, dans le monde arabe, une imitation de son propre système, fait de sunnisme musclé et de dérapages autoritaires. Nicolas Sarkozy a vécu comme un signal d'alarme « islamiste » le fait que la Turquie ait cherché à bloquer, en 2009, la nomination du Danois Anders Fogh Rasmussen au poste de secrétaire général de l'OTAN. Le Danemark était coupable, aux yeux d'Ankara, d'avoir laissé publier dans la presse des caricatures de Mahomet...

Recep Erdoğan considère, lui, que l'occupant de l'Élysée a brûlé tous les ponts avec la Turquie à force de brandir le grand voisin oriental de l'Europe comme un épouvantail musulman auprès de l'électorat. Il juge Nicolas Sarkozy incapable de déceler les atouts géopolitiques que la Turquie pourrait offrir à l'Europe. C'est une vieille histoire : Nicolas Sarkozy a toujours joué, en politique intérieure, sur le sentiment anti-Turquie. Il a répété à satiété que le pays n'était pas européen mais d'« Asie mineure ». « Sarkozy regrettera, tôt ou tard, ce qu'il a fait », a lâché un jour Recep Erdoğan à la télévision.

La crise de l'euro vaut à la France et à l'Europe des sarcasmes de l'« émergent » turc. « Nous n'avons aucun de vos problèmes économiques – Sarkozy devrait s'en souvenir ! », commente un officiel de l'AKP, le parti de Recep Erdoğan qui, en dix ans de pouvoir, a vu les exportations turques quadrupler et le revenu par habitant tripler.

Au sein de l'OTAN, en avril, il a fallu une médiation in extremis de la secrétaire d'État américaine, Hillary Clinton, pour aplanir le grave contentieux franco-turc qui menaçait de paralyser l'opération en Libye. Plus tard, Paris a constaté avec effroi que les deux navires militaires turcs déployés au large de Benghazi s'employaient non pas à faire respecter l'embargo contre le régime Kadhafi, mais à empêcher que des armes parviennent à... la rébellion libyenne. Du sabotage !

Bref, Nicolas Sarkozy ne regrette en rien de ne pas avoir invité la Turquie au sommet de l'Élysée, le 19 mars, jour du déclenchement des frappes en Libye. « Pourquoi inviter un pays qui était contre ? Franchement, c'est extravagant, quand même ! Pourquoi avoir peur à ce point de la Turquie ? », a-t-il commenté, en privé. L'administration Obama, qui cultive une étroite relation avec Ankara, lui avait beaucoup reproché cette omission.

C'est dans cette ambiance de récriminations que la France essaie d'imprimer un nouveau cours. Nicolas Sarkozy a dû s'y résoudre : la Turquie, 80 millions d'habitants, est trop importante au Moyen-Orient, trop ambitieuse et trop active, pour être ignorée. En filigrane, c'est aussi une forme de rivalité qui s'est esquissée entre Paris et Ankara au Moyen-Orient, en Afrique du Nord et jusqu'en Afrique sahélienne, où la Turquie mène une stratégie de pénétration économique intense.

En septembre, l'empressement de Nicolas Sarkozy à se rendre, avec David Cameron, en Libye, avant qu'Erdoğan n'y fasse étape, en avait témoigné. Le dirigeant turc venait d'entamer une tournée dans les

pays de la révolte arabe, accueilli en vedette. C'était là, aux yeux de Nicolas Sarkozy, une récupération hypocrite des efforts militaires menés par d'autres.

Le terrain tout trouvé pour un rapprochement, aujourd'hui, est la Syrie: les deux pays semblent en phase pour venir à bout du régime de Bachar Al-Assad, en s'appuyant sur la Ligue arabe, les sanctions et de multiples idées encore floues – «zone tampon» et «corridors humanitaires». D'un côté, la France, ancienne puissance mandataire en Syrie, estime avoir une responsabilité, surtout après le dossier libyen, et aimerait priver l'Iran de son allié, le régime d'Al-Assad. De l'autre, la Turquie, mue par son tropisme «néo-ottoman», s'inquiète à la fois de l'afflux de réfugiés et de l'instrumentalisation des Kurdes par le régime de Damas.

Les révoltes arabes ont balayé la politique turque de «zéro problème» avec les régimes voisins, longtemps promue par Ahmet Davutoglu, le théoricien de l'action extérieure. Sarkozy et Erdogan ont finalement cela aussi en commun: après avoir déroulé le tapis rouge pour les satrapes de Damas et de Tripoli, ils se sont mis à jurer leur perte.

Le président français a confié le rapprochement franco-turc à Alain Juppé. Il en a eu assez d'entendre Barack Obama lui dire, à chaque entrevue, qu'il devrait lui aussi devenir un «ami» d'Erdogan. Alain Juppé a l'avantage d'une image «turcophile». Depuis des années, il est membre d'un

comité de l'université Galatasaray, à Istanbul. A la mi-novembre, il effectue une visite remarquée en Turquie. Recep Erdogan se montre d'une grande cordialité, pendant une heure. Il y eut aussi un dîner avec Ahmet Davutoglu, l'ancien professeur devenu ministre, dans un restaurant avec vue sur le Bosphore: deux intellectuels échangeant des propos posés.

Pour ce voyage, Alain Juppé a pris le temps. Il le fallait bien, pour effacer l'impression désastreuse laissée par la visite de «300 minutes», montre en main, effectuée par Nicolas Sarkozy à Ankara, en février, destinée à préparer le G20. Et aussi, pour tenter de réparer les dégâts après les déclarations du président français, en octobre, lors d'une visite en Arménie, sommant la Turquie de «revisiter son histoire». La réplique d'Ankara avait alors été cinglante: la France ferait mieux «d'affronter son passé colonial avant de donner des leçons».

Des explications apportées par Alain Juppé, les officiels turcs semblent surtout avoir retenu que le Sénat français ne voterait pas de sitôt la loi pénalisant la négation du génocide arménien de 1915. La conversation a pu s'orienter vers d'autres sujets: par exemple, une offre française de centrale nucléaire. Auparavant, Claude Guéant avait déjà promis aux Turcs une relance des efforts policiers contre les réseaux du parti kurde PKK en France.

La réconciliation franco-turque est-elle en marche? Hugh Hope, expert de la Turquie au sein du groupe de

réflexion Crisis Group, compare la relation à «un couple qui a divorcé» et chercherait à renouer. «Nicolas Sarkozy a gâché une occasion en ne faisant pas lui-même un geste», en parallèle avec la démarche d'Alain Juppé, estime-t-il. Selon cet expert, «la Turquie n'opère pas en fonction de critères islamistes. Elle suit au plus près ses intérêts nationaux», le développement économique avant l'idéologie. La Turquie, observe Hugh Hope, «ne peut pas tout, qu'en Moyen-Orient, mais elle peut être utile, et Obama l'a compris. La France a une influence extraordinaire sur l'état de l'opinion turque, qui est très émotionnelle et ne demanderait pas mieux que de se tourner à nouveau vers l'Europe». Mais au sein du parti AKP, certains calculent que tout sera plus simple si, après 2012, Nicolas Sarkozy n'est plus aux affaires.

La redistribution des cartes au Moyen-Orient pousse donc Nicolas Sarkozy à rechercher un modus vivendi avec Recep Erdogan pour que la France soit pleinement dans le jeu. La tentative française est-elle une ouverture de circonstances ou le prélude à un rapprochement approfondi? Les résultats seront-ils au rendez-vous pour la Syrie? Une invitation d'Erdogan à l'Elysée ne semble pas pour demain. En juillet 2008, le président français avait eu le plus grand mal à faire venir le dirigeant turc au sommet de l'Union pour la Méditerranée, à Paris. Trois lettres écrites n'ayant pas suffi, il avait fallu décrocher le téléphone, pour se fendre d'un long plaidoyer. ■

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune
DECEMBER 5, 2011

Tehran says its forces shot down a U.S. drone

TEHRAN

FROM NEWS REPORTS

The official news media in Iran said Sunday that its military had shot down an unmanned U.S. spy plane that had violated Iranian airspace along the country's eastern border.

An unidentified military official quoted in the report, by the Islamic Republic News Agency, warned of a strong and crushing response to any violations of Iranian airspace by such aircraft.

"An advanced RQ-170 unmanned American spy plane was shot down by Iran's armed forces," the agency quoted the official as saying. "It suffered minor damage and is now in possession of Iran's armed forces."

No further details were reported.

A White House spokesman, Tommy Vietor, said he had no immediate comment on the report.

The type of aircraft Iran says it downed, an RQ-170 Sentinel, is made by Lockheed Martin. The aircraft is

equipped with stealth technology, but the U.S. Air Force has not made public any specifics about the drone.

Al Alam, an Arabic-language state television network in Iran, quoted a military official as saying, "The Iranian military's response to the American spy drone's violation of our airspace will not be limited to Iran's borders."

Iran is locked in a dispute with the United States and its allies over the intentions of Tehran's nuclear program, which the West suspects is aimed at developing nuclear weapons. Iran denies the accusations, saying that its nuclear program is entirely peaceful and that it seeks to generate electricity and produce medical isotopes.

The United States and Israel have not ruled out military action against Iran's nuclear facilities if diplomacy fails to resolve the nuclear dispute. Iran has dismissed reports of possible U.S. or Israeli plans to strike Iran, warning that it would respond to any such assault by attacking U.S. interests in the Gulf and Israel.

Analysts say Tehran could retaliate with hit-and-run strikes in the Gulf and by closing the Strait of Hormuz, through which about 40 percent of all traded oil leaves the Gulf region.

In July, the Iranian authorities said the country had shot down a U.S. spy drone over the holy city of Qum, near its Fordu nuclear site. In January, Iran said that two pilotless spy planes it said it had shot down from its airspace were operated by the United States and offered to put them on public display.

Tehran holds frequent military exercises, primarily to assert an ability to defend against a potential U.S. or Israeli attack on its nuclear facilities. Iran has focused part of its military strategy on producing drones for reconnaissance and attacking purposes. Iran announced three years ago that it had built a drone craft with a range of more than 600 miles, or 1,000 kilometers, far enough to reach Israel. (AP, REUTERS, BLOOMBERG)

RETOUR SURPar **DILEK AKYAPI**

Massacre du Dersim: la Turquie s'excuse auprès des Kurdes

Un grand débat agite la Turquie depuis une dizaine de jours: la responsabilité de la république dans le massacre du Dersim qui, en 1937, avait provoqué la mort de milliers de Kurdes de confession alevite, un courant moderniste issu du chiisme. Le tabou est tombé le 23 novembre, lorsque le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a adressé des excuses. «S'il est nécessaire que l'on s'excuse au nom de l'Etat, je m'excuserai et je m'excuse», a martelé le

leader charismatique de l'AKP, parti islamiste au pouvoir depuis 2002.

Jamais un massacre en Turquie n'a fait, jusqu' alors, l'objet d'excuses officielles. A Dersim, dans l'est de la Turquie, l'armée avait écrasé en 1937 une rébellion accusée de mettre en péril l'unité de la nation, faisant 13 500 morts selon le bilan officiel, mais les historiens parlent de 30 000 à 50 000 morts. Après le massacre, Dersim sera rebapti-

sée Tunceli, «la main de bronze», du nom de l'opération militaire. Dans son discours, Erdogan a appelé le CHP, le parti républicain du peuple fondé par Mustapha Kemal, parti unique au pouvoir jusqu'en 1945 et, aujourd'hui, principale force d'opposition à prendre ses responsabilités. Ironie du sort, son actuel président, Kemal Kilicdaroglu, est lui-même originaire de Dersim. Une partie de sa famille a, elle aussi, été victime du massacre. Le Premier ministre a trouvé là une occasion de mettre en difficulté l'opposition laïque, tout en renforçant sa popularité auprès des Kurdes. Il s'agit aussi d'un geste vis-à-vis des alevites (30% de la population), qui sont aussi bien kurdes que turcs, et ont toujours été considérés comme moins musulmans et malvus par les conservateurs.

Pourtant, ces excuses sont à double tranchant. D'une part, parce que le parti kurde BDP (Parti pour la paix et la démocratie) et les associations de victimes exigent que le Premier ministre aille plus loin, notamment en faisant des excuses publiques à l'Assemblée nationale. De l'autre, parce que l'AKP n'aurait pas tout à gagner en voulant rallier l'ensemble des minorités ethniques et religieuses. D'autant que cette reconnaissance du massacre du Dersim entraîne d'autres minorités à exiger la même chose: en premier lieu les Arméniens victimes, en 1915, du premier génocide du XX^e siècle qui a fait, selon la plupart des historiens, entre un million et un million et demi de morts. Les autorités turques se refusent toujours à le reconnaître et évoquent, des massacres sur fond de chaos dans l'empire ottoman agonisant. ♦

AFP

Les Kurdes doivent décider s'ils veulent faire partie de l'Irak (ministre)

BAGDAD, 9 décembre 2011 (AFP)

LES KURDES DOIVENT décider s'ils veulent faire partie de l'Irak ou s'ils veulent être indépendants, a affirmé le ministre irakien du Pétrole, Abdel Karim al-Luaybi, à propos des contrats signés par le gouvernement de la région autonome kurde sans l'aval du gouvernement de Bagdad.

"C'est inacceptable que les Kurdes signent des contrats pour l'attribution de chaque mètre carré du Kurdistan irakien sans faire participer à la décision les habitants des 15 autres provinces et qu'ils puissent participer aux décisions concernant les champs pétroliers dans le reste de l'Irak", a déclaré M. Luaybi dans un entretien publié vendredi sur le site Iraq Oil Forum.

Le gouvernement du Kurdistan irakien a déjà signé une quarantaine de contrats avec des compagnies étrangères sans en informer le ministère du Pétrole, ni lui transmettre les contrats.

"Aucun Irakien, qu'il soit Arabe ou Kurde, ne peut accepter cela. Alors, en dernier ressort, la région du Kurdistan doit décider si elle fait le choix stratégique d'être partie prenante de l'Irak ou si elle a dans l'idée d'établir un Etat indépendant. C'est son choix. Mais ils doivent être clairs avec nous", a-t-il souligné.

Concernant le projet de loi sur les hydrocarbures, adopté le 25 août par le Conseil des ministres mais bloqué au Parlement, M. Luaybi a affirmé: "Il y a des principes de base sur lesquels il est impossible de transiger:

les contrats dans le secteur pétrolier doivent être approuvés par le (gouvernement) central et toutes les ventes de pétrole doivent se faire de la même manière".

"Pour moi, il s'agit d'une ligne rouge (...). Cette loi peut conduire à la préservation de l'Irak en tant qu'entité ou au contraire conduire à l'éclatement du pays en petits Etats", a-t-il ajouté, précisant qu'il y avait peu de chance que la loi soit adoptée avant la fin de l'année.

En outre, le ministre a répété que le groupe américain ExxonMobil devait choisir entre l'exploitation du gisement de Qourna-ouest et son récent accord avec le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan.

"Notre position est claire: aucune compagnie, que ce soit ExxonMobil ou une autre, n'est autorisée à violer notre Constitution et nos lois", a-t-il dit, précisant que le gouvernement avait "d'autres alternatives" si le groupe américain renonçait à Qourna-ouest.

ExxonMobil produit avec la compagnie anglo-néerlandaise Shell environ 370.000 barils de pétrole par jour (b/j) à Qourna-Ouest, le deuxième plus grand gisement d'Irak avec des réserves estimées à 8,5 milliards de barils.

Le ministre a également indiqué que les exportations irakiennes atteindraient en 2012 2,6 millions de b/j, dont 175.000 b/j du Kurdistan. Selon ces chiffres, le Kurdistan représente 6,7% des exportations irakiennes, alors que la région perçoit 17% des dépenses du budget fédéral.

Iran's first Great Satan was England

Stephen Kinzer

BOSTON If there is one country on earth where the cry "Death to England" still carries weight — where people still harbor the white-hot hatred of British colonialism that once inflamed millions from South Africa to China — that country would be Iran.

And that is what the leaders of Iran must have been counting on when screaming militiamen, unhindered by the police, poured into the British Embassy in Tehran to vandalize it on Tuesday.

Most Iranians, like most people anywhere, would deplore the idea of thugs storming into a foreign embassy. Nonetheless, some may have felt a flicker of satisfaction. Even an outrage like this, they might have said, is a trifle compared with the generations of torment Britain inflicted on their country.

So Iran's mullahs — they, not President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, are reported to have been behind the attack — were not gambling in ordering, or at least tolerating, it. They presumably realized that the world would denounce their flagrant violation of international law. But they also knew it would resonate with the narrative Iranians have heard for so long about their own history.

The spark for the embassy invasion was Britain's imposition of new economic sanctions on Iran. Pressure for those sanctions came not so much from Britain as from the United States and Israel, but those countries could not be targets for a similar attack because they do not have embassies in Tehran. Besides, Iranians these days can be surprisingly besotted with the United States; in my own visits I am often surrounded by people who compete to proclaim their love for America, and whose anger at Israel seems more political than emotional.

Those Iranians, however, feel quite differently about Britain.

Britain first cast its imperial eye on Iran in the 19th century. Its appeal was location; it straddled the land route to India. Once established in Iran, the British quickly began investing — or looting, as some Iranians would say. British companies bought exclusive rights to establish banks, print currency, explore for minerals, run transit lines and even grow tobacco.

In 1913, the British government maneuvered its way to a contract under which all Iranian oil became its property. Six years later it imposed an "agreement" that gave it control of

Iran's army and treasury. These actions set off a wave of anti-British outrage that has barely subsided.

Britain's occupation of Iran during World War II, when it was a critical source of oil and a transit route for supplies to keep Soviet Russia fighting, was harsh. Famine and disease spread as the British requisitioned food for their troops.

One of the most popular Iranian novels, "Savushun," is set in this period. It tells of two brothers who take roles every Iranian can recognize: The elder is ambitious and panders to the occupiers; the younger refuses to sell his grain to them and pays a tragic price for his integrity.

During their occupation, the British decided that Reza Shah Pahlavi, whom they had helped place in power, was no longer reliable. They deposed him and chose his son, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, as the new shah.

Once the war ended, Iran resumed its efforts to install democracy, under the leadership of Mohammed Mossadegh. He had campaigned against the Anglo-Persian Agreement of 1919 and had written a book denouncing "capitulation" agreements, under which foreigners were granted immunity from Iranian law.

After he was elected prime minister in 1951, Mr. Mossadegh asked Parliament to take the unimaginable step of nationalizing Iran's oil industry. It agreed unanimously. That sparked a historic confrontation.

Mr. Mossadegh embodied the anti-British emotion that still roils the Iranian soul. The special envoy President Harry S. Truman sent to Tehran to seek

Today, many Iranians who loathe the mullahs nevertheless look for Britain's hand behind any dark plot.

a compromise in the oil dispute, W. Averell Harriman, reported that the British held a "completely 19th-century colonial attitude toward Iran," but found Mr. Mossadegh just as intransigent. When Mr. Harriman assured Mr. Mossadegh that there were good

people in Britain, Mr. Mossadegh gave him a classically Iranian reply.

"You do not know how crafty they are," he said. "You do not know how evil they are. You do not know how they sully everything they touch."

Desperate to regain control of Iran's oil, the British sought to crush Mr. Mossadegh with measures that included harsh economic sanctions — sanctions comparable to the ones they are now imposing. When that failed,

they asked President Dwight D. Eisenhower to join in a plot to overthrow him. He agreed, not because he wished to help the British recover their oil but because he had been persuaded that otherwise, Iran might fall to communism. Iran, after all, was on the southern flank of the Soviet Union, standing be-

tween it and the oil fields and warm-water ports of the Gulf.

The coup, staged in August 1953, ended Iranian democracy and allowed Mohammed Reza Pahlavi to build a dictatorship that remained a staunch cold-war ally of both Britain and the United States. But the alliance backfired on both countries when his repression set off the 1979 revolution that brought the mullahs to power. Today, many Iranians who loathe the mullahs nevertheless look for Britain's hand behind any dark plot; some even accuse it of organizing the 1979 revolution, and imposing Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

More than half a century ago, Secretary of State Dean Acheson wrote that Mr. Mossadegh was "inspired by a fanatical hate of the British and a desire to expel them and their works from the country regardless of the cost." Many Iranians still feel that way, as their country falls into ever deeper isolation. In Iran, the words "anger" and "Britain" fit easily together.

Outside interference is a central fact of modern Iranian history. And for most of the 20th century, Britain was at the center of most of it.

Nonetheless, a spark of admiration has long been buried within Iranians' anger, as it was in many other places across the British Empire. Mr. Harriman noticed it in his talks with Mr. Mossadegh. The old man liked to tell stories about his favorite grandson, and Mr. Harriman asked where the boy was attending school.

"Why, in England, of course," was the reply. "Where else?"

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The Kurdish Conflict: The Real Challenge to Turkey's Democracy



Alon Ben-Meir
(Senior Fellow, NYU's Center for Global Affairs)

In the wake of the Arab Spring and Prime Minister Erdogan's championing of political reforms throughout the Arab world, it has now become more urgent than ever before to find an equitable solution to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict. Short of finding an immediate resolution to this debilitating struggle will not only severely compromise Turkey's suggested model of successfully combining Islam and democracy, but it will additionally bankrupt its moral standing as it willfully continues to discriminate against 15 million Kurds who represent one-fifth of its population.

The latest cycle of violence between the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Turkish military in October meant the failure of a historical attempt to put an end to this three decade-long conflict. It began when the PKK took up arms against the Turkish government in 1984 demanding the secession of Turkey's southeast region. Turkey's successive governments chose throughout much of this period to ignore the existence of the Kurds as a separate ethnicity, banned their language and culture, and inadvertently degraded their standard of living, making them one of the country's poorest populations.

This persistent Turkish position was only adjusted in 2002 when Erdogan's party (AK) took office armed with a reformist agenda, which was not only an electoral card but also a stark reflection of the multi-variable shift in the relationship between the AK and the PKK in the last two decades. The PKK had, by this time, managed to establish its message in the minds of the larger Turkish population through years of armed struggle that had cost 40,000 Turkish lives and billions of dollars. Moreover, the political establishment in Ankara feared a repetition of the Iraq/Kurdistan scenario arising through persistent struggle or by outside interference such as the United States' enforcement of a no-fly zone aimed at protecting Iraq's civilians from Saddam Hussein's forces, and was eager to win Turkey's accession to the European Union. Finally, the PKK started moderating its position after the capture in 1999 of Abdullah Ocalan, its leader who made an appeal from prison to end the violence and actively seek equal civil and political rights within Turkey instead of pursuing secession.

Erdogan's AK governments had a real opportunity - and an opportune time - to find an equitable solution to the country's Kurdish problem. Though many reforms have been instituted since 2002, including writing a new Turkish constitution allowing decentralization of authority, changing laws regarding human rights violations and permission of the local use of Kurdish language in schools and broadcasting, few tangible results have been achieved. Despite Erdogan's "Democratic Opening" initiative in 2009, recent years have witnessed a reversal within the political process, inviting Turkey back to the bloodshed of the 1990s.

The AK government refuses to recognize the PKK as a negotiating partner in any official talks and continues to alienate the Kurdish community even further. In 2009, the Constitutional Court banned the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party because it is considered to be the political wing of the PKK. The judiciary later stripped a Kurdish MP from his seat and allocated it to the AK party. As a result, other Kurdish MPs boycotted the parliament and began a campaign aimed at achieving greater powers for the local government. In the run-up to parliamentary elections in June 2011, Erdogan openly sought the ultra-nationalist votes, stating that had Ocalan been captured while the AK was in power, he would have been hanged. Meanwhile, many Turkish obser-

vers suggest that the arrest of Kurdish notables and intellectuals for links with the PKK has become a routine government action.

Why has the apparently reformist Erdogan government failed thus far to keep its promises and offer a solution consistent with the presumed democratic nature of the state? The answer perhaps lies in the concurrence of developments that have taken the AK and its leadership away from focusing on the Kurdish problem. Erdogan and his AK party feel more secure and less obliged to make concessions: AK has set a historical precedent in winning three consecutive national elections. Besides, the Erdogan government has also managed to de-emasculate the military (which has always been its main rival) while the country has had one of the world's fastest-growing economies. Equally, at a time when several years of relative calm has dominated southeast Turkey, Erdogan changed direction from seeking EU membership (which for him only proved to be a mirage) to focus more on a regional hegemony in the Middle East, especially in the wake of the Arab Spring.

However, as the recently-renewed violence has demonstrated, superficial reforms and un-kept promises can only mean the perpetuation of the dangerously deteriorating status-quo. In fact, Erdogan and his government have every reason to seek a solution to the Kurdish problem now more than any time before. First, the Arab Spring has been employed by Erdogan to promote the so-called Turkish model for leadership in the Middle East and this could turn against him as it may very well empower the Kurds to seek their own "Spring". Questions will likely arise as to Erdogan's credibility as a leader when he feels it apt to export abroad the same values he oppresses at home: freedom, human rights and democracy. According to Mehmet Emin Yak, a civil servant, "it is nice to see Erdogan working for peace in the Middle East, but there is bloodshed here in this region." It is important to note that President Bashar Assad of Syria has reportedly begun to support the Kurdish movement in Syrian's north in an attempt to punish Erdogan for objecting to his government's crackdown on protesters.

Second, the increased cycle of violence by the PKK could play into the hands of the de-emasculated Turkish army as it may re-establish its credentials through the continuation of conflict. Erdogan faces the grave prospect of the military reestablishing its power base, which would erase his decade-long effort to lessen the army's political influence and destroy any chances of pursuing his reformist agenda. Finally, as Erdogan said, "If this is about politics, the place is Parliament". Drafting a new constitution is already on the agenda of the current parliament, which presents a serious opportunity to push for lasting reforms that provide the Kurds with their basic human rights as a minority, while fully committing them to the nation's unity and constitutional laws. A prerequisite, however, should be that the government agrees to engage the PKK as a partner, requiring it to then forgo (at this juncture) its demand that the PKK lays down its arms. The focus would then fall on the cessation of violence which would better match Erdogan's promises that, "The era of denying the existence of the Kurdish nation is over."

There is a great need and prospect to end this conflict now, particularly because of the fact that both sides seem to favor such a peaceful and lasting solution. Amir Aktar, a pro-Turkish head of the Bar Association in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish city in the southeast, said it was, "time to break the cycle of violence on both sides and engage in dialogue." Instead of exporting the Turkish model of democracy, the Erdogan government should take a keener and deeper look at its own Kurdish community. A community whose members deserve, like all citizens, an equal opportunity and the freedom to practice their culture, language and education as they see fit which can only strengthen the socio-political fabric of the Turkish society.

The Kurdish problem will otherwise remain a serious handicap for the Turkish model of democracy and a persistent obstacle to the stability of the geo-strategically important Middle East, where Kurdish communities live not only in Turkey but Syria, Iraq, and Iran as well.

☆☆☆

Alevi activist: Alevi to challenge legacy of Kemalism

TODAY'S ZAMAN, İSTANBUL

The Alevi community's decades-long reverence of Turkish founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk has been permanently challenged by last month's government apology over the 1937 Dersim events, says Alevi and Kurdish rights activist Cafer Solgun.

"Atatürk's portrait will absolutely be removed from houses of worship," Solgun told the Turkish daily Taraf in a Monday interview. Revered for years by Alevi, Atatürk was honored by the hanging of his portrait in Alevi houses of worship adjacent to images of Ali, the rightful successors to Muhammad in the Alevi faith. Now, says Solgun, the recent torrent of public debate over Atatürk's involvement in the 1937 Dersim massacres has problematized the historical legacy of Atatürk and made his reverence among Alevi unsustainable. "Alevi are going to be discussing the role of Atatürk in Dersim," Solgun stated.

In 1937, thousands of semi-autonomous Alevi Kurdish and Zaza tribes people were massacred in the province of Dersim as part of the early republican state's plans to "Turkify" and "civilize" the region. "There was no place for Dersim in the modernization

project imposed on Turkey," Solgun said as he explained the justification for the 1937 military campaign in the region.

Republican People's Party (CHP) deputy Hüseyin Aygün challenged the traditional narrative about 1937 last month, when he told Today's Zaman in an interview that the supposed Alevi rebellion, which had precipitated the massacres, was a government pretext for invasion. The deputy's comments, which also leveled blame for the operation at Atatürk and other top members of the Turkish state, touched off a long debate that culminated in an unprecedented apology for the events of 1937 by the prime minister last month.

Briefly speaking to Today's Zaman on Monday, Solgun stated that the apology has touched a collective nerve in a society that has been eager to deny and repress, rather than confront, the historical legacy of Dersim. "Among Alevi there can be no luxury of ignoring the importance of the apology made by the prime minister. It was the first time in republican history a state official acknowledged the truth regarding the Dersim massacre," Solgun told Today's Zaman.

Alevi have historically sought close



ties with the Kemalist Turkish state, voting in large numbers for the secular CHP and honoring Atatürk by displaying his likeness in Alevi houses of worship. Solgun calls such practices evidence both of fear of the state and "denial" of 1937. "They all know the truth. For years they've been practicing self-deception," Solgun told Taraf.

Solgun says that the historical narratives of the past, however, may soon come undone. "Noting that the silent majority among Alevi approach the apology of the government in a positive manner," Solgun told Today's Zaman, stressing that the apology will force Alevi to reconsider their past and their current political devotion to the Kemalist CHP. Solgun predicts that Alevi may finally begin to ask, "Mustafa Kemal is a political figure: What business does he have in a place of worship?" □□□

THE DAILY STAR December 6, 2011

Jumblatt meets officials in Iraq's Kurdish north

The Daily Star / Lebanon

BEIRUT: Progressive Socialist Party leader MP Walid Jumblatt met with Kurdish officials in northern Iraq Sunday and Monday, according to a PSP statement.

"The head of the National Struggle Front [Jumblatt] is on a visit to Iraqi Kurdistan. He held talks last night

with the head of the province, President Massoud Barzani," the statement said.

Jumblatt and Barzani discussed bilateral ties between the PSP and the Kurdistan Democratic Party "given that the political relations between the two parties that go back to the 1970s between the martyr Kamal Jumblatt and Mullah Mustafa Barzani."



Jumblatt also met Monday with head of the National Security Council Masrour Barzani and is scheduled to meet the head of the provincial government Prime Minister Barham Saleh.

○○○

Syria's Kurds Divided On Syrian Opposition



Kurdish antigovernment demonstrators march through the streets in the Syrian town of Qamishli in October.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

By Dorian Jones

ISTANBUL -- Syria's Kurdish minority has suffered more than most under the rule of President Bashar al-Assad, and his father before him. Numerous massacres and political assassinations have been carried out against the restive minority, long-suspected by the ruling regime of secessionist aspirations.

Most recently, Syrian security forces have been blamed for October's assassination of a leading Kurdish figure, Mishaal al-Tammo, after he allied himself with the Syrian opposition.

But despite the history of hostility, the Syrian regime is now actively courting the Kurdish minority as an ally. Basma Kodmani, spokeswoman for the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), says the government's policy is meeting with some success.

"The regime has tried different options to convince the Kurds to stay behind the regime," Kodmani says. "First, 'We will give you back Syrian nationality,' which they have lost. Then promises of some form of autonomy within Syria -- perhaps other promises that we don't quite know of. We suspect that the regime is willing even to endanger the unity of the national territory. But it has neither convinced all the Kurds, nor has it moved all of them into the opposition. We still have a split within the Kurds, definitely."

Restrained Response

Protests against the Assad regime are taking

place in Kurdish towns, but reports indicate the security forces have been in many cases restrained in their response against them.

Mughbir al-Sharif is a member of the Syrian Revolution Istanbul Committee, a Syrian opposition group based in Istanbul. He says while many Kurds do oppose Assad, suspicions remain -- especially among Kurdish leaders -- about the opposition.

"They might be afraid if Assad goes," Sharif says. "For example, now it is the Syrian Arab Republic of Syria. So they demand the removal of the word 'Arabic.' They want the 'Republic of Syria'. The reaction when the Syrian National Council got this demand -- I didn't think they would accept it and they did not."

Another complicating factor is the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is fighting for autonomy in neighboring Turkey. Syrian Kurds are believed to make up as much as one-third of the PKK's membership and the group is a powerful political force among Kurds in Syria. PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was hosted by Damascus, until Ankara threatened to invade in 1999. Ocalan was promptly expelled, heralding a period of Turkish-Syrian rapprochement. But with Ankara now taking steps to ally itself with the opposition SNC, Damascus is free again to court the PKK.

'This Is The Danger'

Murat Bilhan, an international relations expert with Istanbul's Kultur University, says the move will not only strengthen the regime's position at home, but would also punish Ankara.

"I would understand Assad if he wants to damage Turkey. He would do so, because he has been damaged by Turkey," Bilhan says.

"So he would, of course, do anything to harm Turkey. And he does, and this is the danger."

A Turkish newspaper recently published pictures of what it claimed was a PKK base in neighboring Syria.

At the same time, Ankara's strong support for the Istanbul-based SNC is only adding to suspicions among some Syrian Kurds, according to observers.

Another opposition group, the Damascus-based National Coordination Committee (NCC), recently held negotiations in Cairo with representatives of Kurdish groups, including those that are sympathetic to the PKK.

Regional Approach

Abdul Aziz al-Khair, spokesman of the NCC, admits there are concerns among Kurds over the nature of a post-Assad regime.

"It's not only the Kurds -- I believe all the Syrians are worried what the regime will be after this regime falls," Khair says. "And there is something to be done to ease the worry in this field. That's what we are trying to do [through] our talks now."

With Kurds living across Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, Kodmani of the SNC says a regional approach has to be taken. She says they are now reaching out to Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government for help.

"This is a regional issue. The Kurds in Iraq have gone in a different direction," she says. "We feel the need for dialogue with the Kurds in Iraq to ensure that the Kurds in Syria do not see their future similar to that of the Iraqi Kurds."

The KRG acknowledge they have begun negotiations with the SNC. But Kurdistan Regional Government spokesman Falah Mustafa Bakir says that rather than taking sides in the ongoing conflict in Syria, the priority is to look out for the interests of the Syrian Kurds.

"The important thing for us is the Kurds in Syria to get united to have a clear vision for their future in Syria," Bakir says. "For them to ask for their rights, peacefully, and to ensure they will be treated respectfully and equally, by both the current government or the current opposition."

For the Syrian opposition, securing the full support of the country's Kurdish minority would not only be a major boost to their goal of ending Assad's rule but could be crucial for the future unity of a new Syria. □

Tensions Simmer After Dohuk Riots

RUDAW.net

SULAIMANI, Iraqi Kurdistan -- A senior Kurdish official has warned the regional government to calm tensions sparked by rioting in Dohuk province from spreading throughout the region.

"The incidents should remain isolated and not spread to other parts of Kurdistan," said Imad Ahmed, a Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) leader. "The government must condemn violence against both citizens and political parties."

Dozens of liquor stores, massage parlors, hotels and shops were stormed and torched last Friday in widespread rioting against businesses deemed un-Islamic in Dohuk. Vigilantes blaming the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) for the riots attacked its offices and media outlets following the unrest.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which controls politics and security in the province, and the KIU, a moderate Islamist opposition party, have since accused each other of igniting the violence.

Ahmad called on both parties to put the region's interests ahead of their poli-



Some torched liquor stores in Zakho. Photo Rudaw.

Barzani, we said that we can prove that our party had nothing to do with the incidents in Zakho area," he said.

Barzani said the government is investigating the incidents "and if we find out that the KDP was careless in responding to the situation they will have to face charges in court."

Yousif Muhammad, a leader from the opposition Change Movement (Gorran), said security officials should be held accountable for failing to curb the violence but rarely are in Iraqi Kurdistan.

"It isn't enough to just condemn the incidents," he said.

"The only way to settle the situation

told Rudaw, "We believe that last Friday's incidents aren't in the KDP's best interests. The security officers failed in their duty even though they had been informed a few hours before the attacks on Islamic Union offices."

Kurdistan Islamic League (Komal) officials maintain the KDP should apologize to the Islamic Union and hand over the perpetrators of the crimes to the courts.

Dara Muhammad Amin, a senior Islamic League leader, told Rudaw, "The KDP is currently preparing to take the premiership and the opposition is studying the idea of participating in the government if their demands are met, but the opposition will not participate in the government in a situation like this."

Amin said the KDP and Islamic Union should meet face to face to resolve their issues instead of exchanging harsh words in the media.

He believes the KDP itself could be hurt the most by the riots, saying, "This is the second time the Islamic Union's offices have come under attack in areas where the KDP is in charge; that's why KDP must apologize to the Islamic Union."

In 2005, KIU offices were set alight by rioters and several members of the party were killed.

The KDP later compensated families of the victims and renovated the offices of the Islamic Union. ○



A scene from Zakho's Friday riots. Photo Rudaw.

tical agendas, saying, "If we do, there will be room for everyone: Islamists, secularists, leftists and conservatives."

The situation has calmed following a visit by Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani to Dohuk, where he held talks with Islamic Union officials in the area.

Ghazi Saadi, an Islamic Union official in Zakho where most of the rioting occurred, said the president condemned the attacks on the Islamic Union offices and on businesses -- many of which were run by minority Assyrians and Yezidis and catered to foreigners.

"In our meeting with President

is to put those who are responsible for the violence on trial," he said. "The security officers who failed to protect the city and political party's offices must be fired."

Sami Atrushi, a senior KIU leader in the Dohuk region, believes some KDP officials were involved in the tensions.

"Some KDP officials in the area wanted to hurt both KDP and Islamic Union," Atrushi said. "We know this isn't the KDP's policy. These officials wanted to take advantage of the situation for their own interest."

Atrushi, who was arrested by the police during the riots but later released,

Turkey faces east, its back to E.U.

ISTANBUL

Amid economic growth, Ankara weighs new role far from the failing euro

BY DAN BILEFSKY

As economic contagion in Europe stokes a backlash here against the European Union, a newly assertive Turkey is looking increasingly East instead of West and asking a vexing question: Should Turkey reject Europe before Europe rejects Turkey?

When Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan first swept to power in 2002, he made Turkey's entry into the European Union his overriding goal. Determined to anchor the country to the West, his Muslim-inspired Justice and Development party undertook difficult changes, from expanding free speech to restructuring Turkey's financial institutions.

Now, however, that drive for European Union membership is all but dead, Turkish analysts say. With Europe roiled by a credit crisis and with democratic forces sweeping the Arab world, Turkey is seeking to transform itself into a regional power that can act independently of Europe. Emboldened by the country's newfound clout in the Middle East and in Washington, many here are weighing what only a few years ago was unthinkable: walking away from the European Union altogether. *

"Prime Minister Erdogan wanted to be the first conservative Muslim leader who would bring Turkey to the west, but after Europe betrayed him he abandoned those ambitions," said Erol Yasar, the founder of a religiously conservative business group of 20,000 companies. "Today, the E.U. has absolutely no influence over Turkey and most Turks are asking themselves, 'Why should we be part of such a mess?'"

Turkey's increasingly muscular foreign policy in the Middle East was underscored last week when the country imposed sanctions against the Syrian regime, and policymakers in Ankara quietly prepared for possible military action to set up a security zone for refugees along the Syrian border. Meanwhile, Turkey's decision to freeze ties with Israel because of its refusal to apologize for its deadly raid against a Turkish flotilla to Gaza has cast Turkey as a powerful voice of regional outrage.

Even without shifting geopolitics pushing Turkey to look eastward, Turkish officials say relations with the European Union are hopeless.

Ankara's frustrations with Europe were clear in late November when President Abdullah Gul, on a visit to London, assailed the prospect of Cyprus taking



DANIEL LETTER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

A couple posing for a photo in traditional Ottoman attire. Many Turks are connecting with the country's eastern roots and its role beyond the European Union.

over the European Union presidency next year as "half a country" leading a "miserable union," according to Milliyet, the Turkish newspaper.

Turkey is locked in a fight with Cyprus, which remains divided into Turkish and Greek Cypriot regions following the Turkish invasion of 1974. When France took the rare step last week of inviting Turkey to join an European Union foreign affairs meeting in Brussels to discuss the Syria crisis, Cyprus, an European Union member, retaliated by vetoing Turkey's attendance.

Many Turks gloat that Turkey, once dubbed the "sick man of Europe" when the Ottoman Empire was crumbling in 1914, has seen that distinction passed on to an ailing continent. While Europe copes with negative growth rates and harsh austerity measures, Turkey's economy is forecast to grow 7.5 percent this year.

"Those who called us sick in the past are now sick themselves," said Zafer Caglayan, Turkey's minister of economy. "May God grant them recovery."

The European Union is not alone as a target of Turkish disparagement. Last week, Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. of the United States listened as Ali Babacan, a deputy prime minister, talked of Turkey's strong economic growth this year and argued that his country, and not the larger but troubled economies of the United States and Europe, was poised to win in the 21st century.

"The fast fish, not the big fish, eats the small fish," he said.

When Mr. Biden spoke, he took issue with Mr. Babacan's competitive tone, saying, "I am going to suggest that we, all nations, are in this together." Then, even as he was acknowledging economic difficulties, he reminded the audience

that in a sea of young sharks, the United States was still the whale.

Exacerbating tensions between Turkey and Europe, analysts say, is that Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, who both oppose European Union membership for Turkey, are currently leading the agenda. Mr. Sarkozy has said that Turkey is not geographically part of Europe. Many Turks interpret this to mean their country is not welcome because of its large Muslim population.

Due to opposition mainly from France and Cyprus, 17 areas of Turkey's negotiations have been blocked since 2006. When Cyprus takes over the six-month rotating presidency of the 27-member bloc in July 2012, Ankara has said it will boycott the presidency, effectively putting its negotiations on ice. Turkish officials say privately that if negotiations still remain deadlocked in 2014, Turkey could abandon the talks with Brussels.

In 2004, 73 percent of Turkish respondents said membership in the European Union would be a good thing, but that dropped to 38 percent in 2010, according to a survey by the German Marshall Fund.

For all the depressing signs, Turkey insists its European Union aspirations have not faltered, and Egemen Bagis, Turkey's minister for European Union affairs, said in an interview that Turkey remained committed to joining the European Union. The recent outreach to its neighbors, he insisted, was helping Turkey to become an even more effective bridge between east and west.

"Hold on Europe," he said. "Turkey is coming to the rescue."

Even members of the Turkish business community, which has long been among the most ardent supporters of European Union membership, have lost patience with Brussels.

Mr. Yasar owns 404, a chemical and food company that produces Turkey's iconic apple tea. He said that the European Union's snubbing of Turkey was helping to draw Turkish companies toward the Muslim world. While Europe still accounts for about 56.3 percent of Turkey's exports, in 2010 the Middle

"Those who called us sick are now sick themselves."

East received nearly 20.2 percent, about \$18.7 billion worth of goods, compared with 12.5 percent in 2004.

For Europe, the backlash in Turkey comes with a heavy price, depriving it of influence in the Arab world where Turkey, a NATO member bordered by Iran, Iraq and Syria, is becoming the west's main interlocutor. For the first time in decades, analysts say, Europe needs Turkey more than Turkey needs Europe.

For those taking to the streets in Cairo or Damascus, Mr. Erdogan, a Muslim

overseeing a prosperous country of 78 million, has become a powerful symbol of the compatibility of democracy and Islam. Senior Turkish officials say that Mr. Erdogan has turned away from Europe and embraced Washington instead.

Europe's diminished role was evident last week when Turkey introduced the sanctions against Syria. While Mr. Erdogan coordinated closely with President Barack Obama, Turkish officials said that the European Union was relegated to a supporting role.

If soured relations are harming Europe, its waning influence here is also harming Turkey at a time when the country is fashioning itself as the model of democracy in the Arab world.

Turkey has continued to democratize, circumscribing the role of the army and preparing to draft a new Constitution to bring Turkey's military-imposed Constitution in line with European standards. Yet now that the incentive of European Union membership holds little sway, human rights advocates say

the government's authoritarian streak is growing unchecked.

According to a November report by the European Commission, 64 journalists are in jail in Turkey. The Dogan Media Group, previously an outspoken critic of the government, was saddled by the government with a tax fine of \$2.5 billion.

Yet even the younger generation in this cosmopolitan city are fed up with the European Union.

At a bustling café on the European side of Istanbul overlooking Asia, just a short trip across the Bosphorus, Tugce Erbad, 19, a student studying international finance, said her generation of Turks was not interested in joining a sinking European Union. Yet she insisted that she and her friends were still more drawn to Europe than to the Arab world.

"I would rather go to Paris than Beirut," she said, before quickly adding: "Turkey is neither east or west. We are moving in our own direction."

Le Monde

Mardi 13 décembre 2011

En Turquie, la croissance est devenue le principal argument électoral de l'AKP

Istanbul
Correspondance

Lorsque le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) est arrivé au pouvoir à Ankara en décembre 2002, l'économie turque était mal en point. Ruiné par des gouvernements dispendieux et par une crise financière qui avait laissé l'économie exsangue en 2001, le pays réclamait du changement.

Depuis neuf ans, le parti de Recep Tayyip Erdogan gouverne seul et enchaîne les succès électoraux. Réélu haut la main en juin 2011 avec 50 % des votes, le premier ministre a axé toute sa campagne sur son bilan économique, passant en revue les progrès fulgurants observés depuis 2003 : le produit intérieur brut (PIB) annuel par habitant est passé en moins de dix ans de 3 000 à 11 000 dollars (2 200 à 8 193 euros).

Le développement rapide du pays, qui s'est couvert de routes, d'aéroports, d'universités et d'hôpitaux, place désormais la Turquie parmi les vingt premières puissances économiques du monde et parmi les grands pays émergents. Le dynamisme de la croissance – près de 8 % sont prévus fin 2011 après

une année 2010 à 8,9 % – fait de la Turquie une curiosité aux portes de l'Union européenne, dont les pays membres s'enfoncent dans la récession.

Toujours candidate à l'adhésion à l'Union européenne, Ankara est même aujourd'hui en mesure de respecter les critères de Maastricht. « Depuis que je suis premier ministre, la dette publique est passée de 73 % du PIB à 45 %. Nous ne dévierons pas de notre discipline budgétaire », a lancé M. Erdogan lors du sommet du G20, à Cannes, en novembre. Le gouvernement présente pour 2012 un budget en excédent primaire.

L'arrivée au pouvoir de l'AKP avait été accueillie avec soulagement par les milieux économiques. Même par la Tüsiad, la puissante organisation patronale laïque, représentant les grandes familles de l'élite stambouliote.

L'économie turque de la fin des années 1990 restait encore très fermée aux investisseurs étrangers. Mais le parti de M. Erdogan a, dès son arrivée au pouvoir, rompu avec l'étatisme traditionnel du régime, pour épouser une ligne beaucoup plus libérale. Dès 2003, l'AKP a réformé la législation per-

mettant les investissements directs étrangers, essentiels pour la croissance. La refonte complète du code du commerce, très attendue par les acteurs étrangers, devrait, elle, intervenir dans le courant de l'année 2012.

Pragmatisme

Deux lignes directrices ont guidé les réformes du gouvernement turc depuis neuf ans : les négociations d'adhésion à l'Union européenne, ouvertes en décembre 2004, et les recommandations du Fonds monétaire international (FMI), garant d'une certaine orthodoxie budgétaire dans la gestion de l'après-crise. Sous l'impulsion du FMI, la Turquie a renforcé l'indépendance de la banque centrale, réformé sa politique fiscale et fait la chasse aux déficits.

L'AKP a aussi lancé une vaste campagne de privatisations de secteurs entiers de l'industrie : agroalimentaire, énergie, transports... Les préoccupations sociales sont passées au second plan, même si le gouvernement a fait voter la réforme de la « carte verte », une sorte de couverture maladie universelle qui donne aux foyers les plus pauvres un accès gratuit aux soins.

Pragmatique, l'AKP a totalement rompu dès sa création, en 2001, avec l'islamisme plus classique, antilibéral et anti-occidental, qui caractérisait les mouvements précédents au sein de la même mouvance. « Une fois au pouvoir, on demande des comptes aux dirigeants. Il ne suffit pas de prêcher des principes, les citoyens réclament des résultats », estime Mustafa Akyol, auteur d'*Islam Without Extremes* (« L'islam sans extrêmes »), aux éditions Norton. « S'ils voulaient interdire la vente d'alcool, par exemple, cela poserait de gros problèmes à l'industrie touristique. Ils sont forcés de faire des compromis », poursuit-il.

La transition avait même été amorcée dès le milieu des années 1990, à l'époque où M. Erdogan, alors jeune maire d'Istanbul, nouait ses premiers contacts avec les milieux d'affaires. En 1994, la Müsiad, le patronat islamiste, avait publié un fascicule intitulé *Homo Islamicus* (Müsiad, 1994, en turc), dans lequel il faisait l'éloge du travail et du libre-échange, en s'appuyant sur le fait que le Prophète Mahomet était un commerçant. ■

Guillaume Perrier

L'appareil répressif syrien détaillé par un rapport de Human Rights Watch

L'organisation de défense des droits de l'homme liste les responsables militaires mis en cause

Ce n'est pas des victimes mais des bourreaux que traite le nouveau rapport de l'organisation de défense des droits de l'homme Human Rights Watch (HRW), publié jeudi 15 décembre. Ce document – intitulé « Par tous les moyens nécessaires » – est, à ce jour, l'étude la plus détaillée sur les responsables au jour le jour de la répression et sur la façon dont elle est menée.

Plus de 5 000 personnes ont été tuées depuis le début du soulèvement en Syrie, le 15 mars 2011, d'après une estimation des Nations unies. Sans compter plus d'un millier de membres des forces de l'ordre tués par les insurgés, selon le régime de Bachar Al-Assad, qui attribue les troubles à des « bandes armées », d'obédience « salafiste » ou « islamiste », « financées par l'étranger ».

HRW s'efforce de remettre les choses et l'histoire à leur place. C'est bien le gouvernement syrien qui a commencé par réprimer dans le sang une protestation pacifique. Les embuscades menées contre les forces de sécurité par des déserteurs – regroupés dans l'Armée libre de Syrie (ALS) – et des civils armés ne sont intervenues que plus tard, en représailles et par désespoir.

L'étude de l'ONG américaine est basée sur les interviews de 63 déserteurs de l'armée syrienne, en Syrie, ainsi que dans les pays voisins (Jordanie, Liban, Turquie). Les faits relatés couvrent sept des quatorze gouvernorats en Syrie. « Nous n'avons pas pu envoyer de chercheurs en Syrie en raison des circonstances », explique Ole Solvang, l'un des deux auteurs du rapport, mais nous disposons d'un réseau d'informateurs sur place. »

Les entretiens, réalisés séparément et confrontés à des témoignages de victimes ou de témoins, confirment le systématisme et l'ampleur de la répression. Dès le début des manifestations, les ordres consistaient à tirer pour tuer ; en fait, à forcer les manifestants à rentrer chez eux « par tous les moyens ». Plusieurs déserteurs ont personnellement entendu les



Les corps de 25 hommes, tués par des « terroristes » selon les autorités syriennes, sont conservés dans une chambre froide, à Homs, fin novembre. ANWAR AMRO/AFP

commandants de leur unité donner ce genre d'ordre : le général de brigade Jaoudat Ibrahim Safi et le général Ali Durgham, de la IV^e brigade, les colonels Qousaï Mihoub et Souheil Hassan, des renseignements de l'armée de l'air, le général de brigade Ramadan Mahmoud Ramadan, du 35^e régiment des forces spéciales.

Des témoins accusent le colonel Sami Abdelkarim Ali (171^e bataillon) d'avoir tué un adolescent de 16 ans. La liste des gradés mis en cause, en annexe du rapport, est longue et détaillée. Elle pourrait donner lieu à des poursuites devant la justice internationale.

D'après Ole Solvang, les services de renseignement (les *moukhabarat*, en arabe) jouent un rôle de premier plan dans la répression : « Selon les témoignages que nous avons recueillis, les soldats sont placés en première ligne. Leurs officiers et les services de renseignement se tiennent à l'arrière. Les soldats sont convaincus que s'ils n'obéissent pas, ils seront eux-mêmes tués. Nous avons recensé huit cas de déserteurs témoins de tels incidents. »

Les services de renseignement procèdent aussi à la majorité des arrestations et des interrogatoires. Ils ont ouvert de multiples lieux de détention, où la torture est pratiquée couramment. Parmi les multiples agences des *moukhabarat* syriens, les renseignements militaires et les renseignements de l'armée de l'air sem-

« Le président Assad est responsable en tant que commandant en chef de l'armée »

Ole Solvang
Human Rights Watch

blent les plus actifs. Ces derniers sont chargés de la sécurité de la capitale, Damas. Au sein de l'armée, les forces spéciales et la IV^e division, dirigée de facto par Maher Al-Assad, frère du président, sont les plus zélées.

Enfin, les *chabiha* sont le troisième pilier de la répression en Syrie. Il est difficile d'évaluer le nombre de ces miliciens civils armés, recrutés dans les milieux alaouites pau-

vres, la communauté d'origine de la famille Assad, et des cadres de l'armée et des renseignements. « Il y a encore beaucoup d'interrogations sur qui sont vraiment les « *chabiha* », qui les commande, pointe M. Solvang. Les soldats n'ont pas de contacts directs avec eux. Mais il est évident qu'ils sont chargés des pires besognes. »

HRW ne dispose pas de témoignage mettant en cause les responsables politiques, mais « en dernier ressort, le président Assad est responsable en tant que commandant en chef de l'armée », souligne M. Solvang, dont l'organisation recommande la saisine de la Cour pénale internationale par le Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU.

Son rapport contredit directement les propos tenus par le président Bachar Al-Assad, sur la chaîne américaine ABC News, le 7 décembre, dans laquelle il niait avoir donné l'ordre de tuer aux forces de sécurité. Ces déclarations étaient sans doute une précaution destinée à éviter toute éventuelle mise en cause, un jour, devant la justice internationale. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

La rente pétrolière, seul facteur d'unité en Irak



Fabrice Balanche

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Les milliers de soldats américains stationnés en Irak quitteront le pays fin décembre. En instaurant une gouvernance basée sur la régionalisation, les Américains qui visaient une meilleure répartition des revenus pétroliers, ont finalement encouragé la corruption et le clientélisme.

A la fin du mois de décembre, les quelques milliers de soldats américains qui stationnent encore en Irak auront quitté le pays. Le retrait s'effectue sans heurt, au profit de l'armée nationale irakienne, qui hérite en prime d'un matériel trop coûteux à rapatrier.

Les troupes américaines ne sont pas harcelées par les groupes d'Al-Qaida ou les milices chiites de Moqtada al-Sader. Leur départ, préparé à l'avance, ne donne pas lieu à des affrontements entre milices rivales et l'armée régulière. Seule l'évacuation de la base aérienne « Hourriya » - située au cœur de Kirkouk, ville disputée entre le gouvernement de Bagdad et le Gouvernement Régional du Kurdistan - a failli provoquer des heurts entre les Peshmergas (combattants autonomistes kurdes en Irak du Parti Démocratique Kurde de Massoud Barzani) et l'armée irakienne, obligeant les troupes américaines à se maintenir jusqu'à ce qu'un terrain d'entente soit trouvé.

Les régions de Kirkouk et de Mossoul constituent des zones disputées entre les Kurdes et le gouvernement central. Ce dernier refuse qu'elles soient annexées au Kurdistan irakien, car d'une part elles ne sont plus à majorité kurde, et d'autre part leurs richesses pétrolières offriraient aux Kurdes les moyens d'une véritable indépendance

économique, et par conséquent politique. Jusqu'à présent, le Kurdistan irakien est sous perfusion de Bagdad, qui lui verse 18% des revenus pétroliers du pays. Cette manne financière contribue à la croissance économique exceptionnelle de cette région déshéritée.

La régionalisation américaine au service de la corruption et du clientélisme

Les États-Unis ont promu en Irak une nouvelle forme de gouvernance basée sur la régionalisation. En théorie, cela doit permettre de mieux répartir les revenus du pays dans les périphéries, afin que les populations bénéficient équitablement de la rente pétrolière. Il s'agit également de créer des espaces de pouvoir secondaires, où l'opposition pourra s'investir, et ainsi ne pas verser dans l'insurrection. Enfin, la décentralisation devrait permettre la promotion d'un nouveau personnel politique, plus efficace dans la gestion des affaires courantes que des administrateurs nommés par le pouvoir central.

Cependant ce système a renforcé les tendances centrifuges dans les régions kurdes et arabes sunnites, encouragé la corruption et le clientélisme à base ethnique, religieuse et tribal, accentuant la fragmentation territoriale du pays. Le gouvernement de Nouri al-Maliki maintient la cohésion de l'Irak, grâce à la rente pétrolière qu'il redistribue généreusement. Mais il risque de revenir à une politique beaucoup plus centralisatrice, une fois les États-Unis partis, ce qui ne se fera pas sans de fortes résistances.

L'Irak, un État tampon soumis aux caprices des différentes puissances régionales

Sur le plan géopolitique, l'Irak est devenu un État tampon soumis à diverses influences étrangères. L'Iran appuie les Arabes chiites, et l'Arabie Saoudite les Arabes sunnites. La Turquie protège la minorité turkmène et se poste en embuscade, au cas où les Kurdes auraient des velléités d'indépendance, mais reste la principale bénéficiaire du dynamisme économique de la région kurde. Quant à la Syrie de Bachar el-

Assad, elle a cessé de soutenir les groupes armés qui opéraient depuis son territoire en Irak. Elle compte sur ses nouvelles relations privilégiées avec l'Irak de Nouri al-Maliki pour contourner les récentes sanctions internationales, et sauver son économie. Le croissant fertile est de nouveau réuni, non plus sous la houlette des Ottomans mais de Téhéran, le grand bénéficiaire de la chute du régime de Saddam Hussein.

Depuis 2008, la violence a diminué mais la sécurité n'est véritablement rétablie qu'au Kurdistan. Dans le reste du pays, les attentats meurtriers et les enlèvements crapuleux constituent le quotidien de la population. Les chrétiens furent les principales victimes de l'insécurité, puisque les trois quarts de la communauté ont fui l'Irak. L'essentiel des 300 000 chrétiens qui demeurent en Irak se trouvent au Kurdistan, dans des quartiers et des villages sécurisés par les Peshmergas et des milices communautaires.

Le Kurdistan séduit les investisseurs étrangers...

La sécurité qui règne au Kurdistan attire aussi les entreprises étrangères, qui affluent à Erbil pour profiter des pétrodollars. En janvier 2012, Carrefour ouvrira son premier magasin dans la capitale de la région autonome kurde, à partir de laquelle le groupe essaimera dans les autres villes contrôlées par le Gouvernement Régional Kurde. Cependant, Carrefour attend 2015 pour ouvrir des magasins dans le reste de l'Irak, en priorité Bassorah, la deuxième ville du pays, avant d'atteindre Bagdad, jugée trop peu sûre pour encore de nombreuses années.

Tout comme l'enseigne française de grande distribution, les investisseurs parient sur une stabilisation de l'Irak au cours de la décennie, et s'ils investissent dans le Nord de l'Irak, c'est pour pouvoir fondre ensuite sur le Centre et le Sud du pays, dès que les conditions de sécurité le permettront. En fait, la manne pétrolière est plus efficace pour désamorcer les conflits internes et obtenir la paix sociale que la présence de 200 000 soldats américains. La rente pétrolière, tant qu'elle demeure entre les mains du gouvernement central et qu'elle est équitablement redistribuée, devient le véritable facteur d'unité de l'Irak.

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AFP **Huit rebelles kurdes tués par l'armée turque (officiel)**

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 15 décembre 2011 (AFP)

HUIT REBELLES KURDES ont été tués jeudi au cours d'un accrochage avec des militaires dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a annoncé un responsable local.

L'affrontement avec des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan

(PKK) s'est produit lorsque des soldats ont fait irruption dans une habitation de la région rurale de Cay, dans la province de Bingöl, a déclaré le gouverneur local Mustafa Hakan Guvencer à l'agence Anadolu.

Le PKK, qui est considéré comme une organisation terroriste par de nombreux pays, a pris les armes en 1984 pour défendre les droits des Kurdes de Turquie, et le conflit a fait au moins 45.000 morts.

L'EXPRESS 18 décembre 2011

Turquie: les ratés du "modèle" Erdogan

Le gouvernement d'Ankara multiplie depuis quelques mois les arrestations d'intellectuels. Un recul des libertés sur fond de nouvelles tensions dans les zones kurdes.

Dominique Lagarde, avec Nükte Bouvard à Istanbul

Alors que l'évolution des pays du Maghreb et du Proche-Orient au lendemain des révolutions arabes demeure incertaine, la Turquie est aujourd'hui considérée dans la plupart des chancelleries occidentales comme un modèle de démocratie islamique. De Rabat au Caire en passant par Tunis, les partis islamo-conservateurs plébiscités par les électeurs affichent, dans l'espoir de rassurer leurs opposants et leurs partenaires étrangers, leur proximité avec l'AKP - le Parti de la justice et du développement - du Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Ce dernier, il est vrai, n'en finit pas d'engranger les succès électoraux, diplomatiques et économiques. Il a réussi à contraindre l'armée à rentrer dans ses casernes, toiletté une Constitution passablement antidémocratique et rétabli la croissance. Mais, depuis quelques mois, il y a une ombre au tableau: un tournant autoritaire qui se traduit par une vague d'arrestations dans les milieux intellectuels, sur fond de raidissement sur la question kurde.

Universitaires, avocats, journalistes, étudiants: tous ceux qui s'intéressent au sort de la minorité kurde sont dans le collimateur des



Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan (ici, au centre), semble mener un double jeu en politique. (REUTERS/Umit Bektas)

autorités. Il a, par exemple, suffi que Busra Esranli, professeure de sciences politiques à l'université de Marmara, accepte de diriger une table ronde sur "les questions controversées de l'histoire de la République turque" pour qu'elle soit arrêtée. Tout comme Ragip Zarakolu, éditeur et militant des droits de l'homme depuis plus de quarante ans. Dans tous les cas, c'est la loi visant l'"appartenance à une organisation terroriste" qui sert de base juridique.

Une confrérie à l'influence grandissante...

La presse est tout particulièrement visée. 76 journalistes sont aujourd'hui sous les verrous. La plupart d'entre eux ont eu le tort de s'intéresser à la question kurde. Mais pas seulement. Lorsque Ahmet Sik, un journaliste d'investigation, a été arrêté en mars, il s'appretait à publier un livre dévoilant le noyautage de la police par une confrérie islamique proche du gouvernement et dirigée, depuis les Etats-Unis, par un imam turc, Fethullah

Gülen. Sans aucune preuve, il a été accusé d'avoir rédigé cet ouvrage à la demande de l'organisation Ergenekon, soupçonnée d'avoir cherché à renverser le régime.

L'affaire traduit l'influence grandissante de cette confrérie qui possède par ailleurs Zaman, l'un des principaux groupes de presse du pays. Au point que certains intellectuels se demandent si la Turquie n'est pas en train de devenir un Etat policier dirigé en sous-main par les fidèles de Fethullah Gülen.

Le regain de tension dans les zones kurdes, attisée par le régime syrien, et l'absence d'une véritable opposition organisée face à l'AKP expliquent sans doute pour une large part ce recul sur le terrain des libertés. Mais l'Europe doit aussi s'interroger. Les Européens - la France en premier lieu - se sont évertués à ruiner tous les espoirs d'adhésion à l'Union européenne nourris par les Turcs. Ils se sont ainsi privés d'un puissant levier pour encourager la Turquie à se démocratiser. ●

Guide: Syria's diverse minorities

The anti-government uprising in Syria is widely understood to be staged and supported by members of the majority Sunni Muslim population, with lesser representation from other religions.

There is a fear that the unrest - which began in March 2011 as part of the Arab Spring' uprisings across the Middle East - could lead to ethnic and religious polarisation, with different groups having to choose sides.

Sunni Muslims comprise about 75% of the population, with the remainder split between Christians, Alawites, Druze and Ismailis. Official Syrian censuses don't cover religion or ethnicity, making it difficult to gain an accurate break-down of society.

KURDS

Kurds make up the largest ethnic minority in Syria, constituting somewhere between 10% and 15% of the population, or about 2 million out of a population of around 22 million. The most concentrated Kurdish populations are in the north and north-eastern parts, particularly Hasaka province and the town of Qamishli on the Turkish border.

In neighbouring Turkey Kurds are a marginalised minority, and in Iraq Kurds suffered under the rule of ousted president Saddam Hussein but now enjoy a large degree of regional autonomy.

Many Syrian Kurds consider themselves victims of discrimination, accusing the Syrian authorities of denying them their basic social, cultural and political rights. Tens of thousands have been stateless since changes to Syria's nationality laws in the 1960s, but the government appears to be rectifying this now - to keep Kurds on-side, some observers say.

Kurdish political activity is severely repressed and Syrian military courts regularly jail Kurdish activists. The Kurdish Popular Union Party, which campaigns for self-determination for Syrian Kurds and is one of the oldest Syrian Kurdish parties, is banned.

Syrian Kurds appear divided over whether to back the protest movements or support the authorities in the hope of improving their status.

There is Kurdish representation in opposi-

tion groups, including the Syrian National Council (SNC), an umbrella group which was formed in August 2011 and seeks regime change.

A separate Kurdish entity called the Syrian Kurdish National Council (KNC) was formed in October 2011. Comprising 10 Kurdish parties, the KNC says it is committed to "finding a democratic solution to the Kurdish issue", emphasising that it is "part of the revolution". A Kurdish website in November reported on a mass demonstration of 50,000 Kurds in Qamishli carrying banners that read: "The Kurdish National Council in Syria Represents Me".

ALAWITES

Alawites, a branch of Shia Islam, make up the largest religious minority in Syria, and represent between 8% and 15% of the population.

They are arguably the most powerful sect in Syria, but potentially the most vulnerable if there is regime change because of their association with President Bashar al-Assad, who is a member of the Alawi community. Alawites occupy top posts in



President Bashar al-Assad, whose poster is paraded during a pro-government demonstration, is a member of the Alawite community

the government and the security services, giving them a disproportionate amount of power.

However, as a community the Alawites aren't seen to be in an advantageous position. According to Burhan Ghalioun, chairman of the opposition Syrian National Council, the Syrian government "treated the Alawites the worst and those from the Alawite community that benefited from this regime make [up] only a tiny percentage".

According to a briefing by the International Crisis Group, an organisation that seeks to prevent conflict, "the regime in effect took the Alawite minority hostage, linking its fate to its own. It did so deliberately and cynically, not least in order to ensure the loyalty of the

security services which, far from being a privileged, praetorian elite corps, are predominantly composed of underpaid and overworked Alawites hailing from villages the regime has left in a state of abject underdevelopment."

Activists have accused the government of employing heavily armed men derived from the Alawite community, as well as other minorities such as the Druze, to fight alongside regular army and security units. Commonly referred to by the opposition as "Shabbihah", or thugs in colloquial Syrian Arabic, they have been accused of intimidating, beating and killing protesters.

CHRISTIANS

About 10% of the population is estimated to observe Christianity, with the Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches making up the largest denominations. Christians are spread throughout the country, with sizeable populations in Damascus, Homs and Latakia.

Predominantly Christian villages, such as Saydanaya and Maalula, exist on the outskirts of Damascus, in addition to the coastal towns of Safita.

Christians are considered to enjoy a relatively high degree of religious tolerance. They worship freely and hold some senior positions in government



Christians have enjoyed religious freedom in Syria but face an uncertain future

It is widely believed that most Christians have so far abstained from taking part in the protests out of fear that an Islamist government would deny them religious privileges.

Syrian media have used clerical figures such as Greek Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius IV Hazim to support the government position. President Assad reportedly met Christian leaders shortly after the unrest began and warned that their future was more secure with him in power. Christian leaders have addressed pro-government rallies, voicing their backing for the

authorities and urging Syrians to engage in dialogue.

ISMAILIS

Ismailis in Syria are said to number around 200,000. Ismailism is a branch of Shia Islam, and has around 15 million followers worldwide who recognise the Aga Khan as their spiritual leader. He visited Syria in 2008.

The city of Salamia, near Hama, is largely populated by Ismailis.

There have also been reports of pro- and anti-government demonstrations in the city. A state-organised rally in support of the government was reported in November. Anti-government protests were reported to have been staged in the city in June.

DRUZE

There are around between 500,000 and 700,000 Druze in southern Syria.

Druze follow a monotheistic religion

drawn on Ismailism, the second largest branch of Shia Islam.

President Assad has reportedly sought their support after the prominent Lebanese politician and Druze leader Walid Jumblatt berated the Druze in Syria for not being more supportive of the protests. "Shame on the Druze of Syria; they have always been at the forefront of all revolutions," he said

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL December 8, 2011

Iraq Killings Fuel Fear Of Ethnic, Sectarian Conflicts

By SAM DAGHER

BAGHDAD—The deaths of three men in separate incidents on Wednesday extended a resurgence of attacks aimed at inflaming ethnic and sectarian tensions in Iraq.

The development comes as the U.S. troop pullout and the threat of civil war in neighboring Syria are stirring up concerns about the ability of the Iraqi government and security forces to control the situation.

The latest spasm of violence began more than a month ago, after U.S. President Barack Obama announced he would bring all troops home by the end of the year.

Attacks have hit a variety of areas and targets across the country, with some of the most worrisome in provinces with a volatile ethnic and sectarian mix and a long-running dispute over land and resources, such as Kirkuk and Diyala, both north of Baghdad.

On Wednesday, the head of the local rail authority, Dulair Khodr, a Kurd, was killed when a sticky bomb attached to his vehicle exploded on the southern side of Kirkuk city, according to security officials.

Earlier in the day an Arab contractor was killed in a similar manner next to the headquarters of the state-owned North Gas Company west of Kirkuk. Also, gunmen assassinated an officer with the Kurdistan region's armed forces, known as the Peshmerga, in a drive-by shooting southeast of the city, the officials said.

Maj. Gen. Jamal Taher Baker, Kirkuk's provincial police chief, says these attacks were carried out by militant groups linked to al Qaeda and Saddam



Hussein's former regime to derail any easing in the dispute in Kirkuk, which has pitted local communities against one another.

The day's violence came after at least four people were killed and 45 others wounded over the previous 10 days in roadside bombings and mortar attacks targeting members of the Shiite Turkmen community in and around Kirkuk, according to local police.

Some of the badly wounded Turkmen, a minority group sharing the same ethnic heritage as Turks, were evacuated by air by the Turkish government for treatment at hospitals in Turkey, as it has done for years.

Some Iraqi officials have long accused Turkish and Iranian intelligence services of backing extremist groups in places such as Kirkuk. Turkey and Iran have denied such accusations.

Officials worry that the standoff across the border in Syria, where Ankara has increasingly turned against a regime supported by Tehran, could spill over to Kirkuk, among other places in Iraq.

The Kirkuk provincial council on

Wednesday said that Kirkuk was the object of "big plots," without offering specifics.

A police official said pamphlets were found in some parts of Kirkuk that were intended to instigate attacks against Turkmen, Shiites and Kurds "to foment discord in Kirkuk."

The pamphlets were distributed a few days ago, the official said, and were signed by Ansar al-Sunnah, a militant Islamic Kurdish group suspected of maintaining ties to al Qaeda in Iraq and opposed to the largely secular and pro-American Kurdish leadership in Iraq.

In Diyala, a province south of Kirkuk and home to a similar ethnic and sectarian patchwork, a bombing at a vegetable market in a Shiite town that killed 13 and the execution of seven people in a predominantly Sunni village within the span of less than 24 hours last week were blamed on militants linked to al Qaeda.

The U.S. military, which pulled out of Kirkuk last month in preparation for full withdrawal by the end of the month, has warned that extremists would seek to exploit ethnic and sectarian rifts in Iraq.

"There are very extraordinary security forces up there," said U.S. Ambassador James F. Jeffrey in an interview on Tuesday about the abilities of the security forces in Kirkuk. "There's a lot of security forces but nonetheless there's also terrorists there."

The U.S. maintains a diplomatic presence in Kirkuk and a small team of military liaison officers to coordinate with the Iraqi and Kurdish forces securing the area. Those forces include the local police, the army reporting to the central government, and the Peshmerga, which is under the control of the semiautonomous Kurdistan region.

Both the region and the central government claim a disputed swath of oil-rich territory stretching from Diyala through Kirkuk to areas on the Syrian border in the northwest.○

Deep divisions blunt Syrian opposition's efforts

ANTAKYA, TURKEY

BY DAN BILEFSKY

A growing rift between the political and armed branches of the Syrian opposition illustrates one of the key dynamics in the nine-month revolt, according to senior opposition officials: its failure to offer a concerted front against President Bashar al-Assad.

The Syrian National Council, a broad-based dissident umbrella group launched in October in Istanbul, is riven by divisions over personalities and principles. The Free Syrian Army, the main insurgent group, has emerged as a new force, even as some dissidents question how coordinated it really is. And the opposition inside Syria has yet to fully embrace the exiles.

The tensions threaten to undermine their efforts, opposition activists say, even as the Assad regime intensifies its crackdown.

This month, the Syrian National Council and the Free Syrian Army agreed to coordinate their actions against the government. The move followed the concerns by some opposition members that the rebel army, formed by deserters from the Syrian Army, was undermining the opposition's commitment to nonviolence by launching high profile attacks and feeding the narrative of the Assad regime that it was besieged by a foreign plot.

On Thursday a pipeline carrying oil to a refinery in Homs was blown up, casting a huge pillar of black smoke over the city. The official news agency, Sana, blamed an "armed terrorist group" — the phrase the government uses to describe those behind the uprising — for the attack.

The Syrian National Council's insistence that the Free Syrian Army limit itself to defensive actions has led to rising tensions, according to officials close to the Free Syrian Army, which is being hosted by Turkey and orchestrating attacks across the border from inside a temporary refugee camp guarded by the Turkish military. They said the council moved this month to take control of its finances.

Abdulsatar Maksur, a Syrian in Hatay, Turkey, near the Syrian border, who said he was close to the Free Syrian Army and was helping to coordinate their supply network, drove the point home. "We don't like them," he said of the Syrian National Council. "They just talk and are interested in politics, while the Assad re-

gime is slaughtering our people. We favor more aggressive military action."

The Syrian crisis has shifted geopolitics in the region, complicating an international response. Turkey, once a close ally, has turned emphatically against the Assad regime. But Russia, which has close strategic relations with Syria, and China have blocked all attempts to negotiate a resolution against Syria at the United Nations. Meanwhile, Iran has been forging closer ties with Syria, fueling fears of regional unrest.

Turkish officials say they are hosting the rebel forces for purely humanitarian reasons. "We have no intention of sending arms or fighting groups from Turkey to any other country, including Syria," a senior Foreign Ministry official said Thursday. "They are in Turkey for their own protection."

But in recent days clashes at the Turkish-Syrian border between the rebels and the Syrian Army have been intensifying, rebel officials say. The Syrian regime said Tuesday that it had prevented 35 gunmen from infiltrating Syrian territory from Turkey. The Free Syrian Army said wounded rebels had been taken across the border for treatment. Turkish officials said there were no military confrontations along the borders with Syria, but

residents in the Turkish border village of Guvecci said that in recent days they had heard gunfights through the night.

Syrian activists say the Free Syrian Army is organizing a smuggling network to Syria from inside Turkey in order to supply soldiers, weapons and medical supplies to its rebels fighting inside Syria. On a recent day in Gorentas, a rugged Turkish mountain village near the Syrian border, a group of smugglers were seen packing guns into empty flour sacks before speeding away on

"They just talk and are interested in politics, while the Assad regime is slaughtering our people."

motorbikes. Asked where they were going, they replied, "Syria, Syria."

The Syrian National Council insists that it is the only legitimate representative of the Syrian people, including its armed factions. Its leader, Burhan Ghalioun, met for the first time in early December with the Free Syrian Army chief, Col. Riad al-Asaad, in Hatay, where Colonel Asaad agreed to rein in attacks on Syrian government forces.

The Turkish Foreign Ministry, which handles media requests for meetings with Colonel Asaad, declined to make him available.

During an extensive interview with senior members of the Syrian National Council at its newly opened headquarters in Istanbul, Hassan Hachimi, a member of the eight-member executive board, said the Free Syrian Army was emerging as the armed force of the Syrian opposition. But he emphasized that the council's support for it was limited to providing financing and humanitarian aid, not weapons. "We want them to stay within the limits of protecting civilians, not to attack the regime," he said. "It is better to coordinate with them than to let them do what they want."

One observer who recently spent two weeks in Syria shadowing the rebels described the army as a ragtag group of soldiers, some as young as 16, who wielded AK-47s and showed up at demonstrations to protect civilians. At least some have positions in caves near the Turkish border and smuggle weapons and supplies under cover of night.

Mr. Hachimi said that while Turkey was providing a haven to the Syrian opposition, the Syrian National Council was financed with donations from Syri-

an supporters and from others in the Arab world. The council operates from a small office in Istanbul strewn with unopened boxes and paid for by a Syrian businessman. "We don't have a budget," he said. "We haven't even opened a bank account yet in Turkey."

A senior defector from the Syrian Foreign Ministry said in an interview that if the international community armed the opposition rebels, it could inflict serious damage on the Assad government. The official, a former ambassador who fled to Istanbul from Syria last week, said Mr. Assad's state security apparatus was operating in up to 50 locations in Syria. He argued that surgical strikes, in conjunction with a buffer zone inside Syria implemented by Turkey, would prove fatal to the regime.

The recent defector from the Syrian Foreign Ministry warned that the Assad regime was deluded and still believed it would be rehabilitated internationally. "The regime is living in a bubble and have no sense of reality," he said. "Like Qaddafi, they will only realize it when the end comes."

Sebnem Arsu in Istanbul, Daniel Etter in Antakya and Anthony Shadid in Beirut contributed reporting.

Turkey's bid to restore balance

Despite the historic animosity between the two neighbours, the recent shift in Ankara's Syria policy is due to geo-political factors

By Marwan Kabalan,
Special to Gulf News

Since they emerged as new states after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire following the First World War, relations between Syria and Turkey were marked by animosity. The history of Syria and Turkey would reveal that most of these relations have contributed to their physical insecurity with regard to each other, and their persistent endeavours to achieve their security requirements.

Border dispute was perhaps the thorniest issue. Both Syria and Turkey claim unquestionable sovereignty over Uskandaron province (Turkey calls it Hatay) which came under Turkish control in 1938. Dispute over water distribution – the problem of the Euphrates, Orontes and Tigris rivers – had also hindered the establishment of good relations between the two countries. This is especially an important issue wherein both sides try to meet their developmental requirements.

Furthermore, since the early 1980s, Turkey used to accuse Syria of providing the separatists Kurdistan Workers Party (Partiya Karkerana Kurdistan, or PKK) with weapons and logistic support to gain concessions on other fronts. Syria accused Turkey, on the other hand, of supporting the Muslim Brotherhood during and after the Hama massacre in 1982.

Given the complex nature of these relations, the end of the Cold War did not lead to fundamental shift in the way the two neighbours viewed each other. It was the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, however, that resulted in notable change in the foreign policies of

Damascus and Ankara. Facing different set of challenges, Syria and Turkey opted for co-operation to help restore the regional balance of power, which has been disrupted by the occupation of Iraq. Common geo-political interests made most, if not all, of the historic differences between Turkey and Syria irrelevant.

Disregarded

Following the invasion of Iraq, Turkey sought to act independently, perhaps provocatively, towards Washington, which has completely disregarded Turkish interests in the region. Turkey opposed the invasion, fearing that it would lead to disintegration and eventually the emergence of a Kurdish state in the north. This would certainly affect Turkey's Kurdish minority and strengthen cession trends.

US policy on Iraq has hence provided key incentive to improve ties with Syria, which shared with Turkey its concerns on Iraq partition and the Kurdish issue. Rapprochement with Damascus was therefore of considerable geo-political significance for Ankara. It demonstrated that regional alliances are still seen by venerable states as key means to ward off threats and tackle challenges.

The withdrawal of the US forces from Iraq by the end of 2011 seems to have made the opposite impact on the relationship between the two neighbours. It played key role in bringing the situation back to conflict. In fact, the US invasion of Iraq brought Syria and Turkey close together; the US withdrawal is bringing them apart.



Syrians living in Turkey wave Turkish and Syrian flags as they protest against the government of Syria's President Bashar Al Assad after Friday prayers in front of the Syrian consulate in Istanbul on Friday

Rising influence

As the US retreats, Turkey, alongside the Arab Gulf States, fears Iran's rising regional influence. Iran could emerge with a sphere of influence stretching from western Afghanistan to the Mediterranean. If Iran manages after the completion of the US withdrawal from Iraq to establish the so-called Shiite Crescent consisting of Iraq, Syria and Hezbollah under its leadership, the political landscape of the entire region will undergo a fundamental change.

The breakout of the so-called "Arab Spring" presented Turkey therefore with a golden opportunity to contribute to reshaping the future of the region and re-assert itself as a key regional power with a political model to promote.

In addition, as the US seems to have accepted Iran's dominant position in Iraq, Syria is seen by Turkey as too important to be lost to Iran's sphere of influence. Following the outbreak of its uprising, Syria emerged as an ideal arena to check Iran's power and contain its ambitions. At present, the

polarisation is clear; taking a sectarian flavour for some and Turkey sees an opportunity to bring about a regime change in Damascus.

This is quite a shift in Turkish foreign policy which until a few months ago viewed Syria and to an extent Iran as friends and partners. The failure of the US to prevent Iran from dominating Iraq and Tehran's attempt to aggressively further its regional influence made Turkey rethink its position on Syria.

Indeed, several other factors such as the position of the Turkish public opinion on the brutal repression of the Syrian uprising and the ideological and religious orientation of the Turkish leadership have played an important role in contributing to the shift in Turkish foreign policy. Yet, the geo-political factor remains the driving force of this shift.

☆☆☆

Dr. Marwan Kabalan is the dean of the Faculty of International Relations and Diplomacy, Kalamoon University, Damascus, Syria.

Syria nearing civil war as army and defectors battle

BEIRUT

Violence around country kills 8; embassy protest in Jordan leaves 6 hurt

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

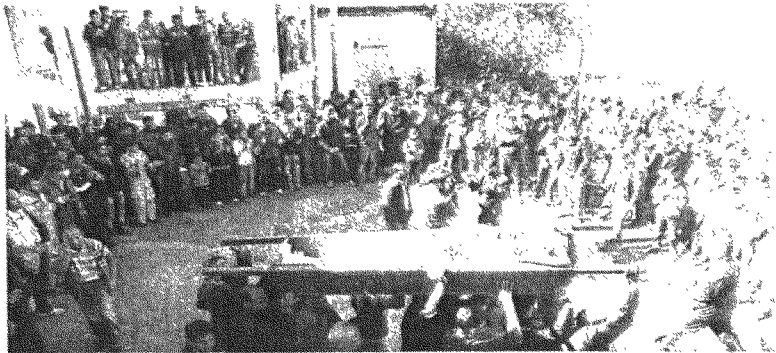
Syrian troops battled army defectors Sunday in clashes that set several military vehicles ablaze. The fighting and other violence around Syria killed at least eight people, activists said.

For the first time, an act of violent protest against President Bashar al-Assad's government spilled across the border into Jordan, where about a dozen Syrians attacked their embassy in Amman, wounding at least two diplomats and four other employees.

Opposition activists called a general strike in a bid to squeeze the government. Mr. Assad has refused to buckle under Arab and international pressure to step down and has shown no sign of easing his crackdown, which has included assaults by the military on unarmed protesters. The United Nations says more than 4,000 people have been killed.

The uprising against Mr. Assad, which blossomed in March, has grown increasingly violent in recent months as protesters began to take up arms and soldiers defected and fought the army, threatening to push the confrontation into civil war.

Two people were killed in one clash before dawn Sunday between the mili-



Protesters carrying the body of Abdul Halim Baqur in Homs Province. They said he had been killed by government shelling.

tary and the Free Syrian Army, a loose-knit group of military defectors, in Kfar Takharim, a northwestern town, said the British-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights. It said two military armored vehicles had also set ablaze.

Three vehicles were burned in another clash, near Busra al-Harir, a southern village, the group said. Similar battles took place in several other parts of the south, said the Observatory and another activist group, the Local Coordination Committees.

Two other people who disappeared days ago were tortured and killed in Homs Province, and one person was shot at a checkpoint in Dara'a Province, the group said.

Two other people were killed in Douma, a Damascus suburb, and another person in Hama, in central Syria.

It was impossible to independently verify any death count because Syria has banned most foreign journalists and prevented local reporters from moving

freely. Accounts from activists and witnesses, along with amateur videos posted online, provide key channels of information.

Mr. Assad has tried to counter the mass revolt against his family's 40-year dynasty with a security crackdown, coupled with promises of reform. He has lifted the decades-old state of emergency, and in July he endorsed legislation that would enable newly formed political parties to run for Parliament and local councils.

On Monday, Syrians are scheduled to vote in municipal elections for the country's 14 provinces — the first test of reforms by Mr. Assad since the uprising began. The state-run news agency, SANA, said 42,889 candidates would be competing for the 17,588 seats on local administration councils.

Opposition figures have dismissed the moves as mere posturing and say the only way to resolve the crisis is to oust the regime.

International Herald Tribune DECEMBER 16, 2011

Deserters said to kill 27 soldiers in Syria

BEIRUT

BY NADA BAKRI

Military defectors in Syria killed 27 soldiers Thursday, an opposition group reported, in one of the largest attacks yet on Syrian security forces by a growing armed insurgency.

The opposition group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in London, said in a statement that clashes had erupted at dawn in and around the city of Dara'a, where the anti-government uprising began in March. It said the attackers, armed with rifles and rocket-

propelled grenades, hit two checkpoints in the countryside and a military base inside the city, suggesting a level of coordination that had not been seen before.

The Syrian Observatory, which has a network of contacts and informants inside the country, did not specify the sources of the information, and it was unclear from the group's statement whether any of the attackers had been killed.

In recent days, attacks have escalated around Dara'a and in the hinterland of Hama, a tense city in central Syria, where vast protests gathered in the summer before security forces retook the city in August.

Though the report by the Syrian Observatory and other activist groups leave an incomplete picture of the situation on the ground in Syria, and it is impossible to verify the reports because of government restrictions on outside reporting, some activists have suggested that parts of those regions have become so hostile that security forces are finding it difficult to enter them.

Word of the soldier killings came as

Human Rights Watch issued a report Thursday in which it named 74 commanders and officers that former Syrian soldiers identified as being responsible for attacks on unarmed protesters.

The report said the commanders were members of the Syrian military and intelligence agencies and had given orders to carry out widespread killings, torture and unlawful arrests, according to soldiers who defected and were interviewed by the group.

In the report, Human Rights Watch urged the U.N. Security Council to refer the government of President Bashar al-Assad to the International Criminal Court and to impose sanctions against all officials implicated.

"Defectors gave us names, ranks, and positions of those who gave the orders to shoot and kill," said Anna Neistat, associate director for emergencies at Human Rights Watch, and one of the authors of the report. "And each and every official named in this report, up to the very highest levels of the Syrian government, should answer for their crimes against the Syrian people."

Americans pull out of a shattered Iraq

BAGHDAD

War drawing to a close
for Americans after 9
years and 4,500 deaths

BY TIM ARANGO

At a crowded market in the city center here the flotsam of the war is for sale. Ripped fuel workout supplement. Meals-ready-to-eat, macaroni-and-cheese "Mexican style." Pistol holsters. Nothing seems off limits to the merchants out for a quick dinar, not even a bottle of prescription pills from a pharmacy in Waco, Texas, probably tossed out by a departing soldier.

The concrete blast walls that shielded the shopping stalls have lately come down. Since then, three explosions have struck the market, killing several people.

"This will be an easy target for car bombs," said Muhammad Ali, a merchant who lost two brothers during the cruelest times of the conflict. "People will die here."

After nearly nine years, 4,500 fatalities and about \$1 trillion dollars, America's war in Iraq is about to end. Officials symbolically marked the finish Thursday with a modest ceremony at the airport days before the last troops traverse the southern highway to Kuwait, going out as they came in, to conclude the United States' most ambitious and bloodiest military campaign since Vietnam.

Iraqis will be left with a country that is not exactly at war, and not exactly at peace. It has improved in many ways since the 2007 troop "surge," but it is still a shattered country marred by violence and political dysfunction, a land defined on sectarian lines whose future, for better or worse, is now in the hands of its people.

"It is the end for the Americans only," Emad Risn, a columnist, recently wrote in the pages of *Assabah al-Jadeed*, a government-funded newspaper. "Nobody knows if the war will end for Iraqis, too."

Iraq will be on its own to find its place in a region upended by revolutions and to manage its rivalry with Iran, which will look to expand its influence culturally and economically in the power vacuum left by the United States military. While American officials worry about the close political ties between Iraq's Shiite leadership and Iran, the picture at the grass-roots level is more nuanced. Iraqis complain about shoddy Iranian consumer goods — they frequently



A demonstration in the battered city of Falluja, the scene of some of the most violent fighting since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, marking the departure of the last U.S. forces.

mention low-quality yogurts and cheeses — and the menacing role of Iranian-backed militias, which this year killed many American soldiers.

The Iranian rivalry frequently plays out in the Shiite holy city of Najaf, where Iraq's religious authorities have their headquarters. Iran, which like Iraq is majority Shiite, recently installed one of its leading clerics in Najaf, raising worries that Iran is trying to spread its brand of clerical rule. Meanwhile, Moktada al-Sadr, the anti-American cleric with close ties to Iran, has recently said that with the military withdrawal, U.S. diplomats are now fair game for his militiamen.

Iraq faces a multitude of vexing problems the Americans tried and failed to resolve, from how to divide the country's oil wealth to sectarian reconciliation to the establishment of an impartial justice system. A longstanding dispute festers in the north over how to share power in Kirkuk between Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, an ominous harbinger for power struggles that may ensue in a post-America Iraq. A recent deal between Exxon Mobil and the Kurdistan government has been deemed illegal by Baghdad in the absence of procedures for sharing the country's oil resources.

"We are in a standstill and things are paralyzed," said Adel Abdul Mahdi, a Shiite politician and former Iraqi vice president, describing the process of political reconciliation between Iraq's three main factions, Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds. "We are going from bad to worse."

A surprising number of Iraqis refuse to believe the Americans are really leav-

ing, the effect of a conspiratorial mindset developed over years living under the violent and repressive dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, and a view of history informed by the Crusades, colonialism and other perceived injustices at the hands of the West.

Rani Basil, who drives a taxicab in the capital, said "Iraq will be a great place if the U.S. withdraws," but he does not believe they will. "I do not think the United States will leave Iraq, because they are about to attack Iran," he said.

In Falluja, where years of block-to-block urban combat left a city that its Sunni residents refer to as Iraq's Hiroshima, residents celebrated the withdrawal with a day of public demonstrations, angry speeches, burning American flags and a gallery exhibition of photos of mangled children, destroyed homes and other signposts of what residents call the bitter legacy of the invasion.

"It's a huge happiness that the Americans are getting out," said Mohammed Adnan, 35. "Hopefully, we are all going to be fine, we Iraqis. We were doing fine before 2003."

Not everyone was doing fine before 2003. After a failed Shiite uprising at the close of the 1991 Gulf war, Mr. Hussein executed tens of thousands of people, mostly Kurds and Shiites. International sanctions destroyed the economy, creating mass poverty and crime. The dictatorship inflicted deep wounds to the collective psyche, which partially explains why the American invasion unleashed so many unforeseen consequences, from sectarian violence to a zero-sum politics.

"If you go to Basra and go house to house, wives will say that their husband

disappeared," said Jana Hybaskova, the European Union ambassador. "The level of destruction of society was a million times deeper than anyone expected."

Experts estimate that the remains of 250,000 to one million Iraqis lie in mass graves around the country, victims of the Hussein regime. Not a single victim has been identified by DNA analysis, partly because various government ministries and the two factions with the greatest claims of victimhood — the Kurds and Shiites — have been unable to agree on how to proceed. The lack of a painful but cathartic process of reckoning with its history — as South Africa and others have done — has stymied the society's ability to vanquish the ghosts of its past.

While more than 100,000 Iraqi civilians perished in the war and its aftermath, violence has decreased significantly since 2007, when there were almost 7,500 attacks a month. But Iraq remains an extremely dangerous place. According to the American military, there were between 500 and 750 attacks a month this year, including bombings, rocket attacks and assassinations. There are still roughly a dozen insurgent groups and militias active in Iraq: Sunni groups made up of former members of the ruling Baath Party and the home-grown insurgent group, Al Qaeda in Iraq; and Shiite militias supported by Iran and Moktada al-Sadr.

While the violence has declined, sectarian rifts still have not healed. American officials worry that a large attack on a Shiite shrine could trigger a new round of sectarian bloodletting. It remains unclear whether Iraq's security forces are loyal to their nation or their sect. In Abu Ghraib, the Sunni stronghold outside Baghdad, residents complain about harassment by the Shiite-dominated security forces and say they fear them more than insurgents. Local police and army outposts fly the flag of Imam Hussein,

the revered Shiite martyr.

The war opened Iraq's tremendous petroleum reserves to foreign investment for the first time since 1974, though American companies did poorly in the postwar auctions. So far, the Ministry of Oil has granted 12 licenses for fields in the south to companies from China, Russia, Korea, Britain, the Netherlands and elsewhere, with just one going to an American major, Exxon Mobil. The outcome helped defuse criticism that the United States had invaded Iraq for its oil.

Yet, Iraq's oil output still has not rebounded to the level it was in the late 1970s, according to the International Energy Agency. The Iraqi government's stated goal of raising output from the current 2.95 million barrels per day to 12 million by 2017 is regarded as unattainable by some analysts.

Aesthetically, Baghdad is still a war zone of checkpoints, blast walls and coils

"When I used to go out and see the dead bodies, I would cry for what it used to be like here."

of razor wire, where buildings sit partially destroyed from the first wave of bombings that President George W. Bush called "shock and awe." At entrances to the garrisoned heart of the central government, the Green Zone, vehicles on the way in are searched for bombs and on the way out for kidnap victims. Most Iraqis still receive only a few hours of electricity a day, which forces many to sleep outdoors on their rooftops during sweltering summer nights.

Iraq has improved in some respects. Life in Baghdad has blossomed in recent years — street life has returned, markets are bustling, a new amusement park is opening and even the circus came to town this year. The government

of Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, while hamstrung by sectarian infighting, was chosen in elections last year that international monitors declared to be free.

On the garbage-strewn banks of the Tigris, a group of young men who lived abroad during the bad days now gather on Fridays to ride their Jet Skis, arriving in the early afternoon and staying until the sun goes down. They drink Tuborg beer and Chivas whiskey, and listen to American pop and rap music.

"When I'm on the Jet Ski on the Tigris, I forget all the explosions and the politics, everything," said Khaldi Nuami, who owns an import-export company whose primary product is armored cars.

A palpable sense of melancholy pervades Iraq. The war opened a generational divide that splits older Iraqis, who recall a brief golden age in the 1960s and 1970s, from younger ones, who have been drawn more to the culture and ideas the Americans tried to import here.

"In the 1960s, life was good," said Qassim Jasim, who has baked bread at the Abu Naseer Bakery in Adhamiya, a Sunni enclave in the capital, for 38 years. During the war, he said, "when I used to go out and see the dead bodies, I would cry for what it used to be like here."

His neighborhood is no longer a bloody battleground controlled by Al Qaeda. But the Shiites have mostly left. The fabric of the community has been forever altered. Ghaith Raad, whose family owns a famous sweets shop across the street from the bakery, returned from Syria — where he fled to during the fighting — about four months ago.

"When I came back, I didn't find any of my friends," he said. "The society has changed here, the people have changed."

Reporting contributed by Jack Healy, Michael S. Schmidt, Andrew Kramer, Duraid Adnan, Omar al-Jawoshy and an employee of The New York Times.

 **REUTERS**

Turkish forces kill 8 Kurdish militants

December 15, 2011 - Reuters

Tunceli - Turkish security forces killed eight Kurdish militants in fighting in eastern Turkey on Thursday, security sources said.

Helicopter gunships were dispatched to a camp thought to be a winter compound for Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) guerrillas in Bingöl province, where the clashes were continuing.

Five of the militants killed were women, security sources told Reuters.

The PKK, which took up arms against the Turkish state in 1984 with the aim of carving out an ethnic Kurdish homeland, is designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the European Union and the United States.

More than 40,000 people have been killed in the separatist conflict.

Winter is traditionally a season of lowered tensions between Kurdish guerrillas and Turkish security forces due to harsh conditions in the mountainous region.

L'Irak plonge dans l'inconnu après le départ des troupes américaines

par Yves BOURDILLON

C'est un pays encore très instable que l'armée américaine a quitté hier, après neuf ans d'occupation. Certes, l'Irak a été débarrassé du régime de Saddam Hussein, l'un des plus sanglants de la planète, mais les défis sont légion dans cet Etat assis sur les deuxièmes réserves prouvées de pétrole du monde. Ainsi, juste après que le dernier convoi de 500 soldats de la 1re division de cavalerie des Etats-Unis traversait la frontière hier matin, le chef du gouvernement irakien Nouri al-Maliki demandait au Parlement de retirer sa confiance au vice-Premier ministre Saleh Moutlak, nouvel épisode d'un conflit entre le Premier ministre et le parti Iraquiya. Saleh Moutlak avait affirmé à la télévision que Washington laissait l'Irak « aux mains d'un dictateur », « qui ignore le partage du pouvoir ».

L'Irak, aux institutions faibles et corrompues, n'a plus, non plus, de ministre de l'Intérieur depuis deux ans, faute de compromis entre factions politiques, qui s'opposent généralement sur le plan ethnique. Le gouvernement dominé par les chiites accuse les anciens partisans sunnites de Saddam Hussein de comploter. Les Kurdes, s'ils ne réclament plus l'indépendance, s'opposent au pouvoir central sur la souveraineté d'une région riche en pétrole autour de Kirkouk.

D'ailleurs, la loi régissant l'exploitation des hydrocarbures, de loin premières ressources du pays, est toujours en attente. Un quart de la population vit sous le seuil de pauvreté. Les séparatistes kurdes de Turquie disposent de bases dans le nord du pays, où frappe de temps en temps l'armée d'Ankara.

Bilan lourd

Face au refus de Bagdad d'accorder l'immunité juridique à des milliers de soldats américains chargés de poursuivre la formation de leurs homologues irakiens, le président Obama avait décidé en octobre d'amplifier le retrait américain programmé. Il ne reste désormais en Irak que 157 instructeurs militaires américains et le contingent chargé de protéger l'ambassade.

Le bilan pour les Etats-Unis est lourd à l'issue de cette intervention la plus longue et la plus controversée depuis la guerre du Vietnam. Les pertes sont, certes, bien inférieures à celles subies en Indochine (77.000 morts), mais sans équivalent depuis 1974, avec 4.480 morts, dont 3.500 au combat, et 32.000 blessés. Londres a, pour sa part, perdu 180 soldats. Le Pentagone a déployé jusqu'à 150.000 combattants en Irak en mars 2003, effectifs ramenés à 50.000 en septembre 2010. Le coût dépasserait 770 milliards de dollars pour un objectif, il



Le dernier convoi militaire américain quitte l'Irak et franchit la frontière koweïtienne le 19 décembre 2011 Photo : Mario Tama/AFP/Getty Images

est vrai, stratégique. Affirmant éliminer un régime détenant des armes de destruction massive qui se sont révélées inexistantes, Washington a installé un régime allié (quoique, aujourd'hui, soupçonné de s'acoquiner avec l'Iran) dans un pays clef pour la sécurité de l'approvisionnement énergétique mondial, après que les terroristes saoudiens du 11 septembre 2011 ont illustré le caractère imprévisible du golfe Persique. Pour les Irakiens, le bilan humain est lourd, avec environ 110.000 civils tués, selon l'ONG de référence Bodycount. Toutefois, la violence diminue, les arrestations et tortures sont moins répandues que sous Saddam Hussein et l'Irak, dont la production pétrolière, sous souveraineté nationale, remonte en flèche, a organisé plusieurs scrutins pluralistes des années avant le printemps arabe. ■

Irak-Les sunnites d'Iraquiya suspendent leur action au parlement

REUTERS -Le bloc parlementaire sunnite à l'assemblée irakienne a suspendu samedi sa participation en accusant le Premier ministre Nouri al Maliki, chiite, de concentrer les pouvoirs.

Ce retrait du bloc Iraquiya, dirigé par l'ex-Premier ministre Iyad Allaoui, témoigne d'un retour des tensions poli-

tiques à l'approche du départ des soldats américains et fragilise l'équilibre délicat entre chiites, sunnites et Kurdes au sein du gouvernement.

Dans un communiqué, Iraquiya annonce "suspendre sa participation au parlement (...) jusqu'à nouvel ordre" et accuse Maliki de chercher à gagner du temps sur sa promesse de former un gou-

vernement en partenariat.

Plus spécifiquement, le groupe parlementaire accuse le Premier ministre de retarder la nomination de plusieurs responsables de haut rang, notamment les ministres de la Défense et de la Sécurité dont les postes sont vacants depuis un an en raison de désaccords politiques.

Iraquiya a remporté le plus grand nombre de sièges lors des législatives de 2010, mais n'a pu réunir de majorité pour former un gouvernement. ■

Qui n'a pas perdu la guerre d'Irak ?



Par **Guy Sorman**
www.hebdo.ch

Depuis les Etats-Unis, j'écoute par internet comment les médias français commentent le retrait définitif des troupes américaines hors d'Irak : retrait à pas comptés puisque les militaires iront camper au Koweït mitoyen, ce qui permettrait un retour instantané. Autant aux Etats-Unis, les médias américains disputent du bilan de ces neuf ans de guerre, en France règne l'unanimité : « il ne fallait pas y aller - puisque les Français ne l'ont pas fait - et ce départ programmé par Barack Obama, le bon, contre George W. Bush, le nul, est au mieux un échec, au pire une déroute ».

Vus et entendus de près comme de loin, je suis sans cesse émerveillé par la capacité des journalistes français de penser tous la même chose, en un instant donné. Comment parviennent-ils à se synchroniser en une pensée unique, quels que soient le sujet et le support ? Cette pensée unique, il est vrai, s'inscrit toujours dans une même vision du monde, sans nuance : le capitalisme est toujours en crise, les Américains ont toujours tort, les musulmans sont toujours islamistes, les Allemands sont de retour, le climat se réchauffe et Johnny Halliday est le meilleur.

Les médias américains ne sont pas supérieurs aux français, mais au moins sont-ils contrastés, en désaccord entre eux, et en dehors de Fox News, porte-voix des conservateurs, plutôt inclassables.

Si l'on s'employait à penser cette guerre par soi-même, avec les informations dont tout le monde dispose - il n'y a plus de secrets ni civils ni militaires - le bilan devrait être au choix, nuancé ou impossible. Impossible puisque la validité de cette intervention (qui ne fut pas qu'américaine, mais aussi britannique, polonaise, espagnole...) ne sera tranchée que d'ici une dizaine d'années : on saura alors, mais pas avant, si l'Irak est devenue

une nation stable, sûre pour elle-même et ses voisins, où coexisteront des peuples distincts dans une relative démocratie. Si tel devait être le résultat final, l'Histoire classera la guerre d'Irak du bon côté. En fonction de l'évolution des pays arabes voisins et de l'Iran, on pourrait à terme envisager que le renversement de la dictature de Saddam Hussein fut bien le premier domino qui entraîna à sa suite les révolutions démocratiques en Egypte, au Liban, en Tunisie, au Maroc, au Yémen... Seraient alors oubliés les motifs peu persuasifs de l'invasion de 2002 - des armes de destruction massive introuvables - auxquels seraient substitués les arguments des néoconservateurs (Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, Dick Cheney) pour qui cette guerre ne fut jamais autre qu'une réorganisation du Proche-Orient sur des bases démocratiques, pro-occidentales et s'accommodant de l'Etat d'Israël. Pour l'heure, on ne peut encore rien affirmer d'aussi positif ; on ne devrait rien affirmer du tout.

Un bilan plus immédiat n'est guère plus facile à dresser mais il devrait au moins être nuancé. "Le monde se porte mieux sans Saddam Hussein", observe Condoleezza Rice dans ses Mémoires : on doit lui en donner acte. Saddam Hussein, en trente ans de règne, parvint à tuer plusieurs millions de ses propres sujets, en les envoyant se faire massacrer sur le front iranien (entre 1980 et 1982, 200 000 morts irakiens, un million de morts iraniens), en gasant les Kurdes (200 000 victimes en 1988), en affamant et en humiliant les Chiïtes. Saddam Hussein, s'il était resté au pouvoir neuf ans de plus, ne serait pas devenu un despote plus éclairé : sans doute aurait-il progressé en mégalomanie sanguinaire. Raison pour laquelle il est difficile de comparer les cent mille victimes irakiennes, en neuf ans de guerre, pour la plupart d'entre elles tuées par d'autres Irakiens avec ce qui aurait pu se produire si les Américains n'étaient pas intervenus. L'exercice est théorique mais mérite d'être signalé : la même interrogation théorique vaut pour la récente incursion de l'OTAN

en Libye : combien de vie sauvées par rapport à ce qui aurait pu se produire sans le renversement de Kadhafi ? La réponse apportée par les Irakiens eux-mêmes dépend entièrement de là où ils se trouvaient il y a neuf ans et là où ils se situent à ce jour : un Sunnite regrettera le bon vieux temps, un Chiïte se sentira enfin digne, un Kurde enfin indépendant et un Chrétien soulagé de vivre ailleurs.

Cette arithmétique approximative justifie-t-elle, dans le regard américain cette fois-ci, la mort de cinq mille soldats ? Quitte à choquer, ce chiffre est extraordinairement faible au regard de la violence et de la durée du conflit, de la multiplicité des fronts et de l'impréparation des troupes. Comme nous le déclarait le Général David Petraeus conquérant Bassora : "Je me suis senti comme un étranger dans une terre étrange" (a stranger in a strange land). Cette impréparation américaine, contrairement à des commentaires mille fois répétés en France, ne tenait pas à une ignorance des cultures musulmanes en Irak, ni à une ignorance des langues : l'armée américaine bénéficie d'un recrutement si divers que toutes les cultures du monde y sont représentées. Les erreurs stratégiques vinrent plutôt de ce que pour les Américains, l'Irak fut la première guerre postsoviétique. Petraeus encore, le vainqueur de l'Irak si victoire il y eut, observait que ses troupes avaient été formées à détruire des colonnes de chars soviétiques à partir d'hélicoptères d'attaque : pas à des combats de rue, ni à désamorcer des bombes improvisées. Par suite de ce conflit, bien involontairement, l'armée américaine s'est reconvertie en temps réel aux prochaines guerres du 21^e siècle : celles-ci ressembleront plus à l'Irak qu'à la deuxième guerre mondiale. Ce qui implique, ultime commentaire de Petraeus - avec qui j'ai dialogué au cours de ces neuf années écoulées - que dans les conflits contemporains, la distinction entre vainqueurs et vaincus n'est plus aussi évidente que jadis. La guerre moderne est une mêlée confuse qui ne permet pas de planter son drapeau sur une colline et de proclamer la victoire : gagner, souvent, c'est ne pas perdre. L'armée américaine n'a pas perdu la guerre en Irak, mais nul ne sait encore si elle l'a gagnée. ●

En Turquie, protestations officielles contre la France avant un vote au Palais-Bourbon sur le génocide arménien

L'Assemblée nationale examine la possible pénalisation de la négation du génocide de 1915

Istanbul
Correspondance

Les relations franco-turques menacent de connaître une nouvelle période de turbulences. Dans une lettre envoyée vendredi 16 décembre au président de la République, Nicolas Sarkozy, le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a averti Paris des « graves conséquences » pour les relations bilatérales, « sur le plan politique, économique et culturel », qu'impliquerait l'adoption d'une loi pénalisant la négation du génocide arménien. L'Assemblée nationale française doit examiner, le 22 décembre, une proposition de loi déposée par la députée (UMP) Valérie Boyer, fruit du travail d'un avocat de Marseille, Philippe Kirkorian, selon laquelle toute person-

ne qui nierait ou contesterait le génocide des Arméniens de l'Empire ottoman par le gouvernement nationaliste Jeune Turc en 1915 serait passible d'un an de prison et de 45 000 euros d'amende.

Le ministre turc des affaires étrangères, Ahmet Davutoğlu, a dénoncé cette semaine la « mentalité moyenâgeuse » de la France et les « calculs électoralistes du président Sarkozy ».

La diplomatie turque ne veut pas, pour le moment, parler de sanctions, évoquant seulement un éventuel rappel de l'ambassadeur à Paris pour consultations, « une mesure de routine ». S'il était adopté par les députés, le texte devrait encore passer devant le Sénat, qui avait rejeté une proposition de loi similaire, en mai, ainsi que le souhaitait l'Élysée. Comme,

depuis, le Sénat a changé de majorité, le résultat du vote pourrait être différent. Tous les leviers de pression se mettent en place. L'association patronale Tüsiad et l'Union des chambres de commerce et d'industrie (TOBB) ont envoyé une délégation à Paris pour y rencontrer des représentants du Medef. En 2006, après le vote du texte en première lecture à l'Assemblée nationale, la Turquie avait exclu les entreprises françaises de marchés publics et écarté GDF d'une participation au projet de gazoduc Nabucco.

Tabou historique

Depuis l'adoption par la France, en 2001, d'une loi reconnaissant le génocide arménien de 1915, la question s'invite régulièrement dans les relations franco-turques. « Malheureusement, à chaque fois que la France entre en campagne électorale, ce type d'attitude se manifeste de nouveau », déplore Volkan Bozkir, président de la commission des affaires étrangères au Parlement, qui conduira un groupe de députés turcs devant arriver lundi 19 décembre à Paris pour deux jours de consultations. Les intérêts économiques – les échanges se montent à 8 milliards d'euros – et la coopération culturelle pour-

raient pâtir de cette situation, prévient ce député du parti au pouvoir AKP. « Ce sujet doit être laissé aux historiens et ne peut pas être jugé par les parlements », estime Yusuf Halaçoğlu, élu du parti nationaliste MHP et ancien directeur de l'institut d'histoire turque, qui a élaboré la version officielle de l'État turc sur la tragédie de 1915.

La délégation turque représentera « un Parlement à l'unisson », selon Osman Koçotürk, député du parti kémaliste CHP et ex-ambassadeur turc en France. Mais les députés du parti kurde BDP, favorables à une reconnaissance du génocide arménien, ont affirmé ne pas avoir été invités à y participer.

Vendredi, une cinquantaine de militants nationalistes du Comité Talaat Pacha, du nom du ministre de l'intérieur qui organisa à l'époque la déportation des Arméniens, ont manifesté devant l'ambassade de France à Ankara.

Plus que l'hostilité, cette initiative provoque l'incompréhension en Turquie. Et les historiens et les intellectuels qui se sont employés ces dernières années à déverrouiller timidement le tabou historique du génocide de 1915 craignent une poussée de fièvre contre-productive. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Le génocide arménien toujours réfuté par Ankara

24 avril 1915 Des centaines de notables arméniens d'Istanbul sont arrêtés et déportés. Dans les mois qui suivent, entre 1 et 1,5 million d'Arméniens de l'Empire ottoman (soit les deux tiers de la population) sont tués ou expédiés depuis les provinces occidentales et orientales de l'actuelle Turquie vers les déserts de Syrie.

« Massacres réciproques » La Turquie reconnaît des « massacres réciproques » ayant fait plusieurs centaines de milliers de victimes turques et arméniennes, mais réfute la qualification de génocide. Une vingtaine de pays, dont la France, et le Parlement européen ont légiféré pour reconnaître le génocide arménien.

LE FIGARO 21 décembre 2011

Sarkozy, la promesse d'Erevan

CHARLES JAIGU

LE 7 OCTOBRE dernier, à Erevan (Arménie), lors d'une conférence de presse avec son homologue Serge Sarkissian, Nicolas Sarkozy avait fait une mise au point pesée au mot près sur les conséquences de toute entreprise de négation du génocide arménien sur le sol français.

Il se devait d'aller plus loin que son prédécesseur, Jacques Chirac qui, en 2006, avait invité les Turcs à « reconnaître » le génocide. Il se devait aussi de répondre à l'opposition qui, par la voix de François Hollande, avait plaidé pour que le nouveau Sénat, à majorité de gauche, mette au vote la proposition de loi sur la pénalisation du négationnisme, rejeté au début de l'année par l'UMP. Il se devait enfin d'honorer sa promesse de faire voter cette loi, dans les limbes au Sénat depuis 2006.

Sarkozy devait le faire, sans tomber pour autant dans le piège d'une brouille

avec « la grande nation turque » selon son expression. Sans trop heurter nombre de députés et proches conseillers hostiles à une énième loi mémorielle. « Il ne peut pas y avoir de réconciliation durable sur la négation des souffrances » a-t-il expliqué en exhortant la Turquie à un « gigantesque pas en avant ». « Il ne revient pas à la France de poser un ultimatum à qui que ce soit, (...) mais enfin, le temps n'est pas infini, 1915-2011, il me semble que pour la réflexion, c'est suffisant », avait prévenu le chef de l'État, en ajoutant, pour la première fois explicitement, que si la Turquie ne faisait pas ce « geste de paix » il envisagerait de proposer l'adoption d'un texte de loi réprimant spécifiquement la négation du gé-



Nicolas Sarkozy avec le président arménien, en octobre 2011, à Erevan. REUTERS

nocide arménien. Si la forme se voulait respectueuse, il s'agissait bien, sur le fond, d'une injonction. Sans surprise, Ankara a dénoncé une posture « électorale ». Finalement, Sarkozy a tenu la promesse faite à Erevan.

Avec ce geste, Sarkozy reconquiert le cœur des Arméniens de France qui avaient voté pour lui en 2007, au moment où Hollande était sur le point de lui griller la politesse. Il assume aussi un rapport de forces avec le colérique Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Le président français sait bien que le PS n'osera pas se prononcer clairement

contre l'adhésion de la Turquie à l'Europe. Il se relégitime par ce geste à l'égard des électeurs de la droite et du centre qui ont toujours refusé l'entrée d'un pays fort de 80 millions de musulmans. ■

L'Irak plonge dans une profonde crise politique

Alors que le dernier convoi américain a quitté le pays, rien ne va plus entre le premier ministre et les sunnites d'Irak.

FATMA KIZILBOGA
BAGDAD

MOYEN-ORIENT Hier à l'aube, le dernier convoi militaire américain a quitté l'Irak en traversant la frontière koweïtienne située au sud du pays. Les quelque 500 GI à bord de 120 véhicules blindés y ont rejoint Camp Virginia, ultime halte, avant d'être rapatriés aux États-Unis. Une sortie de scène presque sur la pointe des pieds, par l'une des bases militaires d'où avait été organisée en grande pompe l'invasion en 2003. Une page se tourne pour l'Irak, clôturant le chapitre d'une guerre de près de neuf ans.

Un virage politique que les responsables irakiens amorcent de manière périlleuse. Samedi, Irakia, principal bloc de la coalition à majorité sunnite, annonçait son boycott du Parlement. Le groupe parlementaire, dirigé par l'ancien premier ministre Iyad Allaoui dressait un violent réquisitoire contre le chef du gouvernement, Nouri al-Maliki accusé de mener une « politique de marginalisation, usant de détentions abusives et d'une politisation du système judiciaire ».

Motion de défiance

Cette réaction a été déclenchée par la fuite de rapports sécuritaires laissant entendre l'émission d'un mandat d'arrêt contre le vice-président sunnite, Tareq al-Hachémi, soupçonné par la majorité chiite de soutenir des activités terroristes, après l'explosion le mois dernier d'une bombe sur le parking du Parlement situé dans la zone internationale, quartier ultraprotégé de Bagdad.

Des allégations non confirmées par les autorités, mais qui alimentent les craintes d'hommes politiques sunnites selon lesquelles al-Maliki concentrerait en catimini tous les pouvoirs entre ses mains, dans le but d'évincer ses adversaires.

À ces critiques, le premier ministre

irakien a réagi avec virulence, en proposant hier au parlement une motion de défiance à l'encontre du vice-premier ministre, Saleh al-Moutlak, un sunnite accusé dans le passé d'appartenir au parti Baas, l'ancien parti de Saddam Hussein, aujourd'hui interdit en Irak. Dans une interview accordée à la chaîne américaine CNN, al-Moutlak affirmait que les États-Unis laissent l'Irak « aux mains d'un dictateur qui ignore le partage du pouvoir, qui contrôle les forces de



Les États-Unis laissent l'Irak « aux mains d'un dictateur qui ignore le partage du pouvoir »

SALEH AL-MOUTLAK,
VICE-PREMIER MINISTRE

sécurité du pays et qui a arrêté ces dernières semaines des centaines de personnes ». Il faisait référence à l'absence de nomination à la tête des principaux ministres en charge de la sécurité. Des fonctions assurées par le premier ministre en personne depuis la difficile formation du gouvernement, il y a un an.

Autre élément déclencheur de cette crise, la détention en octobre de centaines de baasistes présumés contre lesquels al-Maliki a juré de résister. Au lendemain du retrait des

troupes américaines, la communauté sunnite craint désormais d'être persécutée par un pouvoir chiite proche de Téhéran.

Risque d'éclatement

Une politique de répression qui pousse les provinces sunnites à demander leur autonomie, à l'instar des Kurdes installés dans le nord du pays. Longtemps considérés comme les principaux défenseurs d'un pouvoir central, les sun-

nites sont aujourd'hui accusés par les chiïtes de conduire l'Irak vers l'éclatement. Des tensions qui font craindre une intensification des violences intercommunautaires, dans un pays où les violences quotidiennes persistent. Dernier exemple en date, la province de Diyala située à l'est de Bagdad qui déclarait la semaine dernière son intention de demander l'autonomie régionale comme l'autorise la Constitution irakienne.

La réaction des milices ne s'est pas fait attendre. Elles ont encerclé vendredi le siège du Conseil provincial et ont mis à feu la maison du gouverneur.

Même si certains parlent d'opportunisme politique et si d'autres perçoivent les préludes d'une exacerbation du conflit intercommunautaire, il est une certitude : la crise politique qui secoue l'Irak inquiète la population, déjà marquée par des années d'instabilité. ■

770
milliards de dollars
le budget alloué
aux opérations en
Irak par le Pentagone
depuis 2003



Des soldats américains laissent éclater leur joie de retour de leur dernière patrouille, vendredi, aux alentours de Nassiriya. LUCAS JACKSON/AFP

Les Etats-Unis quittent un Irak en pleine crise politique

Par Catherine Gouëset

Alors que se retirent les troupes américaines, le pays est proie à l'instabilité. Et un mandat d'arrêt a été lancé lundi à l'encontre du vice-président Tarek al Hachemi.

L'Irak sera un modèle de démocratie pour le Proche-Orient, avaient promis les néo-conservateurs américains, quand ils préparaient la guerre il y a neuf ans. On est bien loin du compte. Alors que les derniers soldats américains -il restera un millier de militaires pour assurer la formation de l'armée irakienne et quelque 16 000 employés à l'ambassade, la plus importante au monde- ont quitté le pays dimanche, la crise politique bat son plein à Bagdad.

Un mandat d'arrêt a été lancé lundi à l'encontre du vice-président Tarek al Hachemi, soupçonné d'avoir trempé dans la préparation d'attentats contre le Parlement. Et le Premier ministre Nouri al Maliki réclame la tête du vice-Premier ministre Saleh Moutlak, qui l'avait traité à la télévision de "dictateur pire que Saddam Hussein".

Maliki accusé de vouloir concentrer tous les pouvoirs

Dans le même temps, le bloc laïque Iraquiya, de l'ancien Premier ministre Iyad



Le dirigeant kurde irakien Massoud Barzani a appelé à une réunion d'urgence pour éviter l'effondrement du processus politique en Irak (afp.com/Safin Hamed)

Allaoui - dont sont membres Tarek al Hachemi et Saleh Moutlak, tous deux sunnites-, a annoncé lundi qu'il allait boycotter le gouvernement, deux jours après avoir suspendu sa participation aux travaux du Parlement. Iraquiya critique violemment la façon dont Nouri al Maliki monopolise le pouvoir.

Iraquiya a dressé samedi un violent réquisitoire contre le Premier ministre Maliki: "Nous refusons la politique consistant à agir en ignorant les autres partis politiques, la politisation de la justice, l'exercice solitaire du pouvoir, la violation de la loi". "Cette manière d'agir pousse les gens à vouloir se débarrasser de la main de fer du pouvoir central, d'autant que la Constitution les y autorise", poursuit Iraquiya en faisant allusion aux récents votes en faveur de l'autonomie des provinces à majorité

sunnite d'Anbar, Salaheddine et Diyala.

L'unité du pays ébranlée

L'unité du pays est en effet fragilisée par le renforcement de l'autonomie des Kurdes et les revendications des potentats locaux: "Le gouvernement central est le fruit d'un compromis entre régions", explique Pierre-Jean Luizard, spécialiste de l'Irak au Monde. Chacun "fait passer les enjeux locaux avant les enjeux nationaux au sein même de l'agence où il siège." Les contrats signés par le gouvernement de la région autonome kurde avec Exxon, sans l'aval du gouvernement de Bagdad, ont ainsi provoqué un tollé dans la classe politique irakienne, mais celle-ci semble impuissante à s'y opposer.

Divisions sectaires

La crise renforce également les divisions sectaires déjà exacerbées depuis la guerre: "Bagdad est une ville hérissée de palissades en béton qui séparent les quartiers les uns des autres", témoigne Pierre-Jean Luizard, dans Le Monde des religions. "Avant 2003, très souvent on ne savait pas qui était sunnite et qui était chiite; depuis 2003, c'est quelque chose qui est devenu impossible", ajoute le chercheur, qui explique que cette question gangrène désormais la société irakienne.

Dans ce contexte, un appel de détresse a été lancé lundi soir par le dirigeant kurde irakien Massoud Barzani: "La situation s'achemine vers une crise profonde qui menace notre partenariat politique, c'est pourquoi nous appelons à une réunion d'urgence pour éviter l'effondrement du processus politique", a-t-il plaidé. Sera-t-il entendu? ●

Turquie: une quarantaine de personnes, dont un photographe de l'AFP, arrêtées

AFP

ISTANBUL, 20 décembre 2011 (AFP)

UNE QUARANTAINE DE personnes, dont un photographe de l'AFP, ont été arrêtées mardi lors d'une opération policière menée dans plusieurs villes de Turquie et visant des milieux soupçonnés de collusion avec les rebelles kurdes, selon l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Parmi elles figure un photographe de l'AFP, Mustafa Özer, qui a été arrêté au terme d'une perquisition de plusieurs heures effectuée par la police anti-terroriste à son domicile d'Istanbul, a précisé son avocate, Sibel Tokaoglu.

La police a saisi des CD et des documents et copié des cartes de mémoire informatique appartenant au photographe de l'AFP, a-t-elle ajouté.

Au moins 38 personnes, dont un nombre non précisé de journalistes, ont été arrêtées lors de ces opérations de police visant des personnes soupçonnées de liens avec le KCK (Union des communautés kurdes), a précisé Anatolie.

Le KCK, une organisation clandestine, est soupçonnée d'être la branche urbaine du mouvement armé PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), en lutte depuis 1984 contre le pouvoir central, d'abord pour l'indépendance, puis l'autonomie des régions kurdes de Turquie.

Selon les lois anti-terroristes en Turquie, les suspects peuvent être détenus en garde à vue pendant quatre jours avant d'être présentés devant un juge, qui peut alors décider d'une inculpation et d'un placement en détention dans l'attente d'un procès.

Depuis 2009, 700 personnes, selon le gouvernement, et 3.500 dont des députés et des élus locaux, selon les milieux kurdes, ont été incarcérées sous l'accusation de collusion avec le KCK.

Quelque 70 journalistes et intellectuels ont été arrêtés en Turquie, notamment dans ce dossier visant les milieux kurdes, ce qui a entraîné les critiques et condamnations d'associations de défense des droits de l'Homme, ainsi que de l'Union européenne.

AP Associated Press

Iran's fortunes in post-US Iraq clouded

By ROBERT H. REID | AP – December 16, 2011

CAIRO (AP) — The U.S. military's departure from Iraq opens the door to expanded Iranian influence in the Middle East, though that door could close fast if Iran's closest Arab ally Bashar Assad falls from power in Syria.

That's among the uncertainties looming over the Middle East in the wake of President Barack Obama's decision to remove all U.S. troops by the end of this month, fulfilling a campaign promise to end the unpopular war and abandoning efforts to negotiate an extension of the year-end deadline agreed to by the Bush administration in 2008.

At first glance, that would make Iran the big winner, especially if the U.S. move heralds a tectonic shift of power in the strategic Persian Gulf region as the United States shifts its military focus to East Asia and the Pacific. But the tumult from the Arab Spring, on top of the end of the nearly nine-year Iraq War, has made the rivalry between Iran and the U.S.'s Arab allies even trickier and predictions more cloudy.

No longer will tens of thousands of American troops be stationed along Iran's western border. They are leaving behind an Iraqi government dominated by Shiite Muslim parties beholden to the Iranians, who sheltered them for years when Saddam Hussein and his Sunni-dominated Baath regime were in power.

With the American military presence reduced to a few hundred members of an embassy-based liaison mission, Iran is likely to step up infiltration of Iraq's intelligence services — the key to manipulating Iraq's internal politics — and expand its links to both Shiite and Kurdish politicians, to the alarm of the country's Sunni minority.

As the second most populous country in the Gulf, with some of the world's largest proven petroleum reserves, an avowedly pro-Iranian Iraq would be a game changer in the power struggle between Iran and the U.S.-backed, conservative Gulf states led by Saudi Arabia.

Iran already wielded considerable influence in Iraq even when U.S. troop strength approached 170,000. The U.S.-led invasion of 2003 produced a strange alliance between the Americans and religiously based Shiite parties tied simultaneously to both Washington and Tehran. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite who had been cool toward Iran, has moved closer to the pro-Iranian groups since a political crisis in 2010 nearly cost him his job.

With the American military gone, Tehran's prospects for bolstering those ties in Iraq look bright.

At closer examination, however, the future appears less certain. Much will depend on how the key players — including the United States — maneuver diplomatically through the new environment created by the end of the Iraq War.

"The United States must succeed in limiting and countering Iranian influence in Iraq and in creating Iraqi forces that can defend the

country," wrote analyst Anthony Cordesman of the Center for International and Strategic Studies. "The United States must also restructure a mix of forward-deployed U.S. forces and ties to regional powers that can contain every aspect of Iran's military forces and political ambitions."

Iran's ability to manipulate a post-America Iraq is by no means unlimited, in part due to a flowering of Iraqi nationalism which survived the horrific bloodshed of the Sunni-Shiite sectarian war.

Many ordinary Iraqi Shiites harbor bitter memories of the 1980-1988 war with Iran, when young Shiite soldiers bore the brunt of the casualties. Among the Sunni minority, hostility to Iran runs even deeper, and much of the talk of Iranian domination stems from overblown comments by Sunni politicians seeking to discredit their Shiite political rivals.

"The Iraqis have no desire to be a client state of their Persian neighbor," said Doug Ollivant, senior fellow at the New America Foundation and former director for Iraq on the National Security Council in both the Bush and Obama administrations. "This is a real threat ... but the threat is overstated."

An Iranian strategic victory in Iraq could also be checkmated by a regime change in Syria, where Assad is facing mounting resistance to his family's autocratic 40-year rule.

The fall of the Assad regime would be the biggest blow to Iranian foreign policy since the Iran-Iraq war and would render Tehran's international isolation nearly complete.

In strategic terms, Syria is an even bigger prize for Iran.

Syria is Iran's bridge into Lebanon, a near-client state of Damascus where the militant Shiite movement Hezbollah has flourished for decades with Iranian support, channeled through Syria. Iran would also lose its conduit to the radical Palestinian group Hamas, which is headquartered in Damascus.

With the stakes high and so much still shrouded in uncertainty, the major players in the region are scurrying to retool their political strategies.

Fearing that Iraq will eventually fall into Tehran's orbit, Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners have focused on Syria in hopes of containing Iran's influence. The key to that is to cut the links between Iran and Syria, and to accomplish that, the Gulf states have been at the forefront of moves by the Arab League to impose sanctions against Syria over the killing of protesters.

At the same time, the Saudis are pushing their Gulf partners into bolstering support for Jordan, which also borders Iraq, Egypt and Morocco in hopes of maintaining a strong bloc of Sunni Arab states — some of whom have been shaken by the Arab Spring — in the face of a resurgent Iran.

In the end, all these scenarios will be influenced by what happens in Iraq now that the American troops have gone.

"Tehran will likely react to that power shift by trying to build more influence in Iraq," wrote analyst Paul Salem of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "However, Iranian influence over tomorrow's Baghdad is not a foregone conclusion. Iraqi and Arab nationalism run deep in Iraq, and Iran might find it as hard to dominate Iraq as the Americans did."

The New York Times

December 17, 2011

What Iraqis Think of the American Withdrawal: Kurdish Region

By STEPHEN FARRELL and
BAGHDAD BUREAU

As American forces pulled out of Iraq, we asked Iraqis around the country three questions:

1. Will Iraq be better or worse off after American troops leave?
2. What did the Americans achieve in Iraq?
3. What have they personally lost or gained since the 2003 invasion?

SULAIMANIYA, Kurdish Region

Three Iraqi provinces form the semi-autonomous Kurdish region — Sulaimaniya, Erbil and Dohuk — that now has a de facto border with the rest of Iraq, complete with checkpoints and car searches. The region is more stable than the rest of Iraq because it was under American protection for the last decade of Saddam Hussein's rule following the 1991 Kurdish uprising, and largely escaped the post-2003 violence. It has oil, and ambitions in Kirkuk, both of which have caused political tensions with Baghdad.

Mula Qadr Ali, 57, Office worker

1. America's withdrawal means chaos in

Iraq between the Sunnis and Shiites and Arabs and Kurds, also among the minorities. It will be the worst period of Iraq's history.

2. The best things that America achieved in Iraq were toppling the dictator Saddam Hussein, from whom Iraq had suffering for many decades, improving the living conditions for people and bringing democracy to Iraq. I think America will leave some of its forces in Iraq in order to maintain America's interests in the area.

3. Personally, my economic situation got better.

Ghaeb Baibani, 30, Laborer

1. Iraq will be a country in crisis after the withdrawal because the government is unable to control security and stability for the people. Conflicts are ongoing, so if the United States leaves it will not be in Iraq's interests.

2. We benefited by gaining freedom from the military operation that freed Iraq from the traitor Saddam, as well as other good things. But America will not leave Iraq completely until it gets what it wants.

3. The economic situation is much better in Kurdistan since 2003, as well as security.



Kasha Umeed, 36, Teacher

1. Iraq faces harder times in all areas, security and the economy, after the United States withdrawal and the situation will be worse for a reason that is very clear — Iraq in general has no government.

2. America did not achieve anything for Iraqis, only for itself. America looks after its interests. America will not leave Iraq, it needs a permanent base like the one in Turkey, but the number of troops will be changed.

3. I did not lose anything or gain anything after 2003. Things are still the same for me, with the exception of the improvement in the economy in the region in general.

AKnews

Agency of Kurdistan for News

KBC supports Diyala's demand, Ahrar Bloc cries foul

DIYALA, Decembre 15, 2012 (AKnews)

THE KURDISH BLOCS Coalition pledged its support for Diyala becoming a region on Thursday with the caveat that it does not include the district of Khanaqin which Kurds want to join Kurdistan.

Diyala Provincial Council KBC member Jalil Ibrahim told AKnews: "All the members of the coalition support the establishment of Diyala region on the condition that non of the other districts like Khanaqin join it."

The KBC called on the leaders of political blocs in Baghdad to support Diyala's aspirations and end the tensions that followed the province's announcement.

But the Ahrar Bloc which belongs to the hardline Shiite Sadrist movement raged that turning Diyala Province into an autonomous region is illegal.

The head of the Ahrar Bloc Bahaa al-Araji told AKnews the bid is politically motivated and the Federal Court rejected the demand since the Province includes disputed areas.

Diyala Representative Salim al-Jabbouri in the Iraqi Council of Representatives told AKnews earlier that 29 Provincial Council members, more than half the Council, signed the declaration of the Province's intention to become an administratively independent region.

Article 119 of the Iraqi constitution allows a province to become a region through a referendum requested by one third of the provincial council members or one tenth of the voters.

Over the last two months several provincial councils have declared autonomy or threatened to do so. This glut of schisms is a response to the arrests of more than 615 alleged former members of the Baath Party, especially among Sunni provinces.

The arrests were ordered by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki after he received information from Libyan interim leader Mahmoud Jibril. Libyan rebel forces obtained documents indicating Muammar al-Qaddafi tried to support an attempt of Baath members to overthrow the Iraqi government.

By Mahmoud al-Jabbouri and Mouhammed Tayyeb

Syrians protest a lackluster response from Arab League

BEIRUT

BY NADA BAKRI

Hundreds of thousands of anti-government demonstrators in Syria took to the streets on Friday, driven in part by new impatience with the Arab League over what they viewed as its repeated failure to penalize President Bashar al-Assad's regime over the violent repression of their nine-month-old uprising.

The demonstrations, reported by rights activists and opposition groups, convulsed several regions as Mr. Assad faced what appeared to be an unexpected source of new diplomatic pressure from Russia, one of his most loyal allies. On Thursday, Vitaly Churkin, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations, proposed a surprise Security Council resolution that called on all antagonists in the Syria conflict to stop the violence

and begin negotiations. The resolution, however, does not call for sanctions, and its prospects for passage were unclear.

Activists and opposition groups reported at least 17 people in Syria were killed in violent confrontations with security forces during the Friday protests, including two minors and three women.

Some activists said the street demonstrators were energized by anger over the Arab League's delays in imposing economic sanctions on Mr. Assad's regime, which it had promised nearly three weeks ago. A meeting of Arab League foreign ministers on Syria, which was to take place this weekend in Cairo, was indefinitely postponed on Thursday.

The Kremlin, which has supported the Assad family's grip on power in Syria for decades, has consistently blocked any move by Western countries to impose Security Council sanctions on Syria.

At the same time, it has been difficult

for Russia to ignore the daily reports of killings coming out of the country.

Mr. Churkin, the Russian envoy, said that the draft resolution "considerably strengthens all aspects of the previous text," referring to a resolution drafted by European countries in October that both Russia and China vetoed.

The new resolution called on all Syrian parties to stop violence but said nothing about penalizing Mr. Assad's government. Western officials said they were pleasantly surprised, although they said it would need amendments to gain wider acceptance. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said the United States would study the text carefully and that it would have to be reviewed by the Arab League as well.

Steven Lee Myers contributed reporting from Washington and a New York Times employee from Beirut.

Top Iraqi official accused of running death squad

BAGHDAD

As American forces exit, Baghdad in uproar over charges against key Sunni

BY JACK HEALY

The Iraqi government was thrown into crisis on Monday night as the authorities issued an arrest warrant for the Sunni vice president, accusing him of running a personal death squad that assassinated security officials and government bureaucrats.

The sensational charges against Tariq al-Hashimi, one of the country's most prominent Sunni leaders and a close ally of American officials, threatened to enflame widening sectarian and political conflicts in Iraq just a day after the last American troops rolled into Kuwait.

The accusations were broadcast over Iraqi television, in a half hour of grainy video confessions from three men identified as Mr. Hashimi's bodyguards. They spoke of how they had planted bombs in public squares, driven up to convoys carrying Iraqi officials and opened fire.

Under the direction of Mr. Hashimi's top aides, the men said, they had gunned down convoys carrying Shiite

officials, and had planted roadside bombs in traffic circles and wealthy neighborhoods of Baghdad, then detonated them as their targets drove by. One of the men said Mr. Hashimi had personally handed him an envelope with \$3,000 after one of the attacks.

It was impossible to substantiate any of the accusations aired in the confessions.

An aide in Mr. Hashimi's office said the three men had indeed worked for the vice president, but he denied all of the allegations. The aide said Mr. Hashimi was in the northern region of Kurdistan, meeting with Kurdish officials to defuse the worsening political standoff with Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

Reidar Visser, an analyst of Iraqi politics and editor of the blog historiae.org, called the situation the worst crisis Iraq had faced in five years.

"Any leading Sunni politician seems now to be a target of this campaign by Maliki," Mr. Visser said. "It seems that every Sunni Muslim or secularist is in danger of being labeled either a Baathist or a terrorist."

The past week has yielded a near breakdown of relations between Mr. Maliki, a religious Shiite, and his ad-

versaries in the Iraqiya coalition, a large political bloc that holds about 90 seats in Parliament and is supported by many Sunni Iraqis.

Members of the Iraqiya coalition walked away from Parliament on Saturday, accusing Mr. Maliki of seizing power and thwarting democratic procedures through a wave of politically tinged arrests in recent weeks. The boycott was the culmination of months of political discord, and signaled the near breakdown of relations between two of the country's most powerful political adversaries.

Earlier on Monday, the Iraqi High Court — a body often seen as beholden to Mr. Maliki — announced it was barring Mr. Hashimi from leaving the country. For days before the confessions were aired, several of Mr. Hashimi's bodyguards were detained while state-run television and government surrogates promised to reveal evidence tying Mr. Hashimi to criminal acts.

On Sunday, Mr. Maliki sent a letter to Parliament seeking a no-confidence vote in one of his deputies, a prominent Sunni politician who has also been a vociferous critic.

The U.S. Embassy said Ambassador James F. Jeffrey was in contact with Iraqi officials but declined to comment further.

Iraq: unstable and divided

Reidar Visser

NOORDWIJK, THE NETHERLANDS

When the last remaining American forces withdraw from Iraq at the end of this month, they will be leaving behind a country that is politically unstable, increasingly volatile, and at risk of descending into the sort of sectarian fighting that killed thousands in 2006 and 2007.

Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki has overseen a consolidation of military force, but the core of his government is remarkably unrepresentative: It is made up of mostly pro-Iranian Shiite Islamists. The secular Iraqiya Party, which won a plurality of votes in the March 2010 parliamentary elections, has been marginalized within the cabinet and was not represented when Mr. Maliki visited Washington on Monday.

This Shiite Islamist government bodes ill for the country's future. And unfortunately, it is a direct product of America's misguided thinking about Iraq since the 2003 invasion — an approach that stressed proportional sectarian representation rather than national unity and moderate Islamism.

This flawed policy has been more important in shaping today's Iraq than the size of the original force that occupied the country in 2003, the Abu Ghraib prison-abuse scandal in 2004 or the "surge" of 2007. And it is to blame for the precarious condition in which the United States is leaving Iraq today.

In the 1990s, America envisaged post-Saddam Hussein Iraq as a federation of Arabs and Kurds. At the time, Kurds focused on their own autonomy; Shiite Islamists rejected federalism south of Kurdistan; and many other Shiites explicitly ruled out an Iranian model of government for fear that it might alienate secularists and the Sunni minority.

The fateful change in American thinking came in 2002 as the Bush ad-

ministration was preparing for war. At conferences with exiled Iraqi opposition leaders, Americans argued that new political institutions should reflect Iraq's ethno-sectarian groups proportionally. Crucially, the focus moved beyond the primary Arab-Kurdish cleavage to include notions of separate quotas for Shiites and Sunnis.

When Americans designed the first post-Hussein political institution in July 2003, the Iraqi governing council, the underlying principle was sectarian proportionality. What had formerly been an Arab-Kurdish relationship was transformed into a Sunni-Shiite-Kurdish triangle: Arabs who saw themselves first and foremost as Iraqis suddenly became anomalies.

Remarkably, Iraqis themselves turned against this system. After the violent sectarian conflict in 2006 and 2007, Iraqis rediscovered nationalism. The American surge and growing nationalist criticism of the country's new constitution provided the necessary environment for Mr. Maliki to emerge in 2009 as a national leader who commanded respect across sectarian lines. Some Sunnis even began considering a joint ticket with Mr. Maliki.

But in May 2009, with President Barack Obama now in the White House, Shiite Islamists who had been marginalized by Mr. Maliki in the local elections regrouped in Tehran. Their aim was a purely sectarian Shiite alliance that would ultimately absorb Mr. Maliki as well. The purging of Sunni officials with links to the former government, known as de-Baathification, became their priority.

By this time, however, Washington was blind to what was going on. Instead of appreciating the intense struggle between the cleric Moktada al-Sadr's sectarian Shiite followers, and moderate Shiites who believed in a common Iraqi identity, the Obama administration remained steadfastly focused on the Sunni-Shiite-Kurdish trinity, thereby reinforcing sectarian tensions rather

than helping defuse them.

After faring poorly in the 2010 parliamentary elections, Mr. Maliki switched course and adopted a pan-Shiite sectarian platform to win a second term as prime minister. But Obama administration officials failed to see how Mr. Maliki had changed. Nor did they appreciate the chance they'd had to bring Mr. Maliki back from the sectarian brink through a small but viable coalition with the secular Iraqiya Party — a scenario that could have

Maliki has overseen a consolidation of military force, but his government is remarkably unrepresentative.

provided competent, stable government to Iraqi Arabs and left the Kurds to handle their own affairs.

Instead, an over-size, unwieldy power-sharing government was formed, with Washington's support, in December 2010.

The main reason Mr. Maliki could not offer American forces guarantees for staying in the country beyond 2011 was that his premiership was clinched by pandering to sectarian Shiites. As a result, he has become a hostage to the impulses of pro-Iranian Islamists while most Sunnis and secularists in the government have been marginalized. His current cabinet is simply too big and weak to develop any coherent policies or keep Iranian influence at bay.

By consistently thinking of Mr. Maliki as a Shiite rather than as an Iraqi Arab, American officials overlooked opportunities that once existed in Iraq but are now gone. Thanks to their own flawed policies, the Iraq they are leaving behind is more similar to the desperate and divided country of 2006 than to the optimistic Iraq of early 2009.

REIDAR VISSER, a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, is the author of "A Responsible End? The United States and the Iraqi Transition, 2005-2010."



Criticism over Turkish offer to receive Hashimi, MP

December 25, 2011 / BAGHDAD / Aswat al-Iraq:

INDEPENDENT MP Alia Nsaif criticized Turkish interventions in vice-president Tariq al-Hashimi's case by readiness to receive him.

In a statement issued by her media office, copy received by Aswat al-Iraq, she added "Turkey began negatively intervening in Iraqi internal affairs, which might be affecting bilateral relation between the two countries".

She added that the Turkish invitation to receive Hashimi stirred public uproar.

"Turkey knows clearly the volume of economic, trade and investment relations with Iraq, so it is wrong to venture their future", she added.

Iraqi Interior Ministry disclosed issuing an arrest warrant against Hashimi and broadcasted the confessions of his bodyguards for operating assassination attempts and bombings in 2009.

These political developments come at the time of US forces withdrawal, according to the agreement signed between the two countries at the end of 2008.

○○○

BDP: Raids in KCK probe 'civilian coup'

ISTANBUL - ANKARA

'All those political detentions are being carried out as part of a concept activated not by the judiciary but the government,' says Hasip Kaplan.

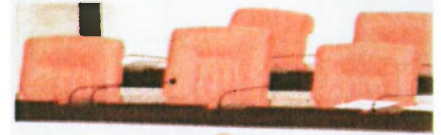
The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) has slammed as a "civilian coup" the latest wave of detentions in the probe into the Kurdish Communities Union (KCK), accusing the government of direct involvement in the process.

"The incidents that happened [yesterday] are clearly a process of a civilian coup," BDP Deputy Group Chairman Hasip Kaplan told a press

conference in Parliament yesterday after about 40 people, among them many journalists from Kurdish media, were detained across Turkey.

The operation aims to "bully and silence free media and dissident press organizations and render them ineffective," he said. "All those political detention operations are being carried out as part of a concept activated not by the judiciary but the government."

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) "is trying to finish the job started by Kenan Evren and the fascist junta," Kaplan said, referring to the general who led the 1980 military coup in Turkey. □



'All those political detentions are being carried out as part of a concept activated not by the judiciary but the government,' says Hasip Kaplan. AA photo

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune DECEMBER 23, 2011

Turkey acts to penalize France over genocide bill

ISTANBUL

BY SEBNEM ARSU

Turkey halted diplomatic consultations and military dealings with France on Thursday after the lower house of the French Parliament approved legislation making it a crime to deny that Turkish forces committed genocide against Armenians in the early 20th century.

"It is impossible for us to remain silent in face of this extremely intentional decision taken on false motives," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in a televised statement. "We halt all kinds of political dialogue with France, cancel bilateral military functions and joint exercises as of now."

The French bill mandates a fine of €45,000, or about \$58,500, and a year in prison for "those who have praised, denied or roughly and publicly played down genocidal crimes, crimes against

humanity and war crimes." It is not expected to be considered by the upper house until after the new year.

That Mr. Erdogan took such pronounced steps even before the bill became law underscores the obstacles facing Turkey's reach for a new international profile and its long-delayed efforts to join the European Union.

More than 15 countries have officially recognized the slaughter of some 1.5 million Armenians in the chaos surrounding World War I and the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire as genocide, and its denial is already a crime in Switzerland and Slovenia. Turkey's own penal code makes affirming the genocide a crime on the ground that it is an insult to Turkish identity.

The French moves toward outlawing denial of the Armenian genocide carries special weight, given the leading role that France has played for the past six years in assessing Turkey's readiness to join the European Union.

Turkish lawmakers joined to denounce the bill and called on France to investigate into its own atrocities in Algeria and Rwanda. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said the bill violated the spirit of the French Revolution and European principles like freedom of speech.

Mr. Erdogan said he had recalled Turkey's ambassador and canceled the annually issued permission for French military planes to use Turkish air space and French naval vessels to enter Turkish

harbors. The move means that French military planes must apply for permission for each flight. Turkey also refused to cooperate with France in joint E.U. projects or take part in a joint economic conference set for January in Paris.

Bernard Valero, the spokesman for the French Foreign Ministry, said France "deplored all the announcements" made by Mr. Erdogan and "regretted" the recall of the Turkish ambassador from Paris. Mr. Valero emphasized the need for cooperation on a range of issues including the unrest in Syria, the future of Afghanistan and Iran's nuclear aspirations.

Turkish-French relations began taking a turn for the worse after President Nicolas Sarkozy took office in 2007. Turkish officials see political motives in his increasingly nationalist stance against Turkish accession to the European Union and his support for the genocide denial law, even though Mr. Sarkozy's opposition to full membership for Turkey is shared broadly across the French political spectrum. Mr. Erdogan said, "These irrational steps by Sarkozy, based on vote calculations, will harm French-Turkish relations."

As French lawmakers debated the bill, they particularly denounced Turkish lobbying against it, including efforts by business groups to emphasize the trade issues. Turkish figures show that bilateral trade is valued at €12 billion.

Iraq's power-sharing government in crisis

BAGHDAD

Prime minister threatens to abandon deal just days after last U.S. troops exit

BY TIM ARANGO AND YASIR GHAZI

Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of Iraq threatened Wednesday to abandon a U.S.-backed power-sharing government created a year ago, throwing the country's fragile democracy into further turmoil just days after the departure of American troops.

In a nearly 90-minute news conference aired on tape-delay on state television, Mr. Maliki defied his rivals and pushed back on all fronts in Iraq's burgeoning political crisis, threatening to release investigatory files that he claimed show his opponents have been involved in terrorism.

He told Kurdish leaders that there would be "problems" if they did not turn over Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, who fled to the semiautonomous Kurdish region in recent days to escape an arrest warrant on charges that he ran a death squad responsible for assassinations and bombings.

Mr. Maliki, a Shiite, also issued a warning to his rivals from Iraqiya, the largely Sunni bloc of lawmakers that includes Mr. Hashemi: If it does not end its boycott of Parliament and the Council of Ministers, he will move to form a majority government that would, in essence, exclude them from power.

If Iraqiya's ministers do not show up at future sessions, he said, "we will appoint replacements."

The news conference was the first time the nation had heard directly from its prime minister since the controversy erupted several days ago.

The crisis was triggered when the Shiite-dominated government issued its arrest warrant for Mr. Hashemi, the top Sunni politician, on terrorism charges. Mr. Maliki did offer a small attempt to defuse tensions by calling for a conference of Iraq's political elite to discuss the matter. If the issue cannot be resolved, he said, he will "move toward forming a majority government."

But his efforts at conciliation seemed to end there.

Public life in Iraq is one of perpetual crisis, but some analysts say this is the worst political instability here in years.

It is certainly the gravest predicament for the country's young democracy in the period since it took nearly eight months to form a government after last year's parliamentary elections.

In calling for the Kurds to turn over Mr. Hashemi, Mr. Maliki risked alienating a powerful minority that operates in its own semiautonomous region and whose support he would need to form a new government without the support of the Sunni-dominated Iraqiya. While in the north, Mr. Hashemi is largely out of reach of Mr. Maliki's security forces, and from there could easily flee the country.

"We demand the Kurdistan region

hand him over, and to bear the responsibility and do their duty," Mr. Maliki said. "If he escapes, this will create problems."

Iraq now faces myriad political problems that in sum could derail the national unity government, which American diplomats helped craft last year and which is supposed to include meaningful roles for Iraq's three major factions — Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds. This, in turn, raises fears of a return to rampant sectarian and factional violence — although so far it appears that the infighting has remained confined to the arena of politics.

There has been no recent spike in attacks. But the latest problems have laid bare the sectarian fissures still pervasive in society despite ongoing reconciliation efforts, encouraged by American diplomats, in the years since a sectarian civil war nearly tore the country apart.

The government's actions against Mr. Hashemi — regardless of the veracity of the allegations — are seen by many Sunnis through a sectarian lens.

The minority Sunni community, which had dominated Iraq's affairs under Saddam Hussein, feels increasingly marginalized.

Mr. Maliki has also recently sought a vote of no confidence from Parliament

against another Sunni leader, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq, for calling Mr. Maliki a "dictator" in a television interview.

"Although Maliki is going after political rivals, his impulsive actions have the same consequences to Iraq's stability as if he were targeting the Sunni community as a whole," said Ramzy Mardini, an analyst at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington. "The

Iraqiya bloc is simultaneously Maliki's main political rival and represents the Sunni community."

All of this comes just after the final withdrawal of American troops over the weekend, after nearly nine years of war that began with the 2003 invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated government. The departure of the Americans left behind a country that President Barack Obama described as "stable and self-reliant."

As the last U.S. military convoy departed Sunday morning, the crisis was already brewing. Iraqiya began a boycott of Parliament on Saturday, as rumors swirled in Baghdad that a tank had been placed outside Mr. Hashemi's compound in the Green Zone, the fortified power center in the capital, and that some of Mr. Hashemi's guards had been arrested.

By Sunday evening Mr. Hashemi was briefly barred from boarding a flight to the Kurdish north. On Monday night state television was playing taped confessions by Mr. Hashemi's guards, who said they had carried out killings and bombings on the vice president's orders. Mr. Hashemi, in a news conference Tuesday, angrily denied the charges and said they were fabricated.

"The accusations have not been proven, so the accused is innocent until proven guilty," Mr. Hashemi said at the news conference in Erbil, in the Kurdish region in northern Iraq, where he is beyond the reach of the government's security forces. "I swear by God I didn't do this disobedience against Iraqi blood, and I would never do this."

Many Iraqis feared the consequences of a power vacuum left in the wake of the departing American troops, but most did not anticipate the country's precarious politics to disintegrate so quickly.

"I was expecting this to happen, but not so soon," said Saif Abdul Salaam, a barber in Adhamiya, a largely Sunni neighborhood in Baghdad. "The Sunnis are angry, but they can't do anything because they don't control anything."

Irak: le Premier ministre demande aux Kurdes de remettre le vice-président à la justice



Le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki a appelé mercredi le Kurdistan autonome à remettre à la justice le vice-président Tarek al-Hachémi, sous le coup d'un mandat d'arrêt pour complot, sur fond de crise politique opposant chiïtes et sunnites.

Un an exactement après le vote de confiance du Parlement au gouvernement d'union nationale, M. Maliki a également menacé de remplacer les ministres du bloc parlementaire laïque Iraqiya, soutenu par les sunnites, si ce dernier continuait de boycotter le gouvernement.

Cette crise intervient quelques jours après que les derniers soldats américains ont quitté le pays, laissant derrière eux un Irak "souverain, stable, autosuffisant, avec un gouvernement représentatif qui a été élu par son peuple", selon les termes du président américain Barack Obama.

Les Etats-Unis ont appelé au calme, mais après avoir invité au dialogue ces derniers jours, M. Maliki s'est montré particulièrement ferme mercredi lors d'une conférence de presse.

"Les ministres n'ont pas le droit de suspendre leur participation au gouvernement parce qu'ils seront considérés comme démissionnaires", a-t-il déclaré à propos des neuf ministres d'Iraqiya.

Deuxième groupe parlementaire avec 82 députés, derrière la coalition chiïte de l'Alliance nationale (159 députés), Iraqiya a annoncé lundi un boycott du gouvernement, deux jours après avoir suspendu sa partici-

ipation aux travaux du Parlement, en dénonçant la "dictature" de M. Maliki.

"S'ils ne reviennent pas, nous nommerons des remplaçants", a menacé le Premier ministre, qui a déjà réclamé le limogeage de Saleh Moutlak, vice-Premier ministre du même bloc, parce que ce dernier l'a qualifié de "dictateur pire que Saddam Hussein". Le Parlement doit se pencher sur cette demande le 3 janvier.

Auparavant, M. Maliki avait demandé au gouvernement du Kurdistan irakien de "prendre ses responsabilités" et de remettre à la justice M. Hachémi, qui se trouve actuellement à Erbil, capitale de cette région autonome.

"Nous n'acceptons aucune interférence dans la justice irakienne", a insisté M. Maliki.

Le Premier ministre a aussi refusé que des représentants de la Ligue arabe suivent l'enquête et assistent à tous les interrogatoires, comme le réclame M. Hachémi: "Il s'agit d'une affaire criminelle, il n'y a nul besoin que la Ligue arabe ou le monde y jouent un rôle".

Selon des responsables de sécurité, au moins 13 gardes du corps du vice-président ont été arrêtés ces dernières semaines, et plusieurs ont avoué avoir organisé et commis des attentats, avec des fonds et un soutien du vice-président.

M. Hachémi a rejeté toutes les accusations et son bureau a assuré que seuls trois gardes du corps avaient

été arrêtés et que leurs aveux étaient montés de toutes pièces.

Lundi, le président du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, avait appelé à "une réunion d'urgence" des forces politiques pour éviter une "crise profonde". En novembre 2010, il avait déjà accueilli une réunion décisive qui avait permis la mise en place du gouvernement d'union nationale après neuf mois d'impasse.

Selon la Maison Blanche, le vice-président américain, Joe Biden, s'est entretenu mardi par téléphone avec M. Maliki, l'appelant à régler dans le dialogue cette crise qui menace la trêve fragile établie il y a un an entre les différentes forces politiques du pays.

Le chef du Parlement, le sunnite Ossama al-Noujaifi, également membre d'Iraqiya, a affirmé dans un communiqué que M. Biden lui avait dit que "certaines personnes essaient de déclencher des violences confessionnelles au lendemain du départ des forces américaines".

Il a ensuite rencontré l'ambassadeur d'Iran à Bagdad, alors que Washington a à plusieurs reprises accusé Téhéran de s'ingérer dans les affaires politiques de l'Irak.

Des responsables américains ont confirmé que David Petraeus, actuel directeur de la CIA et ancien commandant militaire en Irak, s'était rendu à Bagdad ces derniers jours. Mais ils ont assuré qu'il s'agissait d'une visite prévue de longue date et qu'il n'avait pas eu de discussions politiques.

□ □ □

L'armée turque a tué 21 activistes kurdes en cinq jours

Ece Toskabay-Reuters

L'armée turque a tué depuis samedi 21 activistes kurdes, dont un commandant régional, lors d'une opération

dans le sud-est du pays, ont dit mercredi des responsables.

L'opération, entrée dans son cinquième jour, se poursuit, ont ajouté des responsables des forces de sécurité. Le vice-Premier ministre Besir Atalay a annoncé lundi qu'il n'y aurait pas de trêve des opérations militaires cet hiver, contrairement à l'habitude.

L'armée a lancé l'opération, impliquant quelque 3.000 soldats turcs soutenus par des hélicoptères d'attaque et des avions de combat, après avoir identifié un groupe de 30 combattants du PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan) à la frontière entre les provinces d'Elazik et Diyarbakir.



Le PKK, qui dispose de bases arrières dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien, a multiplié les attaques cet été contre les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie, à majorité kurde.

Irak : attaques meurtrières multiples à Bagdad, 70 morts

EURONEWS

Bagdad frappé ce jeudi par une série d'attentats meurtriers.

Dans ce qui semble être des attaques coordonnées une douzaine de bombes ont explosé. Le bilan se monte à près de 70 morts et quelque 200 blessés.

Il s'agit des premiers attentats depuis qu'a éclaté une importante crise politique en Irak qui laisse craindre le retour de violences confessionnelles.

"Ceux qui dirigent ce pays devraient s'asseoir autour d'une table et résoudre le problème politique. Car les attentats ne résolvent pas grand chose", dit ce



Baghdadi.

L'Irak est partagée entre trois ethnies, sunnites, chiites et kurdes. Mais la trêve politique, laborieusement mise sur pied il y a un an est plus fragile que

jamais.

Ainsi, le vice-président sunnite Tarek Hachémi est accusé d'avoir financé et soutenu des attentats, accusations qu'il rejette.

Quant au Premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki, il menace de cesser de partager le pouvoir au sein du gouvernement d'union nationale.

Cette crise politique survient quelques jours après le départ du pays des derniers soldats américains.

La Maison Blanche a condamné les attentats et s'attend à surveiller de près l'évolution de la situation politique.

Le département d'Etat américain a appelé les dirigeants irakiens à "agir rapidement pour résoudre leurs différends" et à s'unir. □

SYRIE

L'ESCALADE SANGLANTE

Sourd aux admonestations de la communauté internationale, le régime de Bachar al-Assad intensifie sa sanglante répression. 123 civils auraient été tués mardi, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH), ce qui en fait une des journées les plus meurtrières depuis le début des révoltes, en mars. Parmi les victimes,



Manifestation à Homs, en Syrie.

111 auraient été massacrées dans le village de Kafroueid, qu'elles tentaient de fuir. Alors que 22 nouvelles personnes ont été tuées hier, l'ONU fait état de plus de 5 000 morts liés aux événements.

Dénonçant «une tuerie d'une ampleur sans précédent», Paris a appelé hier à «faire cesser cette spirale meurtrière dans laquelle Bachar al-Assad entraîne chaque jour davantage son peuple». La France a appelé la Russie à accélérer le rythme sur son projet de résolution à l'ONU condamnant les violences «de toutes les parties» en Syrie. •

Un « printemps kurde » inachevé

La jeunesse rejette les deux partis qui se partagent le pouvoir dans la région autonome depuis 1991

Reportage

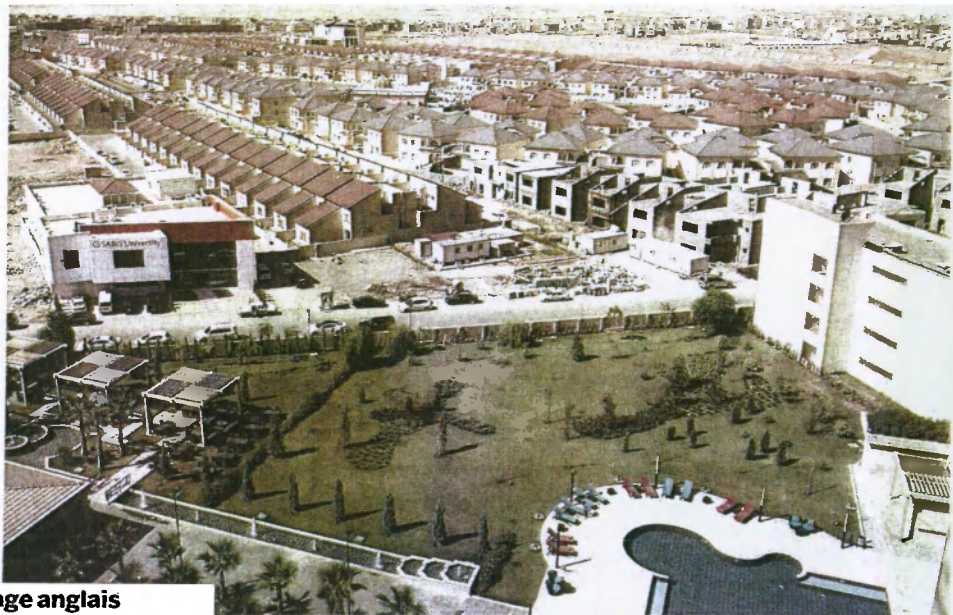
Erbil (Kurdistan irakien)
Envoyée spéciale

Attablé à la cafétéria d'un des centres commerciaux qui poussent ici comme des champignons, l'écrivain Farhad Pirbal raconte comment, dans son enfance, il aimait venir à cet endroit, « à quarante minutes de marche de la maison, au pied de la citadelle, pour chasser scorpions et serpents »...

Le développement fulgurant d'Erbil, devenue capitale de la « Région » quasi indépendante, des 5 à 6 millions de Kurdes d'Irak, vient de la sécurité qu'ils ont su y préserver quand le reste du pays plongeait dans le chaos, après 2003. L'argent a afflué dans cet « autre Irak », qui a, par exemple, inauguré, début 2011, une des plus longues pistes d'atterrissage du monde, sur son aéroport international d'Erbil. Et qui a produit au moins « 19 milliardaires en dollars » locaux, selon un aveu du président kurde de l'Irak, Jalal Talabani, en visite à Paris en 2007.

Le problème est que c'est son fils, ainsi que celui de son alter ego Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du Kurdistan, qui figurent en tête, et de loin, de la liste des milliardaires.

Le problème également, c'est que les deux partis qui dirigent ces éternels rivaux, le Parti Démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani, et l'Union Patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) de Jalal



Le village anglais et le village italien d'Erbil, exemples de développement résidentiel voulu par le gouvernement régional kurde.

PHOTOS TISO PICCIONI/INVISION/REA

Talabani – ce dernier est toutefois en perte de vitesse –, se partagent encore tous les pouvoirs dans la région autonome. Non sans légitimité : leurs familles ont dirigé les soulèvements nationalistes des *peshmegas* – combattants kurdes – contre les Britanniques puis contre Saddam Hussein, avant la protection aérienne de la zone kurde en 1991, sous couvert de l'ONU, qui a entraîné le retrait de l'armée irakienne.

Mais après vingt ans de quasi-indépendance, et à l'heure où les dynasties héréditaires sont contestées voire balayées dans le monde arabe, le Kurdistan irakien, pourtant plus démocratique que la plupart des régimes de la région, n'a pas échappé à un « printemps kurde ».

Le 17 février 2011, à Souleimaniye, la « capitale culturelle », limitrophe de l'Iran et fief de l'UPK, une manifestation de jeunes en solidarité avec les Tunisiens et les Egyptiens dégénère. La colère enfle les 19 et 20 février, mais les forces de sécurité répriment. Le mouvement s'esouffle peu à peu, sans vraiment gagner les cités d'Erbil et de Dohouk (à la frontière turque), plus traditionalistes et fiefs du PDK. Il y aura quand même, fin avril, 12 morts et un millier de blessés.

Les jeunes voulaient le départ du gouvernement et la fin de la corruption. Mais sans représentation politique, ils ont laissé les négociations avec le pouvoir aux partis d'opposition : Goran (« le changement »), un parti libéral laïc issu d'une scission de l'UPK, et deux formations islamistes, l'Union islamique du Kurdistan (KIU), avatar local des Frères musulmans, et le Groupe islamique, fondé par un ancien hôte des prisons pour « terroristes » américaines.

Aux législatives de 2009, Goran a obtenu 25 sièges sur 111, la KIU six et le Groupe quatre. Si les

élections avaient été honnêtes, Goran aurait eu la majorité, assure la vox populi. Et si Goran n'avait pas surgi avant le scrutin, les islamistes l'auraient emporté, supposent certains analystes. Pour d'autres, la majorité des Kurdes, nationalistes avant tout, seraient immunisés contre tout islamisme radical, perçu comme fondamentalement « arabe ».

Mais sur le campus de l'université Salaheddin d'Erbil – publique, elle accueille les étudiants qui ne peuvent se payer les nouveaux établissements américains, turcs ou autres –, 90 % des jeunes filles portent de légers foulards. « Célé a commencé il y a deux ans (...) les garçons veulent maintenant des épouses ayant l'air sage », explique Peyman, jeune assistant du département de français.

Un « retour » de l'islam qui, ici comme ailleurs, traduit aussi un besoin de justice, face à l'envolée de la corruption et du consumérisme des couches aisées. Il touche facilement une jeunesse, notamment rurale, dont plus de la moitié, ici, a moins de 20 ans, et qui risque de ne plus être cooptée dans les réseaux de patronage des partis. Car le PDK et l'UPK ont la haute main sur les nominations des fonctionnaires de la région autonome, à commencer par les anciens et nouveaux *peshmegas*, ses « forces de défense », en passant par les innombrables gardes dont se

Une nation sans Etat

1920 Le traité de Sèvres prévoit l'instauration d'un Etat kurde sur les ruines de l'Empire ottoman.

11 mars 1974 Autonomie relative pour le Kurdistan irakien.

Février-septembre 1988 L'opération Anfal, menée par l'armée irakienne, fait 182 000 victimes civiles kurdes.

1991 Le soulèvement kurde, postérieur à la fin de la guerre du Koweït, est réprimé par l'armée irakienne. L'armée américaine

intervient et impose une zone d'interdiction aérienne. Début de l'autonomie de fait.

1992 Création de deux régions autonomes, autour d'Erbil sous la direction du PDK et autour de Souleimaniye (UPK).

6 avril 2005 Election de Jalal Talabani, dirigeant de l'UPK, comme président de la République irakienne.

7 mai 2006 Instauration d'un gouvernement régional du Kurdistan.

dotent les élites.

Le « miracle économique » du Kurdistan reste fragile et dépendant de ses voisins turcs, syriens et iraniens

Le système tient car le Kurdistan se voit octroyer 17% du budget fédéral de l'Irak, quelque 10 milliards de dollars (7,65 milliards d'euros), somme qui risque d'être longtemps bien supérieure aux revenus que la région autonome pourra tirer de ses propres exportations de pétrole – et qui rend peu probable une prochaine déclaration formelle d'indépendance, malgré les aspirations massives en ce sens.

A moins que l'Irak ne sombre à nouveau dans le chaos. Ce que les Kurdes d'Irak craignent moins qu'un renforcement du pouvoir central de Bagdad, qui pourrait remettre en question leurs acquis vieux de 20 ans. Et rallumer les conflits sur les zones contestées et riches en pétrole, autour de Mossoul ou de Kirkouk, évacuées, au grand regret des Kurdes, par leurs protecteurs américains, comme le reste de l'Irak.

Le « miracle économique » du Kurdistan reste donc fragile, et toujours dépendant de ses voisins turcs, syriens et iraniens qui craignent un effet domino indépendantiste sur leurs propres minorités kurdes. Ils pourraient bloquer des frontières vitales pour la région autonome, qui doit toujours importer 60% de ses besoins alimentaires et pratiquement tous ceux en matériaux et équipements de construction. Un secteur hypertrophié, dénonce l'opposition, aux dépens de l'agriculture, la santé, l'éducation...

Les frustrations enflent en conséquence, même si le niveau de vie a progressé. « C'est parce qu'ils ont moins faim que les gens osent s'élever aujourd'hui contre leurs maîtres », commente Daoud Bagishani, un vétéran des combats de libération kurdes qui dénonce la « trahison » de ses anciens compagnons, « engoncés dans leurs châteaux, leurs 4x4 et leurs monopoles ».

Après s'être livrés une guerre entre 1994 et 1996, le PDK et l'UPK ont conclu un accord laissant chacun maître dans sa région. Ce système perdure, malgré l'unification de certaines institutions en 2005. Mais les ministères sensibles (pesh-

mergas, services secrets, finances) restent sous le contrôle des deux partis. La démocratisation est donc factice. Après les manifestations, le président Barzani l'a reconnu, en promettant réformes et lutte contre la corruption.

« Nous avons déjà doublé les salaires des policiers et découvert que 6 000 gardes sont employés abusivement », a plaidé Suzanne Shihab, députée du PDK, lors d'un récent débat télévisé. « Vous appelez ça des réformes ? Cessez plutôt de retarder les élections régionales ! », a répliqué Adnan Othman, député de Goran.

Ils commentaient les désordres qui ont secoué le Kurdistan irakien, le 2 décembre. Ce vendredi-là, à la sortie d'une mosquée, des jeunes saccagent un « salon de massage » dans la ville de Zakho, à la frontière turque. Dans les heures qui suivent, des foules brûlent et pillent magasins et hôtels vendant de l'alcool qui appartiennent à des chrétiens ou à des yézidis, une minorité religieuse kurde.

Dans la nuit, en représailles, des « inconnus », sans doute du PDK, brûlent les locaux et les bureaux des médias du KIU à Zakho et à Dohouk. Le parti islamiste accuse le PDK de provocations : certains, avance-t-il, auraient voulu montrer aux Américains « le vrai visage des islamistes modérés » qu'on leur reproche de soutenir. Le PDK, lui, dénonce « ceux qui veulent nuire à l'expérience d'ouverture du Kurdistan », notamment vis-à-vis de ses minorités, dotées de tous les droits et reconnaissances.

« Sans le président Barzani, nous ne pourrions pas vivre parmi ces musulmans ! », assène le yézidi Cheikh Shamo, propriétaire d'un des hôtels attaqués. L'écrivain Farhad Pirbal est bien d'accord, lui que la protection présidentielle a sauvé d'une condamnation pour écrits jugés contraires aux « bonnes mœurs ». Les jeunes émeutiers arrêtés à Zakho ne devraient pas jouir d'un tel privilège. ■

SOPHIE SHIHAB

La vieille citadelle d'Erbil, qui surplombe la ville moderne, attire de plus en plus de touristes étrangers, mais également irakiens, venus des quatre coins du pays.



Un quartier de maisons fraîchement construites à Souleimaniye, berceau culturel

du Kurdistan irakien, où le marché de l'immobilier s'envole.



Dans un centre commercial d'Erbil. La capitale du Kurdistan irakien, qui compte

plus d'un million d'habitants, connaît un fort dynamisme économique.



Le Monde
23 décembre 2011

Les GI partis, l'Irak menace de sombrer à nouveau

Bagdad a été frappée par une série d'attentats, jeudi 22 décembre, sur fond de grave crise politique

Bagdad
Envoyé spécial

Dix attentats quasi simultanés contre des écoles, des administrations, des centres commerciaux, au moins 57 morts et 170 blessés, Bagdad a renoué jeudi 22 décembre à l'aube avec ses heures les plus sombres. Ces attaques visaient en priorité la communauté chiite. Pour les Irakiens, il ne fait aucun doute qu'elles sont la conséquence directe de la crise politique ouverte lundi par l'inculpation du vice-président sunnite Tarek Al-Hachemi pour « *soutien et financement d'actes terroristes* ».

Dans tous les cas, l'affaire est très grave. Si l'accusation est fondée, comme le prétend le premier ministre chiite, Nouri Al-Maliki, cela en dit long sur la nature de la démocratie mise en place après près de neuf ans d'occupation américaine. Si elle est montée de toutes pièces, comme l'assure M. Hachemi, elle en dit tout aussi long sur les méthodes du premier ministre, accusé par ses adversaires de mettre en place une dictature.

Le plus embarrassant veut que cette crise politique, la plus grave depuis plus d'un an, ait éclaté à peine 24 heures après le départ, quasiment en catimini, du dernier soldat américain.

Washington, qui voulait éviter les commentaires sur son bilan calamiteux et sur le caractère prématuré de ce retrait, a été rattrapé par son cauchemar irakien. A peine parti, il a donc fallu intervenir. Mardi, le vice-président américain, Joe Biden, a téléphoné à Nouri Al-Maliki et aux principaux dirigeants, leur demandant de résoudre cette crise par le dialogue. Même David Petraeus, directeur de la CIA et ancien commandant en chef en Irak, a effectué une brève visite à Bagdad pour ramener les Irakiens à la raison.

Tout a commencé le 28 novembre avec l'explosion d'un véhicule piégé à l'intérieur de la « zone verte » ultra-sécurisée de Bagdad. L'attentat, qui visait semble-t-il le Par-



Les forces de sécurité inspectent le cratère causé par un des attentats qui ont secoué, le 22 décembre, la capitale irakienne. HADI MIZBAN/AP

lement, a fait un mort et deux blessés en plus du kamikaze. D'après le ministère de l'intérieur, l'enquête a conduit aux gardes du corps de M. Hachemi. Treize d'entre eux ont été arrêtés, rapportent des sources officielles, trois seulement selon le vice-président. Dans des aveux télévisés, lundi, certains ont avoué avoir été payés par M. Hachemi pour commettre des attentats ces dernières années, y compris celui du 28 novembre.

Dans un premier temps, la cible annoncée de cette dernière attaque était Oussama Al-Nujaifi, président du Parlement et étoile montante dans le camp sunnite, ce qui en fait un rival de Tarek Al-Hachemi, membre de la même coalition politique, Iraquiya.

Mais depuis dimanche, Nouri Al-Maliki assure qu'il était la cible principale. C'est lui qui a pris en main l'enquête, distillant révélations et mises en demeure. Premier ministre, il occupe également les portefeuilles de l'intérieur et de la défense. Et semble désormais diriger également la justice, tant il s'exprime à la place des magistrats.

Dimanche, ses hommes ont failli empêcher Tarek Al-Hachemi de prendre l'avion pour le Kurdistan autonome, dans le nord de l'Irak. Lundi, un mandat d'arrêt était publié. Mardi, M. Hachemi, qui nie les accusations en bloc, a dit être prêt à un procès au Kurdistan et a demandé que l'enquête soit supervisée par la Ligue arabe.

M. Maliki a contre-attaqué mercredi en donnant une longue conférence de presse. Le premier ministre a demandé au gouvernement kurde de « *prendre [ses] responsabilités* » et de livrer le vice-président. Il a écarté toute ingérence internationale dans cette affaire, exigeant la destitution de son propre vice-premier ministre, le sunnite Saleh Al-Motlaq, membre d'Iraquiya lui aussi, qui l'avait accusé d'instituer « *une dictature pire que Saddam Hussein* ». Une accusation insupportable pour le premier ministre, ancien exilé politique, surtout provenant d'un ancien baasiste.

Saleh Al-Motlaq se référerait à l'arrestation, durant l'automne, d'un millier de personnes dans tout

l'Irak sous l'accusation de « *baasisme* ». Pour la classe politique sunnite, qui s'estime marginalisée depuis la chute, en 2003, de Saddam Hussein (sunnite et baasiste), M. Maliki cherche à instaurer un pouvoir personnel et confessionnel, chiite évidemment.

Réagissant à ce qu'elle estime être une campagne de harcèlement, la coalition Iraquiya, qui regroupe la plupart des élus sunnites – bien qu'elle soit dirigée par un chiite laïque, Iyad Allaoui –, a annoncé, samedi, son retrait du gouvernement et le boycottage du travail parlementaire. Les sunnites de Ninive (Mossoul), Anbar (ouest) et Salaheddine (centre) sont de plus en plus tentés par un statut d'autonomie, à l'instar des

Kurdes, qui affaiblirait un peu plus l'unité irakienne.

Le retrait d'Iraquiya met à bas le fragile édifice gouvernemental de l'après-législatives de 2010, qui avait nécessité neuf mois de tractations. Les Etats-Unis, qui s'étaient impliqués dans la constitution du gouvernement, avaient insisté pour que les principales composantes de la société soient représentées : les chiites, majoritaires, mais aussi les sunnites et les Kurdes.

Sans le gendarme américain, chaque camp semble désormais laisser cours à ses appétits de pouvoir

Sans le gendarme américain, chaque camp semble désormais laisser cours à ses appétits de pouvoir, faisant craindre une reprise des violences interconfessionnelles et des assassinats politiques, en nette diminution depuis 2008. Surtout, cette crise montre les limites de l'échafaudage institutionnel irakien, bâti sur un partage communautaire du pouvoir et des richesses pétrolières. On est loin de l'Irak « *souverain, stable, auto-suffisant, avec un gouvernement représentatif élu par son peuple* », vanté par Barack Obama.

Dans cette crise, les Kurdes, qui ont bâti au nord un quasi-Etat indépendant, se retrouvent paradoxalement en position d'arbitres et de médiateurs. Il y a peu de chances que Massoud Barzani, leader incontesté du Kurdistan, remette son hôte Tarek Al-Hachemi au gouvernement. Interrogé par *Le Monde* sur les raisons profondes de cette crise, Yonadam Kanna, un député chrétien, a cette formule : « *Les anciens opprimés [les dirigeants chiites] n'arrivent pas à croire qu'ils sont devenus les oppresseurs ; et les anciens oppresseurs [les dirigeants sunnites] n'arrivent pas à accepter qu'ils sont devenus les opprimés.* » ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Court acknowledged existence of death list of Kurdish businessmen

TODAY'S ZAMAN, İSTANBUL

While Turkey continues to discuss extrajudicial killings in the 1990s, the Star daily on Wednesday shared a document, showing that an Ankara court in 1996 had approved the existence of a death list of 193 Kurdish businessmen, who were allegedly aiding the terrorist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Then-Labor and Social Security Minister Ziya Halis sued the state in 1996, claiming that he was among the 193 Kurdish businessmen who were on a death list allegedly prepared by the state. The case was heard in the Ankara 6th Tribunal Court and the interior minister of the time acknowledged the claim of the existence of such a death list. For violating personal rights,

the court at that time fined the Turkish state TL 100 million non-pecuniary damages.

Speaking to Star, Halis stated that the '90s were one of the darkest eras that the Turkish nation has faced. "We were all hopeful about the country when the True Path Party (DYP) and Social Democratic People's Party (SHP) coalition government came to power. However, Turkey experienced its toughest times while this coalition ran the government. We were expecting the state to be closer to Kurds; instead, assassinations, setting villages on fire and many other unfortunate things happened. I feel ashamed of myself for even experiencing such a period," Halis said.

Furthermore, former State Minister Mehmet Salim Ensarioğlu, who was a

Diyarbakır deputy from the former True Path Party (DYP) headed by Tansu Çiller, has said that a list of hundreds of prominent Kurdish people who were marked for death by some dark forces could still be in the files of the National Security Council (MGK), which had a meeting in Diyarbakır in August 1992. "At that meeting were [former President] Turgut Özal, [former Prime Minister] Süleyman Demirel and [former Deputy Prime Minister] Erdal İnönü," Ensarioğlu was quoted as saying by the Radikal daily on Tuesday. "Demirel is still alive. He would know about that list." Ensarioğlu was referring to a number of prominent Kurdish businesspeople and other Kurds who were marked by some in the state to be killed because of their alleged help for the outlawed PKK.

REUTERS

Iraqi Shi'ite rally against autonomy push in Diyala

BAGHDAD -December 15, 2011 -(Reuters)

THOUSANDS of Iraqi Shi'ites rallied in the restive mainly Sunni province of Diyala on Thursday, demanding the provincial council retract its declaration of autonomy as Washington officially ended its war in Iraq.

Demands for more provincial power have simmered for years in Iraq, split by ethnic, sectarian and tribal tensions. But the Diyala push and an autonomy drive from the mainly Sunni Salahuddin province threaten to stir tensions as the last U.S. troops withdraw before December 31.

Police used batons and water cannon to disperse around 2,500 mainly Shi'ite protesters who demonstrated for a second day in front of the provincial council in Baquba, Diyala's main city.

"If the local government insists on its situation, we will form a transitional government ... and cancel the decision of the previous council, particularly declaring Diyala an independent region," said Jaafar Sadiq, a tribal sheikh as he stood outside the council with protesters.

Some protesters tried to storm the council headquarters, while others climbed to the roof of the building and raised green and black Shi'ite flags. Local authorities placed security forces on alert for a possible outbreak of violence.

Members of the mainly Sunni Arab-controlled council declared autonomy on Monday for Diyala, an al Qaeda hotspot comprised of a volatile mix of Sunni, Shi'ite, Kurds and Turkmen.

A long-standing dispute between the minority Kurds in the north and Arab Shi'ite-led government in Baghdad over land, oil and power is considered a potential flashpoint for future conflict after American troops depart. Some parts of Diyala are disputed territories between the Arabs and Kurds.

Demonstrators had streamed into Baquba from all over the province, some carrying Iraqi and green and black Shi'ite flags, photos of Prophet Mohammed's grandson Imam Hussein, and banners with "No for separation, no for region."

Others were chanting "Sunnis and Shi'ite are brothers and we will not sell this country."

"Those who declared this province an autonomous region represent only one sect, but there are many sects and ethnics in Diyala and no one asked all these people what do they want," said Sheikh Hussein al-Taai, head of Khalis tribal council.

Autonomy would give the province more power over finances, administration and laws, and an upper hand in supervising public property, which could loosen Baghdad's grip.

SIMMERING TENSION

Dulair Hassan, a Kurdish Diyala council member, said Sunni council members had agreed to hand over the district of Khanaqin to the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in exchange for votes from Kurdish council members in favour of autonomy for Diyala.

Khanaqin, 140 km (100 miles) northeast of Baghdad, is one of the areas disputed by Arabs and Kurds in Diyala. Minority Kurds in the north have enjoyed semi-autonomy for years since Western powers imposed a no-fly zone after the 1991 Gulf War.

Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who took part in writing the constitution in 2005, supports powerful central government.

In both public pronouncements and in private meetings with tribal leaders, his government has tried to quiet the autonomy movement, partly out of concern it could lead to instability as the U.S. troops withdraw.

While bombings and other attacks have ebbed following the sec-

tarian slaughter that pushed Iraq to the brink of civil war in 2006-07, violence has remained stubbornly high in Diyala as Sunni Islamist al Qaeda and other groups wage turf wars.

Only around 4,000 U.S. soldiers now remain in Iraq and they are scheduled to withdraw before the end of the year, leaving the country still facing a weakened, but stubborn insurgency and political uncertainty.



22 December 2011

Iraq's Shiite premier tells Kurds to hand over wanted Sunni VP as sectarian tensions rise

BY PATRICK COCKBURN

The Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has demanded the Kurds hand over his Sunni Vice-President, Tariq al-Hashemi, for whom an arrest warrant has been issued on charges of terrorism.

Mr Maliki said ominously that Mr Hashemi, who has taken refuge in Kurdistan, will receive as fair a trial as that of Saddam Hussein, who was executed in 2006.

Mr Maliki is deliberately escalating the political crisis, which is seen by the Sunni minority as a bid by the Shia-dominated government to marginalise them. The Kurds, who have total political and military control of most of northern Iraq, are likely to refuse to hand over Mr Hashemi and are seeking to act as mediators between him and the Prime Minister.

Mr Hashemi said the accusations against him – that he ran death squads made up of his bodyguards against his opponents – are fabrications. The charges are based on confessions from his guards who said that he personally paid them for attacks, but these allegations may well have been extracted by torture or the threat of it.

Mr Maliki had earlier claimed that an attempt to assassinate him with a remotely detonated bomb three weeks ago outside the parliament building inside the closely guarded Green Zone had been arranged by Mr Hashemi's guards. The details revealed about the alleged plot suggest that, if it was an assassination bid, it was a poorly organised one unlikely to succeed.



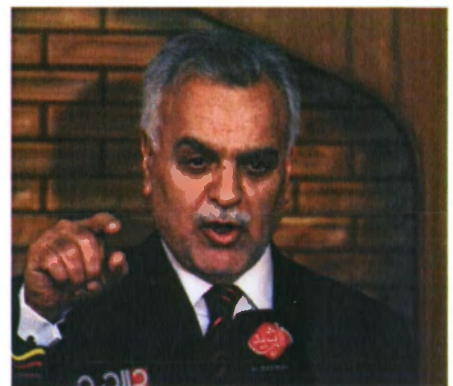
Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki

In his first comments on the arrest warrant, Mr Maliki said that Iraq is a unitary state and that the Kurds must hand over Mr Hashemi. "I do not allow myself and others to bargain over Iraqi blood," he said. "If they will not hand him over or let him flee or escape, this will lead to problems."

Mr Maliki leads what is nominally a power-sharing government set up exactly a year ago under US pressure in which Shia, Kurds and Sunni all have positions. But the government has always remained divided. Mr Maliki has concentrated power on his own office and is acting as the Minister of Defence and Interior with total control over all security appointments. Top officials in both security ministries are reportedly over 90 per cent Shia.

The Kurds complain that he has appointed all army divisional commanders as "acting commanders" and has ignored the Kurds' preferences. There has also been a recent purge of Sunni officers accused of being Baathists.

Mr Maliki may be overplaying his hand



Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi

by alienating Sunni and Kurdish leaders at the same time, since he probably does not have the political or military strength to rule Iraq by force alone. His accusations against Mr Hashemi come just after the Prime Minister had called for a vote of no confidence in parliament against the Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq, who had accused him of establishing a dictatorship.

Mr Hashemi's Iraqiya bloc, currently boycotting parliament, yesterday rejected a call by Mr Maliki for talks to resolve the crisis, and in turn said it was considering a no-confidence vote against the Prime Minister.

Mr Maliki's actions, within hours of the departure of the last US troops, will come as a blow to Barack Obama, who has sought to give the impression that US soldiers leave behind a stable Iraq.

The overthrow of Saddam ended Sunni hegemony and subsequent Sunni marginalisation was increased by disbanding the army and the Baath party. □

Car bombs kill 65 in Baghdad, worsening crisis



By ROY GUTMAN AND SAHAR ISSA
McClatchy Newspapers

BAGHDAD A dozen car bombs detonated Thursday in the Iraqi capital, killing 65 people and wounding more than 200, in the latest blow to Iraqi stability following the departure of U.S. troops last weekend.

The attacks, which came amid a serious government crisis, were directed at Sunni Muslims as well as Shiites, at mixed areas and even a once mainly Christian neighborhood - an almost inexplicable pattern that suggested extremist groups of different sectarian backgrounds were involved.

Among the casualties was a Turkish worker killed and three of his countrymen wounded in the Dora neighborhood, where there were three explosions.

The White House said in a statement that the "terrorist attacks against innocent Iraqis" served no agenda "other than murder and hatred."

The first spate of attacks - 10 car bombs, six roadside bombs, one bomb attached to a car and one mortar shell - occurred in the early morning, according to an Interior Ministry official. Two more cars were blown up Thursday evening.

The attacks added to Iraqis' fears that the country is heading into an unstable future as the Shiite-dominated government publicly battles the country's Sunni and Kurdish minorities in a controversial case involving Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashimi.

An officer in the Iraqi counterterrorism command, who could not be

named as he isn't an official spokesman, said some of the attacks may have been a misguided attempt to show support for al-Hashimi, who is now under attack by Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. But he added there are also armed " sleeper cells " supported by different sects that are waiting to take advantage of political, ethnic or sectarian division in hopes of bringing a return to the sectarian violence of 2006-2007.

"Are we going to be forever between the anvil and the hammer?" asked Jawad Abu Ali, a mechanic, in central Baghdad near the scene of one explosion. "Aren't our politicians going to settle down and get on with the business of governance? They should either all go to jail or turn a new page in order for the poor Iraqi people to have a normal existence."

There was no sign Thursday that the politicians were going to settle down or turn a new page. Instead, the standoff sharpened as Kurdish leaders refused to serve an arrest warrant against al-Hashimi, an order that appears to be based entirely on the televised accusations of three former guards from his security detail.

"Many Iraqis from across the political spectrum appear concerned about what they term political aspects of this case, such as the television appearances" of the three arrested bodyguards, said a U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity under diplomatic protocol.

"There seems to be a reasonably legitimate case against" the security guards, reporters were told, including

physical evidence that some were involved in building bombs. There were no apparent signs that the confessions had been coerced.

But observers have been troubled by what was described as "the foolish 'in-your-faceness'" of the government's case against al-Hashimi, whose motive for running an assassination squad isn't clear. Some note that while all this was going on, al-Hashimi was a leader of a campaign to eliminate immunity from prosecution for government officials.

Al-Hashimi sought refuge in semi-autonomous northern Kurdistan after the prime-time spectacle of the TV confessions. Kurdish refusal to serve the arrest warrant issued by a five-judge panel has in turn raised questions about the rule of law in Iraq.

A number of senior political aides in al-Maliki's own coalition have told McClatchy Newspapers that other than the confessions, there is no hard evidence that al-Hashimi personally directed the guards in a string of assassinations dating back to 2009. That said, it would be hard for al-Hashimi to deny ultimate responsibility if guards in his employ were running assassination squads.

In addition, the Iraqi Islamic Party, which al-Hashimi formerly headed, is believed to be infiltrated by al-Qaida in Iraq.

The controversy erupted just as the last U.S. troops departed Iraq over the weekend. The arrests of the three guards occurred earlier this month, on the eve of al-Maliki's trip to Washington for talks with President Barack Obama. While in Washington, U.S. officials, who knew of the arrests, asked al-Maliki for an explanation, McClatchy Newspapers learned. It wasn't clear how al-Maliki responded.

Al-Maliki told reporters Wednesday that while he was in Washington, U.S. officials told him: "Let's release these officers." He said he replied: "It's not up to me, it's up to the judiciary." U.S. officials in Baghdad said they did not recall such a conversation.

□ □ □

Lessons of the Iraq war

Three observers weigh the costs of the invasion and the eight-year occupation.

U.S. credibility suffered heavily

The war in Iraq was a strategic miscalculation and the single greatest blow to American power and prestige since Vietnam. I supported the initial invasion in 2003 while serving as U.S. ambassador to NATO, but have long since been convinced that any good from it was far outweighed by the sacrifices of our soldiers and the significant damage to our international credibility.

We must never forget the human cost of the war. We lost 4,500 American men and women and hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were killed and wounded. Also, the war cost close to \$1 trillion at a time we could ill afford it. And when it became clear that the stated reason for our invasion was blatantly wrong, we lost any hope of international support as well as the trust of our own people.

Furthermore, our occupation had the ironic effect of strengthening the radical government of neighboring Iran. Finally, Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo did lasting damage to America's reputation among the world's more than 1 billion Muslims.

As we reflect on the war, we should remember the valor of our soldiers. Their invasion and defeat of Saddam Hussein was brilliantly executed. But we asked too much in ordering them to occupy a hostile country for nearly a decade and to be exposed to vicious roadside bomb attacks by both Shiite and Sunni terrorists. They did their best under extraordinarily difficult circumstances.

Our war effort did deliver Iraqis from the tyranny of dictatorship, but they will need our help in the years ahead as they confront continuing sectarian and tribal divisions. President Obama was right to bring the troops home, but we have a moral responsibility to stay engaged politically and economically so that Iraqis are not left alone to nurture the seeds of freedom and democracy in the sands of the Middle East.

There are two important lessons to consider. First, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have tied us down for 10 years and deflected our attention from the far more important challenge of China's threat to U.S. power worldwide. Second, while the use of brute strength is sometimes necessary in an often cruel and violent world, it can also backfire as it surely did in Iraq. America must now return to a smarter foreign policy — as we seek to outwit our enemies as well as outlast them through the patient application of diplomacy rather than excessive reliance on the force of arms.

— R. NICHOLAS BURNS

Professor of diplomacy and international politics at Harvard's Kennedy School

of Government and former U.S. under-secretary of state for political affairs.

Biggest failure is an Iraqi one

The U.S. administration that went to war in Iraq was as much at war with itself as it was with Saddam Hussein: The C.I.A., the Defense Department, the White House and the State Department were all at odds with one another over what needed to be done. These mighty institutions had entirely different philosophies, and neither the president nor his national security team was able to bring them into alignment.

This is why nothing was adequately planned for, and why everything after the invasion in 2003 was handled amateurishly. The United States went into postwar Iraq with no idea what it was going to do. Still, the U.S. learned from its mistakes and gradually improved.

For all my criticisms of what was done wrong in the postwar period, I believe the removal of the dictator was an

unmitigated absolute good that the people of the United States should be proud of. It is something Iraqis will forever be grateful for, irrespective of the lack of grace and gratitude of the overwhelmingly corrupt and sectarian political elite in power in Iraq today.

The biggest failure of this war is not an American one; it is an Iraqi one. It is a failure of the few thousand Iraqis — the political elite — that has governed to one degree or another since 2003. I did not think of them as sectarian and corrupt before the war. They became so after being empowered by American military might, whipping up sectarian sentiment for narrow selfish political ends, and as a compensation for their own lack of legitimacy.

In so many ways they are showing themselves to be no better than the former Baathist elite that was overthrown. To be sure, they have less blood on their hands at the moment. They are also more fragmented, so they will never wield the same power as Saddam Hussein once did. But they don't really differ in their capacities for truly venal political behavior toward other Iraqis.

— KANAN MAKIYA

Professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern studies at Brandeis University and author of "Republic of Fear," which helped shape the Bush administration's case for the Iraq war.

Pullout brings fresh dangers

If there is one iron law of American history it is that the longer U.S. troops stay in a country, the better the chances of a successful outcome to a war. Germany, Italy, Japan, South Korea: All are places where U.S. troops still remain decades after the wars that brought

them there. It is no coincidence that they are also democratic and prosperous. Compare this with the hellish outcome in places like Somalia and Haiti, where U.S. troops entered and then left.

Iraq is likely to be neither Germany nor Somalia, but its odds of the latter outcome now look better because U.S. troops are leaving while the divisions that led Iraq to the precipice of catastrophe in 2006 and 2007 remain fresh and raw. Iraq has had free elections, but the government is dominated by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and hard-line Shiite Islamists who refuse to share meaningful power with Sunnis, Kurds, or secular Shiites. Deputy Prime Minister Salah al-Mutlaq, a leading Sunni politician, recently told CNN: "The political process is going in a very wrong direction, going toward a dictatorship. People are not going to accept that, and most likely they are going to ask for the division of the country. And this is going to be a disaster."

Another potential disaster looms in the north, where the boundary between Iraq proper and the Kurdish Regional Government remains in dispute. In the past, clashes between the Iraqi security forces and the Kurdish peshmerga were prevented only by the presence of U.S. troops. Now those peacekeepers are gone. Who will prevent a renewed flare-up of hostilities between Shiites and Sunnis, Arabs and Kurds?

Iraq is on its own. And it is located in a dangerous neighborhood where states like Iran and Saudi Arabia are eager to meddle in its politics. That is a recipe for trouble, which should make President Obama hesitate before he launches into another bout of self-congratulation about how he "ended the war." By pulling out U.S. troops prematurely, he has made another war more likely.

— MAX BOOT

Senior fellow in national security studies at the Council on Foreign Relations.

THE BOSTON GLOBE

Iraq PM urges Kurdish authorities to hand over Al Hashemi

The National / UAE

BAGHDAD // Iraq's Shiite Prime Minister Nouri Al Maliki called on Kurdish authorities to hand over the Sunni vice president to face charges his office had run death squads that targeted government officials.

It's a demand likely to further heighten sectarian tensions.

The latest move in the dispute between Iraq's Shiite-led government and Sunni rivals erupted on the first anniversary of the formation of the government of national unity and days after the last US troops were withdrawn from Iraq.

Mr Al Maliki had sought Tariq Al Hashemi's arrest, prompting the Sunni leader to travel to Kurdistan. "We ask our brothers in the Kurdistan region to take responsibility and hand the wanted person over to the judiciary. His running to another state would create problems," Mr Al Maliki said during a news conference.

"We will be sure to provide a fair trial for Tariq Al Hashemi. I do not allow myself and others to bargain over Iraqi blood."

Officials issued the warrant for Mr Al Hashemi's arrest on Monday, after earlier banning him from travelling overseas. The last US troops withdrew from Iraq on Sunday, nearly nine years after the invasion that toppled Sunni dictator Saddam Hussein.

At least 13 of the vice president's bodyguards have been detained in recent weeks, security officials have said, although it was unclear how many remain in custody. The White House on Tuesday said it was "obviously concerned" about the arrest warrant issued for Mr Al Hashemi and urged the probe be conducted according to rule of law.

Mr Al Hashemi's office said only three of the bodyguards were arrested, and has complained of "intentional harassment" in the form of blockade of his home by security forces for several weeks, as well as other incidents.

Mr Al Hashemi has denied the charges he says were fabricated by Mr Al Maliki's government, and said he is willing to face judges in the northern Kurdish enclave. The three provinces that make up the Kurdish region are part of Iraq, but the Kurds have their own security forces and

An Iraqi man looks at a newspaper featuring a front page picture of Tariq Al Hashemi, the vice president, with the word "wanted" above his face. Ahmad Al-Rubaye / AFP



Iraqi army and national police do not operate there.

"I swear to God that I never committed a sin when it comes to Iraqi blood," Mr Al Hashemi told reporters in Erbil on Tuesday. "I suggest transferring the case to Kurdistan. On this basis, I will be ready to face trial."

Mr Al Maliki also rejected Mr Al Hashemi's calls for Arab League representatives to observe the investigation and any questioning, telling reporters, "We gave the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein a fair trial, and we will ensure that a fair trial will also be given to Hashemi," referring to the now-executed Hussien.

Mr Al Hashemi added that apparent confessions aired on state television linking him to attacks were "false" and "politicised".

The crisis risks unravelling a fragile year-old power-sharing deal among Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs that have struggled to overcome tensions since sectarian slaughter in the years after Saddam's fall in 2003.

Shiite leaders say the case involves law enforcement against individuals and does not target a community, but the Sunni minority fears that Mr Al Maliki is increasing his hold on the government and marginalising Sunnis.

Many Sunnis feel the Shiite-led government is overly aligned with neighbouring Iran and determined to keep Sunnis, who once dominated the country under Hussein, from ever regaining positions of power.

In a system devised under US occupation to divide power, Iraq has a Shiite prime minister with Sunni and Kurd deputies, a Kurdish president with Shiite and

Sunni vice presidents, and a Sunni parliament speaker with Shiite and Kurd deputies.

Kurdistan, locked in a struggle over oil and territory with Mr Al Maliki, may use the crisis as leverage in talks with Baghdad over disputed Kurdistan contracts it has signed with US oil giant Exxon Mobil, which Mr Al Maliki's central government says are illegal.

"Maliki still has a chance of keeping the government together - the Kurds will be critical to this," Gala Riani at IHS Global Insight told the Reuters news agency. "They might use this opportunity to press Maliki for the resolution of long-standing disputes."

Mr Al Maliki has also asked parliament to fire the Sunni deputy prime minister, Saleh Al Mutlaq. Mr Al Hashemi and Mr Al Mutlaq are the country's most senior Sunni politicians.

Mr Al Maliki also threatened yesterday to replace ministers belonging to the iraqiyya bloc if they continued to boycott the national unity cabinet.

"Ministers have no right to suspend their membership in the government because they will be considered resigned," he said. "In the next cabinet meeting, if they do not come back, we will appoint replacements."

Iraqiyya, which controls nine ministerial posts and 82 seats in the 325-member legislature, has not pulled out of the government but has boycotted parliament and cabinet. □

** Compiled from reports by Reuters and Agence France-Presse*

'Turkey's moment' carries risk



Images of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of modern Turkey, and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in an Istanbul teahouse. The economy has surged under Mr. Erdogan.

ISTANBUL

New swagger draws criticism as country takes more assertive role

BY DAN BILEFSKY

It is a sign of the euphoric mood in this newly confident nation that Turks of all ages are embracing dressing up as Ottoman sultans and noblewomen, harking back to an era when Turkey ruled an empire stretching from the Balkans to the Indian Ocean.

"This is Turkey's moment," said Esra Poroy, a 39-year-old housewife, admiring a photo of herself adorned in the sumptuous silks and jewels of a sultan's wife. "We feel a strong pride in our strength and influence, much as we did during the Ottoman days."

Yet, even as many in Washington and Europe praise Turkey's newly assertive leadership, such brashness is prompting some concerns both at home and abroad that Turkey's giddy sense of self-confidence could tip into arrogance and alienate allies and foes at a critical time. Ankara faces a raft of foreign policy challenges on its doorstep, any one of which could derail its long-term goal of obtaining regional power status. An in-

creasingly outsized national ego, analysts say, has already frayed ties with Europe. On Thursday, Ankara recalled its ambassador from Paris after France voted to criminalize the denial of the genocide of up to 1.5 million Armenians between 1915 and 1918 by the Ottoman Turks. (Page 4)

And with talks to join the European Union hopelessly stalled, many Turks have greeted the euro crisis with barely concealed glee, saying Europe has rejected them because they are Muslim.

Closer to home, three of the most volatile states in the world — Syria, Iraq and Iran — are lined up along Turkey's southern and eastern borders. Syria is already in a state of civil war and Iraq seems to be flirting once again with sectarian strife and dissolution. Throw in the longstanding Kurdish problem and an Iran that erupted in 2009 and now may be descending into economic chaos, and the possibilities of regional destabilization, mass refugee flows and even war do not seem terribly remote.

Facing such threats, analysts and diplomats say, Turkey needs to resist the temptation to gloat and swagger. Soli Ozel, professor of international relations at Istanbul's Kadir Has University, said that European and American economic decline, coupled with the Arab Spring, was emboldening Turkey as it evolves into the model of democracy for

the Arab world.

"Turks are saying, 'We are now on the rise, you are running out of steam and we don't have to take any stuff from Westerners,'" he said. But he added: "There is a fine line between self-confidence and hubris."

Turkey and its charismatic prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, could

Turkey's increasingly outsize national ego, analysts say, has already frayed ties with Europe.

be forgiven for displaying some vanity. He has overhauled a country once haunted by military coups into a regional democratic powerhouse. He is so popular in the Arab world that there has been a surge in babies named Tayyip.

While Turkey's economy surges — growing by 8.2 percent in the third quarter, second only to China in the world — Europe is sputtering and Greece, a long-time rival, has been flattened by the sovereign debt crisis. With its new clout as a leader in a region long dominated by the United States, this large Muslim country of 79 million people has also been basking in its role as the voice of regional indignation against Syria and chastising Israel.

Earlier this month a deputy prime minister boldly lectured Vice President Joseph Biden Jr. that it was Turkey, and not the struggling economies of the United States and Europe, that would win the 21st century.

"The fast fish, not the big fish, eats the small fish," said the official, Ali Babacan, who oversees the economy. Challenging his host's boastful tone, Mr. Biden reminded the audience that in a sea of young sharks, the United States was still the whale.

Six years ago, Burak Turna, a Turkish writer, was mocked here as a literary shock jock after he wrote a futuristic novel in which Turkish commandos besiege Berlin, obliterate Europe and take control of the Continent. Now, he says the same people who once dismissed him are celebrating him. "There is a new air being pumped into the Turkish consciousness," he said. But, he warned, "We shouldn't be too brave or overconfident."

Indeed, for all of Turkey's recent achievements, its aim of having "zero problems" with its neighbors has shown few successes.

Turkish officials tried in vain for months to persuade President Bashar al-Assad to halt his violent crackdown against civilians, before finally turning against him. Turkey has been unable to resolve conflicts with Cyprus and Armenia. Its recent decision to host a NATO radar installation has ruffled Iran. Relations with Israel collapsed after Israeli troops killed nine people aboard a Turkish flotilla trying to break the blockade of Gaza.

In September, the limits of Turkey's

appeal as a political model were laid bare when Mr. Erdogan told the Egyptian satellite channel "Dream TV" that secularism was not the enemy of religion and Egypt should embrace a secular constitution. A spokesman for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood party, which won first-round parliamentary elections there, told the Egyptian daily Al Ahrām that Mr. Erdogan was interfering in Egyptian affairs. (Mr. Erdogan's aides said the term secularism had been mistranslated as atheism.)

Nor were many Kosovar Albanians amused in August when Turkey's minister of education, Omer Dincer, asked his Kosovo counterpart to remove offending paragraphs from history text books, which he said insulted the Ottoman Turks. Local historians protested that

Turkey was trying to whitewash centuries of Ottoman subjugation.

The perils of standing in Turkey's way became abundantly clear at the United Nations during the annual General Assembly meeting of world leaders this autumn.

Mr. Erdogan was on the fourth floor of the general assembly hall when he learned that the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, whom he ardently supports, was making his address demanding full United Nations membership for Palestine. When Mr. Erdogan

rushed to the nearest entrance to take Turkey's seat on the main floor, a security guard refused to let him pass. When Mr. Erdogan pressed forward, a loud scuffle erupted that was audible four floors below.

One Western diplomat noted that "the Turks were literally throwing their weight around."

Yet Turkey's many defenders say the West cannot expect Turkey to play regional leader and then criticize it when it flexes its muscles. Moreover, they note, the country is entitled to defend its dignity.

At the Cannes summit meeting of the G-20 major economies in November, cameras showed Mr. Erdogan suddenly kneeling down when he noticed a sticker of the Turkish flag on the floor to mark the position where he was supposed to stand for a group photo, near President Barack Obama.

He gently folded it and put it in his pocket.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune DECEMBER 23, 2011

IRAQ'S LATEST BATTLE

Maliki is showing a greater interest in reprisals against the Sunni minority than in encouraging inclusion.

No one expected the dangers and tensions in Iraqi politics to vanish after the last American troop departed. But at least Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, a member of the Shiite majority, might have made an effort to step up to the challenges of creating a future for Iraq based on democratic principles. Instead, he is showing a greater interest in reprisals against the Sunni minority than in encouraging inclusion.

Mr. Maliki has created a dangerous political crisis by issuing an arrest warrant for Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, a leading Sunni politician, accusing him of running a death squad. Mr. Hashimi has denied those charges and fled to the semiautonomous region of Kurdistan to avoid arrest.

The timing of the arrest warrant — immediately after American troops withdrew from Iraq — is highly suspicious. If there are bases for the charges, they should be investigated. The problem is ensuring an independent inquiry because Mr. Maliki's government has often interfered with the functioning of the fragile judiciary system.

Sunnis understandably see the action against Mr. Hashimi as a move to consolidate power. They have been denied promised jobs by the Shiite-led post-Saddam governments. In October, Mr. Maliki arrested 600 Iraqis for being suspected former members of Saddam Hussein's Baathist Party and army.

On Wednesday, Mr. Maliki recklessly threatened to abandon an American-backed power-sharing government and warned Kurdish leaders of unspecified "problems" if they did not turn Mr. Hashimi over to Baghdad.

Republicans like Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham are using this crisis to fault President Obama for not keeping substantial troops in Iraq indefinitely. They're wrong on the principle, but also did they not notice that an Iraqi-U.S. agreement authorizing the military presence expires at year's end?

At this point, what is needed is a serious dialogue among the

top Iraqi political players on how to calm tensions and begin governing effectively. Obama administration officials say that in a telephone call on Tuesday, Vice President Joseph Biden Jr. urged Mr. Maliki to call such a meeting (which he later did) and also made clear that Iraq's relationship with the United States could eventually suffer if the conflict continues. Washington is going to have to lean much harder on Mr. Maliki and all Iraqi leaders to make compromises over tough issues like revenue sharing as they move forward to build a government that can deliver jobs, education, basic services and security.

Even with the troops gone, Washington has leverage. It could, for example, withhold F-16 jets that Iraq has ordered but not yet received, and it could delay acting on promises to help spur foreign investment. Regional allies like Turkey and Saudi Arabia must also be enlisted to help send an unmistakable message to Iraqi political leaders that political turmoil or the disintegration of Iraq into sectarian fiefdoms would be disastrous for the country and its neighbors.



Michael Kamber for The New York Times
An Iraqi sat dazed at a Baghdad hospital on Thursday. He had rescued his badly wounded brother from the site of the deadliest attack in the capital, in which 13 were killed.

Tensions entre la France et la Turquie

PARIS Le vote par les députés français d'un texte de loi pénalisant le génocide arménien, qu'Ankara a toujours nié, replonge les relations entre la France et la Turquie dans une mauvaise passe, alors qu'elles commençaient à s'entendre et à coopérer, en particulier sur le brûlant dossier syrien.

L'Assemblée nationale française a voté hier une proposition de loi punissant d'un an de prison et d'une amende la négation du génocide arménien de 1915 sous l'empire ottoman, qui a fait 1,5 million de morts, selon les Arméniens.

Ce vote «va ouvrir des plaies irréparables et très graves dans les relations bilatérales», a réagi le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, annonçant une première série de mesures de rétorsion, gel des visites et de la coopération militaire, rappel de l'ambassadeur à Paris.

Les dirigeants turcs, tous dressés contre le texte de loi français, avaient prévenu avant le vote qu'il aurait de lourdes conséquences sur les relations économiques, diplomatiques et culturelles entre les deux pays. L'opposition et les milieux



EPA / E. FOSTER

d'affaires turcs ont joint leurs voix à celle du gouvernement pour dénoncer l'initiative parlementaire française, venue d'une députée de la majorité présidentielle, et qui vise selon eux à séduire l'importante communauté des Arméniens de France avant l'élection présidentielle de 2012. La volonté de resserrer les liens avec Ankara, et de mettre entre parenthèses l'opposition résolue de la France à accepter son entrée dans l'Union européenne, avait été clairement exprimée lors de la visite en Turquie en

novembre du ministre français des affaires étrangères Alain Juppé.

Les deux pays avaient condamné d'une même voix la répression des manifestations antigouvernementales en Syrie et Paris avait manifesté «la volonté de la France de continuer à travailler étroitement avec la Turquie pour accroître la pression sur le régime de Bachar al-Assad».

Autre sujet majeur de coopération récente entre les deux pays: la lutte contre les rebelles kurdes. ■

LE FIGARO 23 décembre 2011

Devedjian: « Il ne faut jamais céder à la menace »

JUDITH WAINTRAUB

LES MENACES d'Istanbul n'impressionnent pas Patrick Devedjian. Invité hier du « Talk-Orange-Le Figaro », le président du conseil général des Hauts-de-Seine a estimé que « la Turquie menace beaucoup trop pour un pays qui veut entrer dans l'Union européenne ». Selon lui, le comportement de la Turquie, présent ou passé, à l'égard d'Israël, de Chypre, de l'Irak du Nord, de la Syrie, de la Grèce, et bien sûr de l'Arménie, lui donne une image « assez repoussante ». « Ce n'est pas une



manière de se comporter dans les relations internationales, a-t-il estimé. Il faut apprendre à vivre avec les autres pays. »

En réponse à la « démonstration de force » et aux « slogans extrêmement violents » des manifestants turcs, hier matin, devant l'Assemblée nationale, l'avocat Devedjian a rappelé que « la Turquie est mal placée pour donner des leçons » en matière de liberté de pensée, « puisque l'article 301 du Code pénal turc interdit d'émettre en Turquie la moindre thèse sur le génocide arménien ».

La Turquie ouvre les hostilités avec la France

Alain Juppé appelle les Turcs à ne pas « surréagir » après le vote sur la pénalisation de la négation des génocides.

SOPHIE HUET
ET LAURE MARCHAND (À ISTANBÜL)

DIPLOMATIE Aussitôt la proposition de loi UMP visant à sanctionner la pénalisation de la contestation de tout génocide, y compris donc le génocide arménien de 1915, votée à l'Assemblée nationale, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a contre-attaqué, pendant que le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Alain Juppé, appelait « nos amis turcs à ne pas surréagir ».

Le premier ministre turc a annoncé hier la suspension des « visites politiques, économiques et militaires » entre les deux pays. Mais aucune sanction économique n'a été annoncée. Les exercices militaires conjoints devraient être arrêtés, mais ils sont actuellement très limités. Le chef du gouvernement turc a aussi déclaré que la Turquie refuserait désormais de travailler avec la France dans le cadre de l'Union européenne. Les navires de guerre français seront systématiquement interdits d'entrée dans les ports turcs et l'usage de

L'ambassadeur turc a été immédiatement rappelé pour consultations à Ankara

l'espace aérien turc sera accordé au cas par cas. « Dans notre histoire, il ne s'est jamais produit un tel génocide, nous ne pouvons pas accepter » une telle loi, a-t-il martelé, indiquant que celle-ci allait « ouvrir des plaies irréparables et très graves dans les relations bilatérales ». Ce train de sanctions constitue « une première étape », a-t-il poursuivi. Sans surprise, l'ambassadeur turc a été immédiatement rappelé pour consultation à Ankara. Une procédure que la Turquie avait déjà appliquée en 2006 avant de renvoyer son ambassadeur à Paris quelques jours plus tard.

Sourds aux annonces de repréailles d'Ankara, les députés présents hier dans l'Hémicycle (une cinquantaine) ont voté à main levée, droite et gauche réunies, la proposition de loi (PPL) UMP de Valérie Boyer. Une demi-douzaine de députés UMP ont néanmoins voté contre, dont Jacques Myard, Lionel Tardy, Jean-Philippe Maurer, Jean Bardet et Michel Dieffenbacher. Ce dernier, président du



Plusieurs personnes ont manifesté devant l'Assemblée nationale, hier à Paris, au moment du vote de la loi. SÉBASTIEN SORIANO/LE FIGARO.

groupe d'amitié France-Turquie, a expliqué que « personne n'avait intérêt à souffler sur les braises », ajoutant : « Que dirions-nous si un autre pays nous demandait ce qu'il faut penser du massacre des Vendéens sous la Convention ? »

Quasi-consensus

Le président UMP de la commission des affaires étrangères, Axel Poniatowski n'a pas pris la parole et s'est abstenu lors du vote. Le président du MoDem, François Bayrou, qui a quitté la séance avant le scrutin, a jugé ce texte « déraisonnable » et « dangereux ». À gauche, les anciens ministres socialistes Robert Badinter et Jean Glavany ont estimé que ce texte était « anticonstitutionnel ». En séance, Bruno Le Roux, porte-parole de François Hollande, a estimé à l'inverse que ce texte « essayait de faire vivre la flamme apaisée du souvenir ». Mais François Hollande, qui n'a pas participé aux débats, a dénoncé de son côté « une opération électorale » et « un effet d'affichage », à rebours des déclarations des dé-

putés PS dans l'Hémicycle. Le ministre des Relations avec le Parlement, Patrick Ollier, s'en est remis à la « sagesse » de l'Assemblée, tout en s'engageant clairement en faveur du texte, soulignant que cette PPL « n'était en rien une loi mémorielle » et qu'il « ne s'agissait pas de compléter notre législation pénale ». Le ministre a contré les amendements de suppression défendus par Lionel Tardy (UMP).

Renaud Muselier, député UMP de Marseille, a déploré « le négationnisme d'État » du gouvernement turc à l'égard du génocide arménien. Plusieurs députés ont souhaité « l'inscription rapide » de ce texte à l'ordre du jour du Sénat, où il fera aussi l'objet d'un quasi-consensus droite-gauche, même si l'ex-président du Sénat, Gérard Larcher, qui va présider le groupe d'amitié France-Turquie, ou l'ancien premier ministre Jean-Pierre Raffarin n'y sont pas favorables. ■



24 décembre 2011

Al-Maliki s'oppose à une région autonome sunnite

Sinan Salaheddin
The Associated Press

BAGDAD - Le premier ministre de l'Irak a prévenu, samedi, que les tentatives de créer une région sunnite autonome à l'intérieur des frontières actuelles diviserait le pays et conduirait à un «bain de sang».

Les commentaires de Nouri Al-Maliki coïncident avec une crise gouvernementale entre les deux principaux groupes musulmans de l'Irak, les sunnites et les chiïtes, une crise qui pourrait faire voler en éclat le gouvernement.

Le premier ministre Al-Maliki et le principal leader politique sunnite du pays sont engagés dans un véritable bras de fer. Le gouvernement Al-Maliki a émis un mandat d'arrestation visant le vice-président sunnite, Tariq Al-Hashemi, accusé d'avoir mené des escadrons de la mort contre des responsables gouvernementaux. M. Al-Hashemi nie catégoriquement ces allégations.

Depuis la formation du gouvernement Al-Maliki, en décembre dernier, la minorité sunnite s'est plainte d'avoir été marginalisée dans une assemblée dominée par les chiïtes.

Certaines provinces sunnites ont par la suite appelé à la création de région autonome, à l'instar de la région nord du pays, occupée par les Kurdes.

Avec une région autonome, les sunnites pourraient mener leurs propres affaires de sécurité et auraient plus d'indépendance dans les démarches pour attirer les capitaux étrangers. Ces régions seraient toujours une partie de l'Irak mais leur autonomie affaiblirait le contrôle exercé par Baghdad. Plusieurs observateurs craignent par ailleurs qu'une telle démarche ne soit l'élément déclencheur de l'éclatement du pays entre les factions religieuses.

Les appels en ce sens ont été maintes fois repoussés par le premier ministre Al-Maliki.

Samedi, il a réitéré son objection à la formation de régions sur une base confessionnelle, soutenant que cela mènerait à une «division de l'Irak et à des bains de sang».

«Je ne peux pas rejeter ce dossier [de la formation de régions] puisqu'il est permis par la constitution», a-t-il déclaré devant des représentants de la province sunnite de Salahuddin, l'une des trois zones irakiennes à majorité sunnite ayant demandé plus

d'autonomie. Les provinces de Diyala et d'Anbar ont aussi fait de telles demandes.

«Mais laisser libre cours à cela, ce serait diviser l'Irak sur une base confessionnelle alors que notre pays est uni», a lancé le premier ministre Al-Maliki.

Les tensions entre sunnites et chiïtes ont ressurgi ces derniers jours, soulignant du même coup la présence toujours réelle d'une méfiance entre les deux groupes malgré des années d'efforts pour la surmonter. La minorité sunnite craint que la majorité chiïte ne l'écarte de toute politique un de ces jours, tandis que les chiïtes soupçonnent les sunnites d'être liés à l'insurrection et au terrorisme.

Un homme religieux chiïte et anti-américain, Muqtada Al-Sadr, a lancé samedi un appel à une coexistence pacifique entre tous les Irakiens au lendemain du départ des derniers soldats des États-Unis. Les troupes américaines ont plié bagage le 18 décembre.

M. Al-Sadr, dont les hommes forts ont été blâmés en lien avec des violences confessionnelles pendant les années les plus sanglantes de la guerre en Irak, tente d'asseoir son poids politique au pays dans la foulée du départ des soldats



américains.

La suggestion de M. Al-Sadr survient par ailleurs deux jours seulement après une terrible vague d'attentats ayant secoué Bagdad, au cours de laquelle 69 personnes ont été tuées et près de 200 autres blessées. Les bombes ont éclaté principalement dans des quartiers chiïtes de la capitale, ravivant de nouveaux les craintes que le pays ne sombre dans une spirale de violence interconfessionnelle.

Par ailleurs, deux policiers ont été tués samedi et deux autres personnes blessées dans l'explosion d'une bombe de circonstance à Hawija, à 240 kilomètres au nord de Bagdad, a fait savoir le commandant de la police de Kirkuk, le brigadier-général Sarhad Qadir.□□□

AFP

Irak/contrats pétroliers kurdes: Maliki était au courant, affirme Barzani

Erbil (Irak), 23 décembre 2011 (AFP)

LE PREMIER MINISTRE irakien Nouri al-Maliki était au courant du contrat signé par le gouvernement de la province autonome du Kurdistan avec la compagnie pétrolière américaine ExxonMobil, a affirmé vendredi le dirigeant kurde irakien Massoud Barzani.

Il a ajouté que ce contrat respectait la Constitution et que M. Maliki avait initialement donné son accord.

L'accord signé le 18 octobre prévoit l'exploration de six champs au Kurdistan. Le gouvernement irakien considère toutefois comme illégaux les contrats qu'il n'a pas lui-même signé.

"Nous avons envoyé une lettre à M. Nouri al-Maliki pour l'informer de la situation et lui dire que nous le tiendrions au courant de tous les développements et il n'a pas fait d'objection", a déclaré M. Barzani lors d'un dis-

cours dans la ville de Dohuk (Kurdistan irakien).

"Nous avons ensuite envoyé une lettre pour lui donner les détails quand le moment est arrivé de signer le contrat, il a dit +bien+ mais finalement ils ont protesté et dit que cela ne respectait pas la Constitution", a-t-il ajouté.

M. Maliki avait affirmé le 15 décembre à l'AFP qu'ExxonMobil avait promis de "reconsidérer sa décision" de mener des explorations pétrolières au Kurdistan irakien.

Le vice-Premier ministre irakien Hussein Chahrstani a également sommé le N.1 mondial du pétrole de choisir entre son contrat avec le Kurdistan et celui qu'il a dans le champ pétrolier de Qurna-Ouest (sud). ExxonMobil y produit environ 370.000 barils de pétrole par jour avec la compagnie anglo-néerlandaise Shell. Qurna-Ouest, situé dans le sud du pays, est le deuxième plus grand champ d'Irak avec des réserves estimées à 8,5 milliards de barils.

Iraqi Kurdistan Is Booming. Will It Ever Be a Separate State?

The New Republic (www.tnr.com)
by Larry Diamond

As American troops withdraw from Iraq, anyone searching for rays of progress amid the country's miasma of corruption, sectarian strife, and political stalemate might look to the foothills of Sulaimaniyah, Kurdistan. There, rising rapidly out of some 400 dusty acres, is a gleaming constellation of glass, steel, and Jerusalem stone that is the new campus of American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS). The venture, which now educates some 500 Iraqi students on the American model, is a sign of Iraqi Kurdistan's evolution toward a modern, flourishing society. But when I visited the American University this past November, there seemed to be one question on the minds of nearly every Kurdish student I met: When can we get a separate state of Kurdistan?

It's understandable why Kurds are asking this question. Seeing all the construction cranes in Erbil and Sulaimaniyah, the bustling markets and the passionate youth, one gets the sense that Iraqi Kurdistan is itself living through a protracted spring—a moment of economic and political opportunity unprecedented in the modern history of the long-suffering Kurdish people (who, with some 25 to 30 million Kurds spread across four Middle Eastern states, are widely considered to be the largest stateless people in the world).

Beyond the university, Kurdistan is booming, with an estimated economic growth rate for next year predicted to be as high as 12 percent. Investment is pouring in, not just from a vast array of Turkish companies, but from American oil companies like Exxon, and from construction, hotel, and retail companies throughout the Arab world. If the claims of the Kurdistan Regional Government are correct—that it possesses 45 billion barrels of oil reserves—it would rank sixth in the world in oil wealth.

And unlike your typical Mideast oil economy—mired in corruption, falling short in democracy, and leaving a third or more of youth unemployed—Kurdistan boasts robust political plu-



President of Iraq's Kurdistan region Massud Barzani (R) welcomes US Vice President Joe Biden upon his arrival in Erbil on December 1, 2011 during the latter's official visit to Iraq as the last American soldiers prepare to depart.

ralism. The two long-ruling parties and dominant families (Massoud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party and Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) have patched up their differences since the civil war of the mid-1990s. Though their power-sharing arrangement can appear corrupt and stifling to anyone not a member, in the 2009 regional elections the ruling coalition squeaked by with just 60 percent while facing a fresh opposition list called Gorran, Kurdish for "change." In Kurdistan today, there is a freer and more open—though far from perfect—climate for expression than in Iraq as a whole.

Kurdistan, in short, is doing so much better than the rest of Iraq that it's perfectly logical for its citizens to wonder why they can't simply head out on their own as an independent nation—as they have long aspired to. What, then, should be the American answer to the 95 percent or more of Iraqi Kurds who would vote for independence tomorrow if it were possible?

The first part of the answer is that it is not possible. A declaration of complete independence by Iraq's Kurds would be met with a campaign of military pressure, if not outright attack, and economic strangulation from every one of Kurdistan's neighbors. The remainder of Iraq would not accept national

dismemberment—not merely because of the loss of huge oil reserves, but for reasons of national pride as well. Turkey, Iran, and Syria would also view a declaration of Iraqi Kurdish independence as a provocation to their own Kurds to rise up and seek either secession or the creation of a supra-Kurdish state. All four neighbors would work to ensure that the Iraqi Kurdish state failed. And with control of Kurdish oil pipelines (which run through Turkey) and trade routes, they could do much to bring about this outcome.

Fortunately, there is a more practical option for Kurds. We should be encouraging them to summon a parallel to another small and exceptional society: Taiwan, which has long faced a similar kind of threat from China. For all intents and purposes, Taiwan functions as a completely independent country. Yet it also does not flaunt its independence from mainland China. Over the last two decades, Taiwan has cemented a pivotal security relationship with the United States by moving toward, and then deepening and reaffirming, democracy. But Taiwan also edged away from the brink of national suicide by restraining secessionist impulses and pragmatically forging cooperative economic and social ties with the mainland. Once, when a reckless leader almost went too far in pressing a pro-independence agenda, the United States reined him in, using the immense leverage that came with the American commitment to support Taiwan's security so long as it did not unilaterally—and foolishly—move to alter the status quo.

The Taiwan model should be attractive, or at least acceptable, to Kurds in part because of globalization. For many years and probably decades to come, the arbitrary boundaries drawn by Europe over the shattered pieces of the Ottoman Empire will remain the boundaries of modern states. But in a rapidly globalizing world of new kinds of trading communities and new forms of de facto sovereignty, the formal trappings of de jure statehood do not matter as much. If they are smart, Kurds will grudgingly accept their boundaries and work within the deli-

cately negotiated features of Iraq's essentially federalist constitution to chart their own course. They can use their share of Iraq's staggering oil wealth to follow in the footsteps of their northern neighbor, Turkey, by building a prosperous and free society. Indeed, if Iraqi Kurds can be persuaded to defer their for-now-impossible dream of Kurdish independence in exchange for the prospect of Kurdish dignity and prosperity, Iraqi Kurdistan could become an epicenter of relative freedom, openness, and economic dynamism—a place people want to come to, rather than a place people

want to leave.

The United States made many terrible mistakes in its engagement in Iraq over the past nine years. But one thing we got reasonably right—and for which the much maligned American viceroy, L. Paul Bremer, and his colleagues in the senior ranks of the Bush administration have gotten too little credit—is the exquisitely difficult balance we struck between our moral obligation to the Kurdish people and our political obligation to hold Iraq together as one state. The incipient, if still very partial, success story that is

Kurdistan today is the fruit of that policy. If Kurdistan's leaders can accept de facto rather than de jure independence, and if their democracy continues to develop as it has thus far, the United States will have achieved at least something significant for its staggering investment, even if the rest of Iraq continues to flounder and disappoint.

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As Iraq smolders, Kurds sit on oil riches

IRBIL, Iraq, December 22, 2012 (United Press International)

AS IRAQ LOOKS like collapsing into another sectarian free-for-all, with energy resources a key prize, the semi-autonomous Kurdish region is like an island of stability and security.

In large part, that's because it's sitting on its own energy treasure house, an estimated 60 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, more than Libya's entire reserves, and 45 billion barrels of oil, roughly the amount Britain has produced from its North Sea fields.

"Sweeping changes ... have taken place in Iraq's semi-autonomous northern region over the past decade, changes driven by the wealth that lies underneath its desolate landscape," observed the Financial Times.

"The days when Kurdistan was an economic backwater are over," Prime Minister Barham Salih told Kurdistan's first regional oil and gas conference in Irbil, the Kurdish capital, in November.

But the Kurdistan Regional Government, which runs the three northern provinces that constitute the Kurdish enclave, is locked in a bitter battle with the central government in Baghdad over oil rights and revenue-sharing as well as territory.

This seemingly intractable dispute has in recent weeks spread to other provinces that now seek more autonomy, including oil-rich Basra in the south, which contains two-thirds of Iraq's known oil reserves of 143.1 billion barrels.

With the Shiite-dominated government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki showing increasing signs of cracking down on minority Sunnis and Kurds, marginalizing them politically and concentrating all power in the hands of the majority Shiites now that U.S. forces have withdrawn, the stage seems set for major turmoil.

The KRG recently upped the stakes dramatically by signing an agreement with Exxon Mobil, the world's largest oil company, Oct. 18 to explore six blocks widely believed to be sure-fire gushers.

Exxon was the first international oil major to venture into Kurdistan, defying Maliki's government, which insists Baghdad alone can make such deals.

Exxon faces stiff reprisals by Baghdad but refuses to back

down.

Meantime, as political infighting intensifies with the departure of the Americans, the Kurds and Sunnis are quitting Maliki's shaky coalition amid a wave of arrests by his security forces.

So Kurdistan, which also claims the Kirkuk oilfields in the north, is likely to be in the eye of the storm.

The Kurds' big problem is that their territory in the northeastern corner of Iraq is landlocked and to get their oil out they have to use state pipelines controlled by Baghdad.

Kurdish oil is pumped northward through twin pipelines to neighboring Turkey's Ceyhan terminal on the Mediterranean, so any break with Baghdad means no outlet for Kurdish crude.

But the Kurds have found a possible ally in Turkey, even though Ankara's a bitter opponent of the Kurds' burning ambition for an independent state.

The Turks fear an independent Kurdistan will encourage their own Kurdish rebels in their 20-year separatist war, as well as the wider region's 20 million Kurds.

Even so, Ankara may find Iraqi Kurds' support for the Turkish rebels might be dampened if Turkey gives the KRG separate access to Ceyhan.

Turkey, with no energy resources of its own, is particularly eager to import natural gas to fuel its power stations, possibly via a new pipeline from Kurdistan.

"The large deposits of natural gas in Iraqi Kurdistan and a booming bilateral trade -- together with a better mutual security understanding -- have led to much-improved relations," the Financial Times' Commodities Editor Javier Blas reported.

The presence of senior Turkish officials at the Irbil oil and gas conference testified to that.

"Turkey is even talking about connecting an export pipeline from Kurdistan to the projected Nabucco pipeline which would link the gas-rich Caucasus and Central Asia to energy-hungry European nations," said Blas.

Kurdistan is currently capable of producing 100,000 barrels of oil per day. That's scheduled to hit 175,000 bpd in 2012.

But if Exxon Mobil or any of the 40 smaller outfits that also have contracts with the KRG strike it big, KRG Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami says production could reach 1 million bpd by 2015.

If Iraq starts to fragment, that could convince other oil majors to invest in Kurdistan. □

America and Iraq

A troubled farewell

BAGHDAD



SEVERAL bombs exploded in Baghdad on Thursday morning, killing dozens of people in the Iraqi capital's worst attack in a year and stoking fears that without American soldiers, an unravelling political situation could herald a return for Iraq to the bad old days of sectarian bloodshed.

The troops' final departure on December 18th was a quiet affair marked by flag-folding and the rumble of convoys heading towards Kuwait. But though many have lamented the Americans' failure to oversee the creation of a functioning government or to bring security to Iraq, their presence may have been a stabilising factor and their departure has left people fearful for Iraq's future. As army trucks kicked up their last clouds of Iraqi dust, a political crisis descended on Baghdad that could fracture the fragile power-sharing government and re-open sectarian grievances.

Iraqia, the parliamentary bloc which includes many Sunni politicians and won the support of most of the Sunni population in the elections held in 2010, has suspended its participation the ruling coalition. One Iraqia MP said that in doing so, his party hoped to ring



alarm bells that the country was going in the wrong direction.

After the elections Iraqia, which won a plurality of seats, agreed—reluctantly—to participate in a government led by Nuri al-Maliki, who commands the support of many Shia parties and voters. They struck a bargain, they say, in which a member of Iraqia would be defence minister, and the bloc's leader, Ayad Allawi, would play a central role in government. None of this has happened. No defence or interior minister has been confirmed, and power is increasingly concentrated in Mr Maliki's hands. Iraqia alleges that Shia militias responsible for much of the sectarian violence that

tore the country apart five years ago have been incorporated into the security forces, and target Sunnis.

The cracks in the government are increasingly apparent. Saleh al-Mutlak, a Sunni member of Iraqia who is deputy prime minister, called Mr Maliki a dictator during an interview with CNN, an American television network, last week. His boss swiftly called for a vote of no confidence in him though this has yet to take place. Tanks are reportedly parked outside Mr Mutlak's house. An arrest warrant has been issued for Tariq al-Hashemi, another senior Sunni politician, after his former aides appeared on television claiming that he had participated in terrorist activities.

Sunni politicians outside Baghdad are increasingly worried about their position. In Diyala, a mixed province northwest of the capital, there were reports of Sunni politicians being arrested and bullied, apparently on orders from the government in Baghdad. Earlier in December Sunni and Kurdish members of the provisional council united against their Shia counterparts and announced a bid for federalism, a move that would minimise Baghdad's political and military control of the province. Protesting against the provincial government's actions, Shia rioters gathered around the council building and blocked the main road through the province.

Ordinary Iraqis frequently express bored disdain for their ineffective, corrupt government. But now people are afraid that this undignified sectarian political squabble will spill onto the streets. Sunnis fear that that they will suffer most. Watching the news on a crackly television in a shop in Baghdad, one young Sunni man said he feared sectarian violence would return to Iraq. "I think if the Americans stayed, it would be better," he said.

Deputy PM vows more rights for Turkey's Kurds



Deputy PM Bülent Arınç speaks in Parliament as members of the Cabinet, including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, look on. AA photo

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç promises more rights to the country's citizens of Kurdish origin in a speech in Parliament. All ethnic groups in the country will be granted all constitutional rights, Arınç says, while a prominent Kurdish politician demands action from the ruling party instead of words

Turkey's Kurdish community will be granted as many rights as Turks enjoy in the country, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç has said, prompting angry calls from the opposition to clarify whether the pledges reflect a government policy.

"Anybody who lives in this land, be they Kurds, Arabs or Bosniaks, should be comfortable in revealing their identity. We will respect that identity. We will grant and acknowledge all the cultural and constitutional rights of that

identity," Arınç said Dec. 21 during the closing debate on the 2012 budget in Parliament.

"Those who say they are Kurds – we will give them at least as much education, language, culture and identity rights as we all have in this country," he said.

Arınç said the state's denial of Kurdish identity in the past resulted in the torture and extrajudicial killings of Kurds and fueled conflict.

However, he denounced politics based on either Kurdish or Turkish nationalism. "I believe that social peace in the country is damaged as long as such mistakes grow. We reject racism and negative

nationalism," he said, in a veiled reference to the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), Turkey's main Kurdish party.

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) deputy Devlet Bahçeli lashed out at Arınç, dubbing his speech "a provoca-

tion." He urged the government to clarify whether it stood behind the pledges, recalling that Arınç took the floor at the budget debate on behalf of the government.

"The debate was a provocation. The ovations that erupted at the benches of the BDP and the AKP [Justice and Development Party] show that Turkey is knowingly being dragged in a certain direction," Bahçeli said.

If the government shares Arınç's views it must immediately stop all operations against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its alleged urban network, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) and "fulfill all what the BDP and the PKK want," Bahçeli said.

Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu backed Arınç's call for respect to all ethnic identities, but said the deputy prime minister had failed to clarify what he meant by pledging full rights for Kurds. "He spoke of granting everything with respect to identity but did not elaborate. So I will not comment now," he said.

BDP co-leader Gültan Kışanak said yesterday Arınç's remarks should be backed by legal reforms.

"Individual rights should be backed by laws," she said. "Twenty years have passed since then-president Süleyman Demirel said he recognized the Kurdish reality. Words do not mean anything anymore, words should be echoed in the legal system."

Kışanak said the ruling AKP had a majority in Parliament, giving it the power to make legal amendments "if it is sincere." □

AFP

Irak: le vice-président "prêt" à un procès s'il est jugé au Kurdistan

Erbil (Irak), 20 décembre 2011 (AFP)

LE VICE-PRÉSIDENT SUNNITE de l'Irak, Tarek al-Hachémi, s'est dit mardi "prêt à être jugé" pour des accusations de terrorisme si le procès a lieu dans la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

"Je propose de transférer le dossier au Kurdistan", a dit M. Hachémi au cours d'une conférence de presse à Erbil, capitale de cette région autonome du nord du pays. "Sur cette base, je serai prêt à être jugé."

Il a également appelé à la participation de représentants de la Ligue arabe à l'enquête et aux interrogatoires, et affirmé que les aveux télédiffusés l'impliquant dans des attentats étaient montés de toutes pièces.

Lundi, un comité judiciaire a émis un mandat d'arrêt à l'encontre de M. Hachémi, conformément aux "lois anti-terroristes", selon un porte-parole du

ministère de l'Intérieur. Ce comité avait déjà imposé à M. Hachémi une interdiction de voyager à l'étranger.

La télévision publique Al-Iraqiya a diffusé lundi des images montrant selon le ministère de l'Intérieur des gardes du corps de M. Hachémi avouant avoir planifié et commis des attentats, et qu'ils recevaient des fonds et un soutien du vice-président.

Quelques jours après le départ des dernières troupes américaines et moins d'un an après la mise en place laborieuse du gouvernement, la trêve politique semble toucher à sa fin.

Le bloc parlementaire Iraqiya, qui bénéficie du soutien des sunnites, boycotte le gouvernement et l'Assemblée. Le chef du gouvernement, chiite, a appelé au limogeage d'un vice-Premier ministre sunnite qui l'avait qualifié de "dictateur".

Barzani: Iraq's Political Turmoil Could Harm Everyone

RUDAW.net

In an interview with the Persian Service of the Voice of America, Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani said that if the issue of Kirkuk isn't solved by the constitutional Article 140, the Kurds will refer the issue to Kurdistan Parliament. Barzani said the people of Kurdistan will make their own decision on that issue. Regarding Iraq's recent political crisis, Barzani told VOA Persian that it can be solved through the political and judicial system.

VOA Persian: Iraqi Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi is in Kurdistan and Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki wants him handed over to Baghdad. What is your position on this issue? Will you hand Hashimi over?

Massoud Barzani: This issue has two sides. One side is judicial where the courts will make their judgment and everyone has to abide by it. The second side is political and these two should not be mixed. Politically I have talked to the Iraqi president and other Iraqi leaders in order to find a solution together. This is not an issue that can be solved with just one decision. It has consequences that could harm everyone. This subject has to be solved wisely. Hashimi came to Kurdistan to meet with the president. It wasn't that he had an arrest warrant against him and that he had escaped. Now that he is here, we will all try to find a solution for the whole issue.

VOA Persian: What are the consequences? Do you think this issue will be solved?

Massoud Barzani: We must try to solve it or there will be a big rift between Shias and Sunnis. The al-Iraqiya bloc largely represents the Sunnis. If the Sunnis get out of the government and Parliament and there is a rift between Shias and Sunnis, it will affect the relationship with the Kurds and the situation in Iraq as a whole. That is why this matter has to be solved wisely.

VOA Persian: Hashimi blames the US for leaving Iraq before meeting its duties and ensuring a national partnership in Iraq. What do you think? Do you think the US withdrew from Iraq too early or that they shouldn't have pulled out at all?



Massoud Barzani: The security of the Kurdistan Region is not something the Americans have brought us. Kurdistan is stable thanks to the vigilance of its people and the security forces. The Americans weren't even here. But the American presence in the rest of Iraq had its own impact to prevent the problems from spreading. I expressed my view about four months ago when I said it is too early for an American withdrawal. I said if they leave, they should create a mechanism where some of them would stay because Iraq isn't in a state that could overcome its issues. Back then some people criticized my view, but the result is clear now.

VOA Persian: It is true that Kurdistan is stable and has no security issues. But the case of Kirkuk is still there and many people believe that after the US withdrawal trouble between Kurds and Arabs will arise.

Massoud Barzani: There is a way to solve this issue and it is a constitutional way. We will try to stick to the constitution to the last breath. But on no account we would compromise on that issue. Baghdad has been very negligent regarding this case. Time will not solve this issue. The sooner it is solved the better it would be for Iraq and everyone else.

VOA Persian: You said you wouldn't compromise. What would you do if they (Baghdad) keeps procrastinating?

Massoud Barzani: The issue would then be referred to Kurdistan Parliament and the Kurdish people will decide in a referendum on what we should do. When people make their decision, we will abide it.

VOA Persian: But the Turkmen and the Turkmen Front do not want Kirkuk to become part of the Kurdistan Region. They want to have an independent region of their own. What would you do in that case?

Massoud Barzani: For Kirkuk and other similar areas mentioned in Article 140, no one has the right to impose any particular solution on the Kurdish people. The people of Kirkuk are the ones to decide. That is how you solve it: normalize the situation first, carry out a census and let people decide. If the people of Kirkuk decide to be part of Kurdistan that is fine and if they decided not to be part of Kurdistan that is their choice and we would be relieved of our historical responsibility. Turkmen and others are free to decide what they want. Let them say they don't want to be part of Kurdistan. But if the majority of people want to, they cannot stop them.

VOA Persian: Another issue is that of Iran, Turkey, PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) and PJAK (Party of Free Life of Kurdistan). You have expressed your views on the subject before, but Iran and Turkey don't seem to have accepted your recommendations. How do you see the future of this issue and what is your message for Iran, Turkey, PKK and PJAK?

Massoud Barzani: I would want to express my opinion on this issue. In the past we as Kurdish people had to defend ourselves with weapons because we had no other option. The world was indifferent about us. We were gassed, Anfaled, our villages were destroyed and no one would even mention it. But the world has changed now. So have the methods of struggle. Now is not the time for weapons. It is the time for logic. It is time to do your struggle in a democratic manner. When you have a chance to raise your issues in Parliament, there is no need to resort to arms. Therefore I am against the use of arms by the Kurdish people.

About the border areas, it was a sad situation. It is true that both the PKK and PJAK attack Iranian and Turkish forces in the remote and rugged mountains. But Turkey and Iran have told us they have nothing against the Kurdistan Region. They said 'they attack us from the territories of the Kurdistan Region. They should either stop, or you must stop them or we will defend ourselves.' For us it is an embarrassing situation. We ask them (PKK and PJAK) to take into account the situation of Kurdistan. Sometimes they listen to us and sometimes they don't. This issue cannot be solved with arms. As for Iran, we have reached a deal, the borders are quiet and there are no clashes. We are trying to find a similar solution for the PKK to end the war. Let them go and defend their cause in the Turkish Parliament. Let them stage demonstrations. Let them go and speak in Europe or do political activities here. But the time for armed struggle is over and the world is not on their side.

VOA Persian: The Iranian media does not talk about you in a positive manner and Iran doesn't seem happy with your role in Iraq. Iranian media is the mouthpiece of the state. Is there an issue between you and Iran?

Massoud Barzani: I was in Iran less than two months ago. I think it was a successful visit. So I am surprised. I haven't heard that. When? Prior to my visit it was true. But I haven't heard such comments since my visit.

VOA Persian: Most of Iran's news agencies are affiliated with the government and they link you to American and Israel. It sounds like there are some issues between you and Iran.

Massoud Barzani: It is possible that there were such things before my visit (to Iran) but I haven't heard anything like that since then. They know that I am someone who works on the decisions of my own people. I am nobody's man and I am friends with everyone. They know that, too. If I were to make decisions for myself that I would do. I respect Iran and I would like to have friendly relations with them. But I have never nor will I ever allow Iran, American or any other country to make decisions for the Kurdish people.

VOA Persian: Iraqi Sunnis talk about Iran interfering in Iraqi affairs after the US troop withdrawal. What is your opinion on that?

Massoud Barzani: Unfortunately, Iraq's Sunni leaders accuse Iran and their Shias accuse America and Turkey. But the question is: why do you allow Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, America or any other country to interfere in your affairs? They should blame themselves.

VOA Persian: On the issue of Syria, unlike other Arab states, Maliki supports Bashar Al-Assad. Do you agree with Maliki's position?

Massoud Barzani: I have my own opinion. For me, it is neither Assad that matters nor is it the Syrian opposition. What matters is democracy in Syria and the rights of two million Kurds in that country. If Assad comes forward and recognizes the rights of the Kurds we will have our stance and if the opposition does that we will still express our position. Our stance toward Assad or the Syrian opposition depends on their policy towards the Kurds. But sadly until now, both of them deny the Kurds and their rights.

VOA Persian: As a Kurdish leader, how do you evaluate America's work in Iraq nine years on?

Massoud Barzani: Regarding America I am very straightforward. I have said that we thank America for its sacrifices in Iraq. If it wasn't for them, those who run Baghdad today wouldn't be there. Saddam would still be there. In our view toppling Saddam's regime was a great thing. But they made many mistakes afterwards.

VOA Persian: What kind of mistakes?

Massoud Barzani: They (the Americans) named themselves occupiers. They didn't let an interim government be formed. Their soldiers replaced the Iraqi police and confronted the Iraqi people on the streets everyday. Those were all mistakes, but the biggest one was when they switched their name from liberators to occupiers.

VOA Persian: There are concerns that Islamists have flourished in Kurdistan. This is

a peaceful region and it is a friend of America and the west with relative democracy. But does it seem that this democracy is threatened by Islamists? What's your view? Do you think the Islamists have been shown a soft approach that is why they have grown and give themselves the right to close down some places?

Massoud Barzani: One thing we are very proud of is the culture of coexistence among Kurdistan's religious and ethnic groups. It has been there throughout history and will always be. It is a guarantee for the Kurds. But unfortunately we saw recently some violence from some Islamic clerics or people who see themselves as Islamists. We are now working with Islamic scholars and Islamic parties. Undoubtedly the Kurdish people are Muslims and they are Muslims in a pure way. They are open Muslims, a Muslim that tolerates the other, a Muslim that accepts the others' faith, not violent Muslims who do not tolerate anything. Therefore we won't allow in any way for radical Muslims to take root in Kurdistan. There would be moderate Islam, an open Islam and the Islam and of the Prophet, Koran and God.

VOA Persian: What is your opinion about the Gorran Movement? Do you have normal relations with them now?

Massoud Barzani: I treat Kurdistan's parties the same way. I talk and sit down with all of them. That is my position. My only goal is to reorganize the Kurdish house. It is normal to have different parties and different views, but what is important is to be united on the national issues and thankfully we are doing well on that front.



Biden Calls Maliki, Kurdish Area President After Bombings in Iraq

December 25, 2011
FoxNews.com

Vice President Joe Biden spoke Sunday with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki to offer U.S. moral support for political reconciliation after recent violence marred the start of the country's self-reliance following the departure of U.S. military personnel from Iraq.

Biden also spoke Saturday with the president of the Kurdistan region, Massoud Barzani, his office said. Kurdistan is the northern area where Iraq's Sunni Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi allegedly is hiding out with the help of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani after

Maliki called for Hashemi's arrest.

Maliki is accusing Hashemi of running death squads against the Shiite majority, of which Maliki is a part. Hashemi denies the charges and is reportedly seeking safe passage out of the country as Sunnis boycott Parliament, causing a political crisis in Baghdad.

Biden "offered condolences on the recent violence in Baghdad, exchanged views with both leaders on the current political climate in Iraq and reiterated our support for ongoing efforts to convene a dialogue among Iraqi political leaders," the vice president's office said.

Biden's calls follow a wave of bom-

bings in Baghdad earlier in the week that left at least 60 people dead.

The action has heated up just in the past week after the departure of the last U.S. forces in Iraq. Pentagon spokesman George Little tweeted Saturday that no U.S. combat forces remained in Iraq the day before Christmas.

That has some U.S. officials concerned that the absence of a U.S. military presence has created a vacuum for a festering brew of unrest amid factional tensions that have lasted for decades but were kept under wraps during Saddam Hussein's tyranny and mitigated during U.S. liberation.

"It has been going on for decades," U.S. Sen. Dick Lugar said of the Sunni-Shiite conflict.

"For the moment we're hopeful that the al-Maliki government will hold together," Lugar, ranking Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, told CNN on Sunday.

But, he said, the violence and factional politics are "not good news for Iraq. It is not good news for the whole neighborhood. ... I don't think it will fall apart but

I fear that there will be continued clashes between Shiites and Sunnis and that the Kurds in the northern parts will be less and less affiliated with the other two," he said.

Retired U.S. Navy Capt. Chuck Nash, a Fox News military analyst, offered a more dire analysis.

He said the Iraqis need to understand that if they miss their shot at freedom by allowing sectarian violence to mar their efforts at democracy, they are going to

be subject to neighbors who will "come in and carve it up."

"It really is bad, and especially when you look at the -- just the nasty way that the Iranians continue to cause trouble in Iraq and with us not there anymore, the Iranians are going to increase their control. They've already thoroughly penetrated that government," he said. □

Hurriyet
DailyNews

December 24, 2011

Authorities: 27 PKK militants killed in Turkey

ANKARA - AP

Turkish security forces have killed 27 Kurdish militants in a helicopter-backed offensive in southeast Turkey, authorities say days after another major anti-PKK offensive.

The rebels, including an alleged senior commander, were killed in a five-day long attack targeting caves and other hideouts on Mt. Cudi in Şırnak province, which borders Iraq, the office of the governor said late Friday.

Five other militants, suspected members of the autonomy-seeking Kurdistan Workers' Party or "PKK" were captured alive, it added.

Pro-Kurdish news agency Firat confirmed clashes in Cudi, but made no mention of any militant deaths.

The announcement came two days after another major offensive against the autonomy-seeking group, also backed by airpower, left 21 suspected rebels dead in Diyarbakir province, some 300 kilometers (190 miles) away.

The militants, branded as terrorists by the United States and the European Union, are fighting for autonomy in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast. Tens of thousands of people have died in the conflict since 1984.

The operations are a victory of sorts for the Turkish military, which seemed to



DHA photo

be struggling to clamp down on guerrilla activities after a spate of attacks killed dozens of soldiers and civilians this year.

They follow the U.S. deployment of four Predator drones to Turkey from Iraq following the American troops' withdrawal from the country. The U.S. has pledged to assist Turkey in its fight against the militants who often stage attacks from bases across the border in Iraq's north.

Deputy Prime Minister Beşir Atalay said this week that Turkey is determined to press ahead with the anti-militant operations, rejecting speculation of possible new negotiations with the PKK to end the violence.

"At this moment, no place is secure for the PKK and its members nor will it be", Atalay said.

In a related development, Turkish authorities on Saturday released a pho-

tographer for the French news agency, Agence France Presse, along with 13 other people who were detained as part of an investigation into a group prosecutors accuse of having links to the PKK.

The Anadolu Agency said, however, that a court had ordered 35 other suspects formally arrested pending trial over their alleged involvement in the Union of Kurdistan Communities, which authorities say is an offshoot of the PKK and of working as its political arm. Kurdish activists reject the accusation and insist the group is an umbrella organization to unite all Kurds.

Hundreds of Kurdish activists, including elected mayors, have already been charged as part of the investigation since 2009.

AFP photographer Mustafa Ozer and 48 other suspects, including a number of other journalists, were detained in police raids in seven cities on Dec. 20, sparking increased concerns over media freedoms in Turkey, where dozens of journalists have been jailed mostly on anti-terror charges, accused of aiding alleged terrorist groups.

The Dogan news agency said most of the suspects ordered arrested Saturday are journalists working for Kurdish media organizations.

The U.S. and the EU have criticized Turkey's press freedoms and there are calls for the country to revise anti-terrorism laws which have led to the arrests of the journalists as well as dozens of student protesters. ○

Au moins 35 villageois kurdes tués par l'aviation turque

35 personnes ont été tuées par l'aviation turque qui les aurait prises pour des terroristes. L'AKP admet une possible erreur.

Trente-cinq villageois kurdes ont été tués mercredi soir à la frontière turco-irakienne lors de raids de l'aviation turque, et le parti au pouvoir à Ankara a admis une possible erreur, indiquant que les victimes étaient des trafiquants. "Selon les premières informations que nous avons reçues, ces gens étaient des trafiquants et non des terroristes", c'est-à-dire des rebelles séparatistes avec lesquels ils ont été confondus, a déclaré devant la presse à Ankara Hüseyin Celik, vice-président du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, issu de la mouvance islamiste).

"Au nom de mon parti, je souhaite exprimer notre consternation, notre tristesse pour la mort de 35 de nos citoyens", a-t-il dit. "S'il y a une erreur, une bavure, soyez rassurés, l'affaire ne sera pas enterrée. La Turquie est un État de droit", a dit M. Celik, indiquant croire, d'après les premiers éléments de l'enquête, qu'il semblait s'agir d'"un accident d'opération" militaire. Le gouvernement ne s'est pas exprimé sur l'incident. Selon les autorités locales, les victimes, la plupart des jeunes, se livraient avec des mules et des ânes à une contrebande de cigarettes entre l'Irak et la Turquie, pays voisins, a souligné ce responsable, appelant l'opinion publique à attendre les conclusions d'une enquête administrative et judiciaire menée sur cet incident. Toutefois, l'armée a annoncé que son opération visait des séparatistes kurdes qui tentaient de s'infiltrer en Turquie.

"Massacre"

Il s'agit de l'incident le plus grave de ces dernières années impliquant des civils dans le conflit kurde en Turquie. Selahattin Demirtas, chef du BDP (Parti pour la paix et la démocratie), principale formation



Les victimes se livraient avec des mules et des ânes à une contrebande de cigarettes entre l'Irak et la Turquie. © Reuters

pro-kurde de Turquie, a dénoncé un "massacre", assurant que l'ensemble des victimes étaient des civils. Le BDP a organisé une manifestation qui a réuni plus de 2 000 personnes sur la place centrale de Taksim (partie européenne) à Istanbul pour protester contre le raid de l'armée. Ce rassemblement a dégénéré en heurts avec les forces de l'ordre. Les manifestants, dont certains portaient des photos des cadavres de victimes du raid aérien, ont scandé des slogans favorables au PKK et à son chef emprisonné, Abdullah Öcalan. La manifestation s'est achevée en heurts entre jeunes Kurdes et policiers.

L'armée turque a annoncé que les bombardements avaient visé des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit). "La zone où se sont produits les faits est celle de Sinat-Haftanin, située dans le nord de l'Irak, qui n'abrite pas de population civile et où se trouvent des bases de l'organisation terroriste", le PKK, a indiqué l'état-major dans un communiqué en ligne. Les avions turcs ont pilonné cette zone après que des drones eurent signalé "un mouvement vers notre frontière", précise l'armée.

Les médias et des élus kurdes avaient auparavant parlé d'une

bavure militaire qui a confondu des contrebandiers, originaires d'un hameau du district d'Uludere, avec des séparatistes kurdes. Une vingtaine de corps ont été recensés dans le village d'Ortasu, proche de la frontière avec l'Irak. La télévision locale a diffusé des images montrant des cadavres recouverts de couvertures et allongés à même le sol sur une colline enneigée tandis que des gens se massaient autour d'eux en criant et en pleurant. Un porte-parole du PKK en Irak, Ahmet Deniz, a affirmé que les victimes étaient des trafiquants et que "le gouvernement turc était au courant" de leurs agissements. "Notre parti n'a pas de base dans cette zone", a-t-il dit avant de condamner "un massacre" visant selon lui le peuple kurde. L'armée turque, qui bombarde régulièrement les repaires du PKK dans le Kurdistan irakien, fait face depuis l'été à une flambée de violence des rebelles qui utilisent leurs bases arrière en Irak pour lancer des attaques contre des objectifs en territoire turc, près de la frontière. Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par de nombreux pays, a pris les armes en 1984 et le conflit a fait au moins 45 000 morts. ○○○

Leyla Zana : «L'autonomie des Kurdes en Turquie ne sera pas suffisante»

Source Rudaw, traduction Azadnews

www.lepost.fr/perso/azadnews



La semaine dernière, Rudaw a rencontré la politicienne kurde et députée Leyla ZANA, qui s'est vu attribuée par le parlement Européen en 1995 le Prix Sakharov des droits de l'Homme. ZANA était à Munich, en Allemagne, pour assister à une conférence sur l'histoire de la migration kurde vers l'Europe. Durant l'interview, Zana a évoqué la situation politique actuelle en Turquie et la lutte des Kurdes pour l'autodétermination.

Rudaw: Vous avez mentionné, à l'occasion de la conférence, l'importance d'un référendum qui permettrait aux kurdes de déterminer eux-mêmes leurs propres avenir. Que voulez-vous dire par là?

Leyla ZANA: Nous avons mentionné le moyen du référendum pour les Kurdes. Pourquoi un référendum? Les Kurdes réclament leurs indépendances à l'Est depuis presque un siècle, mais les gouvernements iranien, turc, syrien et irakien ne veulent rien pour les Kurdes et ils font tout pour que les Kurdes restent sous leurs tutelles. De plus, il arrive que ces pays soient les uns contre les autres et nous avons le sentiment qu'aucun accord n'existe entre eux. Or, lorsqu'il s'agit de la question kurde, ils sont tous unis. Les Kurdes en Syrie, en Turquie et en Iran sont toujours opprimés et divisés. Heureusement, les Kurdes en Irak ont une sorte de semi-autonomie. Selon les résolutions des Nations Unies sur l'autodétermination des nations, les kurdes devraient également avoir accès à ce droit.

La politique de coercition à l'égard des Kurdes doit être arrêtée. Les Kurdes devraient avoir le droit de décider de leurs avenir sur leurs propres terres. Pourquoi les Kurdes ne sont toujours pas unis? En effet, les Kurdes ont toujours été divisés et ils ont suivi des méthodes tribales. Les kurdes devraient avoir leurs droits à la liberté, à l'autonomie, au fédéralisme et l'indépendance. Par exemple, la Turquie pourrait créer un système fédéral comme à l'image de l'Allemagne. Ankara pourrait se prononcer sur les questions fédérales et les Kurdes devraient se prononcer sur les questions régionales. Les Kurdes devraient déterminer leurs avenir à travers un référendum. Il nous appartiendra d'accepter les résultats du référendum, que ce résultat soit l'autonomie, le fédéralisme ou l'indépendance des kurdes en Turquie. Les Kurdes devraient être en mesure de décider de leurs avenir comme n'importe quelle autres nations dans le monde et le monde à le devoir accepter cela.

Rudaw: Est-ce la situation actuelle en Turquie est convenable pour le référendum? Est-ce que la Turquie accepte cette suggestion?

Leyla ZANA: Oui, je crois que oui. Aujourd'hui, le débat n'est pas de savoir si les Kurdes existent ou non. La question kurde doit être résolue. Le fédéralisme au sud du Kurdistan (Iraq) peut être actuellement une des solutions. La région kurde a été reconnue dans la Constitution

irakienne et le nom mentionné pour la partie la plus importante est le Kurdistan. Nous pouvons constater que la Turquie ne veut toujours pas utiliser le terme de Kurdistan pour cette région reconnue par l'Irak elle-même. C'est surprenant. La constitution irakienne accepte ce fait, mais la loi turque le rejette. Donnons un exemple, la population québécoise, au Canada, se rend aux urnes tous les quatre ans afin de déterminer leurs avenir. Certaines personnes votent pour l'indépendance et d'autres veulent l'autonomie et le fédéralisme. La population du Québec peut exprimer sa voix par le vote. C'est la voix du peuple et personne ne peut la remettre en question.

Je crois qu'il est temps pour les Kurdes de décider de leurs avenir par référendum. Quelle que soit la volonté des personnes, elle doit pouvoir s'exprimer à travers un référendum. Le gouvernement turc veut résoudre la question kurde par sa propre voie. Pour les Kurdes, le gouvernement de l'AKP (du Parti de la justice et du développement) et son Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan sont trompeurs et perfides. TRT6, la chaîne de télévision Kurde ne résoudra pas la question Kurde. Les Kurdes ne veulent pas le combat, mais le gouvernement turc les oblige à porter des armes pour se battre. Si le gouvernement turc a l'intention de résoudre le problème kurde par le dialogue, alors ils doivent présenter les preuves de toutes les oppressions et les génocides qu'ils ont commis contre les Kurdes.

Rudaw: la Turquie a rédigée une nouvelle constitution. Comment le mouvement kurde se forme-t-il dans cette nouvelle constitution?

Leyla ZANA: Dans la nouvelle constitution, ils mentionnent des droits individuels pour les Kurdes mais nous leurs avons préciser que nous ne sommes pas des individus mais une nation. Nous voulons les droits qu'une nation devrait avoir. Il n'y aura aucun espoir pour la Turquie jusqu'au jour où le problème kurde sera résolu. Certains Kurdes, en Turquie, veulent l'autonomie. La question est de savoir le pourcentage des 20 millions de Kurdes qui veulent l'autonomie? Les discussions doivent porter sur cela. Je crois que les Kurdes devraient être capables de décider de leurs propres avenir. C'est vrai, au début nous avons demandé l'autonomie, mais aujourd'hui les Kurdes, en Turquie, croient que l'autonomie ne sera pas suffisante.

Rudaw: Pourquoi n'y a t-il pas d'unité entre les Kurdes au Moyen-Orient?

Leyla Zana: Il existe beaucoup de partis kurdes et d'organisations, ayant des opinions différentes, qui demandent des choses différentes pour les Kurdes. Dans le monde, les nations des pays développés ont déterminé leurs propres avenir. Pourquoi les kurdes n'ont toujours pas pu déterminer leurs propres avenir? La nation kurde a vécu depuis longtemps sur sa terre, elle a partagé sa terre et sa richesse. Les Kurdes n'ont jamais été hostile à l'encontre des autres nations. Les Kurdes n'ont jamais opprimés quiconque. Ils ont toujours aidé ceux qui étaient dans le besoin.

Malheureusement, à plusieurs reprises, les Kurdes ont été poignardés dans le dos par des personnes, qu'ils avaient aider auparavant. Les Kurdes sont, à la fois, opprimés et humanistes. Si les Kurdes avaient été des oppresseurs, ils auraient aujourd'hui leur propre pays et identité. Chaque fois que les Kurdes réclament leurs droits, ils ont été arrêtés et la communauté internationale n'a pas aidé les Kurdes. Ils utilisaient toujours des termes comme « les rebelles, de tribu et les terroristes » pour les Kurdes.

Les Kurdes ont des faiblesses aussi. Mais d'où proviennent t-elle? L'ennemi a le contrôle total de notre terre et il a pénétré notre nation. Les Kurdes n'ont pas eu assez de courage pour établir une unité entre eux. Chaque parti kurde d'une région différente du Moyen-Orient proclame « nous ne pouvons nous ingérer dans les affaires de l'autre ». Ce qui serait bien, c'est que les kurdes puisse avoir des rapports fort dans toutes les parties du Moyen-Orient, parce que les Kurdes sont une famille qui a été divisée en quatre. □

Quel avenir pour le grand Moyen-Orient

La chute du régime syrien semble scellée

Gérard Chaliand

Géopoliticien spécialiste des conflits armés

Officieusement le sort de la Syrie de Bachar Al-Assad est scellé. Sous l'impulsion de la Ligue arabe, où l'Arabie saoudite joue un rôle central, avec la participation décisive de la Turquie, l'accord actif des Européens, France en tête, et des Etats-Unis, le pouvoir syrien serait renversé au cours de l'année à venir.

Idéalement, l'aval des Nations unies, avec l'accord possible de la Russie, voire de la Chine, légitimerait cette opération. A cet effet, il s'agit de mettre en place, en territoire syrien, ce qu'on désigne du terme de « couloir humanitaire » grâce à la pression turque, à partir duquel s'organiseraient les conditions d'une confrontation armée destinée à provoquer la chute du régime alaouite.

Ces événements, qui seraient dramatiques, les guerres civiles étant très meurtrières, auraient des répercussions probablement violentes au Liban où, comme en Syrie, des sectes religieuses plus ou moins antagonistes rendent l'équilibre politique complexe sinon conflictuel.

L'onde de choc produite par la Syrie ne manquera pas d'entraîner des répercussions sur le Hezbollah chiite, formation la mieux structurée du Liban, ainsi que sur le Hamas palestinien. Le processus de recomposition géopolitique du Grand Moyen-Orient qu'envisageaient, il y a dix ans, les néoconservateurs Américains à la veille de l'intervention en Irak, se déroule aujourd'hui, mais de façon largement imprévue. Israël se retrouve isolé, depuis la récente volte-face de la Turquie et les changements majeurs intervenant actuellement en Egypte.

L'investissement de l'Irak, qui devait préluder à une avancée de la démocratie en Orient, a surtout eu pour conséquences l'accession au pouvoir des chiites et des insuccès militaires des Etats-Unis en Irak et plus encore en Afghanistan, qui a été la victime collatérale du projet des néoconservateurs. De façon ironique, le président George W. Bush remettait le pouvoir à Bagdad entre les mains d'un allié objectif d'un des pays de « l'axe du Mal ».

Ceux qui s'intéressent à l'histoire de la région sur la durée savent que l'Iran chiite a perdu au début du XVI^e siècle ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui l'Irak au profit de l'Empire ottoman, alors champion du sunnisme. Au lendemain de l'intervention américaine, la minorité sunnite qui dirigeait l'Irak depuis le mandat britannique, institué après la première guerre mondiale, se voyait, à son grand dam, marginalisée par la majorité chiite.

Ce retournement s'opérait à la consternation de

l'Arabie saoudite qui n'avait cessé d'œuvrer, depuis la révolution khomeiniste, pour propager un contre-feu sunnite. Il s'agissait d'endiguer, entre autres grâce à l'appui donné à l'Afghanistan en lutte contre l'Union soviétique, la renaissance offensive du chiisme. Récemment, à Bahrein, Riyad bloquait, par son intervention militaire dissuasive, les revendications de la majorité chiite de l'île face à un pouvoir sunnite minoritaire et oppressif.

De façon globale, la montée de l'islamisme militant, du Maghreb au Machrek, est un succès immédiat pour l'Arabie saoudite. La Turquie tirera des bénéfices politiques du rôle qu'elle va jouer dans la chute du régime syrien. L'Iran ressemble de plus en plus à une citadelle assiégée contre laquelle se livre une guerre de l'ombre destinée à retarder le programme nucléaire qui pourrait garantir sa sanctuarisation.

La poussée générale des islamistes plus ou moins radicaux est le résultat des votes démocratiques qui leur ont permis d'apparaître au grand jour et du patient travail entrepris depuis des décennies en faveur des couches déshéritées.

« L'armée, seule force organisée en dehors des Frères musulmans et des salafistes, conserve le pouvoir de jouer un rôle perturbateur »

Parmi des situations contrastées reflétant des conditions spécifiques, celle de l'Egypte est essentielle, non seulement parce que la percée islamiste y est la plus considérable, mais parce que ce pays est le centre de gravité démographique, politique et intellectuel du monde arabe. De surcroît, elle est, avec la Jordanie, le seul pays arabe qui ait signé une paix en due forme avec l'Etat d'Israël.

L'avenir économique du pays s'annonce sombre et quelle que soit la majorité qui, à l'évidence, sera dominée par les partisans de l'islam politique, le problème de la croissance restera central. L'armée, seule force organisée en dehors des Frères musulmans et des salafistes, conserve le pouvoir de jouer un rôle perturbateur.

En Irak, enfin, où malgré le retrait officiel de troupes américaines, le personnel de l'ambassade et les membres des compagnies de sécurité avoisinent 25 000 hommes, les firmes américaines bénéficient d'un marché lucratif.

Cependant, la situation reste incertaine et les tensions interreligieuses vives entre sunnites, encouragés par l'Arabie saoudite, qui réclament davantage de pouvoir, et chiites, dont certains courants, tel celui de Moqtada Al-Sadr, sont fortement soutenus par l'Iran.

La recomposition régionale est en plein développement. ■

Gérard Chaliand est l'auteur notamment de « Géopolitique des empires : des pharaons à l'imperium américain » (Arthaud, 2010) et de « L'Impasse afghane » (Ed. de l'Aube, 158 p., 12 €)

A fresh challenge to Maliki

BAGHDAD

Radical cleric's bloc calls for Parliament to be dissolved and early vote

BY MICHAEL S. SCHMIDT
AND JACK HEALY

A powerful political bloc led by the anti-American cleric Moktada al-Sadr called on Monday to dissolve the Iraqi Parliament and to hold early elections, a potentially fatal blow to a power-sharing government that has teetered on collapse since American troops withdrew a little more than a week ago.

In a statement posted on its Web site, the Sadrists said scrapping the current government was the only way to steer Iraq out of a deepening political crisis that has put Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, a Shiite, at odds with leaders representing the country's Sunni minority. The statement constitutes the first challenge to Mr. Maliki from within his Shiite coalition, a sign that even if his government survives, he has been weakened.

"We have a lot of problems," said Baha al-Araji, a leading lawmaker with the bloc. "The Americans, when they came to Iraq, they gave power to some blocs and some leaders. And they had power."

He added: "We need new elections."

The move by the Sadrists is not enough to quickly bring down the government but does represent the first crack in the ranks of the country's Shiite politicians, who have largely supported Mr. Maliki's government as it has publicly accused Sunni leaders of conspiring with terrorists. It was unclear whether their gambit would go anywhere. The calls for a new election won support from a leading member of the predominately Sunni Iraqiya coalition, one of the prime minister's main antagonists. But members of other powerful Shiite groups quickly dismissed the calls for a new vote as hollow gamesmanship.

"This is ridiculous," said Hassoun al-Fatlawi, a member of the Shiite Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq. "The problems we have can be solved, but not this way. Let them sit down together if they really want to solve it."

Even if the Sadrist proposal won over a majority of Iraqi lawmakers, the group said it would take at least six

months to plan another round of elections.

The Sadrist movement provided crucial support to help Mr. Maliki seal a second term after last year's indecisive elections.

Canny populist political operators, the Sadrists sensed there was opportunity in Iraq's political upheaval and may simply be trying to exploit the recent turmoil to extend the group's power, analysts said.

The Sadrists call for new elections came as violence continued to plague Baghdad. Around 7:30 a.m. on Monday, a car packed with explosives attacked a checkpoint in front of the Ministry of Interior, killing five people, including two officers.

"When the explosion happened it was so loud I couldn't hear anything — I felt like I was in a different world," said Ahmed Abed, 45, a taxi driver whose car was damaged in the attack. "What am I going to do now? I depend on this car for supporting my family."

The attack occurred just hours after two improvised explosive devices were detonated on Sunday night in the predominately Sunni area of Abu Ghraib, which is policed mainly by Shiite security officers. Four officers were killed in that attack and four others were wounded, officials said.

On Thursday morning, a series of explosions across Baghdad killed more than 60 people, marking the deadliest day in the capital in more than a year.

No group claimed responsibility for the attacks but they were similar to others conducted by Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the insurgent group accused of trying to plunge the country back into a sectarian conflict by pitting Sunnis and Shiites against one another.

The Ministry of Interior has symbolic importance in the political crisis that engulfed the country as the last American troops were withdrawing a little more than a week ago. The crisis began when a spokesman for the ministry, which is controlled by Mr. Maliki, publicly accused the country's Sunni vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi, of running a death squad.

In a televised news conference, the spokesman waved a warrant for Mr. Hashimi's arrest in front of the cameras and played videotaped confessions of Mr. Hashimi's bodyguards saying he was behind orders they received to kill government officials. The accusations were a tipping point in a widening rift between Mr. Maliki's Shiite-led govern-

ment and leaders of the country's Sunni minority.

Amid the political turmoil and violence, Iraq appeared to be moving closer to unwinding a standoff between the government and 3,400 Iranian dissidents living at a camp in eastern Iraq.

Under the deal announced late Sunday night by the United Nations office in Baghdad, the members of the People's Mujahedeen of Iran would leave Camp Ashraf, in Diyala Province in eastern Iraq, and move to a former American military base near Baghdad's international airport.

The exiles are members of a paramilitary group that has tried to topple Iran's government and is listed as a terrorist group by the United States. They were given refuge by Saddam Hussein during his war with Iran, but the current Iraqi government, with closer ties to Iran, has vowed to dismantle the outpost by the end of the year.

Mr. Maliki, who fled to Iran to escape a death warrant under Mr. Hussein, gave the group a six-month extension last week, suggesting some hope of resolving the situation.

The U.N. refugee agency will relocate the residents to other countries, most likely as refugees. American offi-

"The Americans, when they came to Iraq, they gave power to some blocs and some leaders. And they had power."

cial and United Nations diplomats hailed the deal as a major step that could prevent a humanitarian catastrophe and avert a head-on confrontation between the camp's residents and the Iraqi security forces stationed just outside its perimeter. In April, dozens of people inside Ashraf were killed after the Iraqi Army raided the camp.

The U.N. said it had spoken extensively with the camp's residents about the relocation, but it was unclear whether they would accept the deal. A spokesman for the camp said in a telephone interview on Monday that its residents had yet to see the terms of the formal agreement signed by the Iraqi government and U.N., and did not know whether it would offer adequate security guarantees.

"The most important thing is the protection of the lives of the 3,400 people at the camp," said Shahriar Kia, the spokesman. "That's the main priority."

Kurds in Turkey: arrests and violence threaten to radicalise a generation

Constanze Letsch reports on the Turkish crackdown on the country's Kurds and the cultural oppression that goes with it

Constanze Letsch in Diyarbakir

Since the beginning of the Arab uprising Turkey has been held up as a blueprint for the emerging Middle Eastern democracies to copy. But many observers question whether its treatment of its Kurdish minority gives it the right to be treated as a role model.

This year more than 4,000 people have been arrested under arbitrary terrorism charges, including dozens of journalists arrested last week, military operations against Kurdish separatists have intensified, with at least 27 killed in December alone, and guerrillas have stepped up violent attacks on security forces and civilians.

Mass trials of Kurds, including local deputies, mayors, academics and human rights activists, have inched forwards. In the biggest case, more than 150 politicians and activists are being tried in a specially built courtroom in Diyarbakir. More than 100 of the defendants have been in pre-trial detention, some of them for many months.

Abdullah Demirbas, the mayor of a district in the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir in eastern Turkey, is among the defendants on trial for "membership in the KCK", an illegal pan-Kurdish umbrella organisation that includes the armed Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK).

If convicted, he faces 35 years in jail on these charges alone.

"They have not even found a pocket knife in my house," Demirbas said. Human rights groups have repeatedly expressed their concern about the arbitrary use of terrorism laws in Turkey.

"The Turkish laws make no distinction between political activity and terrorism. It is never examined in what kind of activities people are actually involved and whether these qualify them for prosecution. Very many of these cases are based on guilt by association," said Emma Sinclair-Webb, the Turkey researcher for Human Rights Watch.

"People have a right to association. You may not like what people are associating with, but it is illegitimate to just jail, suppress and silence critics."

Demirbas fears that the massive repression

Children enjoy a motor-bike ride in Diyarbakir, a mainly Kurdish city in south-eastern Turkey where a courtroom has been built for the mass trial of more than 150 Kurdish politicians and activists. Photograph: Bulent Kilic/AFP



of politicians and human rights activists will decrease confidence in politics and lead to more violence: "A state that wants to end violence should widen the political sphere as much as possible, so that people who used to feel compelled to use armed force will turn to dialogue instead.

"But [Turkey] does exactly the opposite: they arrest more than 4,000 people that have never held a weapon, so people will think: 'If we enter politics, we will end up like that.'"

Demirbas does not need to look far for examples: he was given a prison sentence of two years and six months after saying, in May 2009, that "a soldier's and a guerrilla's mother's tears are the same colour. This war needs to end".

Three weeks later his then 16-year-old son joined the PKK.

"He told me: 'Dad, see this is what happens when you try to do politics. This state does not understand politics, it only understands weapons.'"

Demirbas said that he tried in vain to persuade his son to stay.

"That is the psychology of thousands of Kurds. I know of at least 2,000 young Kurdish people who have [joined the PKK] since then."

Mehmet Emin Aktar, president of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, said that Turkey had become "a republic of fear".

He says: "A democratic state needs to provide a trustworthy judiciary. People need to know that they can expect justice if they step in front of a judge. But this is no longer the case."

Like many of his colleagues, he is very worried that the situation will reach a breaking

point: "If fear and threats continue to be the main method of the government, the younger generation of Kurds will become more radical."

In the cafeteria of the Dicle Fırat cultural centre, a group of men were discussing the latest KCK arrests. "We all have our bags packed," Kazım Öz said. "We now live on the assumption that each and every one of us could be arrested at any minute."

Another man nodded. "Where is this supposed to end? They can't arrest all of us! This morning I counted 36 grandchildren. They can't finish us Kurds like this."

With tensions turning violent again, investment and business development in Diyarbakir has stalled, making unemployment and poverty, for decades a major problem in the predominantly Kurdish south-east, ever more acute.

With prejudice fuelled by the Turkish media, discrimination against Kurds continues.

"Those who conduct business outside Diyarbakir province will not register their car here," said one local Turkish Kurdish politician from the ruling AKP party. "The '21' on your licence plate is often enough to get randomly pulled over and fined. It's just not worth the trouble."

Most people agree dialogue must be reopened and that the Democratic Opening, an ill-fated attempt at rapprochement launched at the end of 2008, was on the right lines.

Recent reports have indicated the AKP may be on the verge of a new peace overture.

"The AKP is wrong when they think they can destroy the PKK through military force," said Vahap Coskun, assistant pro-

fessor at the Diyarbakir Dicle University. "The PKK's strength does not stem from the approximately 5,000 fighters in the mountains, but from its widespread legitimacy among an important part of the population. For every fighter that they kill, another will go to join them."

Coskun said that the PKK, too, was making a mistake in escalating attacks and violence. "People here are tired of fighting. The PKK's attempts to use the momentum of the Arab spring to incite people to revolt have failed."

He believes that the Kurdish-aligned Peace and Democracy BDP party should encourage peaceful civil disobedience campaigns again, and keep young Kurds from taking

up arms.

"There is a massive potential: they have a party, civilian organisations, media, and a very young and mobile mass of people," he said. "If they manage to gather 10,000 people in the streets of Diyarbakir, peacefully demanding mother tongue education, the government would have to acknowledge their request."

This would also put in question the AKP government's use of the "terrorist" label. "The unsuccessful civil disobedience campaign [after the 2011 elections] scared the government, because you cannot label civil disobedience as terrorism," says Coskun.

In his butcher shop in the Diyarbakir city

centre, Metin Özsanli, who is a member of the peace committee that has been arbitrating blood feuds, says: "My father has ended 250 blood feuds, and I have ended 65. It is incredible to see that capacity for forgiveness in people."

He added: "We have to talk to both families many, many times, visit them both many times – when only one person has been killed. But over 40,000 people have died in this conflict."

"Prime minister [Recep Tayyip] Erdogan should not give up this easily. It will take many more talks with both sides to end this feud, but I am hopeful that it will end one day." □ □ □

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune DECEMBER 23, 2011

Arrests in Turkey signal new fears of instability

ISTANBUL

BY SEBNEM ARSU
AND DAN BILEFSKY

The latest roundup by Turkey of dozens of people, many of them journalists, suspected of cooperating with Kurdish separatists comes amid concerns that the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq could create a security vacuum that destabilizes the region.

The separatists, who belong to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., carry out attacks within Turkey from bases in Iraqi Kurdistan, the semi-autonomous northern region of Iraq. Turkish officials say they fear the P.K.K. might now attack from Syria as well, given Ankara's strong stance against the government of President Bashar al-Assad and its crackdown against protesters.

The police detained at least 38 people in dawn raids across Turkey on Tuesday. The operation, in Istanbul, Izmir, Diyarbakir and four other cities, followed the arrests of hundreds of pro-Kurdish political activists, including elected mayors and leading academics, suspected of having links to the P.K.K., which has been conducting an armed struggle for autonomy in the southeast. The group is listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

Critics question the government's true motives, because those arrested have included prominent journalists, intellectuals and academics who have expressed general support for the rights of Kurds, a long-oppressed minority here.

Turkey already has some 67 reporters in jail, according to the Turkish Freedom for Journalists Platform. The government says they are not in jail for their

journalism. Human rights groups have accused the government of abusing its power by using the security apparatus to jail those who challenge its policies.

Initial reports indicated that the arrests focused not only on pro-Kurdish media figures but also those from the mainstream media who occasionally work with them. On Tuesday, several hundred demonstrators gathered in the center of Istanbul, holding signs saying "Freedom for Journalists" and "We Are All Kurds."

Hasip Kaplan, deputy chairman of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, called the arrests an unlawful clampdown by the governing Justice and Development Party against government opponents. "These operations are neither legal nor lawful," he said. "They are entirely political and lack any legitimacy whatsoever."

Johann Bühr of Reporters Without Borders, an advocacy group based in Paris, said in a statement that "the Kurdish issue will not be solved by attempts to suppress dissident views in the name of combating terrorism."

"The authorities must stop trying to criminalize journalism, including politically committed journalism," he said.

The government has made a range of moves to improve relations with Kurds, including starting a Kurdish public television channel and introducing private Kurdish language courses. But many Kurdish activists say they will not be satisfied without a new constitution to enshrine minority rights for the nearly 15 million Kurds living in Turkey.

In November, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan apologized for the killing of scores of Kurds at the end of the 1930s. Mr. Erdogan's apology referred to a previously classified state

document that certified that 13,800 Kurds were killed from 1936 to 1939 in air and land attacks in Dersim Province, later renamed Tunceli Province.

The arrests Tuesday included around 30 journalists, among them Mustafa Ozer, a photographer working for Agence France-Presse. The French news agency's office in Ankara said his house had been raided and he had been taken away by the police. More than 10 journa-

"The authorities must stop trying to criminalize journalism, including politically committed journalism."

lists from the pro-Kurdish news agency Dicle were also arrested, the state-run Anatolian News Agency said. A lawyer for Dicle told The Associated Press that the police had entered the agency's offices to copy documents and hard drives.

In Diyarbakir, the hub of Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast, the police detained at least six people and raided 10 houses and offices belonging to Dicle staff, officials said.

More than 150 pro-Kurdish activists remain in jail facing charges of collaborating with the P.K.K. in an alternative state structure at odds with the central Turkish government. Many are on trial in Diyarbakir, where a large courtroom has been specially built. They are mostly members of the Union of Kurdistan Communities, which prosecutors say is the political wing of the P.K.K., in charge of recruitment and financial support.

Following an escalation of P.K.K. violence in recent months — including the killing of 13 soldiers in July — the government in November ordered an intense military air and artillery operation against the group's bases in northern Iraq, even as it is still urging a peaceful resolution to the Kurdish conflict.

Iran issues a threat to block major oil passage

WASHINGTON

Official vows to stop flow through Gulf if new U.S. sanctions are imposed

BY DAVID E. SANGER
AND ANNIE LOWREY

A senior Iranian official threatened Tuesday to block all oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz if the United States moved ahead with Congressionally-mandated sanctions intended to drastically reduce Iran's oil revenue.

The warning from Iran's first vice president, Mohammad Reza Rahimi, came as President Barack Obama prepared to sign legislation that would attempt one of the most audacious economic experiments in modern times: Cutting the world's third-biggest exporter of crude oil in 2010 off from global energy markets without raising the price of gasoline or alienating some of Washington's closest allies.

Apparently fearful of the expanded sanctions' possible impact on Iran's economy and its place in world oil markets, Mr. Rahimi, according to Iran's official news agency, said: "If they impose sanctions on Iran's oil exports, then even one drop of oil cannot flow from the Strait of Hormuz." Iran just began a 10-day naval exercise in the area.

During recent interviews, Obama administration officials have said that the United States has developed a complex plan to keep the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow passage between the Gulf and the wider shipping lanes leading to the Indian Ocean — open in the event of a crisis. About one-fifth of the world's oil passes through the strait.

Merely uttering the threat appeared part of an Iranian effort to demonstrate its ability to force oil prices up sharply — thus slowing the U.S. economy — and to warn American trading partners that joining the new sanctions, which the Senate passed by a rare 100-to-0 vote, would come at a high cost. Oil prices rose 1.6 percent, climbing above \$100 a barrel, in afternoon trading Tuesday in the United States after the threat was issued, though it was unclear how much that could be attributed to investors' concern that a confrontation in the Gulf could disrupt oil flows.

The new punitive measures, part of a bill financing the U.S. military, would be

a significant amplification of American sanctions against Iran. They come just a month and a half after the International Atomic Energy Agency published a report that laid out, for the first time, its evidence that Iran may be secretly working to design a nuclear warhead, despite the country's repeated denials.

For five years, the United States has implemented increasingly severe sanctions in an attempt to force Iran's leaders to reconsider the suspected nuclear weapons program, and answer a growing list of questions from the I.A.E.A. But Washington has deliberately stopped short of targeting oil exports, which finance up to half of Iran's budget.

Now, with its hand forced by Congress, the Obama administration is preparing to take that final step, penalizing foreign corporations that do business with Iran's central bank, which collects payment for most of the country's energy exports.

In essence, the move would make it impossible for those who do business with Iran's central bank to also conduct financial transactions with the United States. It is seen as so severe that one of Mr. Obama's top national security aides said two months ago it was "a last resort," and the administration raced to put some loopholes in the final legislation so that it could reduce the impact on close allies that have signed on to pressuring Iran. The legislation does allow Mr. Obama to waive sanctions if they cause the price of oil to rise or threaten national security.

Still, the new sanctions raise crucial economic, diplomatic, and security questions. Mr. Obama, his aides acknowledge, has no interest in seeing energy prices rise drastically at a moment of national economic weakness or as he intensifies his bid for re-election — a vulnerability the Iranians fully understand. So the administration, if it is to be successful, has to work with its allies in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries to increase oil production from other suppliers in a way that causes the least disruption in the oil market.

"I don't think anybody thinks we can contravene the laws of supply and demand any more than we can contravene the laws of gravity," said David S. Cohen, who, as Treasury under secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence,

is responsible for administering the sanctions. But "we have flexibility here," he added, "and I think we have a pretty good opportunity to dial this in just the right way that it does end up putting significant pressure on Iran."

The U.S. effort, as described by Mr. Cohen and others, is more subtle than simply cutting off Iran's ability to export oil, a step that would immediately send the price of gasoline, heating fuel, and other petroleum products skyward. That would "mean that Iran would, in fact, have more money to fuel its nuclear ambitions, not less," Wendy R. Sherman, the newly installed under secre-

"If they impose sanctions on Iran's oil exports, then even one drop of oil cannot flow from the Strait of Hormuz."

tary of state for political affairs, warned the Senate Foreign Relations Committee this month.

Instead, the administration's aim is to reduce Iran's oil revenue by diminishing its volume of sales and forcing Iran to give its customers a discount on the price of crude. That would require persuading every major oil importer in the world to go along with the sanctions.

"You could imagine the Europeans, the Japanese and the South Koreans cooperating," said Michael Singh, managing director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "And then China would suck up all of the oil that was initially going to everyone else."

Some economists question whether reducing Iran's oil exports without moving the price of oil is feasible, even if the market is given signals about alternative supplies.

"Either you have a partial embargo, where some countries decide not to buy from Iran and the country sells its oil to someone else instead," said James D. Hamilton, a professor of economist at the University of California, San Diego. "That has no consequences for Iran or the price of oil, whatsoever."

Or, Mr. Hamilton said, "if you keep all Iranian production off the market, it would hurt oil consumers as much or more as it would hurt Iran" by causing prices to increase. Already, analysts at investment banks are warning of the possibility of rising energy prices in 2012 because of the new sanctions by the United States.

Since Mr. Obama's first months in office, his aides have been talking to Saudi Arabia and other suppliers about increasing their production, and about guaranteeing sales to countries like China, among Iran's biggest customers. But it is unclear whether the Saudis can fill in the gap left by Iran, even with the help of Libyan oil that is coming back on the market. The United States is also looking to countries, including Iraq and Angola, to increase production.

Daniel Yergin, whose new book, "The Quest," describes the oil politics of dealing with states like Iran, noted during an interview that "given the relative tightness of the market, it will require careful construction of the sanctions combined with vigorous efforts to bring alternative supplies into the market."

He said that would "add a whole new dimension to the debate over the Keystone XL pipeline," the oil pipeline from Canada to the United States, that the administration has sought to delay. While that pipeline would have no effect on the immediate situation because it would take several years to complete, Mr. Yergin noted that it "would carry a volume

of oil equivalent to a third of Iran's total exports."

A broader question is whether the sanctions — even if successful at lowering Iran's oil revenue — would force Tehran to give up its nuclear ambitions.

One measure of the effects, however, is that the Iranian leadership is clearly concerned. Already the Iranian currency is plummeting in value against the dollar, and there are rumors of bank

runs.

"Iran's economic problems seem to be mounting and the whole economy is in a state of suspended expectation," said Abbas Milani, director of Iranian studies at Stanford University. "The regime keeps repeating that they're not going to be impacted by the sanctions. That they have more money than they know what to do with. The lady does protest too much."

"I don't think there's any workaround if they lose the oil revenue," Mr. Milani said, explaining that Iran's economy would suffer severely. "But the regime has invested far too much political and financial capital to back down."

Rick Gladstone contributed reporting from New York.

arab news.com DECEMBER 25, 2011

Iraq VP says charges could reignite sectarian war

By RANIA EL GAMAL
REUTERS

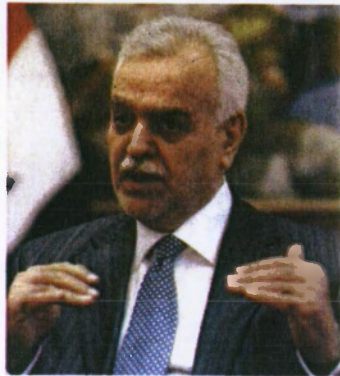
QALACHOWLAN, Iraq: Iraq's Vice President Tareq Al-Hashemi, wanted on charges he led death squads, called the case a plot to destroy opponents of Prime Minister Nuri Al-Maliki that could reignite the sectarian slaughter of 2006-07.

Iraq has been plunged into a political crisis in the week since the final US troops withdrew, after Maliki's government unveiled an arrest warrant for Hashemi, who left Baghdad for the semi-autonomous Kurdish north of the country.

Maliki also asked parliament to fire his deputy prime minister, sidelining Iraq's two most powerful Arab leaders and potentially undoing a shaky power-sharing deal that Washington hoped would keep peace after nine years of war.

"Today the outcome of this crisis, which was unfortunately blown up by the prime minister, is very dangerous," Hashemi told Reuters in an interview at a guesthouse of Iraq's President Jalal Talabani, in the Kurdish north's Sulaimaniya province.

"Today Iraqis live under the atmosphere of sectarian tension that we lived through in the hard years of 2005-



Iraq's Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi

2007," he said.

Speaking about himself and his Sunni community, Hashemi added: "Mr Maliki knows the supporters of Tareq Al-Hashemi and which community he belongs to, and therefore he should have thought about the negative consequences of these issues."

Violence in Iraq has subsided since the sectarian civil war of 2006-07, when insurgents and militias killed thousands of civilians each month, but without US troops to act as a buffer, many Iraqis now fear a return to those days.

At least 72 people were killed in bombings across Baghdad on Thursday, in the first sign of a possible violent backlash against Maliki's moves.

The main goal of US policymakers in the final years of

the war was to prevent a recurrence of that bloodshed by ensuring that all sects remained represented in the government in Baghdad.

A power-sharing deal reached a year ago kept Maliki in office at the helm of a fragile unity coalition. But that appears to have unraveled just as the final US troops pulled out a week ago. Hashemi's Iraqiya bloc has suspended its participation in parliament.

'Political hit'

Hashemi said the timing of the accusations against him to coincide with the US withdrawal was "deliberate."

"The target is clear, a political hit for Tareq Al-Hashemi ... The political dimension for this is to get rid of all those who oppose Nuri Al-Maliki, it is clear. So Iraq can stay in the grip of one-man rule and one-party rule."

His opponents say the case against Hashemi is criminal and not motivated by politics. It cannot be negotiated because it is now with the courts.

Iraq's interior ministry broadcast taped confessions it said were from Hashemi's security detail, talking about payments Hashemi made to them to carry out assassinations and bombings.

Hashemi denied all

charges which he said were "fabricated." He said the three bodyguards worked for him but the confessions showed on Iraqi TV were "taken by force."

Hashemi said he had no plans to seek political asylum or flee Iraq, but had requested that the case against him be moved to a court in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region, rather than Baghdad where "the executive power controls the judiciary."

"If they are seeking justice, let them agree to my request and I will stand trial and will accept any verdict by Kurdistan's courts," he said. "They are not part of Maliki's project and they are not part of Hashemi's project. Kurdistan will be the fair judge in this issue."

Asked if he would consider leaving Iraq or seeking asylum, he said: "This is my country, these are not my thoughts and not in my plans... I will not run from justice."

Looking weary during the interview, Hashemi said he had initially come to Sulaimaniya with a small suitcase and two suits — and had told his wife he would be back in Baghdad after 48 hours.

He planned to stay in the semi-autonomous Kurdish zone for now, and his family had left Iraq after a wave of raids by security forces on his house and office and arrests of his staff, he said. □

How to save Iraq from civil war

Unless America pushes for a unity government now, Iraqi hopes for a democratic future will be destroyed.

Ayad Allawi
Osama al-Nujaifi
Rafe al-Essawi

BAGHDAD Iraq today stands on the brink of disaster. President Obama kept his campaign pledge to end the war here, but it has not ended the way anyone in Washington wanted. The prize, for which so many American soldiers believed they were fighting, was a functioning democratic and nonsectarian state. But Iraq is now moving in the opposite direction — toward a sectarian autocracy that carries with it the threat of devastating civil war.

Since Iraq's 2010 election, we have witnessed the subordination of the state to Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's Dawa party, the erosion of judicial independence, the intimidation of opponents and the dismantling of independent institutions intended to promote clean elections and combat corruption. All of this happened during the Arab Spring, while other countries were ousting dictators in favor of democracy. Iraq had a chance to demonstrate, for the first time in the modern Middle East, that political power could peacefully pass between political rivals following proper elections. Instead, it has become a battleground of sects, in which identity politics have crippled democratic development.

We are leaders of Iraqiya, the political coalition that won the most seats in the 2010 election and represents more than a quarter of all Iraqis. We do not think of ourselves as Sunni or Shiite, but as Iraqis, with a constituency spanning the entire country. We are now being hounded and threatened by Mr. Maliki, who is attempting to drive us out of Iraqi political life and create an authoritarian one-party state.

In the past few weeks, as the U.S. military presence ended, another military force moved in to fill the void. Our homes and offices in Baghdad's Green Zone were surrounded by Mr. Maliki's security forces. He has laid siege to our party, and has done so with the blessing of a politicized judiciary and law enforcement system that have become virtual extensions of his personal office. He has accused Iraq's vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi, of terrorism; moved to fire Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq; and sought to investigate one of us, Rafe al-Essawi, for specious links to insurgents — all immediately after Mr. Maliki returned to Iraq from Washington, wrongly giving Iraqis the impression that he'd been given carte blanche by the United States to do so.

After Vice President Joseph R. Biden

Jr. urged all parties to maintain a unity government on Dec. 16, Mr. Maliki threatened to form a government that completely excluded Iraqiya and other opposition voices. Meanwhile, Mr. Maliki is welcoming into the political process the Iranian-sponsored Shiite militia group Asaib Ahl al-Haq, whose leaders kidnapped and killed five American soldiers and murdered four British hostages in 2007.

It did not have to happen this way. The Iraqi people emerged from the bloody transition after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime hoping for a brighter future. After the 2010 election, we felt there was a real opportunity to create a new Iraq that could be a model for the region. We needed the United States to protect the political process, to prevent violations of the Constitution and to help develop democratic institutions.

For the sake of stability, Iraqiya agreed to join the national unity government following a landmark power-sharing agreement reached a year ago in Erbil. However, for more than a year now Mr. Maliki has refused to implement this agreement, instead concentrating greater power in his own hands. As part of the Erbil agreement, one of us, Ayad Allawi, was designated to head a proposed policy council but declined this powerless appointment because Mr. Maliki refused to share any decision-making authority.

We are being hounded by Maliki, who is trying to drive us out of politics and create an authoritarian one-party state.

After the 2010 election, Mr. Maliki assumed the roles of minister of the interior, minister of defense and minister for national security. (He has since delegated the defense and national security portfolios to loyalists without parliamentary approval.) Unfortunately, the United States continued to support Mr. Maliki after he reneged on the Erbil agreement and strengthened security forces that operate without democratic oversight.

Now America is working with Iraqis to convene another national conference to resolve the crisis. We welcome this step and are ready to resolve our problems peacefully, using the Erbil agreement as a starting point. But first, Mr. Maliki's office must stop issuing directives to military units, making unilateral military appointments and seeking to influence the judiciary; his national security adviser must give up complete control over the Iraqi intelligence and national security agencies, which are supposed to be independent institutions but have become a virtual extension of Mr. Maliki's Dawa party; and his Dawa

loyalists must give up control of the security units that oversee the Green Zone and intimidate political opponents.

The United States must make clear that a power-sharing government is the only viable option for Iraq and that American support for Mr. Maliki is conditional on his fulfilling the Erbil agreement and dissolving the unconstitutional entities through which he now rules. Likewise, U.S. assistance to Iraq's army, police and intelligence services must be conditioned on those institutions being representative of the nation rather than one sect or party.

For years, we have sought a strategic partnership with America to help us build the Iraq of our dreams: a nationalist, liberal, secular country, with democratic institutions and a democratic culture. But the American withdrawal may leave us with the Iraq of our nightmares: a country in which a partisan military protects a sectarian, self-serving regime rather than the people or the Constitution; the judiciary kowtows to those in power; and the nation's wealth is captured by a corrupt elite rather than invested in the development of the nation.

We are glad that your brave soldiers have made it home for the holidays and we wish them peace and happiness. But as Iraq once again teeters on the brink, we respectfully ask America's leaders to understand that unconditional support for Mr. Maliki is pushing Iraq down the path to civil war.

Unless America acts rapidly to help create a successful unity government, Iraq is doomed.

AYAD ALLAWI, leader of the Iraqiya coalition, was Iraq's prime minister from 2004-5. **OSAMA AL-NUJAIFI** is the speaker of the Iraqi Parliament. **RAFE AL-ESSAWI** is Iraq's finance minister.

Kurds look to old enemies for survival

BY JASON PACK
THE AUSTRALIAN

SINCE the invasion of Iraq in 2003, the US has been allied with the Kurds in their drive for regional autonomy. Washington has been committed to maintaining the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Iraqi state. As a result, the Bush and Obama administrations have failed to articulate a clear policy objective with respect to future US ties with the Kurdistan Regional Government.

The US has left the field without formalising its role as security guarantor or nation-builder in Iraqi Kurdistan. In an uncertain Middle East, the Kurds must find a new patron to protect their quasi-independence, which Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki would apparently like to nullify.

Lacking access to the sea and entirely dependent on outside expertise to develop their oil sector, the Kurds cannot pursue an isolationist policy. With Syria in turmoil, Iran attempting to dominate Baghdad through Maliki and US regional power in irreversible decline, only Turkey can offer the KRG political protection, sufficient technical expertise, and access to Western markets for its hydrocarbons. Despite the past century of animosity between Kurds and Turks, it is clear that their long-term interests have increasingly aligned over the past years.

In the wake of the US withdrawal, the central government in Baghdad has descended into an all-too-predictable crisis with overtly sectarian implications threatening Iraq's continued existence as a functional state. Only the Kurdish region remains unscathed thus far.

Arab Sunnis feel threatened by Maliki's ties to Iran and attempts to centralise power at their expense. They see his attack on Sunni Vice-President Tariq al-Hashemi as a threat to their community's independent voice in central government affairs. As such, recent events have provoked demonstrations for greater regional autonomy in the Sunni-majority provinces. Should things continue on this trajectory, the Sunnis may sue Maliki for a divorce, asking to follow the Kurdish model, and the fragmentation of the Iraqi state would be complete.

The KRG already possesses a large degree of authority and independence of action within Iraq's constitutional framework. Were Maliki to try to resurrect Saddam Hussein's centralised state in a Shia guise, it would be no surprise if Iraqi Sunnis rallied behind the banner of increased federalism and found common cause with the Kurds. It is meaningful that al-Hashemi fled to Kurdistan for protection from the Iraqi central government.

The under-reported aspect of this story and the US withdrawal is how Iraqi Kurdistan is affected. To investigate this,

I joined an informal American research delegation to Kurdistan. We held candid discussions with leading KRG ministers, whose message was clear and forceful: despite considerable economic growth during the past decade and increasing security, Kurdish leaders feel abandoned by the US. They wonder if their 20 years of protection, first under a no-fly zone and then by the US military presence in Iraq, have been prematurely ended. In the words of Falah Mustafa Bakir, head of the KRG's department of foreign relations: "The Americans have conducted rebuilding projects in Baghdad and have invested vast amounts of resources into building the Iraqi national army, yet they have neglected their proven allies in Kurdistan. They continue to arm the Iraqi army while neglecting the Kurdish Peshmerga, who supported the Americans throughout the 2003-11 war."

Bakir's pleas for concrete support have fallen on deaf ears. "If America wanted to strengthen its alliance with the Kurdistan Region, it has a whole range of tools at its disposal," he said. "It could encourage its allies in the Middle East and the Arab world to further support the KRG, lift the Kurdistan Region from the State Department's travel advisory, and provide further incentives for US companies to work here."

The Kurds are not ready for independence, yet they must strengthen their military, economy and regional ties to prepare for the day when formal independence becomes a necessity to escape the predations of Baghdad and Tehran. They know they need a protector. The Kurdish political elites appear unanimous in wanting that power to be the

US, but they feel forsaken yet again.

What appears to not be understood in Erbil is that the US troop withdrawal was a necessity for Barack Obama and that it is irreversible. The US President had to fulfil his electoral promises, promote Iraqi self-reliance and attempt to recast America's stigmatised imperial relationship with the region.

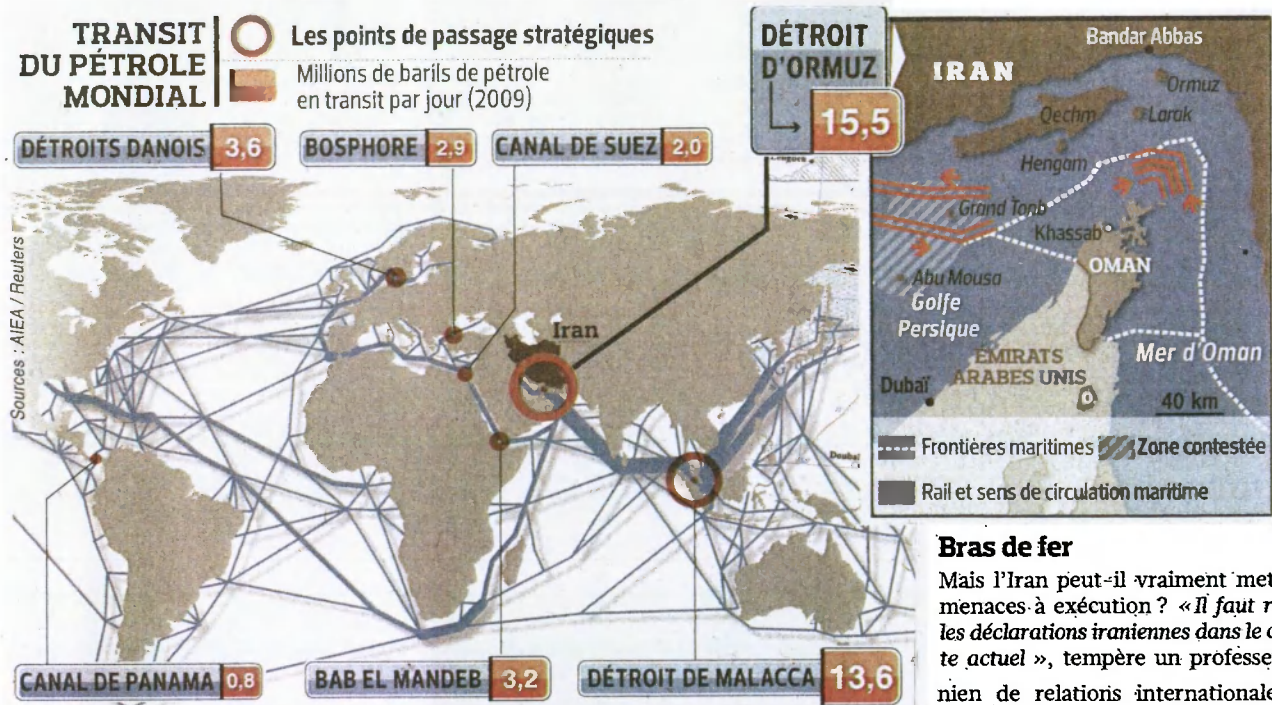
Ankara has watched the decline of US influence and stepped into the void. Fouad Hussein, chief of staff to Massoud Barzani, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party and President of the KRG, says: "The struggle in the Middle East represents a Cold War between Iran and Turkey. Both powers have gained in influence as a result of the Arab Spring and skilful backing of emerging actors."

Turkish companies dominate the construction and import-export sectors in the KRG, and since the rise of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan Turkey's relationship with the KRG has become less ideological. The Turks can foresee a future where most Kurdish oil transits through Turkey to reach Western markets. Increased federalism in Iraq benefits Turkey; increased centralisation of authority favours Iran.

Conventional wisdom holds that Iran is the primary beneficiary of the US withdrawal. Viewed from Kurdistan, Turkey appears to be the main beneficiary of both the Arab Spring and the US withdrawal. KRG is likely to increasingly align itself with Turkey, which is gradually growing into its neo-Ottoman role as the regional superpower from Libya to Iraq.

□ □ □

Téhéran menace de cadenasser le détroit d'Ormuz



La République islamique n'exclut pas d'interdire le transit des navires pétroliers pour contrer les sanctions occidentales.

DELPHINE MINOUI
 CORRESPONDANTE AU MOYEN-ORIENT

MOYEN-ORIENT Le détroit d'Ormuz est l'un des corridors les plus stratégiques de la planète, celui par lequel transitent près de 40 % du trafic maritime pétrolier mondial. En menaçant, mardi, de le verrouiller, la République islamique savait qu'elle frappait fort. Sur les marchés, les cours du pétrole n'ont pas tardé à grimper, tandis qu'un vent d'inquiétude se mettait à souffler sur les capitales occidentales.

La fermeture du détroit est « plus facile que de boire un verre d'eau »



AMIRAL HABIBOLLAH SAYYARI, COMMANDANT DE LA MARINE IRANIENNE

« Le détroit d'Ormuz est un détroit international. En conséquence, tous les navires, quel que soit leur pavillon, bénéficient du droit de passage en transit, conformément à la Convention des Nations unies sur le droit de la mer, adoptée en 1982, et au droit international coutumier de la mer », s'est empressé d'affirmer, hier, le ministre français des Affaires étrangères, en guise de mise en garde. La veille, le vice-

président iranien, Mohammad Reza Rahimi, avait prévenu ses adversaires qu'« aucune goutte de pétrole ne transitera

(it) par le détroit d'Ormuz » en cas d'un renforcement des sanctions occidentales contre Téhéran. Réagissant à cette menace, les États-Unis ont eux aussi mis en garde Téhéran : « Aucune perturbation du trafic maritime dans le détroit d'Ormuz ne sera tolérée », a déclaré George Little, un porte-parole du Pentagone.

Les inquiétudes de la communauté internationale sont d'autant plus fondées que la menace iranienne coïncide avec une série de manœuvres militaires navales lancées samedi dernier autour du détroit d'Ormuz. Ces dix jours d'exercices au large des côtes iraniennes comprennent, entre autres, des opérations pour lancer des mines antinavires et anti-sous-marins. Autant de pratiques jugées sensibles quand on connaît la présence navale américaine dans cette zone névralgique, avec notamment la 5^e flotte, basée à Bahreïn. Les spécialistes de l'Iran gardent également en mémoire la fameuse « bataille des tankers » pendant la guerre Iran-Irak (1980-1988). Sans compter cet accrochage évité de justesse, début 2008, en plein détroit d'Ormuz, entre cinq vedettes des gardiens de la révolution iranienne et trois navires de guerre américains, après qu'un farceur se fut invité dans les conversations radio en menaçant de « faire exploser » l'USS Port Royal...

Bras de fer

Mais l'Iran peut-il vraiment mettre ses menaces à exécution ? « Il faut replacer les déclarations iraniennes dans le contexte actuel », tempère un professeur iranien de relations internationales, qui préfère ne pas donner son nom, en rappelant que ce n'est pas la première fois que Téhéran profère de telles menaces. Selon lui, les déclarations iraniennes s'inscrivent plutôt dans le bras de fer qui oppose la République islamique aux Occidentaux au sujet du dossier nucléaire iranien. Elles ne seraient donc qu'une réaction verbale au projet d'embargo sur le brut iranien que défendent depuis plusieurs semaines la France, la Grande-Bretagne, l'Allemagne et les États-Unis. C'est d'ailleurs dans ce sens que s'est exprimé, mardi, Mohammad Reza Rahimi, en menaçant de fermer le détroit. Et d'ajouter : « Nous n'avons aucune envie d'hostilité ou de violence (mais) les ennemis renonceront à leurs complots seulement le jour où nous les remettrons à leur place. »

Pour l'amiral Habibollah Sayyari, commandant de la marine, qui s'exprimait hier sur la chaîne de télévision iranienne Press TV, la fermeture du détroit est « plus facile que de boire un verre d'eau ». « Mais, pour le moment, nous n'avons pas besoin de le fermer puisque nous contrôlons la mer d'Oman et son trafic », a-t-il précisé. Les cours du pétrole ont d'ailleurs retrouvé hier leur niveau antérieur. « C'est une nouvelle tentative de détourner l'attention du vrai problème, qui est le non-respect de la part de l'Iran de ses obligations en matière de nucléaire », a commenté pour sa part le porte-parole du département d'État américain, Mark Toner. ■

LE FIGARO

29 décembre 2011

Syrie : les observateurs accusés de myopie

Tandis que la répression continue, la Ligue arabe juge que la situation « n'a rien d'effrayant ».

PIERRE PRIER

PROCHE-ORIENT Au deuxième jour de leur visite, les critiques ont continué de pleuvoir hier sur les observateurs arabes en Syrie. La France s'est montrée la plus virulente, accusant sans détour les enquêteurs de légèreté dans leur travail à Homs, bastion de la résistance, où s'était rendu mardi matin un groupe d'observateurs emmené par le chef de la mission lui-même, le général soudanais Mohammed al-Dabi.

« La brièveté de leur séjour n'a pu leur permettre d'apprécier la réalité de la situation prévalant à Homs. Leur présence n'a pas empêché la poursuite de la répression sanglante dans cette ville, où des manifestations importantes ont été violemment réprimées, faisant une dizaine de morts. » Le général al-Dabi ne s'en est pas aperçu. Hier, il a jugé que la situation à Homs « n'avait rien d'effrayant, au moins lorsque nous étions là », ajoutant : « Tout était calme et il n'y a pas eu d'affrontement. »

L'armée a pourtant continué hier à tuer à Homs, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) qui recense deux morts, dont un enfant. Les enquêteurs de la Ligue arabe, revenus dans la ville, n'ont rien fait pour rassurer la population sur leur indépendance. Des résidents du quartier Baba Amro, cœur de la répression, ont voulu leur en refuser l'accès pour protester contre la présence aux côtés des observateurs d'un « accompagnateur » de l'armée syrienne. « Les habitants leur ont demandé de venir voir les personnes blessées et les parents des martyrs, et non pas des membres du parti Baas » [Le parti au pouvoir], a déclaré Rami Abdel Rahmane, de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH).

La visite a pu finalement avoir lieu, sans que l'on sache si l'officier était présent. Le manque de crédibilité de ces



Tirée d'une vidéo amateur diffusée sur YouTube, cette image montre des observateurs de la Ligue arabe, mardi dernier, dans le centre de Homs, avec un tank syrien à l'arrière-plan. AFP

tournées encadrées a été souligné en pointillé par l'un des derniers alliés du régime, la Russie. « La mission devrait pouvoir visiter n'importe quelle partie du pays et formuler une opinion indépendante et objective sur les événements », a demandé le ministre des Affaires étrangères, Sergueï Lavrov.

« Où sont les observateurs ? »

Damas a pour sa part annoncé la libération de 755 prisonniers arrêtés lors des manifestations, afin de satisfaire l'une des exigences du plan de paix arabe. L'ONG Human Rights Watch a, de son côté, affirmé que des centaines d'autres prisonniers ont été transférés vers des sites militaires, interdits aux observateurs. L'ONG presse les enquêteurs de « réagir à ce subterfuge ». Les manifestations et la répression ont continué hier, faisant un mort à Hama, un autre près d'Alep et plusieurs blessés dans la province de Damas. Les images de la télévision qatarienne al-Djezira montrent un panache de fumée noire s'élevant au-dessus de la ville où plusieurs dizaines de personnes ont défilé en criant : « Où sont les observateurs arabes ? »

Ces derniers devraient arriver aujourd'hui à Hama, ainsi qu'à « Idleb, Deraa et dans un périmètre de 50 à 80 km autour de Damas », a déclaré hier le général al-Dabi. Les observateurs arabes devront sans doute travailler également sur les morts tombés dans le camp gouvernemental. Hier, selon l'OSDH, quatre soldats de l'armée syrienne ont été tués et 12 autres blessés dans une embuscade tendue par des déserteurs dans la province de Deraa. ■

Un opposant agressé à Berlin

LE MINISTÈRE allemand des Affaires étrangères a reçu, hier, l'ambassadeur de Syrie, « invité » à s'exprimer après les accusations selon lesquelles Damas serait derrière l'agression d'un opposant au régime syrien à Berlin. Dans la nuit de lundi à mardi, deux

hommes affirmant être des policiers se sont présentés au domicile de Ferhad Ahma, 37 ans, élu municipal Vert à Berlin. Originaire du Kurdistan syrien et membre du Conseil national syrien (opposition), il vit à Berlin depuis 1996. Alors que le militant ouvrait la porte,

il a été immédiatement frappé à coups de barre de fer et de matraque, occasionnant de graves contusions et des blessures multiples. Les agresseurs, silencieux lors de l'agression, ont pris la fuite à l'arrivée d'un voisin.

Early election debate surrounds Iraq, disintegration worries Turkey

TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH REUTERS,
ANKARA

As an increasing risk of a conflict along sectarian and ethnic lines looms over the Iraqi horizon, the head of an influential Shiite bloc, Moqtada al-Sadr, has suggested that Iraq could opt for early elections to resolve conflicts in the country, as a growing rift between the Sunni and Shiite blocs of the Iraqi coalition alarms the US and neighboring countries, including Turkey.

"We are in a new phase and have found a lot of problems that give no stability to Iraq. So we will discuss this subject with the National Alliance because we are part of it," Bahaa al-Araji, the head of Sadr's bloc, said in a statement relayed by the Reuters news agency on Tuesday. Sadr also called for "new and early elections" in the country, in the hope that the dispute might better be resolved through elections and prevent further bloodshed in the country.

Sadr's reaction came days after Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki pressed for the arrest of Sunni Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, a powerful rival, as well as the resignation of his deputy, another influential Sunni official, Saleh al-Mutlaq. Maliki's moves were interpreted by Hashemi and the Sunni bloc as attempts at taking key posts under Shiite control, while "framing" Sunni officials to force them out of office until no strong opposition is left in the country. Hashemi, in various interviews with international and Turkish media outlets last week, further alleged that Maliki would seek removal of Kurdish seniors from the coalition government, so that he would stand as the sole authority in his "one-man autocracy" in Iraq.

While Turkish officials expressed concern over the fast-paced movement in Iraq following the US departure from the country, they also said they feared increased terrorism inside Iraq, based

on the excuse that the government is not capable of representing all blocs. Last week, multiple bombings in Baghdad caused havoc in the country, killing dozens of people, mostly Shiites, recalling recent Iraqi history when thousands died in a matter of weeks in clashes between Shiites and Sunnis. On Tuesday, an al-Qaeda affiliate in Iraq claimed responsibility for the bloodbath, Reuters reported, citing a US-based intelligence group that monitors communication between insurgents.

The al-Qaeda branch also posted statements on Islamist websites on Monday, and the attacks carried out in Baghdad were to demonstrate support for Sunni prisoners, Reuters said. Prior to the claim of responsibility, it was speculated that the bombings were in response to the arrest warrant for Hashemi, coupled with the parliamentary protest of Iraqiya, the Sunni party that won the most votes in the Iraqi elections but fell short of forming the government when Shiites united in one single bloc under the banner of National Alliance. Iraqiya has been protesting the government for more than a week, based on the conviction that Maliki would not heed calls for sharing power in key posts, including the interior and defense ministries.

Sadr's Shiite bloc supported Maliki to power, as well as other Shiite groups, and the fact that Sadr is now suggesting early elections might be a hint that Shiite opinion is divided over the future of the country. "Elections are an option that could prevent more blood from spilling in Iraq and might be a tangible one since the US did not care much for the storm that erupted after its departure," Aladdin Yalçinkaya, chairman of the international relations department of Sakarya University, told Today's Zaman on Tuesday, as he restated that all parties, but mostly Turkey, were worried about the situation in Iraq, the fallout of which could seriously affect

the region.

"The possibility looks grim but the only way out for Iraq is for the blocs to recognize the existence and rightful claims of the others," Yalçinkaya added, as he welcomed the Shiite initiative for new elections as a sign that "the Shiite bloc does not consist only of Maliki." The academic suggested that leaders of Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs in the country need to "sit around a table and negotiate," since various signs of a sectarian strife and civil war were visible on the Iraqi horizon, referring to the recent conflict between the blocs after the US era.

As the ruling Shiite bloc tries to push most senior Sunni officials out of the picture with regard to the fragile Iraqi power sharing, bloodshed flows in the streets of Baghdad, which has been left without the protection of US troops, who pulled out around 10 days ago and left the Iraqi government in charge of running its own business. However, Hashemi, who is now wanted by the Baghdad government on charges of running a hit squad to murder political rivals, stated it was not possible for the blocs to negotiate, now that Maliki has "destroyed years of efforts" for reconciliation.

Although the coalition government houses representatives from Sunni, Shiite and Kurdish backgrounds, the alleged attempts by the Shiite bloc to hoard power could make Shiite Prime Minister Maliki the most powerful man in the country. The possibility of the re-emergence of sectarian unrest again alerts officials, dividing the Shiite bloc as the most powerful Sunni party, Iraqiya, threatens to withdraw from the cabinet if a resolution is not reached soon. □

Exxon Mobil-Kurd oil deal spat spotlights Iraq's juggling act between politics and investment

SINAN SALAHEDDIN - Associated Press

BAGHDAD — An oil exploration deal between U.S. oil giant Exxon Mobil and Iraq's autonomous Kurdish region is fueling political tensions in a country where a post-U.S.-troop withdrawal spike in violence and political turmoil is clouding the climate for foreign investments sorely needed by Iraq.

Baghdad's anger over the deal highlights the long-simmering power struggle between the Kurdish and central governments. The dispute is building momentum as Iraqi Premier Nouri al-Maliki faces criticism over his stewardship of a country where, years after the 2003 U.S.-led war to topple Saddam Hussein, development remains a distant dream for millions.

The deal "will certainly contribute to further complicating the relationship" between the Kurds and Baghdad, said Gala Riani, Middle East and North Africa Regional Manager at the London-based IHS Global Insight.

It "may also raise tensions in border areas which have already become more restive as a result of the withdrawal of the U.S. troops," he said.

While the Kurds have sought control over the oil within their northern territory, Baghdad insists the resource should overseen by the central government. About 30 percent of Iraq's 143.1 billion barrels of proven reserves of conventional crude sit in the Kurdish region.

The dispute has festered unresolved since the U.S.-led coalition ousted Saddam Hussein in 2003. Parliament has failed to signed off on a draft national oil law on sharing the resources since 2007, angering the Kurds and making foreign majors leery of investing. Baghdad's last two international oil licensing auctions drew limited interest by deep-pocketed firms like Exxon Mobil, Royal Dutch Shell and BP PLC.

Under the Kurdish deal, Exxon Mobil, would explore for crude in six patches in northern Iraq, including land claimed by both the Kurds and Arabs in northern Ninevah province.

More broadly, the issue of the disputed territory, which stretches from across the country from the Syrian border to the



In this Jan. 25, 2010, file photo, From left to right, ExxonMobil Corp. President Robert S Franklin, ExxonMobil Corp. Director Richard C. Vierbuchen, Iraqi Oil Minister, then, Hussain al-Shahristani, are seen during a signing ceremony in Baghdad, Iraq. An oil exploration deal signed by the U.S. oil giant ExxonMobil with Iraq's self-ruled Kurdish region is deepening divisions between Kurds and Arabs at a crucial time as U.S. troops are leaving. /AP Photo

Iranian border, is one of Iraq's most nagging post-Saddam era problems. American forces for years acted as a buffer between the Kurds and Arabs in the area by building partnerships between Iraqi army forces and their Kurdish counterparts known as the peshmerga. But after the U.S. troops' withdrawal, officials warn violence could flare there.

Parliament speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, a Sunni Arab nationalist from Ninevah and an outspoken opponent to Kurdish land ambitions, called the granting of the exploration blocs an "unacceptable violation" of Ninevah's administrative boundaries and demanded it be annulled. Opposition to the Kurds' moves is one of the few things that unite Sunni Arabs and the Shiite parties that dominate the Baghdad government.

A day earlier, a Ninevah provincial delegation to Baghdad files an official complaint to the government, according to provincial councilman Abdul-Rahim al-Shimmari.

Baghdad and the Kurdish government have already nearly come to blows over oil fields in this disputed region. In 2008, a 24-hour standoff developed between their respective security forces over a section of an oil field in Kirkuk, an ethnically-mixed area the Kurds want to annex.

Baghdad warns it could punish Exxon Mobil and that the company's existing contracts could be in jeopardy. But so far it has taken no punitive measures.

Many analysts doubt that it will, considering Baghdad's profound need for foreign investment.

Outside the Kurdish zone, Exxon Mobil and Shell are already developing one of Iraq's biggest oil fields, the 8.6 billion-barrel West Qurna Stage 1 field in southern Basra province. Exxon Mobil is also expected to lead a multibillion dollar project in Basra, a Shiite stronghold, that will help make available the water needed for oil development.

Baghdad's oil policy is not a "long-term sustainable program that would attract foreign capital into Iraq," said Fadel Gheit, chief economist with Oppenheimer & Co.

Although Iraq sits atop the world's fourth largest proven reserves of conventional crude, decades of sanctions, war, sabotage and negligence have battered the sector that generates about 95 percent of the government's foreign revenues. Iraq hopes to boost its output to 12 million barrels per day by 2017 from about 3 million a day now. Such a surge will only be possible with help from foreign majors.

Despite its oil resources, electricity remains spotty, at best, years after Saddam's ouster and the country faces chronic problems with unemployment and private sector growth largely because of daily violence and rampant corruption.

Western companies have so far been wary of significant investments in a country where violence has recently spiked, and where tensions are growing between Sunnis and Shiites.

During the last two international licensing rounds, Western majors expressed little appetite, and Baghdad signed contracts with a host of state-run companies from China, Angola, Algeria and others. Few of those companies are seen as having the capital or experience of the Exxons or Shells of the world.

Exxon Mobil has not commented on the deal since it was announced by the Kurds in mid-November. Officials from the company did not respond to requests for comment.

If the deal goes forward, it would be an enormous vote of confidence for the Kurds' oil policy and could open the door for other majors to jump in.

"This is a further step for the Kurds' autonomy in the federated Iraq," Theodore Karasik, an analyst at the Dubai-based Institute for Near East and Gulf Military Analysis said.

For the company, the deal's benefits are

obvious. It allows Exxon Mobil to retain a share of the profits from the oil produced while the service contracts offered by Baghdad provide the firms with a flat fee per barrel of oil produced for their services.

The Kurds win the coup of netting a major company. They have unilaterally signed scores of oil deals, mostly with mid-sized companies. Baghdad considers all of these deals illegal and has

blacklisted the companies involved.

The Kurds and Exxon Mobil appear to be betting the Baghdad government will be forced to acquiesce.

They "are now in a position where they could essentially force Baghdad to accept the status quo and the two separate regulatory systems that exist in the country," said Riani.

□ □ □

Rudaw

25 DECEMBER 2011

Decline in Public Protests by Turkey's Kurds



Relatives holding pictures of Kurdish journalists arrested in a police campaign in Turkey last week and demanding their release. Photo DIHA.

By **HEMIN KHOSHNAW**
rudaw.net

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan -- Since the breakout of new clashes between the fighters of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish army in July, public protests have dramatically decreased in the Kurdish areas of Turkey.

Political observers attribute this decline in peaceful protests to the arrest campaigns carried out by the Turkish police against members of the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), Kurdish political activists and government officials.

The Turkish government has charged many detainees with membership in the banned Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK).

PKK leaders announced a decade ago that they would adopt a new path of civil and political struggle to achieve the rights of the Kurds in Turkey. In the past several years street

campouts and public protests became a dominant pattern in the Kurdish areas of Turkey. But police crackdown in 2011 brought these activities to their lowest level.

Osman Ocalan, former leader of the PKK and brother of Abdulla Ocalan—the jailed PKK leader—blamed the PKK for the drop in civil activities. Ocalan believes people are discontent with PKK's policies.

"PKK made a big strategic and technical mistake by investing all its energy in armed struggle," Ocalan told Rudaw. "They need to do everything possible to serve the civil movements, because public protests can weaken Justice and Development Party (AKP)."

Ocalan said that the Kurds of Turkey repeatedly sent their message to PKK especially after 2009, saying that the era of armed struggle was over, but the PKK did not pay heed.

Amin Aktar, head of the Chambers of Lawyers in Diyarbakir who also

advocates for some of the detained activists believes that the end of public protests is because of "People's fear of detention and their disbelief in civil struggle. People now believe that the system in Turkey does not value civil struggle and democratic processes."

Leaders of the BDP say that close to 5,000 Kurdish political activists have been arrested by the Turkish police in the past three years, the majority of them this year.

Nizamettin Tas, a former member of the PKK Leadership Council, said that Turkey has succeeded in dealing a blow to public protests in the Kurdish areas.

"As a result of these KCK operations, many leaders and organizers of public protests have been arrested," he said. "Those who have not been arrested yet are either hiding or have fled to Europe. The Turkish government has stopped the heart of these civil movements."

Meanwhile, some observers predict demonstrations to resume in the spring of next year.

"This is a momentary situation," Aktar said. "The public will resume protests again in another occasion, and if they are hindered, I would expect the eruption of civil war in Turkey. Those who think that the Kurds can be suppressed with KCK arrests have not grasped the situation well."

Ocalan believes that people may be giving the PKK a chance at the moment, but they take matters into their own hands again in the near future.

"People are stepping aside and telling PKK 'let us see what you can achieve with your armed struggle', but this silence of the people is temporary and next year we will see wider civil movements among the Kurds in Turkey," he said.○

Analysis: Iraqi Kurds maneuver in political minefield

Rania El Gamal / Reuters

ARBIL, Iraq (Reuters) - Iraqi Kurds, at odds with Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki over oil and power, have thrown down another challenge to the Shi'ite-led central government by giving refuge to Iraq's Sunni Muslim vice-president, despite a Baghdad warrant for his arrest.

The Kurds, whose kingmaking role in Iraqi electoral politics has been eroded by Maliki's assertion of his own authority, will try to use Vice-President Tareq al-Hashemi's plight to gain leverage in their own disputes with Baghdad, analysts say.

They, like Maliki and other Iraqi politicians, are playing for high stakes in a potentially destabilizing game following the U.S. withdrawal from a nation whose ethnic and sectarian struggles may be affected by the uprising in Syria next door.

Shi'ite factions which emerged as winners from the U.S. invasion of Iraq fret that a Sunni government may replace Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, an ally of Shi'ite Iran, and embolden Iraqi Sunnis whose heartlands border Syria.

"The fact that the Kurds have ended up in the middle of this crisis - and are likely being lobbied by the U.S. to resolve the crisis rather than exacerbate it - means that they are returning to their kingmaker role once again," said Gala Riani, an analyst at IHS Global Insight.

"It is likely that the Kurds will lay low, not inflame the situation and try to mediate whilst at the same time strengthen

their hands vis-a-vis the federal government to try to resolve some outstanding issues."

The Kurds are disgruntled over Maliki's failure to keep promises to solve long-standing disputes over oil contracts, land and constitutional rights that the Shi'ite leader made when he formed his power-sharing government last year

They also fear Maliki is consolidating power in his own hands and sidelining old Sunni rivals such as Hashemi and his own deputy Saleh al-Mutlaq. Maliki asked parliament to fire Mutlaq for comparing him with deposed leader Saddam Hussein.

DEATH SQUADS

Baghdad ordered Hashemi's arrest this month over accusations that he was running death squads, a charge he denies.

Maliki has asked the regional government in semi-autonomous Kurdistan to hand Hashemi over, but it seems unlikely to comply.

Kurdish sources said the decision to protect Hashemi was not taken lightly, given its potential to exacerbate tensions between Arbil and Baghdad. Handing him back would be far worse, not only for relations between Shi'ites and Sunnis, but also between Kurds and Sunnis, they said.

Parts of Kirkuk, Nineveh and Diyala provinces, neighboring the three provinces that make up Iraqi Kurdistan, are territories disputed between Kurds and Sunni Arabs.

"Maliki wants to marginalize the Sunnis and doesn't want to meet the Kurdish demands and this is not acceptable," said Salahaddin Babaker,

spokesman for the Kurdistan Islamic Union.

Maliki's State of Law bloc is in power thanks to the Kurds, who supported him in return for written pledges to resolve issues such as a long-awaited oil and gas law, the disputed territories and pay for the Kurdish peshmerga security forces.

The Sunni-supported Iraqiya bloc won the most seats in a March 2010 parliamentary election, but could not forge a ruling coalition. It won some key posts in an eventual power-sharing deal. Hashemi and Mutlaq are prominent leaders in Iraqiya.

"Iraqiya and State of Law blocs want Kurdish support," Babaker said. "It is natural to sympathize with Iraqiya and their leaders, but we can use this (the Hashemi dispute) as a way to pressure Maliki to meet the Kurdish demands."

The Kurds are seeking a better hand in talks with Maliki's government over the disputed territories and Kurdish oil deals with U.S. oil major Exxon Mobil, which Baghdad says are illegal.

Since Iraq's sectarian carnage in 2006-07, the central government in Baghdad has grown stronger, violence has fallen and political coalitions have become more cross-sectarian, trends that recent power struggles may call into question.

DREAMS OF STATEHOOD

The Kurds have much to lose in their northern enclave.

Brutally suppressed under Saddam, they became one of the nation's most cohesive political forces after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, strengthened by U.S. support and by main-

taining their own unity, forged after an intra-Kurdish civil war in the 1990s.

After the 1991 Gulf War, Western powers and Turkey created a safe haven in northern Iraq for Kurds, who since the 2003 invasion have sought to use their natural resources to start building a modern quasi-state within a federal Iraq.

Iraqi Kurdistan, dubbed "the other Iraq," has its own ministries, parliament and security forces. Red, white, and green Kurdish flags flutter over buildings in Arbil, the Kurdish capital and seat of the regional government.

Arbil is packed with new high-rise buildings and shopping malls. Newly built ring roads and overpasses team with shiny Korean and Japanese cars and the occasional high-end off-roader.

Kurdistan has attracted foreign investment and given its residents better security and living standards than in the rest of Iraq, where bombs and power cuts are part of everyday life.

Kurds have long dreamt of independence, but the northern region, surrounded by Syria, Turkey and Iran, still depends largely on Iraq, making nationhood unrealistic for now.

Kurdistan faces shelling and air strikes from neighboring Turkey and Iran aimed at camps run by Kurdish rebel groups, the PKK and PJAK, hiding out in Iraq's mountain borderlands.

And despite foreign investment in real estate and tourism, Kurdistan depends on its 17 percent share of the federal budget, based on its population. About 95 percent of that budget comes from Iraq's nearly 2.2 million barrels per day of oil exports.

Nevertheless, its relative success has made the Kurdish

north a model eyed by other regions seeking more autonomy.

Complaining of political wrangling in Baghdad and rivalry among Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish parties, provinces such as the mainly Shi'ite southern oil hub of Basra and the mainly Sunni Salahuddin

and Diyala in the centre and west of Iraq have been calling for regional autonomy.

The constitution supports autonomy, but Maliki's government has tried to quieten the movement, partly out of concern that sub-dividing Iraq further could lead to instability after the U.S. withdrawal.

Kurds beg to differ.

"Iraq geographically and politically has proven to everyone that it is divided into three parts, Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish parts," said Shawan Mohammed Taha, a Kurdish lawmaker in the Iraqi parliament. "We in Kurdistan support establishing new regions

according to the constitutional procedures."

He argued that creating new regions did not imply the division of Iraq, but a way of staying together.

"Either we are able to co-exist in a good way or we will end up in bloodshed."□

REUTERS

Turkish police detain 38, most of them journalists

ISTANBUL, Decembre 20, 2012 (Reuters)

POLICE DETAINED at least 38 people, most of them journalists, in dawn raids across Turkey on Tuesday as part of an investigation into alleged links between Kurdish activists and armed separatist militants, security officials and media said.

Turkey already has some 70 reporters in jail, one of the highest numbers in the world, but says they are in prison for other crimes, not there for their work.

Jailing more journalists could fuel accusations that Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan's government is intolerant of dissent and is trying to tame the media. But while the economy continues to grow rapidly, widespread public discontent is unlikely.

Police arrested 25 people in Istanbul, most of them journalists. Reuters witnesses saw Agence France-Presse photographer Mustafa Ozer being led away from his house by police. AFP in Turkey confirmed he had been detained.

More than 10 journalists from the pro-Kurdish Dicle news agency were also arrested, state-run Anatolian news agency said. A lawyer for Dicle said only police remained at the agency's Istanbul office, copying documents and computer hard drives. She said she did not yet know how many reporters had been taken into custody.

Hundreds of people, including elected mayors, are already on trial on charges of ties to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) armed group as part of the same investigation which began two years ago.

In Diyarbakir, the main city in Turkey's restive mainly Kurdish southeast, police held at least six people, and carried out searches in 10 offices and houses belonging to Dicle staff, officials said. Simultaneous raids were also conducted in the capital Ankara, Izmir and other cities where arrests were also made.

Police also searched offices of several other news agencies



Journalists and their supporters attend a protest against the arrests of journalists in Istanbul. Police detained at least 38 people, most of them journalists, in raids across Turkey on Tuesday as part of an investigation into alleged links between Kurdish activists and armed separatist militants. (Reuters)

across Turkey, seizing computers and documents, CNN Turk said.

Last month, more than 100 people were detained in similar raids which coincided with a surge in PKK attacks on Turkish security forces. These triggered military strikes against guerrilla bases in the mountains of neighbouring northern Iraq.

The investigation is focused on an organisation called the Union of Kurdistan Communities (KCK), which the PKK established in 2005 with the aim of creating its own Kurdish political system, according to a 2009 indictment.

Some 150 politicians and activists are already being tried in Diyarbakir, where a large courtroom has been specially built. Similar trials are being held in other cities across Turkey.

The arrests of yet more journalists could also spark further criticism in the European Union, which Turkey is aiming to join.

Due to the proliferation of such cases, Turkey has fallen to 138th out of 178 countries reviewed for the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters without Borders, a media freedom pressure group, from 101st in 2007.

More than 40,000 people have been killed in the conflict between the PKK and the state since the militants launched their armed insurgency in 1984. Turkey, the United States and European Union list the PKK as a terrorist organisation.○

Turkish Kurds vent fury over botched airstrike that killed 35 civilians as funerals held

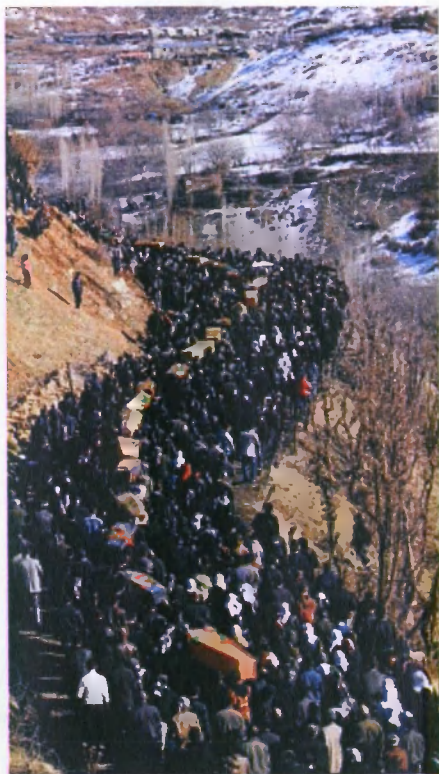
By Associated Press

ISTANBUL — Turkish Kurds vented their rage Friday over a botched military airstrike aimed at Kurdish rebels that instead killed 35 civilians, with thousands lamenting the dead at funerals and scores clashing with police at demonstrations.

The government promised a full inquiry into Wednesday's air strikes, which struck a group of smugglers and resulted in one of the highest single-day civilian death tolls in the long-standing conflict between the Turkish state and Kurdish rebels, who took up arms in 1984.

Even before the latest violence, a government campaign to reconcile with Kurds, who make up roughly 20 percent of Turkey's 74 million people, by granting them more rights has stalled amid a surge in fighting this year.

Footage from the Dogan news



The coffins of the victims draped in Kurdish flags are taken by thousands of mourners to the cemetery in Gulyazi village, near the Iraqi border



Bodies are mounted on to mules after the attack by Turkey's air force near the Turkish village of Ortasu. Photograph: AP

agency showed people digging graves on a hill near the southeast village of Gulyazi, home of some of the slain smugglers, and the funeral rites quickly took on a political tone.

Thousands walked along a mountain path with coffins draped in red, yellow and green, the colors associated with Kurdish identity and the rebel group PKK, whose Kurdish acronym stands for Kurdistan Workers' Party. Victims' families demanded revenge and called Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan a "murderer," according to Firat, a pro-Kurdish news agency.

For a second day, stone-throwing demonstrators clashed with police who responded with tear gas and water cannons in several cities in the mostly Kurdish southeast. Protesters lobbed rocks at a national ruling party office in Diyarbakir, the region's biggest city, and Firat said 30 people were arrested there.

One person was injured and six arrested in southeastern Van city, the state-run Anadolu news agency said. Meanwhile, several hundred people protested peacefully in Istanbul, while some 500 Iraqi Kurds denounced the airstrikes in a rally in the city of Irbil in the Kurdish-controlled region of northern Iraq.

A somber Erdogan described the attack near the border village of Ortasu in Sirnak province as "unfortunate" and "saddening," noting half the dead were under age 20. He said two F-16s bombed the area after images provided by drones showed a 40-person group approaching the

border from the Iraqi side.

"It was revealed later that they were part of a group smuggling cigarettes, diesel fuel and such," he said.

Usually, according to Erdogan, such smuggling is done by groups of just three to five people. He said at least two recent deadly attacks on military outposts near the Iraq-Turkey border were carried out by guerrillas who smuggled guns across the border on mules.

Four hours of official video footage of the raid will be examined, he said.

In an email statement, the PKK called the strikes a "massacre," and referred to "technical and intelligence support" provided by the United States, which recently deployed four Predator drones to Turkey from Iraq to aid Ankara in its fight against the rebels.

The military, meanwhile, issued a message of condolence carried on Anadolu news agency. There was no apology, but such a public outreach is highly unusual for the Turkish armed forces, which are traditionally tightlipped about operations.

"We wish God's mercy and grace to those who lost their lives in the cross-border incident of Dec. 28, 2011, and extend our condolences to their family and friends," the statement said. Last week, the military reported the deaths of 48 suspected rebels in offensives backed by air power.

While many Kurds have assimilated

and are not politically active, a significant number feel marginalized and want autonomy in Kurdish-dominated southeast Turkey. The rebels have long used northern Iraq as a springboard for hit-and-run attacks on Turkish targets.

The conflict has been a drag on Turkey's efforts to burnish its image as a regional model and advocate for democratic change in neighboring countries such as Syria, where thousands have died since an uprising began in March.

Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, a

chief architect of Turkey's rising profile, said the airstrikes would be thoroughly investigated and should not be exploited for political gain. Another top official, Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc, said the inquiry would not be a whitewash.

"If there is any negligence, any fault or any intention, those who are responsible will be found and will endure the consequences," Arinc said.

The Turkish government has taken some conciliatory steps toward the Kurds, allowing Kurdish-language

institutes and private Kurdish courses as well as Kurdish television broadcasts. But Kurdish activists say far more needs to be done to heal scars dating from a time when the Kurdish language was banned, and cite police roundups of Kurdish politicians, journalists and others suspected of rebel links as a sign of intolerance for the minority.

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Rudaw
in English - The Hourglass

23 December 2011

Van Refugees Resettle in Iraqi Kurdistan



A Kurdish family from Van in their new home in Soran, Iraqi Kurdistan.
Photo Rudaw.

By ZUHRI EDLIBI / rudaw.net

SORAN, Iraqi Kurdistan -- More than 70 families from the city of Van in eastern Turkey have been resettled in the Soran district in Iraqi Kurdistan's Erbil province.

Soran immigration officials said that people in the area welcomed the families who lost their homes and properties in the powerful earthquake that struck Van in October and killed nearly 700 people.

Saeed Rashid, 40 a former resident of Van, has lived in Soran for more than a month.

"In Van, we were afraid of more earthquakes," he said. "We feel safe here but we have not found a place yet and have been staying in people's homes."

Rashid and his family live with five other families -- a total of 35 people under one roof.

"Our situation is bad," he said. "We are five families with only one heater.

We would like to settle here because we think of this as our country."

The refugee children cannot attend schools in Iraqi Kurdistan, however, because their past education has been Turkish.

Sukran Vahid, 15, has settled in Soran with his family. He is worried about his education.

"Although our life became terrible after the earthquakes, we still don't want to lose our education. We love to study here in Kurdish," Vahid told Rudaw.

Local residents in Soran have welcomed the families in their own homes.

Safya Kamil, a-30-year-old mother of three, is staying with a family friend.

"We lost everything we had in Van, but when we came here we were warmly welcomed," she said.

Kamil asked the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) to provide them with proper housing and education for their children.

Following the earthquake in Van, a committee was formed in Soran to collect donations for the victims.

Ismael Ibrahim, a member of the committee, said, "We have gathered a good amount of donations, but the Turkish government does not allow us to deliver all the aid to the survivors so we gave it to the refugees in Soran."

Abbas Amir, immigration director in Soran, said that out of the 70 families, only 30 have been registered as refugees.

Amir maintained that his office doesn't have the capacity to fulfill the needs of the refugee families.

"They have two main requests -- education and stipends -- but we can't afford that," Amir said. "We can't offer them education because they were educated in Turkish and we can't provide them with Turkish teachers. Even if we offer them our schooling, it won't be helpful because Turkey doesn't recognize our educational system."

According to Amir, many Soran residents expressed willingness to receive and help the Van refugees.

"This humanitarian gesture of the people of Soran is very heartening, but we still need to know whether they want to stay here long-term or go back to Turkey. We need to know this in order to assist them accordingly," Amir said.

Amir said Soran's local government plans to build residential compounds for the refugees.

"This isn't the best season for building a compound and erecting tents," he said. "We expect more families to arrive from Van and we have fully prepared for it."○



Victimes du raid aérien, hier, dans le hameau de Örtasu: PHOTO EMIN BAL IHA: REUTERS

Ankara bombarde des civils kurdes

TURQUIE L'aviation, croyant viser des combattants du PKK, a tué 35 personnes à la frontière irakienne.



Les corps sur lesquels sont étendues des couvertures bariolées sont alignés dans la neige à flanc de montagne, entourés d'une foule de villageois. «Les corps sont plus d'une trentaine, tous atrocement brûlés», affirme Fehmi Yaman, le maire du village d'Uludere. Au moins 35 civils kurdes ont été tués mercredi soir à la frontière turco-irakienne, près du hameau d'Örtasu, lors de raids de l'aviation turque, qui croyait viser des rebelles du PKK (Parti des travailleurs

du Kurdistan). Ce bombardement de civils est le plus meurtrier commis par l'armée turque depuis celui du village d'Özalp près de Van en 1943, où 33 villageois trafiquant du carburant avec l'Iran tout proche furent tués. Cette fois aussi il s'agissait de contrebandiers. «Les victimes sont des jeunes, tous de moins de 30 ans, qui vivaient de trafics de part et d'autre de la frontière. Parmi eux, il y a même des étudiants», affirme Ertan Eris, membre du conseil de la province de Sirnak, et militant du parti prokurde BDP. L'ar-

mée turque, quant à elle, se refusait toujours hier soir à reconnaître une erreur et affirmait avoir frappé sur la base d'informations – notamment fournies par des drones – «un groupe de terroristes qui essayaient de s'infiltrer», rappelant que la zone touchée, juste au-delà de la frontière, «n'abrite pas de population civile et sert de base arrière à l'organisation terroriste». «Ce terrible incident n'aurait pas eu lieu s'il n'y avait pas eu la menace terroriste», a précisé pour sa part Hüseyin Celik, le porte-parole du Premier ministre,

«Les victimes sont des jeunes qui vivaient de trafics de part et d'autre de la frontière.»

Ertan Eris, membre du parti prokurde, BDP

indiquant que «s'il y a eu une erreur, l'affaire ne sera pas enterrée».

Le choc dans l'opinion est immense. «Il s'agit d'un véritable carnage», a affirmé Selahattin Demirtas, le président du BDP, s'indignant que «quand des civils sont massacrés dans d'autres pays, le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, se révolte, n'hésitant pas à dire au Syrien Bachar al-Assad qu'un dirigeant qui massacre son propre peuple perd sa légitimité». Le BDP – 30 députés au Parlement – a appelé hier à manifester «par des voies démocratiques», ainsi qu'à trois jours de deuil pour les Kurdes. Ceux-ci représentent quelque 15 millions de personnes (sur 73 millions de Turcs), pour la plupart concentrés dans le sud-est du pays.

Le bilan meurtrier de cette bavure témoigne de l'intensification croissante du conflit entre Ankara et la guérilla kurde. En octobre, 24 soldats turcs avaient été tués dans cette même zone frontalière, le plus lourd bilan depuis près de vingt ans. En juillet, les très discrètes négociations entamées par Hikmet Fidan, le patron des services secrets turcs et proche d'Erdogan,

avec des représentants du PKK venus d'Irak du nord et leur leader historique, Abdullah Öcalan,

emprisonné près d'Istanbul depuis 1999, avaient finalement capoté.

Le PKK avait alors décidé de rendre public ces contacts au plus niveau commencés en 2006 pour trouver une solution politique à un conflit qui, depuis le début de la lutte armée du PKK, en 1984, a fait plus de 40 000 morts. Les diverses promesses «d'ouverture kurde» faites par Erdogan sont toujours restées lettre morte, alors que plusieurs milliers d'élus et d'intellectuels sont jugés pour complicité avec «une organisation terroriste».

MARC SEMO
et DILEK AKYAPI



28 décembre 2011

Irak: Allaoui juge que l'Irak est «au bord de la catastrophe»

Avec Reuters

Le chef de file du bloc sunnite Irakia, Iyad Allaoui, a estimé mercredi que l'Irak, plongé dans une crise entre sunnites et chiites, était «au bord de la catastrophe» et a posé comme préalable à sa participation à une réunion de sortie de crise une liste de revendications politiques.

Dans une tribune publiée dans le New York Times, Allaoui indique que l'Irak se dirige vers «une autocratie sectaire qui porte en elle la menace d'une guerre civile dévastatrice».

Les tensions entre chiites et sunnites sont montées d'un cran depuis que le Premier

ministre chiite Nouri al Maliki a demandé au Kurdistan de livrer à la justice le vice-président sunnite Tarek Hachemi, accusé d'avoir orchestré des attentats et des assassinats dans le pays.

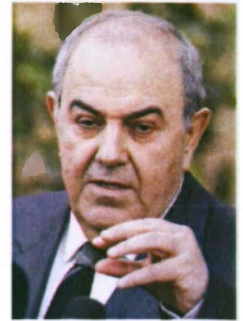
Dans la tribune, co-signée par le président du parlement Osama Noudjafifi et le ministre des Finances Rafie al Esaoui, Allaoui rapporte que les responsables du bloc «sont harcelés et menacés par M. Maliki, qui tente de nous chasser hors de la vie politique irakienne et de créer un Etat autoritaire avec un parti unique.»

La crise politique, la pire depuis la formation du gou-

vernement il y a un an, menace la fragile coalition composée de chiites (majoritaires dans la population), sunnites (qui détenaient tous les pouvoirs sous Saddam Hussein) et Kurdes.

Le président irakien, le Kurde Djalal Talabani, et le président du parlement Noudjaifi se sont mis d'accord mardi sur l'organisation d'une conférence nationale réunissant tous les partis politiques afin d'apaiser les tensions. Ils ont également estimé qu'il appartenait à la justice de déterminer les charges pesant contre Hachemi.

Dans un communiqué distinct, Allaoui pose comme condition à sa participation à la con-



férence une liste de revendications, qui comprend notamment la libération de tous les détenus «arrêtés sous de fausses accusations» et la création d'un panel de responsables politiques chargé de prévenir toute ingérence dans des procédures judiciaires.●



30 décembre 2011

Turquie : colère des Kurdes et regrets du gouvernement

EURONEWS Avec AFP et Reuters

C'est une marée humaine kurde en colère qui a accompagné ce vendredi les cercueils des 35 civils tués par erreur par l'aviation turque. Une bavure militaire commise dans le sud-est de la Turquie dans la nuit de mercredi à jeudi. L'armée croyait cibler des séparatistes kurdes du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan. En fait, il s'agissait de villageois et de contrebandiers. La plupart étaient âgés de 12 à 18 ans, selon des associations de défense des droits de l'Homme.

Le Premier ministre et le président

turcs ont exprimé leurs regrets : "toutes les informations indiquent que les personnes qui sont mortes étaient des civils, a souligné le chef de l'Etat. Nous, tous les civils et les militaires, sommes vraiment désolés".

Cette bavure militaire alimente les tensions entre le gouvernement et la minorité kurde. Pour la deuxième journée consécutive, des Kurdes ont manifesté à Istanbul et fustigé le Premier ministre turc. Ils ont également entonné des slogans favorables aux rebelles kurdes du PKK et à leur chef emprisonné, Abdullah Öcalan.○



Des pro-kurdes manifestent le 29 décembre 2011 à Ankara au lendemain du raid aérien qui a fait 35 morts Adem Altan aff

AFP

Deux rebelles kurdes tués en Turquie

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 31 décembre 2011 (AFP)

DEUX REBELLES kurdes ont été tués samedi à Diyarbakir (sud-est de la Turquie) dans des échanges de tirs intervenus au cours d'une intervention des forces de l'ordre, a annoncé la police.

Les membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont refusé de se rendre et ont lancé des grenades contre la police qui avait attaqué leur cache, selon des chaînes de télévision.

Il y a eu deux morts chez les rebelles et deux fusils et trois grenades ont été

saisies, selon un policier de la région.

Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a regretté vendredi la mort dans un raid aérien de 35 contrebandiers kurdes confondus avec des rebelles kurdes à la frontière turco-irakienne, alors que les séparatistes ont appelé au "soulèvement" et que les victimes étaient inhumées.

"Le résultat est malheureux et affligeant", a déclaré M. Erdogan qui a présenté devant la presse à Istanbul ses condoléances aux proches des victimes.

35 Kurdes tués par l'armée turque, l'AKP évoque une erreur

Erdogan regrette la mort de 35 kurdes inhumés dans leurs villages

Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a regretté vendredi la mort dans un raid aérien de 35 contrebandiers kurdes confondus avec des rebelles kurdes à la frontière turco-irakienne, alors que les séparatistes ont appelé au "soulèvement" et que les victimes étaient inhumées.

"Le résultat est malheureux et affligeant", a déclaré M. Erdogan qui a présenté devant la presse à Istanbul ses condoléances aux proches des victimes.

"Selon les images (de drones) un groupe de 40 personnes se trouvait dans la zone. Impossible de dire de qui il s'agissait (...) Plus tard, il a été déterminé qu'il s'agissait de contrebandiers transportant des cigarettes, et du carburant à dos de mules", a-t-il dit, dans sa première réaction à la bavure militaire.

M. Erdogan a tenté de justifier le raid par le fait que dans le passé les rebelles avaient emprunté le même chemin pour transporter à dos de mules leurs armes et munitions afin d'attaquer des postes militaires.

Des milliers de Kurdes en colère ont enterré les jeunes victimes du bombardement et ont conspué M. Erdogan, le qualifiant de meurtrier.

La foule endeuillée a accompagné dans un convoi de voitures et d'ambulances les cercueils des victimes depuis la bourgade d'Uludere, où les corps ont été autopsiés et où un service funèbre a été célébré à la mosquée, jusqu'au cimetière du village de Gülyazi, près de la frontière irakienne.

A l'issue du défilé des véhicules, au son des avertisseurs, l'assemblée funèbre a scandé "Erdogan est un assassin".

"C'était une jeune pousse, nous n'avons pas pu la cultiver", s'est lamentée la mère de Vedat Encu, âgé de 13 ans.

"Je veux dire au chef d'état-major que mon fils est un martyr est qu'il ne portait aucune arme", a hurlé le père de l'adolescent décédé.

Les familles accompagnent les cercueils de 35 kurdes tués dans un raid aérien, le 30 décembre 2011 dans le village de Gülyazi, près de la frontière irakienne.



"Erdogan, imbécile, Öcalan aura ta peau", a clamé la foule, invoquant la vengeance du chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, a constaté une journaliste de l'AFP.

Les corps ont été déposés dans une vaste fosse commune.

Plusieurs députés du Parti de la Paix et de la démocratie (BDP), la principale formation pro-kurde de Turquie, étaient présents, de même que les symboles du PKK.

L'armée, après avoir initialement annoncé que son opération visait des rebelles qui tentaient de s'infiltrer en Turquie depuis l'Irak, a elle aussi présenté vendredi des condoléances, un geste inhabituel équivalant à la reconnaissance d'une erreur.

Le PKK appelle au soulèvement

Le PKK a pour sa part appelé les Kurdes au soulèvement et dénoncé un acte intentionnel de l'armée.

"Nous appelons le peuple du Kurdistan (...) à réagir contre ce massacre et à demander des comptes à ses auteurs en se soulevant", a déclaré Bahoz Erdal, un des cadres de la branche armée du PKK, dans un communiqué.

Le PKK utilise le terme kurde de "serhildan" (soulèvement) pour désigner des actions de protestation violente, impliquant des heurts avec la police, et de désobéissance civile.

"Nous appelons le peuple du Kurdistan, en particulier à Hakkari et Sirnak [deux provinces voisines de l'Irak, NDLR], à montrer sa réaction contre ce massacre et à demander des comptes à ses auteurs par ses soulèvements", a déclaré Bahoz Erdal, un des cadres de la branche armée du PKK.

Des heurts entre manifestants kurdes et policiers se sont déjà produits jeudi à Istanbul et dans plusieurs villes du Sud-Est anatolien, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes.

Plusieurs centaines de manifestants ont brûlé vendredi le drapeau turc à Erbil, la capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan d'Irak, tandis que dans la ville de Souleimaniye, un rassemblement similaire a également réuni des centaines de personnes.

L'armée turque, qui bombarde régulièrement les repaires du PKK en Irak, affronte depuis l'été une flambée de violence des rebelles qui utilisent leurs bases arrières en Irak pour lancer des attaques en territoire turc.

Le PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par de nombreux pays, a pris les armes en 1984 et le conflit a fait au moins 45.000 morts. □