

INSTITUT
KURDE
DE PARIS

Information and liaison bulletin

N°330

SEPTEMBER 2012

*The publication of this Bulletin enjoys a subsidy
from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (DGCID)
and the Fonds d'action et de soutien pour l'intégration et la lutte contre les discriminations
(The Fund for action and support of integration and the struggle against discrimination)*

This bulletin is issued in French and English

Price per issue : France: 6 € — Abroad : 7,5 €
Annual subscription (12 issues) France : 60 € — Elsewhere : 75 €

Monthly review
Directeur de la publication : Mohamad HASSAN
Numéro de la Commission Paritaire : 659 15 A.S.
ISBN 0761 1285

INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS
Tel. : 01-48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01-48 24 64 66
www.fikp.org
E-mail: bulletin@fikp.org

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IRAQI KURDISTAN A PARTIAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN BAGHDAD AND IRBIL

At the beginning of the month, Kurdistan announced that it would extend the exporting of its crude oil to Iraq until 15 September, its deadline for Baghdad to settle its debts to Kurdish oil companies. Iraq, for its part, had accepted to settle 560 million US dollars, but there were delays in releasing payments due.

On 4 September the Iraqi Prime Minister stated, in a communiqué, that the United States had told the creditor companies to “cooperate” with the central government rather than to take part in a freeze of exports of gas and crude. Nuri al-Maliki indicated that he had received this information during a

meeting with Elizabeth Jones, Assistant Secretary of State for Middle Eastern Affairs.

However, the State Department spokesman did not confirm this, simply answering the Reuters Agency, regarding another dispute — that over contracts, the one over contracts — that Washington just “advised” American companies regarding Iraqi affaires, especially regarding contracts signed with the Kurds without Baghdad’s prior approval, but that the companies make their own decisions.

On the same day, the Iraqi Central Government let it be understood that it might, in its turn, cut the

payments that it made to Kurdistan (17% of the State budget, according to the constitution) to repay itself for the losses incurred by the stoppage of exports — which, according to Baghdad amounted to over \$3 billion. Ali Mussavi, one of the Iraqi Prime Minister’s Advisors, announced that a Kurdish delegation had received a one-week ultimatum to start negotiations or else these 3 billion dollars would be deducted from the Kurdish budget.

Despite the apparent escalation of reciprocal threats, few observers believe in any point of no return in relations between Irbil and Baghdad. This Tony Hayward,

Genel Energy's General Manager, considers that Kurdistan would have more to win than to lose by failing to resolve the conflict and that the issues at stake are too high for them not to reach a compromise: *"In one or two years Kurdistan's production capacity will have grown to about a million barrels a day — that's too much oil to be cut off because of a political quarrel. Thus, in one way or other, it will be resolved"* (Reuters)

Having said this, Genel Energy's Manager recognised that if, despite everything, Kurdistan decided to freeze its oil exports to Iraq, the crude oil that his company extracts from the Taq Taq and Tawke fields (respectively 105,000 and 70,000 barrels a day) could well be sold to local firms who pay \$60 a barrel, that is slightly less than the market price but enough for the company to manage.

If an agreement is reached between Irbil and Baghdad, a new gas pipeline will connect Taq Taq to Khurmala, the point at which the Iraq-Turkey oil pipeline enters Turkey. Regarding direct sales of crude oil and gas to Turkey, it is being carried out by tanker trucks for the moment. Thus it is estimated that about 15 trucks a day leave the Khir Mor plant to deliver oil to Mersin (Adana). In return, the Kurds receive small amounts of diesel fuel and paraffin, a barter deal that is considered the "symbolic" starting point of the future imports and exports between the

two countries. The output of condensed natural gas from Khor Mor is about 3000 barrels a day, which is pretty minute but is sold at \$100 a barrels at Mersin.

As the 15 September deadline was approaching, a false alarm occurred on 11 September when the Iraqi Oil Minister announced that the Kurds had reduced their oil exports to about 75,000 to 80,000 barrels a day, as against 115,000 to 120,000 previously. It emerged, however, that this drop was due to a technical breakdown at Khurmala, which had required pumping to be temporarily stopped.

In the end, as Tony Hayward had foreseen, an agreement finally took place on 13 September between Iraq and the KRG, the latter committing itself to continuing to export oil exports to Baghdad while the latter promised to pay the Kurdistan creditor companies \$857 million (a trillion Iraqi dinars). The objective is to reach 200,000 barrels per day from Kurdistan by the end of the year. Meanwhile the output will remain at 140,000 barrels a day.

This dispute, temporarily buried, remains based on the contracts signed with foreign companies and that of oil exports to Turkey. So far, despite the fury of Hussein Sharistani, the Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister in charge of fuel and power, and the threats of reprisals against their interests in Iraq, the foreign companies that have

signed contracts with the KRG have hardly suffered from the situation. Moreover, the cancellation of most of the contracts for oil exploration and operation in Iraq would be far more damaging to Baghdad and would push the "banned" companies into investing more in Iraqi Kurdistan. Consequently the announcements of possible contract signings between foreign companies and Irbil have been multiplying.

On 22 September close to the KRG let it be understood that the Royal Dutch Shell envisaged working in Kurdistan. However, Shell's French spokesman straight away denied that such discussions had begun, recalling that they were already working on three large scale projects in Iraq, where they were among the most important investors, while also adding that they always looked for *"new opportunities and projects that could add to Iraq's value"*.

Nevertheless, in October 2011m according to sources from oil industry circles, Shell had planned to move into Iraqi Kurdistan, but had dropped the idea on seeing the violent reaction Exxon's had aroused from Sharistani. It is probable that some companies are hesitating between Irbil and Baghdad or more probably want to keep well in with both, are waiting to see what real measure are taken against Exxon, Chevron, Total and all those who have dared to breach the Iraqi bans.

SYRIA: THE KURDISH REGIONS MANAGE THEIR "LIBERATION" WITH UNCERTAINTY

Since the "withdrawal" or partial disengagement of the Syrian forces from the bulk of Kurdish towns, their inhabitants are enjoying a fragile peace — but also suffer from shortages of food and fuel. These

shortages are accentuated by the influx of refugees fleeing the fighting in Aleppo. Thus the Kurdish internet site *Welatê me* (Our Country) describes long queues lasting several hours outside the bakeries of Koban, the only town to be completely

devoid of Syrian forces and state administrations. Mustafa Juma, the General secretary of the Kurdish Azadi Party, who is a native of Koban, confirms the food shortage, especially of flour, and highlights both the fighting between the Syrian

Army and the “Free Syrian Army” (FSA) that hinder traffic and circulation of goods but also the checkpoints set up by the PYD (the Syrian branch of the PKK) which it says are to prevent the FSA from entering the Kurdish areas. Mustafa Juma accuses these checkpoints of taking money from those bringing food into the town, even though recognising that the end of the fighting in Aleppo would considerably improve the situation, as the an important part of the burden on this town of 350,000 is the influx of Kurdish refugees from Aleppo.

The problems also come, as the remarks of the Azadi Secretary show, from the difficulty the Kurdish parties have in agreeing between themselves, on the administration and management of day to day affaires, since they had not prepared themselves for such tasks and a certain distrust reigns between movements linked by a too recent agreement to be really effective on the spot. Thus there has not yet been any opening of schools in Koban, a fact recognised by Abdulhaq Yusuf, a member of the political Committee of the PYD. Education is, in principal managed by the Kurdish High Committee, which is completely overwhelmed with work and subject to internal quarrels.

Muhammad Musa, the leader of the Kurdish Left Party, considers, for his part, that the situation in Koban is fairly good, though less so than at Efrin, but that the Jeziré region is the most disorganised. He confirms, what Abdul Hakim Bashar, the president of the KNC had pointed out last July, that the local staff of the Syrian administration, about 150,000 in number, continue to be paid, but that this will doubtless stop if the Syrian State col-

lapses under the blows of the revolution. (Reuters).

At Qamishlo, the only Kurdish town of which the Baath has chosen to keep control, the Syrian Army arrested and imprisoned 25 young Kurds for “insubordination” (that is to say desertion), which brought hundreds of people out on the streets to demonstrate for their release. The *Komelên ciwanên Rojavayê Kurdistan* (KCRK, an organisation of young Kurds from Western Kurdistan) also organised a rally in front of the mosque on the Friday following these arrests, while shopkeepers lowered the shutters of their shops as a sign of solidarity. Some of these arrests are more in the nature of kidnappings undertaken to exchange prisoners. Thus 3 young Kurds of the village of Girkê Legê were taken away by the Syrian Army after some Kurdish forces from that village had captured 5 soldiers. There followed a reciprocal release of hostages.

In Aleppo, the Sheikh Maqsud district, a quarter largely inhabited by Kurds, an air raid killed a woman, two of her children and their young cousin, as they were taking part in a funeral procession. The Kurdish National Council described this act as “criminal”. So far the PYD’s Kurdish forces, that control Efrin, have not had any confrontation with the Syrian Army, and have also kept the FSA at bay. It is hard to tell whether the raid was deliberate or was a Syrian Army blunder.

Another murder whose motivations are hard to untangle is one that of Mahmoud Wali Babijani (nicknamed “Abu Gandhi”), which took place on 21 September. Abu Gandhi was a Kurdish political activist, member of the Azadi party, co-

founder of a youth movement and prominent member of the KNC. He was shot down by two men riding a motorbike in the town of Ras al’ayn (Hassaké Province). Nine months earlier, he was kidnapped and severely tortured before being released. At the time he had accused the PYD of being behind his kidnapping, which they denied. He had received many death threats and was in hiding most of time, only coming out to take part in demonstrations.

On 30 September a suicide bomb attack took place at Qamishlo — the first of its kind in Kurdistan. It was principally aimed at the Syrian police and security forces, but no Kurdish organisation claimed responsibility for this car bomb attack.

In an interview given to the daily paper *Rudaw*, on 25 September, the PYD leader, who carried out a political tour of Europe the month before, refuted the accusations frequently aimed at his party of being more of an ally than an adversary of the Syrian regime. According to him, the government could hold out for another 2 years, relying on its 170,000 men strong security forces and that the Syrians would have everything to lose from the fall of Bachar al-Assad, especially the Alawiites who might want to dig themselves in, backing their fortified mountainous region, which could, embryonically be a region politically separated from the rest of Syria.

Asserting that the PYD indeed wanted the fall of the Baathist State, Salih Muslim pointed to the dangers and uncertainties the Kurds would face in the new Syria, darkening in the process, the picture of post-Saddam Iraq regarding the situation of the Kurds, asserting that their rights are not ensured and that Article 140 has still not been applied. Finally he

recalled the failure of the National Syrian Council conference in Cairo, from which the Kurds had withdrawn.

The final declaration of the first Conference of the Syrian National Council that took place in Tunis in October 2011, does indeed men-

tion the Kurds as an "ethnic group" that should be mentioned in the constitution along side the other minorities like the Assyro-Chaldeans, and that Kurdish affairs, like those of the Assyro-Chaldeans should be handled "in the context of the country's general business" and of a "Syria united as a

people and a territory". Finally it mentions ensuring the same civic rights to all its citizens, whatsoever their religious or ethnic membership. However, last July in Cairo the Kurds had presented as "not negotiable" the mention of a "Kurdish nation" in the Syrian Constitution.

IRAQ: TARIQ al-HASHIMI IS SENTENCED TO DEATH

On top of the disputes over the exporting of Kurdish gas and the surprise visit of Ahmet Davutoglu to Kirkuk, the death sentence passed on Vice-President Tareq Al-Hashemi, now a refugee in Turkey with all his family, has become both an international conflict and an internal clash between two Iraqi political factions.

On 9 September, the Baghdad Criminal Court sentenced to death in absentia, Tareq al-Hashimi, who has been in flight for several months for organising a terrorist attack on the Baghdad Parliament, causing the death of Member of Parliament Suhad al-Khafail and Talib Balasim, a police officer. This sentence provoked the indignation of his Parliamentary Group, al-Iraqiyya, while a wave of bomb attacks took place causing 88 deaths, without it being possible to establish any certain connection between them and this announced sentence.

Far from creating unanimity in Iraq, this sentence aroused serious reservation from the Kurdistan Regional Government, whose spokesman, on 11 September, warned of the danger of it aggravating the political crisis

the country is experiencing. The Kurdistan Region's Prime Minister, Neçirvan Barzani, judged this sentence "unwise" and considered that the conflict can be resolved "politically, but not in this manner". The President of Iraq, Jalal Talabani, whose main function is to ensure a form of mediation between the antagonistic blocs in the country, expressed his "pain" at the announcing of this sentence, which he considered would be one more obstacle to "national reconciliation". While affirming his commitment to judicial independence, Jalal Talabani called for the holding of a national conference to resolve all the existing conflicts, including the Hashemi case.

From his exile in Turkey, Tareq Al-Hashimi again reodited the accusations and attacked the sentence. He stated that he would only return to Iraq with the guarantee of a fair trial and of his personal safety. He appealed to the United Nations asking for the setting up of a court that would help the Iraqi Criminal Court by sending judges to Baghdad who could investigate his case. In addition to charges of corruption and abuse of power that he has several times made against his political rival, Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki,

the Vice-President alluded to Iranian manoeuvres in this case as in others, and criticised the United States for its blindness regarding the present Iraqi government.

For his part, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, again refused to extradite al-Hashimi, as had done the Kurds when the Iraqi Vice President had at first fled to Iraqi Kurdistan. He then personally attacked Nuri al-Maliki, accusing him of deliberately inflaming "sectarian tensions in Iraq".

Tareq Al-Hashimi was considered one of the principal opponents of Iranian influence in Iraq. The al-Iraqiyya list includes Sunni and Shiite Arab members of Parliament and presents itself as "secular". Thus this is less a matter of a clash between Sunni and Shiite blocs as of interest groups — between Turkey, Irbil and the Syrian opposition on the one side and Iran supporting the Syrian Baath regime and regularly accused by the opponents of the Iraqi Prime Minister of carrying out a political takeover of Iraqi politics since the withdrawal of US troops, in particular by publicly supporting Nuri al-Maliki since the beginning of his second term in office, in 2010.

PARIS: A CONFERENCE ON IRAN

In tribute to Dr. Sadegh Sharafkandi, General Secretary of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, and to his colleagues

assassinated with him in September 1992, in Berlin while attending the Socialist International Congress, the Paris Kurdish Institute organised an International

Conference on the subject of "Iran at the time of Arab revolts". This was held in the Victor Hugo Hall of the French national Assembly on 14 September.

The Symposium was opened by Pouria Amirshani, the Socialist Party's National Secretary for International Cooperation and Human Rights. She spoke of the end of the period of "two great powers" at the end of the 70s, that of the aegis of "ultra-conservative" powers like the governments of Thatcher and Regan and the powers that had led to the overthrow of the Shah and the rise to power of the Khomeiny regime. This has weighed heavily on international relations by encouraging the emergence of radical religious groups, at first in the Middle East, then throughout the world.

As against that, the new period, which is beginning opens with the revolts in Iran and in the Arab world, with movement that are not religious but political and democratic, fighting against social injustice, movement that have established "the strength of civil societies".

Pouria Amirshani saw the "uncertain but real possibilities of building a better world for the coming generations, even if nothing pre-ordained. There are, on both sides of the Mediterranean, serious dangers of clashes and of falling back on nationalist and identity issues.

There is, in Iran, a deep-seated will of its people to emancipate itself in the political area and in that of the sharing of wealth. The Syrian crisis also acts as an issue in the relations between Turkey and Iran. In Syria's case it is necessary, so as to avoid repeating the strategic errors made in Libya, to act together with the neighbouring countries to avoid the whole region exploding.

Turkey and Iran are the region's two great non-Arab powers, through which new East-West relations can be hinged and, through that, the Kurdish question also becomes a central issue. "Over and above the cultural and

geo-strategic point of view, there is a major point to keep in mind — the actors of Kurdish civil society".

The first Round Table was moderated by Hamit Bozarslan; Research Manager at Paris's EHESS and covered "Iranian Society Today". The speakers were Hashem Ahmadzadeh, Lecturer in Middle Eastern Studies, at Exeter University, Great Britain, Stéphane Dudoignon and Marie Ladier, researchers at the CNRS, Gilles Roux, researcher at the IRSEM and Nuri Yesilyurt, at Ankara University of Political Science.

In Hamit Bozarslan's opinion, the present situation is not with analogies with that of the 80s, with a "resort to massive violence" and encompassing the borders because of "long distance military movements".

Another similarity with the 80s: "two States are particularly involved, two countries that have already gone through intense inter-communal and civil wars, Iraq and Lebanon, in which Iran plays an extremely important role (...) in these countries' future".

As for the Kurdish domain, it is once again "involved", and even if the contest is very different from that of the 80s, it is equally "in the front line".

"The internal movements are also important and raise questions about the life span of these regimes and about the possible dynamics for change.

The Iranian regime has three times and by three different methods, ensured its durability. In an initial phase by the war and violence that followed the 1979 revolution, because even if the war was forced on Iran by Saddam Hussein's regime, it then became a means of consolidating the power of the clergy and the personal authority of Ayatollah Khomeiny.

In a second stage, the Rafsanjani then the Khatami regimes tried to move out of the revolution and the revolutionary dynamics either by increasing bureaucracy or by reforms. These experiments also showed their limitations.

A third stage arrived with Ahmedinjad, when the authorities injected a strong of messianic dose, one of expecting a millennial break, to consolidate it authoritarian character. Today, however, this "magic formula", which worked quite well between 2005 and 2009, seems to be running out of breath

In the year 2012-2013, Iran faces an extremely serious crisis, indeed, even four successive crises: a crisis of meaning and legitimacy, since the bitter pill of electoral frauds in 2009 was hard to swallow; a crisis of legitimacy at regional level, since today Moslem public opinion classes Iran with the hangmen, particularly in Syria; a serious crisis of nationality, in Baluchistan, Kurdistan and Azerbaijan; and finally a very serious social crisis whose effects have been accentuated by the embargo".

Hashim Ahmadzadeh's contribution covered "the ethnic challenges of the Iranian world". He first recalled that, 3 weeks earlier, an agreement had been signed between the Kurdistan Democratic party-Iran and other Kurdish political movements, called "the cooperation between parties", so as to harmonise the demands for their rights in Iran. Although the tenor of this declaration includes no new elements, many political figures of the Iranian opposition, particularly in the diaspora, condemned it very severely as an attempt at "separatism".

In Iran it is generally considered that this State is a "nation", since the modernisation of the system, by going back to Iran's pre-Islamic history to find legitimacy

for this national entity. Thus arguments that oppose this Kurdish agreement deny that the latter are a nation, since there is only one nation, Iran, whose territorial integrity must never be questioned — even though the Kurds' declaration never mentions separatism.

Official discourse in Iran talks of non-Persian minorities as *qewm* (communities) but the Kurds reject this and use the term *netwe*, which etymologically come from the same root as nation, considering it more adapted to their situation.

One of the greatest challenges to the contemporary Iranian system is that of accepting that these "ethnic groups" are nations, even if deprived of national sovereignty. One of the means of making Iran democratic is by accepting these ethnic differences and that the Kurds prefer to describe themselves as a nation.

Stéphane Dudoignon, of the CNRS, spoke about "Iran's relations with its Eastern borders", through "some ethno-denominational aspects". Iran is living through a period in which its eastern border has come to be "at the heart of public discussion". A Neo-traditional Islamic tradition, that of the Deoband School, has spread throughout India up to Iranian Baluchistan, then to Khorassan to the Gulf and Central Asia. Although its aspirations are fairly medieval, it has become, in the Islamic Republic today, leading factor in the defence of the most open Parliamentarism possible, a quite astonishing Human Rights approach, for a party that practices the *taqlid* of pre-modern Islamic jurisprudence. This party has developed centripetal forces, in Iran. In the last 30 years we have moved from a period of demands for autonomy and even

independence to one of citizenship and recentralisation, in which Iran's border regions, especially the Eastern ones, (Khorassanian and Baluchi in particular) are plying an extremely important part. Thus all through 2012, there have been campaigns in the regional Iranian press in defence of Kak Hassan Amini, a very important religious leader of Sanandal (Sine, in Kurdistan Province). He has been faced, since the end of 2011, with considerable legal problems, which has aroused, throughout Iran's Eastern border regions considerable solidarity campaigns.

Sunni Islam, this "borderline religion" in Iran, now occupies a quite central position. We would have to go back to the Britain's consistent policy in the region, from 1917 to 1947, and their systematic promotion of the Sunni religious schools, like the Deoband School. These schools were seen as excellent fire breaks against Bolshevik and then Soviet influence reaching the Indian borders. Well versed at legal exercises and modern communication techniques, the present day Sunni clergy of the Deoband school were rapidly able to confront the authority of tribal chiefs and landlords and so appear as alternative leaders — at first at regional level then of the whole of Iran. They have now established themselves as the most active spokesmen for the response being given in Iran to the Arab Spring.

Unlike the situation in India and Pakistan, in Iran the Deoband school has enjoyed favourable conditions for its expansion in the South-East of the country, both under both the Pahlavis and the Islamic Republic with the aim of "tearing into pieces any attempt for the emergence of a secular national intelligentsia".

Two important and interesting public figures among the principal religious leaders and preachers of the so-called Sarbaz school have appeared as the initiators of an "embryonic Sunni community" throughout Iran. One is Mawlawi Abdal-Aziz Mollahzadeh Makkî and his son-in-law and successor Mawlawi Abdal Hamid. The latter was born in 1947 and is, today, the principal spokesman of the Iran Sunnis, and calls himself the "khatib of Iran's Sunnis". There is thus appearing an alternative political religious authority with pan-Iranian claims and is, today, at the head of the attacks on the "corrupt and criminal" Bashar al-Assad regime, which enables a number of Baluchi leaders to apply these terms to other situations... The great advantage of the Arab Springs is that it enables the raising of a certain number of subjects without appearing to do so.

For the last quarter of a century, since the death of his father-in-law in 1987, Mawlawi Abd al Hamid, this Sunni this Sunni khatib in the town of Zahedan, the principal Sunni city South-East Iran "has occupied a central position at the heart of the political sociability" in this region of Eastern Iran, extended to include Khorassan in 1979, with the expansion of so called Deobandi schools.

In their expansion, the networks of Deobandi schools throughout Iran have been accompanied by the network of a transnational missionary organisation: the *Tabliah jama'at*, founded in the 20s in India to fight against Hindu revivalism and, above all to work towards the re-Islamisation of tribes. In Iran it is sponsored and organised by the representative of the Guide, Khamenai who arranges the distribution of the resources of the

Tabliah jama'at among the various missionaries of this organisation, be they Baluchi or otherwise.

Another very important trans-border network, both for uniting the Iranian Sunni community and for extending Iranian influence beyond its borders is formed by affiliations with traditional Sufi mystical paths, particularly those of the Naqshbandiyya and Qadiriyya trends, which remain closely associated with the most powerful Baluchi tribes of Sistan-Baluchistan, and are often found behind the teachings of the Deoband school. From a theological view point, these connections between the Deoband school and the historic Sufi paths are a striking illustration of the extreme adaptability of the deobandi movement in Iran that has been inspired by both the Pahlevi monarchy for centralism and by the institutions of Iranian Shiism, like the city of Qom, to enable Zahedan to emerge as the Sunni religious centre of Iran and also to ally itself with the most traditional Sufi paths. Today, these have become the preferred instrument for promotion and expansion, particularly in the direction of former Soviet areas: the Eastern provinces of Iran, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan and even to Tartaristan and Bachkortostan.

Unlike the world of madrassas, like the Deoband School, whose principal intellectual centres are to the East of Iran, the intellectual centres of Sunni Iranian Sufism continue to be clearly located in Kurdistan. There is, therefore, a double polarity within which this link between the Deoband School and historical traditional Sufism contributes to bring together these differing regions located at the Eastern and Western extremities of Iran.

An extremely important change took place in 2007, the year that Ayatollah Khamenei proclaimed as "*the year of national and religious union*", following the campaign of attacks by the Jundallah in Baluchistan. This led Teheran to adopt a new line in its relations with its Sunni minorities, especially the Baluchis, and with all the countries on its South Eastern borders. The offices of the Guide's representatives in the Eastern provinces of Iran, run by Ayatollah Abbas Sayyid Ali Soleimany in Sistan-Baluchistan, worked to create several areas for discussion and debate (thus trying to neutralise dissidence). This institution included a wide range of protagonists, public figures and institutions under the Guide's direct authority.

Since 2007, the initiatives aimed at making the discussions and negotiations as broad as possible have multiplied. The general situation remains marked by some very powerful tensions and the repetition of demands that remain unanswered since Mahmud Ahmadijad's re-election. Thus there is both an initiative by the Islamic Republic to try and open discussion and, at the same time, a strengthening of this Sunni community that is trying, on the basis of Iran's most marginal regions, to propose a coherent alternative policy.

Marie Ladier, a researcher at the CNRS, returned to Iran's political situation since the fraudulent re-election of Mr. Ahmadijad in 2009.

The Iranians have been the first revolt in this region of the world, but they seem to have remained on the sidelines of the movements in the Arab world since the end of 2010. Which, moreover, could be interpreted

as a consequence of the Iranian movement,

During a recent meeting with students, Hashemi Rafsanjani, the President of the Council of Discernment of the Higher Interests of the Regime, compared the political situation with that just after the end of the Iraq-Iran War, which he considered was much more serious than today; Then its budget had been halved and much of the country's infrastructures destroyed.

However, Rafsanjani underestimates the present day economic and financial difficulties linked to the sanctions against Iran and the seriousness of the political crisis. At the end of the war and, especially after Khomeini's death, the Iranian political system went through a crisis but there was an essential consensus amongst the clergy, who managed to emerge from the crisis by appointing Khamenei as Guide of the Revolution.

Today the situation seems explosive. The Islamic Republic is going through its greatest crisis since 1979. This is characterised by two aspects: that of the legitimacy of power of which Hamid Bozarslan has already spoken, after the fraudulent re-election of Ahmadijad. The other is the trial of strength between the Guide and Mahmud Ahmadijad since 2010. This is the first time that a head of the executive has stood up to the Guide in the whole history of the Islamic Republic. Until the end of 2009, Mahmud Ahmadijad had been loyally supported by the Guide, who had full confidence in him. However I think that from the start Ahmadijad had a political project for the Islamic Republic that ran counter to that of the Guide and those close to him after the 2009 Presidential election. Indeed,

since his re-election he has not hesitated to reveal his political intentions for Iran — proposing another regime for an Islamic Republic but without the clergy. The pact between them has been broken and Parliament has received the green light from the Guide to attack the government.

Since 2009 Ahmadinjad has set up a population policy that aims at reversing the recent drop in the birth rate with object of Iran reaching a population of 150 million in the near future. He has also reformed the system of subsidies, by stopping subsidies of many products and services so as to finance direct subsidies. Since December 2010, Ahmadinjad's government has transferred a sum equivalent to between 20 and 40 euros to the bank account of every household. Prior to that Iranians received subsidies indirectly, through a variety of consumer items and services, so that these subsidies had not "visible face", whereas now they know that they receive State help. While not all economists are opposed to this reform because of the present overall situation, the new system enables Ahmadinjad's government to set up a "principle fund" that gives him some autonomy to manage the currency and the oil revenues together. Other projects are being: re-writing Iran's history in the school books so as to reinforce the indoctrination of the younger generation, to Islamise Social studies and consolidate the national status by giving priority of "Iraniousness", with a nationalist discourse to increase his standing with the population. This trial of strength is the background to the 2013 Presidential elections, though already the 2012 parliamentary elections had shown that the two men and their respective camps are almost equally strong, which makes the

future even more uncertain and extremely worrying.

Gilles Roux, a researcher at INSERM, dealt with "the Configuration of Relations between the centre and the periphery under the Islamic Republic" and with the dynamics of political mobilisation between the Centre and the periphery over the last decade.

The Persians represent less than half of the population of this multi-ethnic Iranian empire. Throughout the 20th Century the central power made great efforts to impose its domination over the country as a whole to put an end to an "Iran of great tribes and of provinces".

The 1079 revolution could seem to be the finalisation of this policy of national unification carried out by the Pahlevis. The new regime then appeared to be in a position to adopt a more conciliatory attitude towards the ethnic groups, as shown by the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, which recognised the country's very great cultural diversity, while still affirming Persian supremacy (Art. 15). However, the Republican regime always wanted to confine this ethnic diversity to its most conventional expression and ensure that any ethnic expression remained strictly a private matter that should not be the subject of political demands. When this occurred it automatically very rapidly treated this an opposition to the Iranian regime.

Since the middle of the 90s, Iran has been facing a certain "politicisation of ethnicity". The subject of nationalities has become a very important part of public discussion, impelled by a multitude of publications dealing with ethnic and national identity, in both Persian and other lan-

guages. During the same period some activists entered the political field that put this national identity forward and presenting themselves as not only Iranians. On the fringes of this politicisation of ethnicity, violent actions could be observed in several peripheral regions: Kurdistan and Baluchistan. Even if these violent actions must be taken into account they remain limited. However, these events led to rethinking the ethnic issue, that had been somewhat forgotten for several years, and to trying to understand how these ethnic movements have appeared and how they work on the political system.

These ethnic dynamics can be linked to the central dynamics of the political movement, particularly that which followed the 2009 elections — the Green movement. There could then be seen very important demonstrations — the first since the Iran revolution — and that, in the territorial location of these demonstrations, they were much greater and more lasting in the cities of the Persian plateau. The towns of the peripheral regions stayed a little more in the background during this period of mobilisation.

Since the end of the 90s, a certain differentiation can be noticed in the political participation of the Provinces of the Iranian plateau and that of the peripheral regions, both regarding voting and demonstrations.

Under the Islamic Republic, election participation was considered an essential element for the regime's legitimacy. The Republic's dignitaries unceasingly spoke of the importance of the polls and to pride themselves on "the people's support". During the 1997 elections that saw Khatami take office, it was

clearly seen that he was particularly well supported in the peripheral provinces, and the same held for his re-election. In 2005 the reforming candidates, who stood in a disorganised manner, did not make it to the second round, yet here too they enjoyed strong supporting the peripheral regions: Karoubi ended up first in the province with a Lori majority and won a very good score in peripheral provinces of the South and the West of the country. Mostafa Mo'im, who is a Turkish speaker from Azerbaijan, had substantial had scores on the mainly Sunni province of Meralizadeh, and though he finished last in the election competition won much larger scores in the North-West of the country.

With regard to the conservative candidates, it should be noted that in 2005, Ahmedinjad enjoyed his greatest support in the provinces in the centre of the country.

In view of the massive fraud, it is impossible to draw any conclusions from the 2009 elections.

The alignment crisis that divided the reformers in 2005 opened the way for autonomous activity in the ethnic movements, favoured, at the beginning of the 2000s by a general context that allowed them to grow in strength — particularly the weakening of the social movements that had carried the reformers into office. These ethnic movements multiplied their protest actions in the 2000 decade: riots in Khuzistan, major demonstrations in Azerbaijan in honour of Babak and then over the Danish caricatures as well as in Baluchistan.

Some of the countries provinces saw acts of violence in Baluchistan and Kurdistan.

This does mean that the provinces of the Iranian plateau were soared the social conflicts that took place in the years 2000L there were many riots in Iranian cities and the administrative distribution of constituencies created very strong tensions. The one million signatures "campaign against discrimination against women was also important. However, there was a difference if timing and territory in these demonstrations as between the centre and the periphery

An important work of preserving ethnic cultures has been conducted has been carried out under the Islamic Republic and has so greatly influenced relations between the centre and the periphery. The accusation of difference of treatment by the Pehlevi regime between the centre and the periphery has been carried over to the Islamic Republic, which has become the target of nationalist activists. This discourse has spread in several social sectors: students, teachers, and trade Union circles. These criticisms have been relayed by members of Parliament.

This discourse on discrimination of peripheral regions should be seen alongside the gradual conquest of the Republic's institutions by the neo-conservatives. This has led to an approach much more centred on questions of security, on ethnic issues and with a massive use of repression along side a weakening of regional development. Moreover, the political organisations close to Ahmedinjad no longer even try to establish political roots in the peripheral regions.

These alternative mobilisations in the peripheral regions that make appeal to national identi-

ty, complicate the unification of the discontent on a national scale.

Mr. Nuri Yesilyart, who teaches political science at Ankara University and is a specialist in international relations, particularly those of Turkey with its neighbours, described the *"Evolution of Turco-Iranian relations before and after the Arab Spring"*.

Turkey and Iran are, except for Israel, the two major Non-Arab powers in the region. They have had many conflicts since the 16th Century, when the Ottomans and Safavides were in *"strategic and ideological conflict"* and this rivalry is still present even though there as a very short and exceptional period of more favourable relations, According to Nuri Yesilyurt the events of the Arab Spring have re-activated this traditional rivalry.

The last series of conflicts between Turkey and Iran began in 1979, during the Islamic revolution. During the cold war the two countries were on the same side, allied to the United States, and both played an important political role against the Soviet Union in the Near East. After 1979, Turkey remained a pro-Western regional power, secular and economically liberal while the new Iranian regime redefined itself as an anti-Western, Islamic and economically statist country, thus opening a new period of ideological and strategic rivalry between the two countries.

The 90s were the worst with regard to their relations, with subversive actions on both sides. As against this, the years after 2000 was the "golden age" of bilateral relations between the two countries. Three main factors contributed to this:

Firstly there was a change in power in both countries: Khatemi, a reformer, was elected President of Iran in 1997 and re-elected in 2001. In Turkey, the AKP, a “pro-Islamic” party won the elections in 2002 and 2007. The Khatemi government tried to reduce the radical trends in Iranian foreign policy and to throw a line to the Western world at the same time as the AKP tried to reduce the pro-secularist tendencies in Turkey and throw a line to the Islamic world — especially its Near-Eastern neighbours. The two countries experienced a period of ideological convergence and in the 2000-2010 decade they did not intervene in one another’s domestic affairs. This in 2009, the Turkish leaders decided not to make any comments on what was happening in Iran. While this period of positive relations lasted after Ahmedinjad came to power in 2005, these factors still encouraged a continued reconciliation.

The second factor was the Kurdish question, which encouraged cooperation between the two countries. After the US intervention in Iraq in 2003, both Turkey and Iran began to suffer from the actions of Kurdish militants. The PKK, which had declared a cease fire after Ocalan’s arrest in 1999, renewed its attacks against the Turkish Army in June 2004 the PJAK, which has organic links with the PKK, started an armed struggle against Iran. PJAK poses a much lesser danger to Iran than the PKK to Turkey, but Iran considered the PJAK’s activity to be a form of US “conspiracy” and consequently wanted to ensure Turkey’s friendly support. Iran and Turkey, therefore, began to fight together against a common enemy, thus strengthening cooperation in security matters. After 2008 they were, in particular, able to set up co-ordinated oper-

ations against Kurdish militants in the Qandil Mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. Thus an operation took place in December 2009 at the “zero point” between Turkey, Iran and Iraq.

The third factor is linked to the economy and the energy policy. The Turkish economy has flourished after the economic crisis of 2001 and consequently the fuel and power sector needed several sources of reliable and readily available power. Thus, during this period, Iran became a good trade partner for Turkey since, at that time, it was the only country in the region apart from Russia, which could supply Turkey with natural gas via pipelines. This source represented about 40% of Turkey’s electricity. For this reason it was very important to prevent to avoid total dependence on Russia for the supply of natural gas. Turkey thus began to buy natural gas from Iran, but the latter was only able to supply 20% of its needs and the rest continued to be supplied by Russia. Iran and Turkey nevertheless began to draw up draft agreements on the production of natural gas and projects for the transfer of Iranian natural gas, even if this hasn’t yet been made concrete.

Because of these three factors, Turkey opposed any external intervention that might destabilise Iran and their bi-lateral relations. Thus any foreign intervention could give the Kurdish separatists more power and prevent Iranian exportations to Turkey. This could also disturb the trade routes between Turkey and central Asia. This is why the Turkish State worked to find a diplomatic solution and chose not to take any stand on Iranian nuclear activities, but tried to mediate. Thus, in May 2010 the Teheran declaration was signed between Iran,

Turkey and Brazil. It had a limited success because the West was not ready to compromise on the nuclear issue and showed little enthusiasm at Turkey playing the role of intermediary. Indeed, the latter maintained its neutrality by voting NO on a Security Council resolution that provided for sanctions against Iran.

Despite this, there were always moments of suspicion and distrust between the two countries regarding regional politics. Firstly because both countries supported the idea of a united Iraqi state but had different views regarding the composition of its regime. Iran supported the Shiite groups and their domination of the government while Turkey tried to forge a dialogue between all the Iraqi parties, in co-ordination with the United States — at least until 2010. A similar situation existed in the Lebanon.

Secondly, because Turkey and Iran supported opposite sides in the Caucasus Turkey supported Azerbaijan while Iran supported Armenia.

Thirdly, even though both countries were fighting Kurdish rebels in the Qandil Mountains, Iran always suspicious of Turkey’s cross-border operations against Iraqi Kurdistan, since they could cause a change in the balance of power between the two countries. Moreover Iran supported Islamist parties in Iraqi Kurdistan while Turkey preferred to support the Turcomen and the Barzanis. Fourthly, Turkey had always, after all, been suspicious of Iran’s potential for securing nuclear arms. Finally Turkey remained a US ally and a candidate for European Union membership.

During the Arab Spring, Turkey adopted a more explicitly Sunni

policy, pro-Western and aggressive in the Middle East, which was a turn away from its previous policy of neutrality. The disagreement was mainly about Syria: Turkey broke off all relations with the Assad regime in 2011, by agreement with the West and the pro-Western Arab states, which supported the rebels. Iran, however, considered the revolt in Syria was a Western conspiracy aimed at the strongest link in the anti-Israeli bloc in the region. Similarly the two countries had divergent views on the Bahrain crisis.

In Iraq, Iran's influence is increasing daily within the Shiite majority while Turkey want to remain close to the Arab Sunnis and the Kurds. Thus its links with the Maliki government have worsened.

Turkey's acceptance of NATO's system of an anti-missile shield in September 2011 again showed that Turkey's alliance with the West and irritated still further the Iranian political deciders, who consider this is only to protect Israel.

These controversies have affected several areas of co-operation between the two countries: the cooperation regarding security against the Kurdish rebels; the Iranian authorities suspended the agreement with Turkey exempting people over 50 from needing visas in August 2012, officially because of a meeting of Non-aligned nations in Teheran (but unofficially because of increasing tensions between the two countries). Iran had complained that Turkey is not playing its role as mediator in the nuclear issue even before the meeting of the 5 powers + 1 at Istanbul in April 2012. The leaders of the two countries have reciprocally criticised one another's stands on foreign policy.

To conclude, Turco-Iranian relations have entered into state of conflict and rivalry through the Arab Spring. These relations have had many ups and downs in the course of history and at present we are in anew phase in which the controversies over regional policy predominate over all others. The level of their cooperation has not yet fallen to its lowest level, as in the 90s — economic and energy forms of cooperation are not yet affected. However, the future of these relations will be determined by the situation in Syria, both long and short term, It is unrealistic to hope for a return to the golden years of the previous decade.

The second round table was moderated by Kendal Nezan, President of the Paris Kurdish Institute on "The Question of the non-Persian Peoples".

Also taking part are: Mr. Karim Abdian, of the Al-Ahwaz Democratic Solidarity Party; Mr. Yussef Azizi, former Professor at Teheran University; Mr. Boladel, First Secretary of the Baluchi People's Party; Mr. Mustafa Heiru, General Secretary of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran and Mr. Hedayat Soltanzadeh, a member of the Executive Committee of the Azerbaijan Federal Democratic Movement.

Introducing the Round table, Kendal Nezan explained that when the media speak about "Iran" it is nearly always on the subject of the nuclear issue, the security of Israel or of negotiations — but the Iranians themselves are rarely given the right to speak. Otherwise they cite the "opposition" which, in fact, is an internal opposition of the Islamic republic, that is "*those who are opposed over the best manner of applying the principles of the Islamic Republic*" and of estab-

lishing the domination of Shiism on the whole of Iran.

Yet, quite apart from this recognised and tolerated opposition, there is that of the many populations who have their own demands and aspirations, who are not sufficiently reflected in the media or in public opinion and even less at the level of political decision making.

One of the objectives of this symposium is to give the floor to representatives of minority peoples of Iran who rarely have a say.

Nasser Boladel, First Secretary of the Baluchi People's Party, recalled that Baluchistan has been divided between three countries, Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan ever since 1839, the year in which British forces attacked the State of Kalat, which radically changed the situation of the Baluchis. A Baluchi region existed even before Persian became Iran and before the establishment of Pakistan or Afghanistan. Many revolts took place in Baluchistan after conquest and domination by the Qajar dynasty in Persia in the 19th Century, but they all failed because of the political interplay between the British and the Persians. In the struggle for power between two major powers, the Baluchis were just little local actors.

Having succeeded in preserving their language and their culture, the Baluchis are trying to establish their right to autonomy, which is not recognised in Iran, where the Baluchi language and culture are forbidden. At school, all teaching is in Farsi, from the primary schools to university. There are a whole series of exclusions and discriminations, particularly financial, that aim at keeping young Baluchis out of

the educational system. It then becomes difficult for a Baluchi to find work. Last week 9 Baluchi prisoners, two of them still teenagers, were sentenced to death — had they been from Teheran they would have been defended by NGOs and Human Rights organisations.

According to Nasser Boladel, the Baluchis are wrongly accused of contributing to general insecurity whereas it is the regime's own unofficial forces that are carrying out assassinations and the Baluchis are constantly threatened by these clandestine forces. They are also accused of terrorism and armed violence but this is either because they have lost all hope of institutional reforms or the actions of people who have had close relatives assassinated. It can be feared that this increasing violence may get even worse on the spot. The secretary of the Baluchi party accused the "total passivity" of Human Rights defence organisations, who turn a deaf ear to these persecutions. *"We are constantly told that Iran is a single and whole country, that it is a united country, but this is a myth"*.

The Baluchi People's Party says it wants a Federal Iran and militates for this with other parties like the Azeri Federal Movement, the Solidarity Party and the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, the Komala and all the parties that make up the Congress for a Federal Iran. However they are always told that they should wait for democracy to be established in Iran, whereas the country is just falling lower and lower in a most worrying situation.

Officially Iran calls itself a plural-national, multi-ethnic country that respects the differences of language and religion. Those who claim their rights, the

nationalities, and the women all demand immediate change not ones in a distant future.

The Iranians fear that if the country became a federation, the situation would become worse than that suffered by Yugoslavia. However, if Iran refuses to accept this plurality they will end up in a situation even more serious than that of Yugoslavia and Syria.

The Baluchi claims are very close to those of the Kurdish people and we have the example of the Kurds, who have been fighting for a long time. What is said of the Kurds in Teheran, *"that they are incapable of agreeing, of working together and cooperating"* is also said of the Baluchis, who are also said to be *"anarchic by nature"*. The Iranian opposition must rethink this equation otherwise there is a danger that Iran will disintegrate and that any perspective of democracy will be even further away.

The Baluchis are said to number 2.7 million in Iran, but statistics are variable. We think there are 3 to 4 million Baluchis in Iran. Some estimates indicate about 4 million Baluchis in Pakistan and about 2 million in Afghanistan, in Kandahar for example. Some Baluchis also live in the Gulf States and Oman.

Mr. Hedayat Soltanzadeh, a member of the Executive Committee of the Azerbaijan Federal Democratic Movement. Recalled that with the accession to power of the Pehlevis, Persia changed its name to become "Iran" and that the present size of Iran is not at all that of the Persian Empire — that it is not the same country. This country is multi-national and there is no such thing as an "Iranian nation", but a mosaic of nations that did not exist as such until the French

revolution. With the coming to power of the Pehlevis, a new system was set up with a single "nationality" — a system based on the political hegemony of the Persians and that of the Persian language as official language the others being forbidden.

There are two levels of discrimination and repression: the Pahlavi dictatorship was a classical dictatorship, but with the Islamic revolution arrived a totalitarian regime based on an ideology — an Ayrian and Islamic ideology. The national question has become intrinsic to the regime and is expressed by daily acts of violence against non-Persian peoples. national cohesion has become a serious problem in Iran, which will never be as it was before. Any change in the new central power will raise the question of nationalities.

Recently an earthquake in Azerbaijan caused uproar because the government had prevented aid services from helping the population. Some Central aid services did come, but they were unable to communicate with the local population. The economic situation today has deteriorated as has ecological housing ... Lac Urmiah has been completely dried out by dams and flood barriers. No investment has been made in Azerbaijan and Azeris must emigrate to the Republic of Azerbaijan and Baku — or else to Teheran or Istanbul. There are Azerbaijanis rotting in prison for having demanded the right to use their own language. From Kindergarten onwards it is forbidden to speak Azeri.

A federal system is needed for the people to live together.

Mr. Mostafa Hejri, General Secretary of the Kurdistan

Democratic Party of Iran, is the successor of Abdulrahman Ghassemlou and Sadeq Sherefkandi, both assassinated by the Iranian government, which has, in all, assassinated 162 of its opponents while abroad. During the 90s alone 151 members of the KDP-I were assassinated while living as refugees in Iraqi Kurdistan, and Mr. Heiri began by recalling the memories of his predecessors political records.

Terrorism, both internal and abroad is an integral part of the Iranian regime's strategy. It enables it to keep itself in power and the victims of this regime are not only Iranians but also foreigners — Europeans for example.

Regarding the Iranian nuclear crisis, the struggle against the regime is not only morally legitimate but can ensure peace in the region and a lasting stability — this means not only the absence of wars low intensity conflicts by a real and durable democracy of a European type.

Today, the dictatorial States are the mortal enemies of their own citizens. The Arab Spring has recalled that reality. It is thus no surprise that the greatest threats to these regimes are not external but internal.

Yet Iran has the capacity to be transformed into a great country and to make a positive contribution to the international community were it to chose democracy. However, millions of Iranians, whatever their ethnicity or their sex are oppressed in different way. The Kurds, the Azeris, the Arabs, the Baluchis, the Turcomen and also members of religious minorities — the Bah'ai, the Yarsans, are oppressed because of their nationals, linguistic or religious

identity. To create a new political system in Iran, that would be really democratic the fact of this current reality must be accepted.

In Iranian Kurdistan, oppression is institutionalised and has political, cultural, economic and social repercussions. Kurds are refused education in their mother tongue as well as the preservation of their culture and right to self-determination. Kurdish culture is constantly threatened. Arbitrary arrests and torture occur daily, aimed at Human Rights activists, intellectuals and even ordinary citizens. Kurdistan is permanently kept economically underdeveloped as a matter of deliberate State policy. This and the lack of education lead to absence of employment perspectives. The result is a state of anxiety in the population and tragic side effects— a very high level of suicides, especially among women, drug addiction and other social evils.

The population of Iranian Kurdistan supports a change of regime. The low election turnouts come from the boycotting of these phoney elections organised in Kurdistan. If regular and free elections took place the Kurds would vote for a federal secular state. In 1979 a referendum was organised to ask the Iranians if they supported the creation of an Islamic Republic. In Iranian Kurdistan this referendum was purely and simply boycotted.

If the present regime is convinced that it enjoys the support of the majority of the Iranian population why does it not organise free and fair elections in the presence of international observers.

The Iranian population in all its diversity, must bring about a

democratic government in this country that would respect their individual and collective rights.

In 2005 a great number of political organisations representing the different nationalities of Iran created a Congress for a Federal Iran so as to co-ordinate our struggle. However this Congress needs the moral and political support of the international community. Already, in 2993 Dr. Sherefkandi had gone to Berlin to explain to the European political elites this vision of a democratic Iran — and he lost his life there

Mr. Yussef Azizi, former Professor at Teheran University, recalled that there were Arabs in Iran and the requests they had made in 1979 to the provisional government at the time of change of regime. Amongst these were autonomy for the Khuzistan region and the return or its original name of Arabistan; recognition of the Arabs as a nation within the Islamic Republic; an autonomous council for the Arab region that would legislate at local level; that Arabic be the official language of the autonomous region, Persian remaining the official language of Iran; education in Arabic as from elementary school, an Arabic language University, freedom of expression and of publication as well as media in Arabic; priority of employment to be given to Arabs in the region; that some funds derived from oil revenues be allocated to develop agriculture and industry in the region; that the topography should use the historic Arabic names; that young Arabs be integrated into the Army and the Police and have access to more senior ranks, which had never been the case.

The situation today: the port city

of Khorramshahr (formerly Mohamerah) that had once been "the jewel of Iranian ports" has not yet been completely reconstructed while unemployment and poverty are endemic. Many dams have been built and their waters turned towards Ispahan, Yazd and Kerman for non-essential crops (lettuces and melons) at the expense of the cultivation of wheat and barley and of the Arab peasants. The pollution from industrial water emptied into the rivers, the atmospheric pollution of Ahwaz and other

major towns is worsened by dust storms (110 days a year), the drying out of the marshland caused by the dams all give a picture of an ecological catastrophe. Water drunk by many residents is unhealthy Ahwaz being one of the most polluted cities in the world.

Despite the oil revenues extracted from this region, the majority of its inhabitants live in poverty.

Arab people make 70% of the population of Khuzistan, but

only 5% of them hold major government positions. The other posts are held by Persians. In the last 80 years no Arab has held the post of Provincial Governor.

The Arabs were the first ethnic group to be targeted by nationalist and racist policies as from the middle of the 19th Century and also following the accession to power of the Pahlavis. This anti-Arab feeling has begun to be part of the general culture, both among the middle classes and even the less comfortably off.

ROME: DEATH OF MIRELLA GALLETTI

Our friend Professor Dr. Mirella Galletti, Died suddenly early in September 2012

This eminent specialist in Kurdish studies, an active member of the Kurdish Institute of Paris since its foundation in 1983, was born in 1949, near Bologna, in Italy. She received her Ph.D. in Political Science in 1974, at Bologna University with a thesis on "the political structure and cultural values of Kurdish society".

Ever since the 1970s, she has travelled to the Middle East, especially in Kurdistan, to carry out her research work. When the Iraq-Iran War broke out in 1980, she was in Teheran. The following year, she secured a press card and was one of the first Europeans to interview A. Ocalan, in June 1988 in the Lebanon, and in 1988 she met the Iraqi Kurdish refugees who had fled from the Anfal campaign.

Since the 1990s she has been teaching Kurdish history and civilisation at Bologna and Trieste Universities, while continuing to make long visits to Iraqi Kurdistan and taking part

in university symposia in various countries. During the 2000s, she has been successively teaching the law of Islamic communities at Venice's Ca' Foscari University and the history of transnational peoples of western Asia at Milan-Bicocca University. Appointed Professor at Naples Orientale University, she has been teaching Arab and Moslem History there.

She has produced an abundant bibliography, covering not only the Kurds, their history, society and traditions but also the Christian minorities of the Middle East, particularly those of Iraq and of Kurdistan. She has also published books and papers on Iraq and Syria. When asked what she had wanted to achieve in her work and her career, she replied "to know and make known the living conditions and difficulties of the Arab and Islamic world" and to observe "with empathy and without prejudice different cultures".

Her funeral took place on Saturday 8 September 2012 at 4.30 p.m. in the Basilica dei SS. Apostoli, Piazza Santi Apostoli, near her home. The church was filled with relations, friends, col-

leagues and public figures from the scientific world as well as official representatives from Iraq and Kurdistan.

Dr. Saywan Barzani, Iraqi Ambassador to Italy, with whom she had forged close links of work and friendship, came with all the embassy personnel. Also present were the Iraqi Ambassadors to the Vatican, the United Nations and to the Arab League and their colleagues, as well as Monseigneur Haddad, Greek Melkite Catholic Archbishop, who has known Mirella well and who was the only person asked to make the funeral oration.

Monseigneur Haddad recalled, in an eloquent manner, the importance of Mirella's work, which as reiterated several times, has made better known the Christian communities established in the Middle East since times immemorial and which aspire to continue living in peace and harmony with their Moslem neighbours. He not only stressed Mirella's erudition but also her kindness and generosity.

The Kurdish Institute of Paris was represented by Joyce Blau,

moved at the loss of a friend of thirty years, who brought the saddened condolences of its President and staff.

Among the crows who surrounded Mirelia's family, her nephews and nieces, should be mentioned Dr. Paola Orsatti, Professor of Persian Language and literature at the "La Sapienza" University of Rome, Professor Angelo Michele Piemontese, of Rome University, Claudio Caprotti, Professor of ancient languages and Mirelia's colleague, Professor Gian-Maria Piccinelli, President of the Jean Monnet Faculty of the Seconda Università degli studi di Naples, where Mirelia taught, the Arabic specialist Isabella Camera d'Afflitto of La Sapienza University and several dozens of other colleagues and friends, many of whom had come from a great distance, and all upset at the sudden loss of this exceptional woman.

Mirella Galletti was a great friend of the Kurds, who she loved deeply. She leaves behind a fascinating and very rich work of inestimable value to Kurdish Studies. All her colleagues and members of the Institute will miss her warm, friendly and always cheerful presence.

The following are some of her works. The full bibliography will be collected shortly.

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TURQUIE: 30 morts dans un accrochage entre soldats turcs et kurdes



Des véhicules blindés de l'armée turque sont stationnés en face de l'avant-poste militaire de Gecimli, le 8 août. (STR/AFP)

Par Le Nouvel Observateur avec AFP

La tension est montée d'un cran dans le dossier kurde le mois dernier, les autorités turques ayant menacé de sévir contre le PKK en territoire syrien.

Dix soldats turcs et environ 20 rebelles kurdes ont été tués dans des combats survenus tard dimanche 2 septembre dans le sud-est de la Turquie, nouveau signe de la recrudescence, à l'heure du conflit syrien, des combats entre l'armée d'Ankara et les séparatistes kurdes.

"Neuf agents de sécurité ont été tués et huit autres sont blessés", a déclaré le gouverneur de la province de Sirnak (sud-est, à la frontière irakienne et syrienne), Vahdettin Özkan. Ses services ont par la suite précisé que toutes les victimes, côté forces de sécurité, étaient des soldats, et qu'un soldat blessé avait perdu la vie.

Attaque aux lance-roquettes

Les heurts dans la localité de Beytüssebap, qui dépend de cette province, ont en outre fait environ 20 morts dans les rangs du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), ont indiqué des sources locales.

Un groupe de rebelles, qui disposent de bases arrière dans la montagne irakienne, ont attaqué avec des fusils mitrailleurs et des lance-roquettes un complexe de sécurité de Beytüssebap, tuant les soldats. La police et les soldats ont riposté, provoquant de violents heurts, a ajouté le gouverneur.

Dans une première réaction à cette attaque, le vice-Premier ministre Bekir Bozdag a assuré sur la chaîne privée NTV que "la lutte contre le terrorisme se poursuivra sans relâche".

Attaque kamikaze

Dans un incident séparé survenu dimanche soir, un membre du PKK, vraisemblablement un kamikaze, a fait exploser sa charge sur un barrage routier à Viransehir (sud-est), se tuant sur le coup et blessant trois agents de sécurité.

Le PKK a multiplié ses attaques avec l'été contre les forces d'Ankara. Le 20 août, une attaque à la voiture piégée a fait dix morts dans la ville de Gaziantep (sud-est), un attentat imputé au PKK. Celui-ci a démenti.

Multiplication des attaques du PKK

Les opérations des rebelles se sont intensifiées dans le sud-est, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes, mais aussi dans l'ouest, où une attaque a tué un soldat près d'Izmir.

Et la tension est montée d'un cran dans le dossier kurde le mois dernier, les autorités turques ayant menacé de sévir contre le PKK en territoire syrien déchiré par un conflit généralisé si ce dernier était utilisé par les rebelles pour déstabiliser la Turquie.

Plusieurs zones du nord de la Syrie, riveraines de la Turquie, sont actuellement au mains de groupes kurdes syriens, dont certains sont proches du PKK. Ankara a accusé Damas d'avoir favorisé l'installation du PKK dans ces régions pour nuire à la Turquie.

Des initiatives en faveur des Kurdes

Turquie

Près de 30 morts dans des combats avec des rebelles kurdes



Dans les années qui ont suivi son arrivée au pouvoir, en 2002, le parti gouvernemental de la Justice et du développement (AKP, issu de la mouvance islamiste) du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a lancé sous l'impulsion de sa candidature à l'Union européenne certaines initiatives en faveur de la minorité kurde, estimée à 12 millions sur une population de 75 millions.

Toutefois, cette politique d'ouverture pro-kurde a fait long feu et Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'a cessé depuis 2009 de hausser le ton contre les milieux Kurdes, poussant l'appareil judiciaire à réprimer toute forme de militantisme kurde.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan a visé systématiquement le parti pro-kurde BDP (Parti de la paix et de la justice), en l'accusant ouvertement de "terrorisme".

Depuis 1984, 45.000 morts

Des centaines de militants ou sympathisants de la cause kurde ont été incarcérés depuis l'an dernier et le gouvernement a menacé de faire lever l'immunité parlementaire des députés du BDP.

Et pour cause: ces derniers ont défrayé la chronique en donnant l'accolade, devant les caméras, à des rebelles du PKK dans une zone reculée du sud-est anatolien. Les images ont provoqué une onde de choc dans une Turquie qui déplore quasi quotidiennement des pertes dans les rangs de son armée.

Le conflit avec le PKK, considéré par Ankara comme une organisation terroriste, a déjà coûté quelque 45.000 vies dans des combats qui durent depuis 1984. ♦

L'Irak va redevenir un grand du pétrole

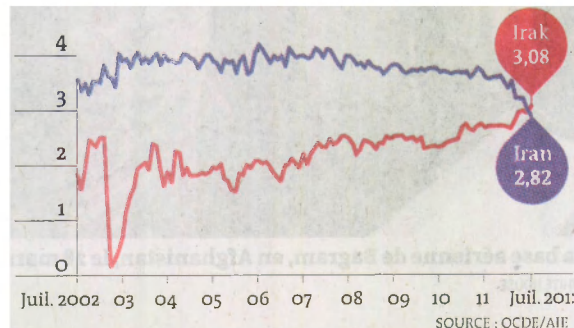
Dans l'ancestrale rivalité opposant l'Irak à l'Iran, le premier de ces Etats vient de marquer un point plus que symbolique : en juillet, sa production pétrolière a dépassé celle de son voisin persan, du jamais-vu depuis 1988. Il est devenu le deuxième producteur de l'Organisation des pays exportateurs de pétrole (OPEP), derrière l'Arabie saoudite. Et l'écart se creusera dans les prochaines années. Bagdad a en effet relancé son activité pétrolière avec le concours de majors américaines, européennes, russes et chinoises. Téhéran voit la sienne décliner, frappée au cœur par l'embargo décrété par les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne pour obtenir l'arrêt de son programme nucléaire. Son pouvoir au sein de l'OPEP – où il est à la tête des « faucons » avec le Venezuela – ne peut que s'émousser.

L'Iran, riche des deuxièmes réserves mondiales de pétrole et de gaz, n'a jamais retrouvé la production de 5,5 millions de barils par jour atteinte au milieu des années 1970. Tombée à moins de 1 million de barils au début de la guerre contre l'Irak en 1980, elle est péniblement remontée jusqu'à 3,5 millions en 2011. Avant de rechuter de 700 000 barils depuis que de nombreux pays européens ou asiatiques refusent le brut iranien. Cet embargo pourrait durer de longs mois, voire des années, si la République islamique persiste dans la poursuite de son programme nucléaire.

La mise au ban de l'Iran par une partie de la communauté internationale coïncide avec le retour de l'Irak sur la scène pétrolière. Les grandes compagnies se précipitent dans l'ancienne Mésopotamie, malgré une série de contraintes : vétusté des infrastructures (ports, routes, pipelines), manque de main-d'œuvre qualifiée, contrats de service peu lucratifs imposés aux sociétés étrangères, attentats à répétition (notamment contre l'oléoduc vers la Turquie), absence de loi pétrolière et dossier toujours pendant de la province pétrolière du Kurdistan.

Les dirigeants de Bagdad savent que leur pays est incontournable sur la scène pétrolière. Il est riche de la troisième réserve mondiale de pétrole (143 milliards de barils). Depuis 2009, les majors

ÉVOLUTION DE LA PRODUCTION DE PÉTROLE DE L'IRAN ET DE L'IRAK, EN MILLIONS DE BARILS PAR JOUR



ont accepté des conditions très dures pour relancer la production de champs géants (Rumaila, Qurna-Ouest...). Depuis 2011, la production a progressé de 12 %, trois fois plus vite qu'entre 2006 et 2010. Si la barre des 3,5 millions de barils est franchie en 2013, l'Irak retrouvera son niveau de 1979 alors que de vastes zones désertiques, dans l'ouest du pays, ont été peu explorées.

A Bagdad, tous ces chiffres montent un peu vite à la tête des autorités. Certains voient déjà leur pays rejoindre, voire dépasser, l'Arabie saoudite dès 2017 et produire jusqu'à 12 millions de barils, comme l'affirmait récemment le ministre du pétrole, Abdoul Karim Luaiby. La plupart des analystes pétroliers n'y croient pas, tablant plutôt sur 4,5 à 5 millions à un horizon de cinq ans.

Mais la rivalité pétrolière n'est plus synonyme de guerre fratricide depuis que des dirigeants chiites sont aux commandes à Bagdad. Après la publication d'une enquête du *New York Times*, le 19 août, le président des Etats-Unis s'est inquiété du soutien que l'Irak apporte à l'Iran pour contourner l'embargo par le biais d'institutions financières comme Elaf Islamic Bank. Les Américains lui reprochent aussi de fermer les yeux sur la contrebande de pétrole. Autant d'activités dont des proches du premier ministre chiite, Nouri Al-Maliki, tireraient profit. ■

JEAN-MICHEL BEZAT

AFP

Conflit sur le pétrole: Bagdad menace le Kurdistan de réduire son budget

BAGDAD, 4 septembre 2012 (AFP)

LE GOUVERNEMENT irakien a menacé mardi le Kurdistan de soustraire 3 milliards de dollars aux fonds qui lui sont alloués, si la région autonome ne comblait pas le manque à gagner engendré par sa décision de suspendre temporairement ses exportations de pétrole.

La région autonome du Kurdistan est en conflit avec Bagdad sur l'exploitation de ses ressources en hydrocarbures. Elle lui réclame 1,5 milliard de dollars d'arriérés de paiement. En avril, le Kurdistan avait décidé de suspendre ses exportations de pétrole, pour les reprendre quatre mois plus tard.

D'après un rapport remis au gouvernement irakien mardi, cette suspension

a privé le budget fédéral de trois milliards de dollars de revenus.

En conséquence, Bagdad donne "une semaine au gouvernement régional du Kurdistan pour venir se défendre. Si tel n'était pas le cas, les fonds seraient retirés de son budget", a déclaré Ali Moussaoui, porte-parole du Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki.

Les relations entre Erbil et le gouvernement fédéral se sont considérablement dégradées ces derniers mois en raison de différends sur des contrats pétroliers et des revendications territoriales.

Le Kurdistan a signé des dizaines de contrats pétroliers avec des compagnies étrangères sans l'approbation de Bagdad, qui exige que ce type de négociations passent à travers son ministère du Pétrole et considère illégal tout contrat conclu en dehors de ce circuit.



Bagdad souhaite se tenir à distance du conflit syrien

5 septembre 2012 - Par Patrick Markey | Reuters

BAGDAD - L'Irak observe avec méfiance les tensions grandissantes entre chiïtes et sunnites dans le monde arabe exacerbées par plus de dix-sept mois de violences en Syrie, déclare le chef de la diplomatie irakienne Hoshiyar Zebari dans une interview à Reuters.

Les chiïtes, au pouvoir en Irak après des années de persécution sous le régime de Saddam Hussein, craignent qu'une chute du régime du président syrien Bachar al Assad ne fasse voler en éclats l'équilibre religieux en Syrie et n'ouvre la voie, à plus ou moins long terme, à la mise en place d'un régime sunnite hostile à Bagdad.

L'intensification des violences entre les rebelles syriens, majoritairement sunnites, et le régime alaouite, une branche du chiïsme, fait également planer une menace sur le fragile équilibre des pouvoirs entre kurdes, chiïtes et sunnites dans l'Etat irakien voisin. Le conflit syrien a d'ores et déjà exacerbé les tensions entre le pouvoir central irakien et la province autonome kurde.

"Nous sommes préoccupés par la multiplication des milices, des groupes armés et la montée du fondamentalisme qui ébranlent notre système politique", explique le ministre des Affaires étrangères. "Nous ne voulons pas être plongés" dans la bataille sunnite-chiïte qui fait rage dans la région.

Alors que les autres pays du monde arabe et du Golfe ont officiellement pris position en faveur de la rébellion syrienne, l'Irak a adopté une approche plus discrète et ne s'est pas joint, jusqu'à présent, aux appels lancés en faveur de la démission de Bachar al Assad.

La guerre civile en Syrie risque de rebattre les cartes dans la région,



Le chef de la diplomatie irakienne Hoshiyar Zebari. / Photo d'archives/REUTERS/Maxim Shemetov

divisée entre un axe chiïte Téhéran-Damas-Hezbollah, favorable au maintien au pouvoir du régime de Bachar al Assad, et l'Arabie Saoudite et le Qatar sunnites qui souhaitent armer les opposants.

LIGUE ARABE

Bien que proche de l'Iran, allié indéfectible de Damas, le gouvernement irakien dément soutenir le régime syrien sous la pression de Téhéran et fait valoir l'indépendance de sa politique étrangère. Bagdad s'est abstenu lors d'un vote sur la suspension de la Syrie de la Ligue arabe en novembre dernier et résiste aux appels lancés en faveur de l'adoption de sanctions arabes.

"La Ligue arabe devrait avoir un rôle à jouer et si elle devient une part du problème, elle n'aura aucun rôle", estime Hoshiyar Zebari. "Si nous prenons parti, nous devons soit déclarer la guerre soit contribuer à armer quelque chose que nous ne soutenons pas."

En privé, les dirigeants chiïtes irakiens reconnaissent que s'ils ne soutiennent pas le régime syrien, ils redoutent l'après-Assad et un retour des anciens membres du parti Baas qui pourraient s'allier aux groupes islamistes sunnites pour déstabiliser le pays.

"L'Irak affirme depuis le départ qu'il soutient les aspirations légitimes du peuple syrien à plus de liberté, de démocratie et de processus politique", souligne le chef de la diplomatie irakienne. "Mais l'Irak a ses propres inquiétudes concernant les événements en Syrie, des inquiétudes en matière sécuritaire, religieuse et terroriste. Nous ne connaissons pas l'issue (du conflit), nous ne savons pas ce qu'il va se passer."



7 septembre 2012

Vingt-six séparatistes kurdes tués par l'armée turque

Seyhmus Cakan / (Reuters)

DIYARBAKIR, Turquie - L'offensive en cours de l'armée turque contre les rebelles kurdes a fait 26 morts en deux jours parmi les séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a-t-on appris vendredi de source proche des services de sécurité.

L'opération a débuté mercredi soir dans la province de Sirnak (Sud-Est), frontalière de l'Irak et de la Syrie. Elle mobilise 2.000 hommes soutenus par l'aviation qui opère des deux côtés de la frontière irakienne.

"L'intense opération se poursuit", a-t-on déclaré de source proche des services

de sécurité.

L'offensive est centrée sur le mont Kato, une zone isolée de la province de Sirnak, mais des habitants font état de bombardements aériens au Kurdistan irakien. Plusieurs chasseurs F-16 ont décollé jeudi soir et vendredi de Diyarbakir, chef lieu de la région, selon un correspondant de Reuters sur place.

Aucune incursion terrestre en territoire irakien n'a en revanche été signalée, bien que l'armée turque dispose d'un millier d'hommes dans le secteur en vertu d'un accord conclu dans les années 1990.

L'été qui s'achève a été l'un des plus meurtriers depuis que le PKK a pris les armes, en 1984.

Depuis juin 2011, les violences séparatistes ont coûté la vie à 500 combattants du PKK, à 200 membres des forces turques et à 85 civils, selon les estimations de l'International Crisis Group, un cercle de réflexion. Depuis 1984, le bilan dépasse les 40.000 morts.

Ankara soupçonne la Syrie de jouer un rôle direct dans l'aggravation de la situation, ce que Bachar al Assad dément.

Autrefois proche du président syrien, le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, est devenu l'un de ses plus fervents détracteurs après le soulèvement populaire contre le régime baassiste il y a dix-huit mois et n'exclut pas une intervention armée contre les positions séparatistes en Syrie.

Lors de ce qui ressemble à un avertissement, l'armée turque a effectué mercredi d'importantes manoeuvres militaires près de la frontière avec la Syrie. ●

'Syrian Kurds' fate will affect whole Middle East'

Syria's Kurds have emerged as a crucial player in the conflict. DW spoke to the head of the main Kurdish political party in northeastern Syria, Salih Muslim Muhammad, about the impact of the crisis on the Middle East.



Kurdish leader Salih Muslim Muhammad Copyright: Karlos Zurutuza

DW: DW has met Kurdish fighters at checkpoints who claimed not to have fired a single shot. It's difficult to believe given the increasing levels of violence in the rest of the country...

Salih Muslim Muhammad: Believe it or not, this might be one the

only region in the country where the Syrians' will is still respected because there are no foreign hands interfering in our areas. From the very beginning we Kurds were demonstrating for freedom and democracy; we wanted a peaceful revolution, not an armed one. It was the regime which dragged the protests into an armed conflict because they are stronger. For the time being, we have managed to protect ourselves and keep our areas quiet despite a few local incidents in Kobani and Afrin. We're doubtless part of the revolution but this is the Syria we want, not what others want.

But rumors have it that your party has negotiated a truce with Bashar Assad's government.

There's been no agreement with anybody whatsoever. Just tell me: who wants the fighting in Syria? Turkey? We have no relations with Turkey. Saudi Arabia? Qatar? NATO? We have no relation with them as they've never recognized our existence; none of them has ever supported the Syrian Kurds. Damascus knows we just want our constitutional rights, that is why they're not afraid of us. We knew Assad would not fall in just two months, that's why we organized our people into civilian defence committees long ago. Actually, we already had some checkpoints a year ago and the government simply couldn't do anything about it. In July there were clashes between the Free Syrian Army and Assad's troops, very close to Kobani, a critical area for Damascus' intelligence. Nonetheless, in areas like in Qamishli, Assad has his own checkpoints but they're not manning them, nor are they patrolling the city.

How high, in your opinion, is the risk of Syria becoming a sectarian-ridden country like neighboring Iraq?

The risk of getting dragged into a sectarian conflict is very high. Actually, the situation is inexorably taking that path but, as said, that's not something the Syrian people have chosen. We know we have to fight for our rights and not let anybody steal our revolution as it has already happened in other Arab countries. Look at Aleppo now, it's full of armed people, many of them foreigners. What are they doing here? We'd never allow al Qaeda or any related group to operate in our areas.

But several sources point out that Arab villages around the area have been given weapons by Damascus. Is that true?

We are aware that the government has handed them weapons but we won't fight against them as long as they don't attack us. We must avoid an Arab-Kurd confrontation by any means necessary. We need to live as neighbors so we are very careful about not igniting violence between us.

Apart from Arabs, there's also a significant number of Christians in the area under your control. Some of them have already said that they don't feel comfortable under the new Kurdish rule.

As far as I know there are very good relations between Kurds and Christians. I met the Armenians a few days ago and they asked us to protect them. We've already told them that they have to protect themselves; if they cannot, we will do it. Even Arabs are also going to set up mediation centres, asking for help to solve their problems. We've lived together for centuries and that's what we are planning to do in the future ahead.

But there have been allegations pointing to several abuses by armed Kurdish fighters at checkpoints or street patrols.

First of all, I want to make clear that the PYD (Democratic Union Party - the ed.) is just a political organization. That said, we know there have been many mistakes because everything is new for us. We lack the necessary experience to make things work from the beginning. Besides, not everybody people likes the PYD so some will try their best to give us bad press at the first opportunity.

Turkey is alarmed at the growing influence of the PYD and suspects it of having links with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has fought a 28-year old conflict in Turkey.

Turkey is trying to convince the rest of the world that we are terrorists, simply because they are afraid of us getting our rights. We are a Syrian political party with no organic relations whatsoever with the PKK. We don't even have armed forces, those committees are just for civil protection and they brought their weapons from their houses. Besides, we were also among the people who established the opposition in Syria so Turkey shouldn't interfere.

Many Syrian Kurds say they're fighting for a "federal state" with a Kurdish Autonomous Region, similar to the one in Iraq. Do you favour such an option?

We've been victims of this regime for decades and we just want our democratic rights. But that doesn't mean that we are aiming to break Syria into pieces. Basically, we want to solve our problems in Damascus, and not elsewhere. We're asking for local civil organizations linked to each other where our people would be represented. We call it "radical democracy" and it's not the classic model of autonomy but a system which accepts differences and dissent and where people can take their own decisions and immediately execute them.

Still, there are around 15 Kurdish political parties in Syria today. Are your people as divided as the figures suggest?

Alongside the PYD, they are all under the umbrella of the Syrian National Kurdish Council. The majority of us are united in the essential points which focus on the achievement of our democratic rights. We have the moral support of the rest of the Kurds in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and the Diaspora. All of them are trying to help us. In fact, if we manage to achieve our democratic rights, it will be a great step for all the Kurds. The Syrian Kurds' fate will affect the whole Middle East.

So what is your proposal to end Syria's escalating conflict?

Just let the Syrians decide by themselves! Assad's is a bloody regime but, even today, Syrians would still be able to find their way out if so many foreign forces weren't involved. Unfortunately, the government is taking weapons from Iran and Russia while the Free Syrian Army is being backed by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey... Kofi Annan's road map could have worked but neither the regime nor the foreign actors wanted it to develop. Even China and Russia were ready to convince the regime to put down its weapons but the plan proposed in Geneva last June was not taken into consideration on the ground.

Today nobody knows whether Syria will be divided or not. Whatever happens, we have to be ready to protect ourselves in any possible scenario, whether it is under the current regime, under the opposition's rule ... even against a Turkish military operation in our area. ♦

Salih Muslim Muhammad is the leader of the Democratic Union Party, the dominant Kurdish political force in northeastern Syria.

Interview: Karlos Zurutuza, Qamishli, northeastern Syria

Could a state for Greater Kurdistan be on the horizon?

As the Middle East is being remapped, this may be the Kurds' last shot at having their own state.



Pepe Escobar

Pepe Escobar is the roving correspondent for Asia Times. His latest book is named Obama Does Globalistan (Nimble Books, 2009)

Millions of Kurds, observing the meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Tehran last week, must have thought: "What about us? What about our non-aligned nation to be? We should be there. Maybe next time..."

It may be just possible that Kurds - which themselves admit their notoriety for internal squabble - are finally getting their act together; after all, history may be dictating, roughly a century after World War I and its aftermath, which dealt a big blow to Kurds. This is the last chance for the emergence of a Greater Kurdistan.

After the two Syrian Kurdish parties made a deal - sealed by Iraqi Kurdistan President Masoud Barzani - to jointly run northeast Syria, Kurdish parties in Iran are also coming together.

Meanwhile, Ankara behaves like a bunch of headless chickens.

Kurds are carefully paying attention to how Ankara decided to boycott NAM - even though Turkish President Abdullah Gul was personally invited by Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Egypt's President Mohammed Morsi proposed a Syria contact group - Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Iran - to try to solve the Syrian tragedy.

This means that Egypt - under a Muslim Brotherhood president - privileges mediation for a civil war inside a fellow Arab country, while Turkey sticks to a colour-blind regime change strategy, which would only be possible with a NATO no-fly zone (it won't happen).

So the pressing question for the Kurds becomes how to profit from Ankara's each and every move.

AND THE WINNER IS... ISRAEL

Not even Turkish public opinion knows what exactly are the contours of Ankara's policy for Syria - apart from regime change. President Gul claims that Damascus weaponises PKK guerrillas (there's absolutely no evidence), and that would be a casus belli.

Damascus for its part does not want a war with Turkey.

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu - he of the defunct "zero problems with our neighbours" doctrine - is still toeing the line that the country could not accept more than 100,000 Syrian refugees (there are already 70,000 and counting); in this case, some fuzzy "safe haven" would have to be installed in Syrian territory. This Thursday, Ankara will press the complexities of the refugee crisis at a ministerial-level meeting at the UN.

Ankara has insistently accused both Damascus and Tehran of supporting PKK guerrillas active in Anatolia and the porous border areas. Yet at the same time, Ankara has developed a quite secretive narrative; Turkey, once again, is aligned with Israel's strategy (the Mavi Marmara incident is now water under the bridge).

Tel Aviv avidly bets on Ankara becoming the hegemonic regional power in the - still hazy - event of a post-Assad Syria. As Israel has been deeply infiltrated in Iraqi Kurdistan for years, with very good connections - the Mossad uses it as an operational base against Syria and Iran - this will be manipulated as a bargaining chip to seduce Ankara.

Meanwhile, in Syria, the red, green and yellow Kurdish flag is now flying in places like Girke Lege - only 35 kilometres from the Iraqi border and only 15 kilometres from the Turkish border. Over 3 million Syrian Kurds now see an ideal opening to revert the official Ba'ath Party Arabisation policy.

The Kurdish PYD (Democratic Union Party) President Salah Muslim vehemently denies that there was a tacit agreement with the Bashar al-Assad government. But in fact there was; as long as Syrian Kurds don't attack Damascus forces, they can do whatever they want in Western/Syrian Kurdistan, which by now is assuming the contours of an autonomous region.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, by the way, has already delivered the message to Ankara; even in a post-Assad Syria, this should be seen as a fact on the ground. And it happens to dovetail with Israel's charm offensive among Kurds - emphasising what would be their common agenda.

So what can Ankara do? Invade? Kurdish blowback is bound to be devastating.

Despite official rumblings, Turkish options for invading Western/Syrian Kurdistan are not exactly stellar. The Turkish army's morale is low - after the purge of several



The current remapping of the Middle East could possibly see the creation of a Greater Kurdistan state [AFP]

ranking Kemalists. Over 60 generals are in jail, accused of plotting a coup - and lower-ranking officials may even try it again. Alevis and Kurdish conscripts will refuse to fight an AKP-incited war. And the Turkish economy - not to mention tourism - will inevitably go down the drain.

IS THERE A LEADER IN THE HOUSE?

One can imagine whether Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Barzani's political scheming will be enough for him to embrace the Angel of History, and rise to the occasion.

He certainly sees a Greater Kurdistan independent from Arabs, Persians and Turks. But for that to happen in a grand scale he would have to conduct himself as a unifier - not only sharing power inside Iraqi Kurdistan but also managing conflicting Kurdish aspirations in Syria, Iran and Turkey. This implies a visionary streak plus tremendous diplomatic skills.

What's certain is that Washington and Tel Aviv are on board; this implies that Brussels sooner or later will follow. BRICS members Russia and China are not exactly against it. There are two possibilities here. A Greater Kurdistan forged as a model for the Middle East - in terms of a secular, dynamic, progressive entity respectful of religious minorities. Or yet another Western stooge.

A major geopolitical volcano is erupting. Ankara certainly has not analysed the blowback of weaponising Syrian Sunnis just for the weapons to find their way back into Turkey to be used by the PKK against Ankara itself.

This anti-imperialist analysis may be very useful to understand the Kurdish dynamic. But there's still much more to it.

Jeremy Salt, professor of History and

Politics of the Middle East at Bilkent University, Ankara, and author of *The Unmaking of the Middle East*, in a conversation with La Stampa's world news editor Claudio Gallo, neatly summarised it:

"In 1918 the imperial powers divided the Middle East in a certain way that suited their interests at the time. They are now

remapping it again - and again to suit their interests. It is not coincidental that this programme dovetails with Israel's own long-term strategic planning. Russia and China are fully aware of what is going on, which is why the present situation can be seen as a 21st century extension of the 'Eastern question' or of the 'Great Game'

between Russia and Britain."

Make no mistake; each day makes it more likely that an unintended - or rather intended - consequence of this Great Game remix will be the emergence of Greater Kurdistan. ○

The Economist

september 1 st 2012

Turkish politics Erdogan's counterproductive ambition

Recep Tayyip Erdogan is too focused on becoming Turkey's next president

ANKARA AND ISTANBUL

THE Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has recently been seen sporting a Cossack-style hat like Atatürk's. Kemalists were horrified. Yet nobody could dispute that Mr Erdogan has been Turkey's most impressive leader since the great man's death in 1938. His mildly Islamist Justice and Development (AK) party came to power in 2002 on a wave of popular support and a rejection of decades of inept rule. Mr Erdogan has lifted Turkey out of stagnation and political paralysis and made it an inspiration in its region.

He has chipped away at the generals' might, improved the rights of women and Kurds, doubled GDP per head, built modern roads and hospitals and empowered the downtrodden. His reforms prodded the European Union into opening membership talks in 2005. Despite worries about a gaping current-account deficit, the economy has slowed but not crashed, unlike others in the Mediterranean.

In this section

It was no surprise when AK won a third term of single-party rule in June 2011. Yet a year on Mr Erdogan is being tested as never before. Setbacks include an alleged bout with cancer, a row with the powerful Muslim Gulenist group, escalating Kurdish violence and the war in Syria. He has grown increasingly authoritarian, his judgment perhaps clouded by an ambition to be elected president when the term of the incumbent, Abdullah Gul, ends in 2014.

It is this ambition that critics say is undermining Mr Erdogan's promises to deliver a new democratic constitution. A parliamentary committee supposed to produce a draft text appears designed to fail. It needs unanimous approval from all its members for every article. "Are the nationalists going to agree to the Kurds' demands for Kurdish-language education?



Of course not," says Levent Gultekin, a pro-Islamic commentator. Many suspect Mr Erdogan wants the AK party to produce its own blueprint that would boost the powers of the presidency, enabling him to keep running the country after the party's rules require him to step down as prime minister. Since he does not have a two-thirds majority in parliament, a new constitution would need to be put to a referendum; most polls give AK a big lead.

Still, he is not taking chances. Over the past year he has been increasingly hawkish over the Kurds, scrapping secret talks with the separatist Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) to end their bloody 28-year insurgency. He has reverted to force and the mass arrests of thousands of Kurdish activists. "The bond between Turks and Kurds is growing weaker by the day," warns Selahattin Demirtas, leader of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party.

Media bosses fearful of losing government contracts have sacked critical journalists. At least 80 journalists are in jail, many of them Kurds accused of PKK membership. The government's intolerance extends to students, 2,824 of whom are in prison, almost a quarter of them charged with "membership of a terrorist group" for calling for free education and other "sins".

Mr Erdogan's secular opponents accuse

him of reverting to his Islamist roots. Calling for a "more religious youth", he has proposed to restrict abortions and has reintroduced imam hatip (clerical-training) middle schools. A new curriculum includes optional Koran and Arabic-language classes. Mr Erdogan's embrace of pious nationalism is calculated to appeal to the far right and to conservative voters. But he may be overplaying his hand. The army's battle against the PKK has had little effect. Scores of soldiers have been killed this year and the rebels have carried their battle from the mainly Kurdish south-east as far west as Izmir.

Mr Erdogan has taken to blaming the Syrian president, Bashar Assad, for the renewed violence. Mr Assad has ceded control of Kurdish towns along the border to a Syrian Kurdish group affiliated to the PKK. Yet critics point to Turkey's overt support for the Syrian rebels, which has antagonised not only Mr Assad but also Iran. With scores of generals jailed on coup-plotting charges the army has been cowed into silence. But even Mr Erdogan's supporters are questioning his Syrian gamble. His gibes at Turkey's Alevi minority, which has spiritual bonds with Mr Assad's Alawite sect, have not helped.

With America distracted by its presidential election, Europe bogged down in the euro crisis and the EU membership talks stuck, Turkey's Western friends have little sway. A recent poll suggests that only 17% of Turks now believe they can join the EU. Many fear their country may be sucked into a regional war. Mr Erdogan is a master at scentsing the public mood, but his popularity is falling. His priority ought to be putting his house in order, with a constitution that supports all Turkish citizens rather than his presidential aspirations. ■

Turkey facing renewed test from Kurdish militants

By Justin Vela,

ISTANBUL — For nearly three weeks this summer, Turkey's military and Kurdish guerrillas have fought one of the longest battles in their decades-long conflict, experts say.

The guerrillas usually carry out spectacular attacks in the summer and fall, but the fight this year has been especially long and intense.

The clashes have taken on new significance given the conflict in neighboring Syria, a country with a large Kurdish population of its own. Syria's Kurds have made significant gains in recent months, which experts say may be inspiring Turkey's Kurds to fight harder.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has been battling the Turkish state since 1984 and is considered a terrorist organization by the United States. At least 40,000 people have died in the conflict as the guerrillas have fought for autonomy in the southeast of the country, cultural rights and the release of their leader Abdullah Ocalan, who was captured in 1999.

In recent weeks, the Turkish government has accused the group of reviving its past connections to the Syrian government in what many see as a growing regional conflict.

Details are sketchy, but in mid-August the Turkish military ended an operation against Kurdish guerrillas who had taken up positions in Turkey's eastern Hakkari district, which borders Iraq and Iran. The guerrillas had set up

checkpoints on public roads, prompting the military to respond. According to a local Kurdish politician, the militants discontinued their traditional "hit and run" strikes and instead attempted to retain control over areas around Hakkari.

Not long before the fighting began in Hakkari, government forces in Syria had abandoned several Kurdish towns and villages along the border with Turkey, leaving them largely under the control of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, or PYD. That has left Syrian Kurds effectively in control of parts of the border with Turkey, alarming the Turkish government.

The Syrian Kurds have remained at arm's length from the rebel uprising against the Syrian government. But the Turkish government says the Kurds in Syria are, in fact, collaborating with Damascus in order to gain the greatest possible benefit from the situation there. From early on in the conflict, the Syrian government offered Kurds concessions to keep them from joining the opposition, observers say.

"The Syrian regime has left some places in the Kurdish-dominated areas of its territory," said a Turkish official speaking on the condition of anonymity. "It shows cooperation."

While Turkey's Kurds might find some inspiration in the Kurds' gains in Syria, the situations in the two countries differ greatly, analysts say. The Syrian Kurds were able to make gains largely because the Syrian government needed to send troops stationed in Kurdish

areas to the war-racked city of Aleppo, said Jordi Tejel, a Kurdish expert at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva.

"The PYD can count on the government's complicity so far. That will never be the case in Turkey. Even in Syria, the so-called liberated zones are fragile," he said.

The near-daily clashes have continued in the Hakkari district.

"When we think of the PYD success in Syria, the PKK would think that they can do the same thing in Turkey," said Emrullah Uslu, a Turkish terrorism expert.

The Turks also blame the PKK for an Aug. 20 bombing that killed 10 people in the city of Gaziantep, which is near the border with Syria. The PKK has denied responsibility for the attack.

Roj Welat, a spokesman for the guerrillas fighting in Turkey, said the militants were trying to push government forces out of the eastern part of the country. In August, the PKK kidnapped several soldiers and two parliamentarians. The politicians were later released unharmed, but Welat warned that the group would continue to target Turkish government representatives.

"All the people working for the Turkish state and its government in the Kurdish region should leave their work and go back to their homes, otherwise we have every right to arrest and question all those people working for the fascist state," he said, speaking via telephone from a PKK base in northern Iraq. ♦



Turkish PM says Syria has become "terrorist state"

(Reuters) / 5 September 2012

TURKISH PRIME Minister Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday that President Bashar al-Assad had created a "terrorist state" in Syria and voiced further frustration at the lack of international consensus over the chaos there.

"The massacres in Syria that gain strength from the international community's indifference are continuing to increase," Erdogan told a meeting of his ruling AK Party. "The regime in Syria has now become a terrorist state."

Ankara initially cultivated good relations with Assad's administration, but Erdogan has become one of Assad's harshest critics since

the uprising against him began 17 months ago.

Turkey, struggling to cope with an influx of around 80,000 Syrian refugees, has repeatedly pushed for a foreign-protected safe zone inside Syria, but the proposal has gained little international support.

Turkey has accused Assad of supplying arms to Kurdish PKK insurgents who have fought government troops in southeast Turkey for almost three decades, and has raised the possibility of military intervention in Syria if the PKK becomes a threat there. Assad has denied that Syria allowed PKK militants to operate on Syrian territory close to the Turkish frontier.

The PKK is listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. ●

Syria and Iran 'backing Kurdish terrorist group', says Turkey

Turkey has accused Syria and Iran of backing Kurdish terrorist attacks on military outposts in the south-east of the country that left 30 dead.



By Damien McElroy,
Sherween, Aleppo

Kurdish-dominated provinces in Turkey have been swept by an upsurge in attacks by the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in recent weeks.

Fighting has spiked since the group gained control of dozens of villages across northern Syria this summer, when the regime concentrated its forces on Aleppo.

Ten soldiers and twenty PKK fighters were reported killed yesterday in overnight clashes in the town of Beytussebab in the Sirnak province of Turkey. It was the largest of four separate PKK attacks near the Syrian border.

In a separate incident, a suspected suicide bomber was shot dead by the security forces near Sanliurfa city.

The PKK has been at war with Ankara for thirty years and the conflict has claimed 45,000 lives. But recent fighting has been the worst for more than a decade and Turkish leaders have pointed the finger directly at President Bashar al-Assad.

"It's known that the PKK works arm in arm with Syria's intelligence organisation," said Huseyin Celik, the deputy chairman of Turkey's AK party. "Assad is inclined to view Turkey's foe, the PKK, as a friend."

Officials said the cross-border element to the attacks can be traced to eastern Syrian enclaves where the flags of the PKK and its allies have been hoisted to demonstrate de facto control.

Turkish suspicions of a conspiracy between neighbouring

regimes have been fuelled by a simultaneous PKK offensive in the eastern province of Semdinli, which borders Iran.

Turkish newspapers last week reported claims that more than 100 Iranian agents were active in Turkey working on behalf of the PKK.

Meanwhile Syrian regime documents seized by rebels include instructions to resist the advance of Turkish influence.

Towns such as Afrin, west of Aleppo, and Qamishli, to the east, are controlled by the PKK and its local offshoot the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), and are off-limits to Syrian rebels.

Mohammad Haj Hassan, the most prominent Kurdish commander in the rebel movement fighting in Aleppo, told The Daily Telegraph the PKK exerts a strong grip on his fellow Kurds.

"There are no-go places for us because of the PKK's ties to the regime," he said. "When the rebellion broke out the PKK was given arms and they fought us. Now they defend the towns they control but don't let us enter. It is one of the greatest problems for the revolution."

With a large ethnic Turkish population residing cheek-by-jowl with the Kurds, northern Syria is pockmarked with potential flashpoints.

Hisham Mousa, a Turkmen farmer from the town of Jaqala, said threats from the PKK in Doudian, the next-door village, had forced some of his neighbours to flee.

"We have very little to do with Doudian. They have their ways and we have ours," he said. "But now they are under the control of the PKK and very threatening to those of us who have joined the revolution."



Turkish soldiers block a street as Kurds demonstrate on in the center of Beytussebab Photo: AFP/Getty Images

"Some of the people have gone away because they fear there will be fighting."

Mr Hassan, a schoolteacher turned warlord, said the PKK's strong organisation in the area made it difficult for local moderates to stand up against its cadres.

"Assad has been cultivating the PKK since the 1980s to provide just this level of protection for his regime," he said. "It is a card for Damascus and they are playing it against us and Turkey at the same time."

Syrian rebels fear their uprising has been exploited by the PKK to ship weapons and explosives across the border. Rebels in Aazaz on the Turkish border said they had set up checkpoints to screen traffic in the days leading up to a car-bomb attack last month in Gaziantep that killed ten. "There was a checkpoint to stop suspicious vehicles just before the attack," said Abu Amir, a local revolutionary. "However the bomb got through to the city."

Turkish security analysts believe that by unleashing the PKK, Mr Assad has achieved a tactical victory that makes foreign military intervention on

behalf of the rebels less feasible.

"The idea behind this policy is to create an administration that will be fundamentally opposed to Turkish domination of that area, or to act as a buffer zone or deterrent in the case of direct military invasion from Turkey," said Prof Abbas Vali, at Istanbul's Bogazici University told Zaman newspaper.

Turkey's government had begun a tentative peace process with the PKK, whose leader Abdullah Ocalan languishes in solitary confinement in a Turkish prison, before the Syrian crisis erupted.

But with the organisation's return to full-scale guerrilla attacks, hopes for a settlement that would grant formal autonomy to the country's 14 million Kurds have been dashed.

"The refugees will one day go home," said one Turkish official. "But the foreign influence over the PKK means that this problem is here to stay." ♦

Kurds and (the Turkish) Way

By ANDREW FINKEL

ISTANBUL - When I first started covering Turkey in the early 1990s, my foreign colleagues and I were sometimes mocked for referring to the brewing resentment in southeastern Turkey as "the Kurdish problem." There was no sectarian or ethnic discrimination, we were told; the problem was terrorism. The Kurdistan Workers Party, better known as the PKK, resorted to violence and extortion, which no civilized society could abide.

The major flaw in this argument was that the Turkish state also resorted to tactics unworthy of a civilized society. For years, to argue for Kurdish rights - let alone regional autonomy - or simply to write in Kurdish could mean prison; such acts were considered aiding and abetting terrorism. Kurdish political parties were shut down. Political activists were tortured. In what became Turkey's own dirty war, thousands of people were assassinated or disappeared.

It's not just the Kurds who suffered. Fear of Kurdish secession has long been the canker in Turkish democracy, the justification for a raft of laws that restrict human rights and the freedom of expression. Now it is compromising Turkey's attempt to play a greater role in its region, particularly as Syria implodes. How can Ankara deal with Kurds beyond its borders if it can't manage relations with its Kurds at home?

And as long as Turkey blurs the line between terrorism and legitimate protest, it will continue to alienate its Kurdish population while legitimating the men of violence.

The Justice and Development Party (AKP) was aware of this challenge when it came to office in 2002. And so in early 2009, after having consolidated power, it initiated a "Kurdish opening." It started a Kurdish-language television station and offered amnesty to young PKK militants to lure them back into civilian life.

But that opening famously shut down in



A Kurdish man wearing a T-shirt with the portrait of Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed PKK leader, guards a checkpoint near the Syrian-Turkish border.

October 2009, after the PKK tried to cast as a victory parade the return of a group of its militants at the Habur border crossing with Iraq. The AKP, despite commanding a strong majority in Parliament, simply wasn't prepared to brave nationalist sentiment and the many Turks who saw compromise as weakness. Just as in Northern Ireland, where a bloodier-than-thou faction of the IRA was shadowing the peace process, there were factions within the PKK with no intention of giving peace a chance.

After Habur, the Turkish government abandoned the carrot and picked up the stick. It was determined to stop the spread of a campaign of civil disobedience to cities with large Kurdish populations, by way of mass arrests and pre-trial detention.

These harsh policies have brought Turkey little security, and the bloody events in Syria are now making matters worse. President Bashar al-Assad of Syria has voluntarily ceded control of the Kurdish north of his country to the Democratic Union Party, a Syrian variant of the PKK. There has recently been an upsurge in PKK attacks against Turkish soldiers and police near the Iranian border, as well as a rise in acts of random terrorism -- including a bomb explosion on Aug. 20 near a police station in Gaziantep that killed 10 civilians. Many suspect the bloodshed is the direct result

of political games in Syria, as well as a ploy by Iran to use the PKK against the Turkish government to punish it for supporting the Syrian opposition.

Ankara has not responded so far, but it could get sucked into the conflict by trying to enforce a buffer zone along the Syrian border. It is already trying to get the international community to establish a no-fly zone to protect the growing tide of refugees from Syria. Some of those are deserters from the Syrian Army, and there is little doubt that the Turkish government is encouraging them to re-enter the fight on the side of the rebels.

All this has prompted Cemil Cicek, the speaker of Parliament and a former hardline AKP minister of justice, to call for a "national consensus" - code for re-opening the Turkish government's Kurdish initiative and granting Kurds more power locally. This sort of plan might have worked miracles decades ago. And it might still succeed today, except that Cicek is being criticized, and by his own party.

Instead of declaring that there is no Kurdish problem, as it did two decades ago, the Turkish government now appears to be saying there is no Kurdish solution. Does that count as progress? ■

Combats meurtriers entre l'armée turque et le PKK

Les indépendantistes kurdes sont accusés par Ankara de collusion avec Damas



Zone de peuplement kurde
Kurdistan irakien autonome

Istanbul
Correspondance

Quelque 400 km². C'est la portion du territoire turc que la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) tient « sous son contrôle », selon Selahettin Demirtas, le dirigeant

du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP), formation légale proche des rebelles kurdes. Cette prise de contrôle serait le signe d'un changement de tactique de la part du PKK qui, jusqu'alors, menait des opérations de harcèlement depuis les camps du mont Qandil, côté irakien, où le gros de ses troupes est retranché : embuscades contre des véhicules blindés ou des colonnes de militaires, enlèvements.

De la « propagande de terroristes », a répliqué le gouvernement d'Ankara à cette annonce. Mais il a tout de même jugé utile de déployer plus de 2000 hommes supplémentaires vers le territoire insurgé, autour de Semdinli, une petite ville encaissée dans les montagnes aux frontières de l'Irak et de l'Iran, là où le PKK déclencha sa première attaque, en août 1984. Le drapeau turc flotte de nouveau sur le sommet des montagnes, a tenu à rassurer l'armée, images à l'appui.

Mais pour prouver leur avancée, les hommes du PKK avaient fait

irruption début août, sur une route, venant au-devant d'un groupe de représentants du BDP. Les images de ces embrassades entre députés et rebelles en treillis et kalachnikov ont passablement irrité l'opinion turque, déjà chauffée à blanc par les slogans nationalistes placardés à la « une » des journaux : « Notre cœur est enflammé », « Nous ne céderons jamais aux terroristes », affichait ainsi la presse turque lundi.

La Turquie a connu l'un de ses étés les plus sanglants depuis les années 1990, et le bilan incertain des combats qui font rage depuis deux mois entre l'armée et les rebelles du PKK s'élève sans doute à plus d'une centaine de victimes. « Nous avons vécu le pire été depuis quatorze ans, depuis l'arrestation du leader du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan », estime l'expert éditorialiste Mehmet Ali Birand.

Au moins 90 membres des forces de sécurité sont tombés en « martyrs » depuis avril, selon les chiffres officiels. Le PKK avance le nombre de 400 pour le seul mois d'août. Une trentaine de personnes, dont 10 soldats et 20 assaillants, ont été tuées dimanche soir, au cours de violents accrochages sur les hauteurs de Beytüssebab, à deux pas de la frontière irakienne, une zone tombée, à son tour, sous le contrôle du PKK, affirme le commandement de la rébellion mardi.

« Situation inquiétante »

Dix jours plus tôt, l'explosion de quatre mines au passage d'un convoi militaire et les représailles de l'armée avaient fait au moins 32 morts. Les funérailles de soldats

et de rebelles se succèdent chaque jour. « Toute la région retient son souffle, chacun des deux camps est prêt à tout. La situation est très inquiétante », note un commerçant de Yüksekova, près de Semdinli. Plusieurs villages de la région ont été vidés de leurs habitants par l'armée, comme au plus fort de la guerre civile, dans les années 1990.

Pour la plupart des analystes et autres « experts en terrorisme » qui se bousculent sur les plateaux télévisés, cette brutale escalade serait liée à l'évolution du conflit en Syrie. Le PKK et son extension syrienne, le PYD (Parti de l'Union démocratique), contrôlent une bonne partie du nord-est de la Syrie et de la frontière avec la Turquie.

D'ailleurs, le gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accusé les rebelles de collusion avec le régime honni de Bachar Al-Assad. « Il est connu que le PKK travaille main dans la main avec les services de renseignements syriens », assure Hüseyin Celik, le vice-président de l'AKP, le parti au pouvoir.

M. Erdogan avait lancé une accusation similaire au lendemain de l'attentat à la voiture piégée qui avait tué au moins neuf civils, dans le centre de Gaziantep, à 80 km de la frontière syrienne, le 20 août. Une attaque attribuée aux rebelles kurdes, pour laquelle le PKK a réfuté toute responsabilité. Bahoz Erdal, le chef militaire de la rébellion, a affirmé lundi que l'attentat portait au contraire la signature de la police et des services secrets turcs. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Une dizaine de morts dans un quartier kurde d'Alep (témoins, ONG)

ALEP (Syrie), 06 septembre 2012 (AFP)

UNE DIZAINE de personnes ont été tuées jeudi soir après la chute d'obus de mortier pour la première fois dans un quartier à majorité kurde à Alep, deuxième ville de Syrie où la guerre fait rage entre rebelles et armée, selon une ONG et des témoins.

Des témoins ont affirmé à l'AFP que trois obus se sont abattus dans le quar-

tier de Cheikh Maksoud (nord) et ce pour la première fois depuis que le conflit a gagné la métropole il y a plus d'un mois.

Ni l'armée ni les rebelles ne se trouvent dans ce quartier jusque là épargné par les violences.

Selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH), citant des militants dans le quartier, au moins 10 personnes ont été tuées et des dizaines d'autres blessées après la chute de deux obus près d'une mosquée. D'après l'ONG, le quartier est contrôlé par des comités populaires en charge de défendre le quartier.

Il n'était pas possible de connaître dans l'immédiat l'origine des tirs.

Plus de 21.000 Syriens ont trouvé refuge en Irak, selon le HCR

BAGDAD, 7 septembre 2012 (AFP)

QUELQUE 21.744 Syriens ont fui les combats pour trouver refuge en Irak, la plupart dans la région autonome du Kurdistan, a annoncé vendredi le Haut commissariat pour les réfugiés des Nations unies (HCR).

Ce nombre ne comprend que les réfugiés qui se sont enregistrés auprès des autorités, et pourrait en réalité être plus élevé, précise le HCR dans un communiqué.

La province de Dohouk, au Kurdistan, accueille 13.997 Syriens, selon le HCR. Quelque 2.984 personnes ont trouvé refuge dans la province d'Erbil, également au Kurdistan, et 492 personnes dans celle de Souleimaniya, dans cette même région.

Enfin, 4.271 Syriens sont réfugiés à Anbar, une province de l'ouest de l'Irak où se trouve le camp de réfugiés de la ville-frontière de Qaim.

Official: Kurdish rebels attack security posts in Turkey, killing 10

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA
Associated Press

ISTANBUL – Kurdish militants have killed 10 police and soldiers in an assault near the Iraqi border, Turkish officials said Monday, amid concern that rebels are seeking to capitalize on regional tensions caused by Syria's civil war with a more intense campaign of attacks in Turkey.

The attack happened late Sunday in southeastern Sirmak province, a traditional area for militants who have bases in northern Iraq. An undetermined number of Kurdish guerrillas were also killed.

The rebel Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has benefited from past upheaval and power vacuums in the region, notably after the 1991 Gulf War and the fall of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in a U.S.-led invasion in 2003. Iraqi Kurds consolidated their own mini-state in northern Iraq, inspiring those Kurds in Turkey who want self-rule.

In Syria, regime forces locked in a civil war with opponents of President Bashar Assad ceded control in some areas near the Turkish border to Kurdish fighters said to be linked to Turkey's Kurdish militants. Turkish analysts suspect the regime's seemingly passive conduct was aimed at stirring trouble for Turkey, which opposes Assad, by providing additional space for the PKK to organize.

Dogan News Agency video Monday showed Turkish security forces patrolling the town of Beytussebab, where militants attacked police and military posts, as well as apartment buildings that house security forces' families. An official is seen removing weapons from the rucksack of what appears to be a slain guerrilla, wearing an olive-green uniform and lying in a gutter. In another sequence, Kurdish townspeople are heard shouting slogans in support of jailed rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan as armored vehicles roll through the streets.

Hurriyet newspaper reported Monday that police had fired into the air in the town to disperse a group of Kurds who wanted to take three rebel corpses away for burial.

It was the latest in a surge of operations blamed on the PKK, including a deadly bombing near Syria on Aug. 20 that intensified questions about the security of Turkey's borders in an unstable region and the possible involvement of outside actors. Turkish officials have not ruled out possible Syrian or Iranian involvement in the bombing, which killed eight people.



Turkey's President Abdullah Gul on Monday condemned what he called the "separatist terrorist organization" for the attack in Sirmak province.

"The internal and external supporters of this shameful game will sooner or later understand that they have made a wrongful calculation and will be punished," he said. "It should not be forgotten that those who believe that a timely opportunity has arisen, will soon realize their great historic mistake and will be disappointed."

The PKK is conducting some of its most brazen operations since its 1990s heyday, though it is limited to hit-and-run tactics rather than seizing and holding population centers.

"More complications bring them more power because they are feeding from chaos," Umit Ozdag, a terrorism expert at the 21st Century Turkey Institute, a research center, said of the PKK. The group, which has been fighting since 1984, is defined as terrorist by Turkey and the West, but still retains the backing of many in the Kurdish minority, which comprises up to 20 percent of Turkey's 75 million people.

Syria resembles a proxy battle in which the regime, backed by Iran and Russia, is pitted against Turkey and its Western and Arab allies. Ozdag said the PKK, which used to have close ties to the Syrian regime, has "partisans" on both sides of the conflict, giving militants "an extensive maneuvering range" in which to press their political aims.

Turkey is hosting more than 80,000 Syrian refugees and has urged the United Nations to set up buffer zones inside Syria, a step that would require military intervention. Last year, the PKK's military chief, Murat Karayilan, spoke in favor of the uprisings that had swept the Middle East and North Africa, but criticized the idea of outside intervention to oust regimes. The remark seemed aimed at the NATO military campaign in Libya that led to the ouster of leader Moammar Gadhafi,

as well as the idea, so far shunned by allied nations, of mounting a similar operation in Syria.

In remarks reported by Firat, a pro-Kurdish news agency, Karayilan said there was a "historical opportunity" in which Syria's Kurdish minority could obtain its "fair basic rights and gain recognition as a people."

Many Kurds in the PKK have Syrian origins, and reported moves toward autonomy by Syrian Kurds may have invigorated the militant group's hopes that increased pressure on the battlefield could draw Turkish concessions. Turkey, which has granted more cultural rights to Kurds but fears autonomy could split the nation, is caught between its stated desire for reconciliation and its handling of the conflict as a strictly law-and-order or terrorism problem.

Turkey has also turned its attention to Iran, which has a history of fighting Iranian Kurds allied with the PKK. Turkish media reported last week that an Iranian spy ring was broken up in an eastern province, a sign of how relations have deteriorated over the Syrian conflict. Newspapers reported that suspects had obtained information on police and military posts, and other government sites, and had also had contact with PKK members, though details on the discussions have not been reported.

Two suspects are Iranian and half a dozen others are Turks, according to Anadolu Agency.

Turkey, a NATO ally with a strong economy, has won praise for backing pro-democracy movements in the region, but increasing tensions with its neighbors as well as internal problems with minorities have muddied its image.

On Monday, Human Rights Watch said members of the Turkish security forces and public officials should be held accountable for thousands of unlawful killings and enforced disappearances during fighting between the military and the PKK in the 1990s. Rebels were also accused of human rights abuses in that time. Emma Sinclair-Webb, a senior research for the rights group, said Turkey's international credibility was on the line as long as it does not address allegations of state impunity stretching back two decades.

"The non-solution of the Kurdish issue in general casts such a shadow over Turkey's efforts to be a broker, or have this regional role," she said. ○

The Arab Spring and the Kurdish Awakening

ÖMER TAŞPINAR

o.taspinar@todayzaman.com

The real fear is not that Syria is dividing. It's that the Kurds are uniting," Aliza Marcus -- the author of the best book published so far on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), "Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence" -- argues in a recent article about Kurds in the Middle East. There are approximately 35 million Kurds in the Middle East. Although exact numbers are often disputed it is widely accepted that at least half of the total Kurdish population -- about 15 to 20 million -- live in Turkey. The Palestinians may be the most often proclaimed "nation without a state." The Kurds, on the other hand, who outnumber the Palestinians by a factor of five, are the most populous such nation in the Middle East.

The concept of a nation-state is of course a Western invention, with relatively recent roots in the 18th and 19th centuries. France, with its famous revolution in 1789, is often considered the textbook example of this European trajectory for nation-state formation. If France is par-excellence the most illustrative European example of a strong nation-state, there is little doubt that the France of the Muslim world is Turkey. The Kemalist revolution modeled itself after the French Republic's anti-clerical laicism and assimilative nationalism. Although France is today far more advanced than Turkey in terms of its democratic evolution, an aversion to religiosity, minority rights, multiculturalism and federalism

became common characteristics of both France and Turkey.

The Kurdish challenge to the Kemalist project traumatized Turkey from the early days and continues to do so today. From the Sheik Said uprising in 1925 to the PKK's current struggle for self-rule, the Kurdish question remains the Achilles heel of the Turkish nation-state. Assimilation was probably an easier proposition in the 19th and early 20th century. It became increasingly difficult to assimilate a minority with growing ethnic and political consciousness in the last few decades.

Today, Turks are facing an increasingly nationalist Kurdish generation with growing expectations and aspirations. And Turks know the power of nationalism. They lost their empire because of nationalist minorities determined to establish their own nation-states. Ethnic demands for self-determination, supported by President Woodrow Wilson in the United States, became the nightmare of the crumbling imperial center. It is therefore not surprising that today Ankara is equally alarmed about prospects of Kurdish nationalism and a greater Kurdistan emerging in the region. It is very likely that in the wake of the dissolution of the Assad regime a semi-autonomous Kurdish regional government will be formed in northern Syria. With the presence of the Kurdish regional government in Iraq, a newly formed Kurdish region in Syria, and Iran's own Kurdish region, soon Turkey will see nothing but Kurdish entities at its southern borders.

As Aliza Marcus argues in the foreign policy journal *The National Interest*: "Ankara, for one, has long worried that what happens to Kurdish minorities in Iraq, Syria or Iran would strengthen Turkish Kurdish separatists or legitimize international calls for Turkey to grant Kurds national rights. Turkey is right to be concerned. After Saddam Hussein was toppled in 2003, the creation of a Kurdish federation in northern Iraq reinvigorated nationalist demands by Turkish Kurds, who demanded no less for themselves. (These demands were one reason why in 2005 the PKK abandoned the cease-fire it had called after PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured and imprisoned by Turkey in 1999.) If Syrian Kurds win autonomy, Turkey's reasons for denying its Kurdish minority the same will sound specious. After all, it's hard to keep claiming that Kurds don't know what they want -- or don't really want what they say -- if almost one-half of the region's Kurds govern themselves."

It is time for Turkey to realize that the Arab Spring at its core is a movement for democratic self determination. Such sweeping change in the region was bound to have a major impact on Kurdish demands for self-determination. The emergence of an independent greater Kurdistan is the dream of millions of nationalist Kurds. The only hope for stemming this growing tide in Turkey is to co-opt the Kurds in the framework of federalism and autonomy. This may be a bridge too far for a country that constantly fears dismemberment due to its vivid memories of Ottoman disintegration. Turkey has already given up strict assimilation. But it has yet to adopt genuine multiculturalism. Nothing less than serious steps towards democratization, multiculturalism and federalism will co-opt the Kurdish tide.



Baghdad threatens Kurds with budget cut over oil row

By Ahmed Rasheed | Reuters – Tue, Sep 4, 2012

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq's central government is considering cutting federal budget payments to the country's Kurdistan by more than \$3 billion to cover losses it says came from the autonomous region's oil exports, a government spokesman said on Tuesday.

Ali al-Moussawi, advisor to Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, said a committee found losses of more than \$3 billion resulting from Kurdistan's failure to pump the amount of oil agreed in the budget, and from its recent halting of oil exports.

"In today's cabinet meeting we gave a delegation from the Kurdistan regional government a week to come to Baghdad to discuss this or we will move ahead and deduct this amount from their budget share," he said.

Kurdistan, caught in a long dispute with Baghdad over oil rights, in

April halted its share of national oil exports in protest over central government payments to companies working in its region. It resumed exports at around 120,000 bpd last month, below the agreed 175,000 bpd in the budget.

Baghdad's decision comes after the Kurdish authorities decided on Saturday to continue pumping oil until September 15 to give the central government more time to settle their payment dispute.

The extension seemed to signal tensions were easing in the long-running feud over oil rights, territory and power-sharing, a dispute that is testing the country's uneasy federal union.

But Baghdad's move could further complicate relations with the Kurdish regional government, and might provoke its government to again halt exports.

"A week's deadline is the last chance for the Kurdish authorities to settle the oil exports issues and we will not give more time," Moussawi said.

Kurdistan halted exports in April, saying Baghdad had not made agreed payments to companies working there. It restarted shipments on August 7, in what it said was a goodwill gesture, with a warning they could be halted again if the payments were not made.

Iraq says Kurdistan's oil shipments have fluctuated around 100,000 to 120,000 barrels per day since they restarted, below the 175,000 bpd that Baghdad says was agreed. ●

U.S. plans its next moves in Iran nuclear standoff

WASHINGTON

Measures include big naval exercises and antimissile system

BY DAVID E. SANGER
AND ERIC SCHMITT

With Israel openly debating whether to strike at Iran's nuclear facilities in coming months, the Obama administration is moving ahead with a range of steps short of war that it hopes will buy time from the Israelis and force the Iranians to take more seriously negotiations that are all but stalemated.

These steps include naval exercises and new antimissile systems in the Gulf, and a more forceful clamping down on Iranian oil revenue. The administration is also considering new declarations by President Barack Obama about what might bring about American military action and covert activities that have been previously considered and rejected.

The first of the steps will begin soon: Later this month the United States and more than 25 other nations will hold the largest-ever minesweeping exercise in the Gulf, in what military officials say is a demonstration of unity and a defensive step to prevent Iran from attempting to block oil exports through the Strait of Hormuz.

In fact, the United States and Iran have each announced what amount to dueling defensive exercises to be conducted this fall, each intended to dissuade the other from attack.

The administration is also racing to complete, in the next several months, a new radar system in Qatar that would combine with radar systems already in place in Israel and Turkey to form a broad arc of antimissile coverage, according to military officials.

The message to Iran would be that even if it developed a nuclear weapon and mounted it atop its growing fleet of missiles, it could be countered by antimissile systems.

On Sunday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel appeared to criticize Mr. Obama for being too vague about how far Iran can go with its nuclear program, building on his critique that sanctions against Iran have been ineffective.

"The international community is not placing a clear red line for Iran, and Iran does not see international resolve to stop its nuclear program," he told his cabinet, according to Reuters. "Unless Iran sees this clear red line and this clear resolve it will not stop moving forward with its nuclear program."

None of the steps being taken by the administration address the most immediate goal: Slowing Iran's nuclear development. So inside the American and Israeli intelligence agencies, there is continuing debate about possible successors to "Olympic Games," the covert cyber operation, begun in the Bush administration and accelerated under Mr. Obama, that infected Iran's nuclear centrifuges and, for a while, sent them spinning out of control. An error in the computer code alerted Iran to the attack in 2010, and since then many of the country's nuclear sites have been hardened, according to experts familiar with the effort.

All of these options are designed to buy time — to offer Israeli officials a credible alternative to a military strike that would almost certainly trigger an Iranian reaction and, the White House and Pentagon fear, could unleash a new conflict in the Middle East.

While Mr. Obama's national security team has been closed-mouthed about the tense discussions with Mr. Netanyahu, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, gave voice to the concerns in London on Thursday, where he was attending the Paralympic Games.

General Dempsey, who has been deeply involved in both planning the efforts to contain Iran in the Gulf and contingency plans on how the United States would respond if Israel attacks, repeated the familiar American position that an Israeli attack would "clearly delay but probably not destroy Iran's nuclear program."

But then he went far beyond any warning Mr. Obama has given to Israel in public, saying, "I don't want to be accused of trying to influence nor do I want to be complicit if they choose to do it."

He added that the international coalition of countries applying sanctions against Iran "could be undone" if the

'Unless Iran sees this clear red line and this clear resolve it will not stop moving forward with its nuclear program.'

country was attacked "prematurely."

General Dempsey's comments seemed to be another in what one senior American diplomat called "our refrain of mixed messages," in which Iran is periodically warned that its activities could provoke attack, and Israel is warned that an attack would be counterproductive.

The administration has already

quietly proposed a "stop the clock" agreement to get Iran to halt production of the fuel that is closest to bomb-grade — and to ship it out of the country, according to diplomats from several countries involved in the discussions. But so far Iranian officials have rejected those calls, insisting on a lifting of all sanctions, and there has been no talk of a broader, more permanent deal.

Iran has long denied that it is pursuing a nuclear weapon, and U.S. intelligence officials have said they have no evidence that Iran's top leaders have decided to take the final steps toward a weapon.

Mitt Romney, Mr. Obama's Republican challenger, has taken a far harder line, saying he would never agree to allow Iran to enrich uranium at any level — a restriction even many Republicans, including some of Mr. Romney's advisers, say there is virtually no chance Iran will accept, since it has a legal right to peaceful enrichment.

One option Mr. Obama has already approved is the military exercise, scheduled for Sept. 16 to 27, in which the United States and its allies will practice detecting and destroying mines with ships, helicopters and robotic underwater drones. The ships will stay out of the narrow Strait of Hormuz, to avoid direct interaction with the Iranian Navy.

In advance of exercise, the U.S. Navy earlier this summer doubled the number of minesweepers in the region, to eight vessels. The deployments are part of a larger series of military reinforcements into the Gulf in recent months, all described by the United States as defensive.

That is also the explanation for the American efforts to create a regional missile defense system across the Gulf to protect cities, oil refineries, pipelines and military bases from an Iranian attack. The latest element is a high-resolution, X-band missile defense radar in Qatar, meant to underscore that Iran's Arab neighbors are as concerned about Tehran's capabilities as is Israel. That is underscored by the sale of billions of dollars of new defense systems, including a variety of missile interceptors and radars, to Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

"The United States does not have to threaten preventive strikes," Anthony H. Cordesman, a longtime military analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote in a recent paper, "Iran: Preventing War by Making It Credible." "It simply has to make its capabilities clear in terms of a wide range of possible scenarios."

But there is concern that Iran will see these actions as encirclement, and that the actions could encourage those elements in the country who want to move faster to a nuclear "capability," if not a weapon itself.



September 6, 2012

U.S. urges Iraq to inspect Iran supply flights to Syria

By Patrick Markey

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - U.S. officials are questioning Iraq about Iranian flights in Iraqi airspace suspected of ferrying weapons to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, whose conflict with rebels threatens to drag his neighbours into a regional struggle.

Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's government is close to the regional Shi'ite power Iran, Assad's main ally, and he has opposed demands by Sunni Arab Gulf nations that Assad step down to end the escalating conflict over his rule.

Three prominent U.S. senators visiting Baghdad told Maliki that ties with Washington would be damaged if his government permitted Iran to use its airspace to deliver arms to Syria. One U.S.

official urged Baghdad to inspect the Iranian flights.

"This could really have some impact on Iraqi-U.S. relations if it were true. The fact of the matter is they have the right to order a plane to land if they think they may be violating their airspace," Sen. John McCain told Reuters.

McCain said Maliki told the visiting lawmakers he had still not received evidence of arms supplies that Iraq requested when U.S. officials raised the Iranian flights earlier this year.

"If we make the allegation, I think is a legitimate request on his part to see the proof of it," McCain said.

U.S. State Department spokesman Patrick Ventrell said on Wednesday Iraq had a responsibility to continue with mea-

asures to prevent Iran shipping arms through its airspace.

"The easiest way, we think, is for them to require these aircraft to land and be inspected in Iraqi territory," he said.

Iraq, fearing any spill over of the Syrian conflict could upset its own fragile balance among Shi'ite, Sunni and Kurdish parties, says it backs no side in the Syrian crisis. But Iraqi Shi'ite leaders fear a hardline Sunni government hostile to Baghdad could follow Assad's fall.

Iraq has had no real air force since the fall of Saddam Hussein and says it cannot defend its airspace. But Iraqi officials say they have no evidence that Iranian flights are carrying weapons or military hardware.

"The prime minister confirmed that Iraq's stance is clear to not allow the passage of anything, of any weapon or anything linked to military activity," said Ali al-Moussawi, Maliki's media adviser. "He is ready to follow up on any evidence." ♦



September 7, 2012

Turkish troops kill 18 PKK rebels in major offensive

By Seyhmus Cakan / (Reuters)

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey - Turkish soldiers have killed 18 Kurdish rebels in two days in an offensive involving over 2,000 troops, as well as by F-16 fighter jets operating on both sides of the Turkey-Iraq border, security sources said on Friday.

The operation against separatist rebels from the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) began on Wednesday night in Sirnak, a southeasterly province bordering Iraq and Syria and the site of frequent clashes between rebels and Turkish troops.

The summer has been one of the bloodiest in Turkey since the PKK took up arms against the state in 1984 with the aim of carving out a Kurdish state.

"Eighteen PKK members have been killed. The intense operation is continuing," security sources told Reuters.

The operation has largely focused on Kato mountain, a remote area in Sirnak, but Turkish security sources as well as Iraqi residents said warplanes had bombed areas inside northern Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdistan region.

A Reuters witness said he had seen several F-16 jets take off from



A Turkish military helicopter flies over the border of an area between Iraq and Turkey during a military operation against PKK Kurdish militants October 25, 2011.

Diyarbakir air base on Thursday night and Friday morning. Diyarbakir is the main city in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast.

There were no reports that Turkish ground troops had crossed the border into northern Iraq, although Turkey has sent soldiers into the region in the past, and still has some 1,000 troops based there under an agreement with Iraq dating from the 1990s.

PKK ATTACKS ON THE RISE

Turkey has stepped up air operations on suspected PKK rebels in northern Iraq over the past year after an

increase in PKK attacks, and the raids have fuelled tension between Ankara and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Security sources said one Turkish soldier had been killed during clashes with PKK militants at the start of the offensive on Wednesday night.

On Sunday, PKK fighters killed 10 members of Turkey's security services in simultaneous attacks on four state and security installations in Sirnak.

More than 40,000 people have been killed since the start of the conflict between the Turkish state and the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union.

In the 15 months to August, some 800 people were killed, including about 500 PKK fighters, more than 200 security personnel and about 85 civilians, according to estimates by the International Crisis Group think-tank.

Ankara has linked the upsurge on the unrest in neighboring Syria and Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has accused Syria's President Bashar al-Assad of arming the PKK militants.

Turkey has raised the possibility of military intervention in Syria if the PKK were to launch attacks from Syrian soil. On Wednesday, the military conducted a major military exercise on the Syrian border, a clear warning to Damascus. □

A la frontière gréco-turque, les migrants en quête de nouveaux passages vers l'UE

Quelque soixante Syriens sont morts dans le naufrage d'un navire, jeudi, au large d'Izmir

Istanbul (Turquie)
Correspondance

Toute la journée, les gardes-côtes turcs ont sorti de la mer des corps sans vie de femmes et d'enfants. Un navire qui transportait clandestinement vers la Grèce plus d'une centaine de migrants a coulé à pic, jeudi 6 septembre, après avoir heurté un récif aux abords des côtes égéennes, au sud d'Izmir, causant l'un des accidents les plus meurtriers de ces dernières années sur la frontière orientale de l'Union européenne. Au moins 61 personnes, dont 31 enfants, sont mortes, à cent mètres à peine des côtes. Une cinquantaine d'autres, parmi lesquels les deux passeurs turcs, ont pu regagner la rive à la nage, saines et sauvées. La plupart des victimes se sont retrouvées piégées dans la cale, a précisé Ardahan Totuk, le gouverneur adjoint d'Izmir.

La grande majorité des passagers – des familles et de jeunes adultes – étaient des Kurdes de Syrie, qui avaient fui leur pays et tentaient de passer en Europe. Au moment du naufrage, ils venaient de quitter les côtes turques à bord d'une embarcation de pêcheurs. Ce « voyage de l'espoir », d'après les premiers témoignages recueillis auprès des survivants, devait les conduire vers la Grèce voisine et jusqu'en Grande-Bretagne.

La Turquie, depuis quelques années, est le principal pays de transit des migrants non euro-



péens qui tentent de pénétrer clandestinement dans la zone de libre-circulation de Schengen. Plus de 80% des entrées dans cette zone se font par la frontière gréco-turque, par mer ou par terre. Toutes les nationalités s'y croisent: Algériens, Afghans, Irakiens...

Jusqu'en 2008, la voie maritime était la plus empruntée, certaines îles grecques du Dodécanèse ne se situant qu'à quelques kilomètres des côtes turques. Des centaines de migrants débarquaient chaque mois sur les îles de Samos, Leros ou Lesbos, rapidement saturées. En 2007, un navire avait chaviré près des côtes, quelques kilomètres plus au nord, faisant 79 morts. Mais depuis, cette route dangereuse

semblait avoir été abandonnée, l'immense majorité des migrants empruntant la voie terrestre, au nord, par la région turque d'Erdre.

Nouvelles routes

« Depuis début 2010, le nombre d'arrivées dans les îles était proche de zéro, atteste Piri Erçoban, coordinatrice de l'association pour les réfugiés Mülteci-Der, basée à Izmir. Mais depuis quelques semaines, il y a de nouveau des arrestations, ce qui pourrait montrer un changement dans l'acheminement des migrants. »

Au cours d'une mission dans les îles qui vient de s'achever le 4 septembre, l'organisation Médecins sans frontières a, elle aussi, consta-

té un afflux récent, principalement de Syriens. Depuis le début de l'année, les Syriens sont les plus nombreux à franchir la frontière, constate le responsable de la mission locale de MSF.

Très organisés, les réseaux de passeurs s'adaptent rapidement aux nouvelles contraintes. Les déploiements de policiers formés par l'agence européenne de surveillance des frontières (Frontex) depuis fin 2010 ont à peine ralenti le rythme des entrées.

Cet été, Athènes a ordonné l'envoi de 2 000 policiers sur sa frontière nord, principalement le long du fleuve Evros, et s'est félicité d'une baisse de 84% du nombre des arrestations dans cette région. D'où le récent déplacement des routes migratoires vers le sud, par la mer. « Si des gens veulent fuir la Syrie, ils trouveront toujours une route, elle sera juste plus risquée et plus contrôlée par les passeurs », estime M^{me} Erçoban.

Pour cette militante associative, les victimes du naufrage de jeudi se sont également heurtées à la politique turque d'accueil. « C'est une politique de protection temporaire, pas d'accueil de réfugiés. Il n'y a pour les Syriens aucune possibilité de faire une demande d'asile en suivant la procédure normale. Certains sont dans des camps depuis un an et demi, sans avenir, sans espoir. La tentation est grande de tenter sa chance par ses propres moyens », explique-t-elle. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Syrie

Combats à Homs, Alep et Damas

DAMAS. Les combats et les bombardements dans plusieurs régions de Syrie ont fait au moins 131 morts, jeudi 6 septembre, selon un bilan fourni par l'opposition. Dans la province de Homs, les rebelles ont attaqué plusieurs barrages tenus par les forces loyalistes dans la région du Krak des Chevaliers, qui abrite le célèbre fort croisé, ainsi que dans Wadi Al-Nassara, qui regroupe des villages chrétiens. Dans la banlieue sud-est de Damas, les combats ont eu lieu aux abords du tombeau de Sayyida Zeinab, un important lieu de pèlerinage chiite, et dans le quartier de Qadam (sud), où deux civils, frères d'un chef rebelle, ont été découverts morts, après avoir été enlevés mercredi soir à un barrage tenu par l'armée.

Le Monde

Samedi 8 septembre 2012

Dans le nord du pays, l'armée a repris mercredi le pont Barkoum, à 20 km au sud d'Alep, dont les rebelles s'étaient emparés il y a trois semaines. Toujours à Alep, une dizaine de personnes ont été tuées jeudi soir après la chute d'un obus sur un quartier à majorité kurde visé pour la première fois. A Deraa, plus de 50 hommes auraient été arrêtés tard dans la soirée par les forces de sécurité. Sur le plan diplomatique, le président russe Vladimir Poutine a appelé les pays occidentaux à « modifier leur position », soulignant leurs échecs en Irak et en Afghanistan. A Londres, le président français François Hollande s'est dit en « plein accord » avec le premier ministre britannique David Cameron pour « accélérer la transition politique » en Syrie. – (AFP.) ■

Allemagne - Mannheim : un rassemblement kurde dégénère, 80 policiers blessés

Un festival kurde a dégénéré en violences samedi soir à Mannheim, dans l'ouest de l'Allemagne, où 80 policiers ont été blessés, dont un grièvement, a-t-on appris de sources officielles.

Environ 40.000 Kurdes venus de toute l'Europe s'étaient rassemblés samedi soir à Mannheim pour une manifestation culturelle. Les incidents ont commencé lorsqu'un garçon de 14 ans a brandi le drapeau d'une organisation interdite, et des milliers de personnes y ont pris part.

Des pierres, des bouteilles et des



engins incendiaires ont été lancés sur les forces de l'ordre, appelées à intervenir par les organisateurs, et qui ont répliqué

en usant de gaz lacrymogènes.

La police, dont 13 véhicules ont été endommagés au cours de ces violences, a procédé à 31 arrestations. Des couteaux et un poing américain ont été saisis.

De source policière on n'était pas en mesure de préciser de quelle organisation interdite le drapeau avait été brandi.

Plusieurs centaines de milliers de Kurdes, pour la plupart originaires de Turquie, vivent en Allemagne. (par AFP)

□□□



10 septembre 2012

L'aviation turque a frappé le PKK en Irak 14 fois en quatre jours

L'aviation turque a bombardé des sites appartenant aux rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak à 14 reprises entre le 5 et le 9 septembre, tuant 25 rebelles, a affirmé ce lundi l'état-major des armées turques sur son site Internet.

«Du 5 au 9 septembre, 14 opérations aériennes ont eu lieu contre des cibles de l'organisation terroriste séparatiste dans le nord de l'Irak et 32 abris, trois dépôts, un véhicule transportant un canon antiaérien ont été détruits. Selon les

premières informations, 25 terroristes ont été neutralisés», selon l'état-major.

«Les travaux de collecte et d'enregistrement d'informations concernant les objectifs atteints dans le nord de l'Irak se poursuivent», conclut le communiqué. Ces frappes aériennes surviennent alors que les combats se sont intensifiés cet été entre les forces de sécurité et les rebelles dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes.

ASSAUT MEURTRIER AU

FUSIL MITRAILLEUR

Une vaste opération de l'armée impliquant des milliers de soldats, de policiers et de «gardiens de village» -une milice kurde mise sur pied par les autorités turques pour lutter contre les rebelles- a été lancée la semaine dernière avec un appui aérien dans des zones montagneuses de la province de Sirnak, riveraine de l'Irak.

Elle faisait suite à un assaut meurtrier au fusil mitrailleur et au lance-roquettes du PKK contre un complexe de sécurité de Beytüssebap, dans la pro-

vince de Sirnak, au cours duquel dix soldats turcs et une vingtaine de rebelles ont été tués.

L'armée turque a régulièrement recours à des frappes aériennes contre le PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, où les rebelles, considérés comme une organisation terroriste par de nombreux pays, disposent de camps qu'ils utilisent comme bases arrière pour leurs opérations en Turquie. (AFP) ●



Quatre soldats tués par l'explosion d'une mine dans le sud-est de la Turquie

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 15 septembre 2012 (AFP)

QUATRE SOLDATS ont été tués et cinq autres blessés samedi dans le sud-est de la Turquie par l'explosion d'une mine posée par des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) au passage de leur véhicule, ont affirmé des sources locales de sécurité.

L'engin, commandé à distance, a explosé sur la route reliant la localité de Cukurca à celle de Hakkari, dans la province de Hakkari, riveraine de l'Irak et de l'Iran, alors que passait un convoi militaire, selon ces sources.

Une opération a été lancée par les forces de sécurité pour intercepter les auteurs de l'attaque, ont-elles ajouté.

L'armée mène depuis le 8 septembre une vaste offensive dans la province

de Hakkari, impliquant environ 5.000 hommes appuyés par des avions de chasse, au cours de laquelle 75 rebelles et quatre soldats ont été tués, selon des sources officielles turques citées vendredi par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Cette opération fait suite à une série de bombardements menée par l'aviation turque au début du mois contre des positions du PKK situées en territoire irakien. Ces frappes ont provoqué la mort de 25 rebelles, selon un bilan fourni par l'état-major de l'armée d'Ankara.

Le PKK a multiplié cet été ses attaques contre les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, mais aussi dans l'Ouest.

Ce regain de tension intervient alors qu'Ankara accuse la Syrie, en proie à une grave insurrection sur son territoire, de soutenir le PKK pour nuire à la Turquie, favorable aux rebelles qui luttent contre le président Bachar al-Assad.

Plusieurs zones du nord de la Syrie, frontalières de la Turquie, sont actuellement aux mains de groupes kurdes syriens, certains proches du PKK. ○

In Jordan camp, hate festers among young Syrians

ZAATARI, JORDAN

BY DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

Like all the small children in the desert refugee camp here, Ibtisam, 11, is eager to go home to the toys, bicycles, books, cartoons and classmates she left behind in Syria.

But not if that means living with Alawites, members of the same minority offshoot of Shiite Islam as the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad. "I hate the Alawites and the Shiites," Ibtisam said as a crowd of children and adults nodded in agreement. "We are going to kill them with our knives, just like they killed us."

If the fighters seeking to oust Mr. Assad sometimes portray their battle as a struggle for democracy, the Sunni Muslim children of the Zaatari camp tell a much uglier story of sectarian revenge. Asked for their own views of the grown-up battle that drove them from their homes, child after child brought up their hatred of the Alawites and a thirst for revenge. Children as young as 10 or 11 vowed never to play with Syrian Alawite children or even pledged to kill them.

Parroting older relatives — some of whom openly egged them on — the

"I hate the Alawites and the Shiites. We are going to kill them with our knives, just like they killed us."

youngsters offered a disturbing premonition of the road ahead for Syria.

Their unvarnished hatred helps explain why so many Alawites, who make up more than 10 percent of the Syrian population, have stood by Mr. Assad even as the world has written him off. They see him as their best protection against sectarian annihilation.

The children's refusal to share a playground or a classroom with Alawites dramatizes the challenge of ever putting together a political solution to the conflict. The easy talk of blood and killing from such young children illustrates the psychic toll that the revolt and repression are taking on the next generation of Syrians.

"We hear it all the time from the kids, but also from the parents — that this is not political at all, and not a call for democracy, but is about people fed up and angry at rule by a minority, the Alawites," said Saba al-Mobaslat, director for

Jordan of the nonprofit group Save the Children, which provides toys to refugee children and tries to teach them understanding. "There is a concern that this is a whole generation that is being brought up to hate, that can't see the other's side."

The roots of the animosity toward the Alawites from members of Syria's Sunni Muslim majority, who make up about 75 percent of the population, run deep into history. During the 19th century, under the Ottoman Empire, the two groups lived in separate communities, and the Sunni majority so thoroughly marginalized Alawites that they were not even allowed to testify in court until after World War I.

Then, in a pattern repeated across the region, said Joshua Landis, a Syria scholar at the University of Oklahoma, French colonialists collaborated with the Alawite minority to control the conquered Syrian population — as colonialists did with Christians in Lebanon, Jews in Palestine and Sunni Muslims in Iraq. The French brought Alawites into the colony's military to help control the Sunnis. After Syria's independence from France, the military eventually took control of the country, putting Alawites in top government positions, much to the resentment of the Sunni majority.

"Now the Alawites believe — possibly correctly — that the Sunnis are going to try to kill them, and that is why the Alawite army now is killing Sunnis in this beastly way," Dr. Landis said. "The Alawites feel justified in brutality because they fear what may be in store for them if they lay down their guns.

"I don't see any way out of that," he said, "except to say that we are in for a long, difficult ride, and you pray that the Syrians are going to get over this somehow."

At the Zaatari camp, a desolate tent city where nearly half of the 25,000 residents are younger than 12 and desperately bored, many of the children retain a disarming innocence. "Who will rule Syria next? Another president, but we will choose him," Rahaf, 11, said confidently. "I don't know who yet, because we have not seen the names."

Just as the Syrian uprising began as a peaceful protest movement inspired by calls for democracy around the Arab world, some children at the Zaatari camp sought to describe the struggle in ideological terms.

"Why are they bombing us?" Ahmed, 12, from the Hauran region near the bor-

der with Jordan, asked rhetorically. "Because we are asking for our freedom."

His father interrupted to explain what freedom might mean. "The biggest general in Hauran, a young Alawite soldier can step his foot on the general's head," his father said. "A young Alawite soldier can humiliate the biggest officer."

His son picked up the theme. "The Alawites say, 'Kneel in front of my shoe,'" Ahmed said before looping the subject back to the revolt. "We can't be free with Assad because he kills us."

The convictions of Heza, 13, were blunt. "We will never live together," he said. "All the Alawites are security agents. After the revolution, we want to kill them."

Even if it might mean killing a Syrian child his own age? "I will kill him," Heza said. "It doesn't matter."

Ms. Mobaslat, of Save the Children, said aid workers with her group avoided bringing up sectarian feelings directly because they tried not to start conversations they could not resolve. She also said she believed that some children at the camp were Alawites, Shiites or other minorities who were pretending to be Sunni Muslims for their own safety, so raising the issue in a group could create trouble.

She said her group's workers tried to talk about children accepting one another, making their own decisions and deciding for themselves whom to trust, to hate or to love. The goal is to encourage children to see others as individuals rather than part of a group, she said, "but that doesn't happen overnight, just because of an uprising."

"Sunnis are Muslims, and Shiites and Alawites are the ones who kill us," Salem, 12, explained matter-of-factly.

Ranya, 13, insisted that "there will always be a problem between Sunnis and Alawites, because they are the ones who are doing this to us."

A few paces away, a 41-year-old mother was swaying with her 2-year-old daughter, Malek, in her arms so the baby could sing for a visitor to the family's dusty tent: "Heaven, heaven, heaven, Syria is heaven."

Ranya Kadri contributed reporting.

Iran flying aid to Syria over Iraq

WASHINGTON

U.S. is pressing Baghdad to shut down air corridor, but so far to no avail

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON

Iran has resumed shipping military equipment to Syria via Iraqi airspace in a new effort to bolster the embattled government of President Bashar al-Assad, according to senior U.S. officials.

The United States pressed Iraq to shut down the air corridor that Iran had been using earlier this year, raising the issue with Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of Iraq. But as Syrian rebels have gained ground and Mr. Assad's government was rocked by a bombing that killed several high officials, Iran doubled down in supporting the Syrian leader. The flights started again in July and, to the frustration of U.S. officials, have continued ever since.

Military experts say the flights have enabled Iran to provide supplies to the Syrian government despite the efforts Syrian rebels have made to seize several border crossings where Iranian aid has been trucked in.

"The Iranians have no problems in the air, and the Syrian regime still controls the airports," said a retired Lebanese Army general, Hisham Jaber, who heads the Middle East Center for Studies and Public Relations in Beirut.

Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., who has played the lead role on Iraq policy for the Obama administration, discussed the Syrian crisis in a phone call with Mr. Maliki on Aug. 17. The White House has declined to disclose details, but a U.S. official who would not speak on the record said that Mr. Biden had registered his concerns over the flights.

The Iranian flights present searching questions for the United States. The Obama administration has been reluctant to provide arms to the Syrian rebels or establish a no-flight zone over Syria for fear of being drawn deeper into the Syrian conflict. But the aid provided by Iran underscores the reality that the

"The Iranians have no problems in the air, and the Syrian regime still controls the airports."

country has no such hesitancy in providing military supplies and advisers to keep Mr. Assad's government in power.

And Mr. Maliki's tolerance of Iran's

use of Iraqi airspace suggests the limits of the Obama administration's influence in Iraq, despite the U.S. role in toppling Saddam Hussein and ushering in a new government. The United States' influence also appears limited despite Washington's assertion that it is building a strategic partnership with the Iraqis.

Mr. Maliki has sought to maintain relations with Iran, while the United States has led the international effort to impose sanctions on the Tehran government. At the same time, the Iraqi prime minister appears to look at the potential fall of Mr. Assad as a development that might strengthen his Sunni Arab and Kurdish rivals in the region. Some states that are the most eager to see Mr. Assad go, like Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey, have poor relations with Mr. Maliki and his Shiite-dominated government.

A spokesman for the Iraqi government, Ali al-Moussawi, acknowledged Wednesday that Iran was ferrying supplies through Iraqi airspace, but said Tehran had assured Mr. Maliki that the flights contained food and other humanitarian aid for victims of the conflict in Syria, The Associated Press reported. He said the United States had promised to provide proof that the Iranian flights were shuttling arms but that Iraq was still waiting.

Iraq could take several steps to stop the flights, including insisting that cargo planes that depart from Iran en route to Syria land for inspection in Baghdad or declaring outright that Iraq's airspace cannot be used for the flights.

Iraq does not have a functioning air force, and since the withdrawal of American forces last December, the United States has no planes stationed in the country. Several airlines have been involved in ferrying the arms, according to U.S. officials, including Mahan Air, a commercial Iranian airline that the U.S. Treasury Department said last year had ferried men, supplies and money for Iran's paramilitary Quds Force.

One former U.S. official said it was not entirely clear what cargo was being sent to Syria before the flights stopped in March. But because of the type of planes involved, the nature of the carriers and the Iranians' reluctance to have the planes inspected in Iraq, it is presumed to be tactical military equipment.

At the time the flights were suspended, Iraq was preparing to host the Arab League summit meeting, which brought to Baghdad many leaders opposed to Mr. Assad. Immediately after the meeting, President Barack Obama, in an April 3 call to Mr. Maliki, reinforced the message that flights should not continue.

Iran has an enormous stake in Syria. It is Iran's staunchest Arab ally, a nation that borders the Mediterranean and Lebanon, and has provided a channel for Iran's support to the militant group Hezbollah.

As part of Iran's assistance to the Assad government, it has provided the Syrian authorities with the training and technology to intercept communications and monitor the Internet, according to U.S. officials. Iranian Quds Force personnel, they say, have been involved in training the heavily Alawite paramilitary forces the government has increasingly relied on, as well as Syrian forces that secure the nation's air bases.

The Iranians have even provided a cargo plane that the Syrian military can use to ferry men and supplies around the country, according to two U.S. officials.

In a new twist, according to one U.S. official, there have been reliable reports that Iraqi Shiite militia fighters, long backed by Iran during its efforts to shape events inside Iraq, are now making their way to Syria to help the Assad government.

While they have not specifically discussed the assistance it is airlifting to Syria, U.S. officials have spoken publicly about Iranian involvement there. "Iran is playing a larger role in Syria in many ways," Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta said last month. "There's now an indication that they're trying to develop, or trying to train, a militia within Syria to fight on behalf of the regime."

David Cohen, a senior Treasury Department official on terrorism issues, said last month that Hezbollah had been training Syrian government personnel and had facilitated the training of Syrian forces by Iran's Quds Force.

In his comments last month, Mr. Panetta insisted that the Iranian efforts would merely "bolster a regime that we think is ultimately going to come down." But some Iranian experts believe that the Iranian leadership may be unlikely to stop its involvement in Syria even if Mr. Assad is overthrown, having calculated that a chaotic Syria is better than a new government that might be sympathetic to the West.

"Plan A is to keep Bashar Assad in power," said Mohsen Sazegara, an Iranian pro-democracy activist who lives in the United States and who was one of the founding members of Iran's Revolutionary Guards. "But Plan B is that, if they can't keep him in power anymore, they will try to make another Iraq or another Afghanistan civil war. Then you can create another Hezbollah."

As vocal as the Pentagon and State Department have been about the Iranian role, they have been loath to publicly discuss the Iranian flights or the touchy questions they pose about U.S. relations with the Maliki government. The State Department, when asked Tuesday about the Iranian flights over Iraq and what efforts the United States had made in Baghdad to encourage the Iraqi government to stop them, would not provide an official comment.

France aids Syrian rebel civilian councils

PARIS

Diplomats stress money is for sanitation and health services, not arms

BY STEVEN ERLANGER

The French government is providing money to five revolutionary councils in rebel-held parts of Syria to help them restore water supplies, sanitation, health services and bakeries, a senior French diplomat, Éric Chevallier, said Thursday.

France is not supplying money for weapons or providing weapons to the rebels, but diplomats are in regular conversation with armed rebel groups to hear their requirements and to encourage them to unite and to protect minorities and democratic values. France also wanted to ensure the support of the armed rebels for the program of aid to these civilian councils, French diplomats said.

Mr. Chevallier, who is the most recent French ambassador to Syria and is in charge of Syria at the Foreign Ministry, said in an interview that President François Hollande decided to begin the initiative on Aug. 29. Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius mentioned it the next day at the U.N. Security Council, and “on Friday morning, we started to deliver this support to these revolutionary councils.”

It is “an important but imperfect beginning,” he said, to supporting civilian authorities who are filling the vacuum left when Syrian government forces are forced to withdraw. France is not promoting military action to help the rebels, as it did in Libya, partly because the opposition is so divided and because there is no U.N. Security Council mandate for the use of military force.

But France, a former colonial power in Syria, is eager to be seen as on the side of the rebels inside Syria and not just aiding refugees who have fled the country. Paris is acting more openly than other Western countries, like the United States, which has also been providing some nonlethal assistance, like radios, to the rebels.

The French program involves five local revolutionary councils in cities in three governates in eastern Syria — Aleppo, Idlib and Deir el-Zour — and covers 700,000 people. Council leaders include a former train driver and a former mathematics professor. The

French are providing money for specific projects in each city. Officials would not be precise about the amount of money involved, but it was believed to be about €5 million, or \$6 million.

The local authorities and fighters have asked for better anti-aircraft weapons, for example, to protect themselves from the Syrian Air Force. France has so far refused to provide any lethal military assistance, but diplomats said the requests were being taken seriously.

Mr. Hollande has urged the divided Syrian opposition to unite and form a provisional government, promising that France would recognize such a government as legitimate as soon as it could be established. And Mr. Fabius has been vocal in decrying the government of Bashar al-Assad as illegitimate.

Last month, visiting a refugee camp for Syrians on the Turkish border, Mr. Fabius said: “The Syrian regime should be smashed fast. After hearing the refugees and their account of the massacres of the regime, Mr. Bashar al-Assad doesn’t deserve to be on this earth.”

French diplomats have been in direct contact with the revolutionary groups, both civilian and military, but are monitoring the use of the money through Syrian nationals who have been working with the French for more than a year and who are said to be independent actors, the diplomats said.

Other countries, like Qatar and Saudi Arabia, are reported to be providing military and other aid directly to the rebels, who are made up of a number of disparate groups that are also under pressure to unite under a single command structure.

Syrian Army storms village

The Syrian Army stormed the village of Tal Shehab near the Jordanian border, opposition groups and activists said Thursday, raising fears that the forces of Mr. Assad may seek to cut off the torrent

of tens of thousands of refugees who have been fleeing across the border, David D. Kirkpatrick reported from Beirut.

The move into Tal Shehab is the latest step in a sweeping military campaign carried out by aircraft and ground troops seeking to wipe out support for the uprising against Mr. Assad around its birthplace in the nearby city of Dara’a.

Refugees and aid workers inside the Jordanian border near Dara’a have said that the opposition fighters operating as the Free Syrian Army have kept open as

many as four border crossings for residents to flee into Jordan, but Syrian soldiers frequently shoot at the refugees and occasionally succeed in reducing the nightly exodus to just 700 from peaks that reached as high as 5,000 in 36 hours.

Two opposition groups that track the violence, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, based in Britain, and the Local Coordination Committees, also reported heavy fighting in the suburbs of Damascus, where the Syrian Army is shelling neighborhoods considered havens for the opposition.

By early afternoon, the coordination committees reported 41 bodies in the Damascus area, including 23 in the neighborhood of Zamalka and 5 in the Yarmouk camp for Palestinian refugees.

Fighting continued around Aleppo in the north, Dara’a in the south and Deir el-Zour in the east. All together, the coordination committees said they had reports as of Thursday afternoon of 67 dead across Syria.

Morsi fires back at Assad as war of words escalates

BEIRUT

BY DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

President Mohamed Morsi of Egypt warned President Bashar al-Assad of Syria on Wednesday that “your time won’t be long,” as Syrian warplanes and artillery shelled the battleground city of Aleppo and opposition groups reported heavy fighting around the eastern city of Deir el-Zour along the Euphrates River.

Mr. Morsi, an Islamist who won Egypt’s first open presidential election, assailed Mr. Assad just days after the top Syrian government spokesman mockingly said that the only change in Cairo since the ouster of Hosni Mubarak was Mr. Morsi’s beard. Mr. Morsi had publicly called for nations of the region to come together to support the Syrian opposition and end the bloodshed, and the exchange dramatized the widening polarization of the region as Syria continues to spill blood and pour out refugees.

At an Arab League meeting in Cairo, Mr. Morsi urged Mr. Assad to heed the lessons of “recent history”: the overthrow of leaders in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Egypt. “There is still a chance to stop the bloodshed,” he said from the Arab League hall. “There is no room for stubbornness. Don’t listen to the voices that tempt you to stay.”

Scott Sayare in Cairo contributed reporting.

Près de 100 morts dans une vingtaine d'attentats en Irak

La condamnation à mort par contumace du sunnite Tarek Al-Hachémi attise la violence

La journée de violence du dimanche 9 septembre a ramené l'Irak aux pires heures de la guerre civile, entre 2006 à 2008. Au moins 92 personnes ont péri et plus de 350 ont été blessées dans une vingtaine d'attentats qui ont frappé plusieurs villes du sud au nord du pays, dont la capitale Bagdad. Cette vague d'attaques non revendiquées, mais qui semble avoir prioritairement visé des cibles chiïtes et gouvernementales, intervient sur fond de regain des tensions politiques et confessionnelles entre la majorité chiïte, à laquelle appartient le premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, véritable homme fort du pays, et la minorité sunnite, qui se plaint d'être de plus

en plus exclue du jeu politique.

Le même jour, le vice-président sunnite Tarek Al-Hachémi, en fuite en Turquie, a été condamné à mort par contumace, pour avoir commandité le meurtre d'une avocate et d'un général. Le mandat d'arrêt visant Tarek Al-Hachémi, l'un des plus véhéments critiques de M. Maliki, qu'il accuse de dérive dictatoriale, avait été lancé en décembre 2011, le lendemain même du départ du dernier soldat américain d'Irak. Les tensions, déjà latentes, entre le premier ministre et Irakiya, la principale formation politique représentant les sunnites d'Irak, avaient alors éclaté au grand jour. Elles n'ont cessé de s'aggraver sur fond de retour de la violence.

Tarek Al-Hachémi, soutenu par une bonne partie de l'opinion sunnite, accuse la justice d'agir sur ordre du premier ministre, qui désirerait se débarrasser de toute opposition avant les élections générales prévues en 2014 mais qui se tiendront probablement avant tant le blocage politique est complet. Il nie farouchement l'accusation qui lui est faite d'avoir financé et dirigé des escadrons de la mort responsables de l'assassinat de quelque 150 responsables irakiens. S'il est probable que Tarek Al-Hachémi a sa part de responsabilité dans des meurtres lors de la guerre civile, c'est le cas de la quasi-totalité du personnel politique irakien.

Pour les élus d'Irakiya, l'accusation n'est donc qu'un prétexte. Ils en veulent pour preuve les aveux de Tarek Al-Hachémi, mis en scène à la télévision comme au temps de Saddam Hussein, et la conduite expéditive du procès.

Résurgence d'Al-Qaïda

Ces règlements de comptes politico-confessionnels illustrent également la nature instable du système institutionnel irakien après l'invasion américaine de 2003 et huit années d'occupation. Le partage du pouvoir entre un président kurde (Jalal Talabani) flanqué de deux vice-présidents sunnite et chiïte, un premier ministre chiïte (Nouri

Al-Maliki) secondé par deux vice-premiers ministres sunnite et kurde, et un président de l'Assemblée sunnite (Oussama Al-Noujaïfi), lui-même entouré d'un chiïte et d'un kurde, ne répond à aucune règle écrite comme au Liban. Dominé par l'ambitieux Nouri Al-Maliki, le système politique irakien est encore en plein ajustement.

Résultat, la violence, après avoir connu une décline constante pendant trois ans, est repartie à la hausse. Et la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaïda, qui avait quasiment disparu, est en pleine résurgence, surfant sur le ressentiment sunnite.

Cette âpre lutte d'influence, qui a suscité un rapprochement entre les minorités sunnite et kurde contre la majorité chiïte, trouve des échos jusque chez les voisins régionaux de l'Irak, qui prennent partie pour l'un ou l'autre camp, accentuant ainsi les tendances du pays à l'éclatement. La Turquie, protectrice autoproclamée des sunnites d'Irak, refuse d'extrader Tarek Al-Hachémi. Ce dernier a d'ailleurs été reçu, le jour de sa condamnation, par le chef de la diplomatie turque Ahmet Davutoglu. Un geste qui va un peu plus détériorer les relations, déjà au plus bas, entre Bagdad et Ankara. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Le Monde

Mardi 11 septembre 2012

Le plus grand procès de la presse turque s'ouvre à Istanbul

Les médias kurdes, dont 79 employés ont été arrêtés fin 2011, sont visés par cette répression judiciaire

Istanbul
Correspondance

Ceux qui disent qu'il n'y a pas de liberté de la presse en Turquie sont des menteurs. Ceux qui disent qu'il y a de la censure en Turquie sont des menteurs», a asseuré Bülent Arınç, le bras droit du premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Même avec des arguments de ce genre, le gouvernement turc aura du mal à convaincre, alors que s'ouvre, lundi 10 septembre, devant la 15^e cour de justice criminelle d'Istanbul, le plus grand procès de l'histoire de la presse turque.

Pas moins de 44 journalistes, dont 35 sont depuis neuf mois en détention préventive, comparaisent pour «terrorisme» et «appartenance à une organisation criminelle». D'autres procès suivront dans les prochaines semaines. Au total, ce sont 79 employés de médias kurdes qui ont été arrêtés en décembre 2011. «Un véritable crime de masse envers le journa-

lisme», écrit l'historien et spécialiste de la Turquie Etienne Copeaux.

Ces professionnels travaillaient pour le quotidien *Özgür Gündem*, l'agence de presse Dicle, la revue *Demokratik Modernite...* Autant de médias réputés proches de la cause kurde, si ce n'est des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK). «C'est un procès politique», a déclaré Oguz Birinci, rédacteur en chef d'*Özgür Gündem*. Huit de ses collègues sont sous les verrous, ainsi que le propriétaire du journal, Ziya Çiçekçi.

Selon lui, le gouvernement tente, par ces procès collectifs, d'affaiblir les voix kurdes et la base de soutien au PKK en Turquie. En août, le ministre de l'intérieur Idris Naïm Sâhin a assimilé les journalistes sympathisants de la guérilla à des «terroristes», en estimant qu'il n'y avait «aucune différence entre les balles tirées [par les rebelles dans le sud-est du pays] et les articles écrits depuis Ankara».

Dimension politique

La lecture de l'acte d'accusation

montre la dimension politique de ce procès, fait remarquer la défense. Les conversations téléphoniques entre journalistes ou avec leurs sources, les courriels et les articles publiés ont parfois été retenus comme preuves de leur activité criminelle présumée.

La journaliste du quotidien de gauche *BirGün*, Zeynep Kuray, a été inculpée pour «tentative d'humiliation de l'Etat turc», pour avoir écrit sur le harcèlement sexuel au sein de la compagnie aérienne nationale Turkish Airlines. Une consœur également visée, de l'agence Dicle, avait révélé en début d'année le scandale de

la prison pour mineurs de Pozanti, où des enfants étaient systématiquement violés.

La presse kurde n'est pas la seule en cause. Ainsi le directeur du site d'information odatv.com, Soner Yalçın, et cinq de ses journalistes, opposants farouches au gouvernement, sont détenus depuis février 2011. Ils ont été accusés de tentative de complot, sur la foi,

notamment, de documents retrouvés dans leurs ordinateurs. Le Tübitak, l'équivalent turc du CNRS, est arrivé à la conclusion que ces appareils avaient été infectés par des virus qui auraient pu servir à télécharger ces documents.

Malgré ces doutes, la demande de libération de Soner Yalçın a été rejetée le 27 août. Il reste détenu dans une cellule où, selon sa description, «il y a des coupures d'eau pendant 17 heures et de la lumière 24 heures sur 24, et où je suis surveillé en permanence par deux caméras».

L'agence de presse indépendante Bianet dénombre au total 95 journalistes dans les prisons turques. Le vice-premier ministre, Bülent Arınç, reconnaît que 70 journalistes sont incarcérés, «mais seulement un ou deux sont en procès pour ce qu'ils ont écrit». ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Au Kurdistan, une caméra très subjective

Clarisse Hahn filme sa belle-famille dans un documentaire où se mêlent cruauté et affection

Kurdish Lover



Au cinéma, les belles-familles sont généralement employées à des fins comiques. Celle de Clarisse Hahn pourrait fournir une demi-douzaine de tragédies, sans parler des épopées historiques et des récits magiques. Le compagnon de la réalisatrice, Oktay Sengul (crédité comme assistant à la réalisation et collaborateur artistique, au générique du film) est issu d'une famille kurde de l'est de la Turquie. Ses parents ont émigré en France et retournent régulièrement, avec leurs enfants, dans la bourgade où s'est établi le clan, après que leur village originel eut été détruit. Au gré de ces séjours, Clarisse Hahn a filmé un portrait de famille qui témoigne d'une attention minutieuse, d'une profonde affection doublée d'une espèce d'effronterie lucide.

Il suffit de découvrir l'aieule du clan, dans la première séquence proprement dite (après un prologue qui montre des militants kurdes en exil) pour comprendre que l'album familial échappera aux normes. Cette vieille femme n'est pas de celles qui racontent des contes de fées, on l'y rencontrerait plutôt sous les traits d'une sorcière. Avare, cruelle avec sa bru, elle tourmente toute sa descendance par ses caprices.

Dans l'espace confiné de la maison, Clarisse Hahn capte les courants qui agitent cette famille : les jalousies, les frustrations, l'inégalité insurmontable entre hommes et femmes. Et aussi, et surtout les tourments de la guerre et de l'exil.

Rien de tout ça n'est dit, tout est filmé, mis en scène, presque sans commentaire. Le film ne dit rien, par exemple, des déplacements de population. Si bien qu'à moins d'avoir une connaissance précise de l'histoire et des us et coutumes kurdes, on ira de questionnement en étonnement. Jusqu'à l'émerveillement.

La réalisatrice privilégie les moments de violence et d'incertitude. Ils vont de la modernité, d'une rupture sur Skype, au sacrifice d'un mouton que l'on dépèce. La rupture numérique n'est pourtant pas si moderne, puisqu'elle est consommée au vu et au su de tout le clan, qui ne prend pas la pei-

ne de sortir de la pièce où l'un des fils se débat avec les exigences de sa petite amie d'Europe de l'Ouest. Et les quartiers fumants du mouton que l'on vient de tailler finiront dans des seaux en plastique fabriqués en Chine.

Habité par des êtres

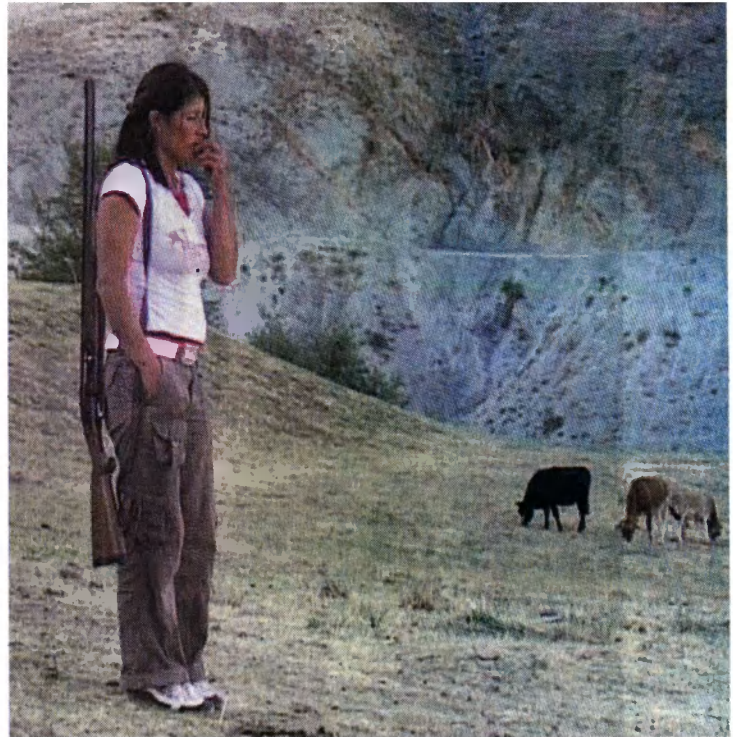
Rien n'est simple : les soldats turcs qui patrouillent dans le village, éléments d'une armée qui mène une lutte d'éradication contre les séparatistes, sont de sympathiques appelés. Et si le nom d'Allah est souvent invoqué dans la conversation, Clarisse Hahn filme plus de rites magiques que de visites à la mosquée. Surtout, chacune de ces situations est habitée par des êtres que le regard de la cinéaste transforme en personnages de cinéma. Les efforts maladroits de l'un pour sortir de son célibat font une petite comédie villageoise pendant que la persécution de la bru par l'aieule

le tourne bientôt au huis clos étouffant.

Reste la présence mystérieuse du couple que forment la cinéaste et son compagnon. Même s'il peut se prévaloir de tenir le rôle-titre, ce dernier reste une figure voilée, dont on devine à peine quelques traits. On en apprend presque plus sur l'auteur, souvent interpellée derrière la caméra par les personnages qu'elle filme avec une insistance que l'on sent parfois pesante pour ses sujets. Cette alternance entre contemplation et violence dans la manière de filmer s'accorde avec la vie chaotique de ce pays qui refuse de disparaître sans jamais être né, le Kurdistan. ■

THOMAS SOTINEL

Documentaire français de Clarisse Hahn (1h38).



Le portrait sans manichéisme d'une famille kurde de l'est de la Turquie.



Diplomats trade barbs over Syria

CAIRO

Assad spokesman assails France; U.S.-Russia talks fail to bridge divide

BY DAVID D. KIRKPATRICK

The Syrian government accused France of "schizophrenia" on Sunday for pledging to support a peaceful resolution to the uprising challenging President Bashar al-Assad and simultaneously aiding the armed groups driving it.

Days after the French government said that it would provide humanitarian and reconstruction assistance directly to the rebels controlling five Syrian cities, a spokesman for the Syrian government accused France of undermining the first trip to the region by the new United Nations envoy charged with negotiating a peace, Lakhdar Brahimi.

"On the one hand, it supports Brahimi's mission, while at the same time it makes statements demonstrating that it supports the militarization of the crisis in Syria," the Syrian spokesman, Jihad Makdissi, said of the French government in an interview with The Associated Press. "The only way to make Brahimi's mission a success is the cooperation of all parties to enable him to bring about calmness and then the political process."

Western leaders and the Syrian rebels say the Assad government expressed similar support for peace proposals of the previous envoy, Kofi Annan, but in fact failed to curb its military campaign to wipe out the opposition. Mr. Annan, the former U.N. secretary general, quit in frustration. And the Assad government has since ruled out talks with the Syrian rebels, dismissing

them as foreign agents acting against Syria.

Mr. Annan had failed to bridge a sharp division among the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council. Russia and China have vetoed three Western resolutions regarding Syria, but with the violence worsening, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton had hoped Russia would show more flexibility at the Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting in Vladivostok, Russia. But she was rebuffed.

"We haven't seen eye to eye with Russia on Syria," Mrs. Clinton said Sunday at the conclusion of the meeting before returning to the United States. "That may continue."

The Russian foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, publicly rebuked her on Syria, as well as on Iran.

"Our American partners have a prevailing tendency to threaten and increase pressure, adopt ever more sanctions against Syria and against Iran," Mr. Lavrov said. "Russia is fundamentally against this, since for resolving problems you have to engage the countries you are having issues with and not isolate them."

Inside Syria, air assaults, shelling and street battles continued around the country, including in the battleground of Aleppo, where clashes between the Syrian military and rebel fighters burst a main pipe that delivered drinking water to hundreds of thousands of residents Saturday.

The sudden water shortage was the latest pinch in a particularly acute humanitarian crisis in Aleppo, the largest city in Syria, that was brought on by more than a month of street fighting and weeks of air attacks. A witness and two opposition groups that track the violence said that heavy shelling from Syrian helicopters appeared to have rup-

tured the water pipe; The A.P. reported that a Syrian official blamed rebel sabotage.

The opposition groups, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the Local Coordination Committees, reported that water flooded into the neighborhoods of Al Midan and Bustan al-Basha in the north of the city. Activists distributed video images of brown water

"Our American partners have a prevailing tendency to threaten and increase pressure."

coursing over curbs and flooding basements as residents carrying children or weapons in their arms waded past.

In Paris, a French doctor who just returned from a two-week medical mission to a rebel-controlled hospital in Aleppo said he was surprised by the number of militants from outside Syria who had joined the fight in the goal of establishing an Islamist government, one of the concerns that has deterred Western governments from supplying more muscular aid to the armed opposition.

The doctor, Jacques Bérès, a 71-year-old surgeon who is known for missions to war zones and co-founded the humanitarian group Médecins Sans Frontières, said in an interview with Reuters that he had treated about 40 wounded patients a day and that 60 percent were rebel fighters, and half of the fighters had come from outside Syria.

"It's really something strange to see," he said. "They are directly saying that they aren't interested in Bashar al-Assad's fall, but are thinking about how to take power afterwards and set up an Islamic state with Shariah law to become part of the world emirate."

"Some of them were French and were completely fanatical about the future."

Dr. Bérès said the high proportion of foreign Islamist fighters was a sharp contrast to his impressions on earlier trips to Syria this spring, to makeshift clinics in the cities of Idlib and Homs.

Activists and rebel fighters interviewed over the Internet consistently describe far lower numbers of foreign fighters and Islamist militants among the opposition, and the few reported interviews with Islamists among the fighters have suggested little agreement on what kind of Islamist government they envision.

Dr. Bérès said that the Syrian government bombing appeared indiscriminate and that the death toll was far higher than reports had previously indicated; those reports have put the number of dead in the Syrian conflict at more than 21,000. "What people have to know is that the number of dead is a far cry from what's been announced," he told Reuters. "I'd say you have to multiply by two to get the real figure."



Free Syrian Army troops carrying a wounded rebel in Aleppo over the weekend. A water main supplying hundreds of thousands of residents ruptured as a result of the fighting.

Syria funeral is focus of Kurdish anger

A bombing in Aleppo that killed a woman, two of her children and their young cousin triggers outrage among Kurds at a village funeral and throughout the region.

EFRIN, Syria — The mourners chanted, "Long live Kurdistan!" as the doleful cortege moved slowly toward the hillside cemetery, past the olive groves and pomegranate orchards.

Funerals have long become settings for political theater in strife-ridden Syria, where each side has tried to turn burials of war dead into highly public affirmations of their adversary's barbarity.

But the procession Friday through the village of Basuta wasn't just another instance of a funeral becoming a rallying cry against the government of President Bashar Assad.

In this case, the victims — a woman, two of her children and their young cousin, all killed Thursday when bombs fell on an Aleppo neighborhood — were members of Syria's Kurdish community, the nation's largest ethnic minority.

The deaths triggered widespread outrage in the region, a vast expanse of heavily farmed valleys and rocky highlands dotted with Roman-era ruins and other ancient sites.

"This was a criminal act," declared Said Najjar, an official of the Kurdish National Council, who attended the funeral along with other Kurdish leaders. "It is proof of the regime's criminality."

Whether the bombing would push Kurds into a more active role in the almost 18-month rebellion remained unclear.

Some Kurdish leaders have avoided taking sides in Syria's raging conflict. Instead, they have seized on the state's debilitated status to gain de facto control of Kurdish areas, including this sprawling township — where Assad's administration left months ago and Kurdish groups have filled the void.

Several officials of the most powerful and best-armed Kurdish faction, the Democratic Union Party (known as the PYD, its Kurdish initials), said Friday that the group was committed to maintaining its "neutral" stance in Syria's civil conflict. The PYD has had an uneasy relationship with the rebel Free Syrian Army, dominated by Sunni Arabs, though the Kurdish party has denied charges of collaborating with the Assad government.

At the funeral, a contingent of camouflage-clad Free Syrian Army fighters were



Kurds at the martyrs cemetery in Efrin condemning Friday's massacre in Aleppo by Syrian security forces.

among those who paid their respects.

"We are one people, Kurdish and Arab," a rebel who gave his name as Abu Abdo, 32, said afterward.

He and several comrades had come from the front-line battle in Aleppo's Salahuddin district, they said.

One PYD official, however, questioned whether the Kurds may have been unintended victims of wayward bombs. "This has to be investigated," said the official, who like others interviewed declined to be named.

The four died in an aerial bombing strike on the Sheik Maqsood neighborhood in Aleppo, according to Kurdish authorities. The district is home to many migrants from Kurdish villages in Aleppo province.

The four buried here Friday were among at least 21 killed and 38 injured in the bombing, officials said. Funerals were also held in other area villages.

For those gathered for the public funeral, there seemed to be no question that the bombing was a deliberate strike on a Kurdish civilian enclave.

"We will take revenge!" mourners declared in one of a number of rhythmic chants assailing Assad's government.

Women wearing head scarves and dressed in traditional Kurdish long dresses ululated in grief. Many knew the family and couldn't hold back tears.

"None of us could believe this happened," said a woman who described herself as a relative of the deceased mother, identified as Amina Mohamad Hassan, 35. "We heard that there had been a bombing near the Marouf mosque in the neighborhood and were so worried. Then we learned it was Amina and her family. That was shocking."

The woman's dead children were identified as Jowan, 7, and Shirin, 3. The cousin wasn't identified.

The father, described as a laborer who has worked as a shoemaker and taxi driver, was seriously injured and remained hospitalized in Aleppo, said friends and relatives of the family. The couple's two other children also survived.

A man who gave his name as Mustafa said he witnessed the attack and helped bring victims to the hospital. He said a government aircraft was responsible. The Syrian military has used aircraft to devastating effect in their battle to push back rebels in Aleppo.

The first bomb struck about 6:20 p.m. Thursday, hitting a four-story apartment building where the family lived, Mustafa said. Then, a few minutes later, as volunteers struggled to remove victims from the smoldering rubble, another bomb exploded on the street outside.

"People who tried to rescue people were killed by the second bomb," Mustafa said.

The four coffins, draped in Kurdish flags, were taken to the cemetery in pickup trucks and then carried to the graves. Loudspeakers played songs celebrating Kurdish "martyrs" of past struggles. A speaker who was no more than 12 years old used a microphone to lead anti-government chants.

Beneath a blazing sun, the four victims were lowered into their final resting place, amid the wails of loved ones and volleys of ceremonial gunfire from rebel fighters positioned on the hillside above.

□ □ □

Kurdish President visits Domiz camp

Barzani hails Erbil Agreement as positive and unifying

The Kurdish Globe

Kurdistan Region's President Massoud Barzani visited the Domiz Refugee Camp in Duhok, where the displaced Syrian Kurds are settled, on Sunday, 2nd September, 2012.

President Barzani met with the refugee families and told them that they are not guests but rather in their own homes, Kurdistan.

He also promised that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) will be doing its best in assisting them, reassuring them that they are in safe hands and hoping that in a very near future they can return to their homes with dignity and self-esteem.

Kurdish President Massoud Barzani talks to displaced Syrian Kurds at the Domiz Camp in Duhok, September 2, 2012./krg.org



Barzani said that in case the situation fails to return to normal by winter time, the KRG and the Duhok Governorate will make other arrangements for them and provide them with all the basic and required services.

Regarding the future of Syria, Barzani said that the

Syrian nation will make the decision by itself and that Kurdistan Region will respect that decision. But what is important for the Kurdistan Region is the future of the Kurds in Syria who are still deprived of Syrian citizenship and basic human rights. Hence the existence of a

democratic alternative is in the interest of both Syria and the Kurdish nation. The country needs to have a strong guarantee for their future, and for this purpose the Region is attempting with foreign nations and countries to provide this guarantee.

The Kurdish President also reiterated that unifying the Kurdish nation is a sacred issue and the Erbil Agreement signed by the Syrian parties is a positive and valuable step for unifying their actions and efforts for the purpose of guaranteeing a bright future for the Kurds in Syria. Hence there should in no way be any conflicts and disagreements among them. All of them should work for this future and have a strong relationship with the other nations, groups and components of the Syrian society. ♦

REUTERS

Kurdish oil trade with Turkey rising, more to come

KHOR MOR, Iraq, September 9, 2012 - By Peg Mackey

KURDISTAN is taking its first steps towards gaining independence from Baghdad in the sale of its oil and gas with a convoy of trucks taking the condensate liquid fuel bi-products of a remote gas field directly into Turkey.

At least 15 trucks a day are loading up with high quality condensate at Khor Mor's gas plant and then trundling down a bumpy road to start the two-day journey to Mersin on the Turkish Mediterranean.

In return, Turkey is trucking back small quantities of diesel fuel and kerosene to use in the autonomous region's power plants.

"It's a very simple but symbolic start to direct oil trade between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Turkey - and there will be more to come," said an official familiar with the barter-type operation between private companies.

"Neither side is thinking about stopping."

But Baghdad wants them to. It believes Iraq's central government has the sole right to export oil and gas produced throughout Iraq and says deliveries by truck from Kurdistan across the border into Turkey are illegal.

Ankara is meanwhile encouraging the swap, which kicked off with five tankers in July. And Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz says the volume could gradually build up to 200 trucks a day - roughly 40,000 barrels per day (bpd).

Industry sources say the KRG is now supplying only Khor Mor con-

densate, but crude oil from other fields will also be exported.

"Turkey believes that Kurdistan's export of oil and gas does not run contrary to Iraq's constitution," said the official, who asked not to be named. "And Turkey is a logical exit route for the KRG," he added.

The KRG's oil can be shipped to world markets through a Baghdad-controlled pipeline from Kirkuk to the Turkish port of Ceyhan.

But this has been a stop-start process over the years due to a long-running feud between Baghdad and Arbil, the KRG's seat of government, over oil and land rights.

The KRG halted exports in April in a dispute over payments from Baghdad to companies working in the region. It restarted them in August, but warned it would cut shipments by mid-September if there was no progress on payments.

For now about 120,000 barrels a day of KRG oil is being exported through the Iraq-Turkey pipeline and the KRG's energy minister Ashti Hawrami says the region's oilfields could ship up to 200,000 bpd. The central government exports roughly 2.4 million bpd, with much of that coming from Iraq's southern oilfields.

At around 3,000 bpd, the condensate flow from Kurdistan's Khor Mor field to Turkey is a mere trickle. But if it's sold on the world market from Mersin, this very valuable product could fetch over \$100 a barrel, say oil market sources.

Khor Mor - developed by the UAE's Crescent Petroleum and Dana Gas, alongside Austria's OMV and Mol of Hungary - supplies gas for power stations in the Kurdistan region, produces liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and pumps out up to 17,000 bpd of condensates.

Arbil is also routing some of the condensate volume to Khurmala, where it is exported through the central government's Iraq-Turkey pipeline system, industry sources say.

Technicians at Khor Mor declined to comment on the final destination of the condensate because Kurdistan's Ministry of Natural Resources is in charge of the marketing effort.

⇒ Kurdistan began its crude-for-products trade with Turkey in order to help plug a product shortfall it says was created by Baghdad. It receives only 15,000 bpd of fuel from southern Iraq, far below its 140,000 bpd allocation, according to the Kurdistan government. But Turkey's delivery has been slower than hoped, with the first products crossing the border at the end of last month, say industry sources. The process got bogged down in bureaucracy. Ankara has increasingly courted Iraqi Kurds as its relations with the Shi'ite-led central government in Baghdad have soured. Turkey

is a major investment and trading partner for Iraq, especially for Kurdistan.

With open support from Ankara, Kurdistan has plans to begin exporting its oil along a new 1 million bpd pipeline to the Turkish border by August 2013. Production from the region is expected to rise towards the 1 million mark by then.

"The KRG needs the infrastructure - they can't have trucks bumper-to-bumper on the roads," says an oil industry source in Arbil. ●

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL SEPTEMBER 7, 2012

Attacks Target Shiite Worshippers in Northern Iraq

By SAM DAGHER

KIRKUK—Eight Iraqis were killed and 88 others wounded on Friday in bombings targeting three Shiite Muslim houses of worship in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, Iraqi police officials said.

The attacks happened during the busy Friday weekly prayers. The religious institutions that were hit are all affiliated to

Iraq's ruling Shiite political parties, including the movement of anti-American cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, residents said.

The worst attack involved two improvised explosive devices and a car bomb outside a Shiite house of worship affiliated to the Dawa Party of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

There were no immediate claims of responsibility.

The attacks come amid a fresh campaign by the al Qaeda-linked group known as the Islamic State of Iraq against the country's Shiite majority and the government's pillars of power, including the army and security forces.

Tensions also remain high in the oil rich city of Kirkuk, which is contested between the Shiite-led government in Baghdad and the self-ruled Kurdish region of northern Iraq. Kurds are blocking forays by Baghdad to expand its military grip in Kirkuk and other contested areas in the north. ■

Hurriyet
DailyNews.com

September / 10 / 2012

Erdoğan shifts to a harder Kurdish policy

MURAT YETKİN

Either stay in the Parliament and earn respect, or go to the Kandil Mountains, Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan challenged the Kurdish problem-focused Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) members of Parliament on Sunday, in a speech to the provincial chairmen of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Parti).

A range located along the Iranian border of Iraq, Kandil is a byword in Turkish politics for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), which has had its headquarters and military camps there for nearly twenty years, from where it has carried out an armed campaign that has claimed more than 40,000 lives in the last three decades.

For some time, Erdoğan has been accusing the BDP parliamentarians of being "tools" and the "extended arms" of the PKK, lacking any initiative independent of the PKK and failing to clearly condemn the PKK for its acts of terror. In his Sunday speech, he escalated his rhetoric against the BDP: "You will either serve the people who have voted for you, or serve your armed masters," he said.

Erdoğan has become more furious

with the BDP since the PKK escalated its acts of terror in July. The last example must be painful for Erdoğan, with his provincial chairmen gathering in Ankara with one absence this time. Mecit Tarhan, the AK Parti chairman for Hakkari province, which borders both Iraq and Iran and which contains both Şemdinli and Beytüşşebap – the site of the latest PKK attacks – is currently being held as a hostage by the PKK. When main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu said that Tarhan's brother had asked for his assistance in securing a release, Erdoğan also called the brother and later denied that the family had asked for the CHP's help.

The Syrian situation is another reason for the hardening of the Turkish government's policy on the Kurdish issue. Some Syrian towns and border posts on the Turkish border are under the control of militia groups related to the Kurdish-origin Democratic Union Party (PYD). The PYD is parallel to the PKK, like the PJAK in Iran. Turkish intelligence believes that Bashar al-Assad's forces have left these posts for the PYD in order to cause a further pain in Turkey's neck.

What Erdoğan meant when he said "either Parliament, or Kandil" is a direct

threat to the BDP to strip them of their parliamentary immunity, which might well lead to trials, them being thrown out of Parliament, and ending up in jail. Referring to the group of BDP members of Parliament who were photographed embracing and saluting a group of militants (who are wanted by security forces on suspicion of a number of killings) during a road block a few weeks ago, Erdoğan said he thought "the judiciary would consider that a warrant of arrest."

"If the judiciary does what is necessary, we will do what is necessary in Parliament," he said, implying that the necessary vote would be taken in Parliament following a legal probe. Here, he also took the risk of being accused of intervening in judicial affairs by the opposition.

The Turkish government of 1994 walked a similar path, kicking a number of Kurdish deputies out of Parliament and into jail, which only resulted in an escalation of the clashes-operations cycle. There is now a totally different set of national and international circumstances, and the chances of a peaceful solution to the Kurdish problem is nowhere in sight, at least not in the short run. □

Sectarian fury, Syrian turmoil pressure Iraq's Maliki

By Patrick Markey | Reuters

BAGHDAD (Reuters) A fugitive vice president condemned to death and rallying opposition to Iraq's "sectarian" prime minister, fresh bloodshed in the streets and the entire Middle East divided by religion over the war across the border in Syria - Nuri al-Maliki has no easy task in holding his government, and his nation, together.

The Iraqi premier was denounced on Monday by Sunni Muslim Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi as a conspirator and oppressor, in league with fellow Shi'ites in Iran and driven by religious hatred to engineer the death sentence handed down on Hashemi on Sunday for murders committed by sectarian death squads.

The verdict against a mainstream leader of Iraq's once-dominant Sunni minority was accompanied by bombings and attacks on Shi'ite targets that killed about 115 people, making it one of the bloodiest days since U.S. troops pulled out in December. Maliki's government was quick to blame Sunni insurgents.

Hashemi, speaking from exile in Turkey, called for "calm" but firm opposition to a premier whose efforts to stitch together an administration uniting Shi'ites, Sunnis and Kurds have looked distinctly ragged since an arrest warrant for the vice president was issued the very day after the Americans left.

"Yesterday Prime Minister Maliki and his ... judiciary concluded the final phase of the theatrical campaign against me using a kangaroo court," Hashemi told a news conference in Ankara. "My people, don't give Maliki and those who stand behind him the chance ... They want to make this a sectarian conflict."

"Oppose his conspiracies and provocation calmly."

Iraq's domestic troubles pitch the majority Shi'ites, long oppressed until U.S. forces deposed Saddam Hussein in 2003, against Saddam's fellow Sunni Arabs, as well as a substantial ethnic Kurdish minority. Tensions are particularly high over the distribution of Iraq's potentially massive oil wealth.

But the country of 32 million also straddles the region's ethnic and sectarian faultline across which the Sunni, Western-allied leaders of most other Arab states confront Shi'ite, non-Arab Iran and allies including Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

MALIKI IN CONTROL

For many Iraqi Sunni leaders, the Hashemi case was a clear example of



An Iraqi soldier keeps guard near the site of bomb attacks in Ur district in northeastern Baghdad September 10, 2012. A series of bombs ripped through mainly Shi'ite Baghdad districts on Sunday ...more after Iraq's fugitive Vice President Tareq al-Hashemi was sentenced to death, ending one of the bloodiest days of the year with more than 100 killed across the country. REUTERS

political manipulation of the judiciary by a Shi'ite leader who they say controls the security forces by keeping a personal grip on the vital defense and interior ministries.

Since the fall of Saddam nine years ago and the rise of Shi'ite leaders in U.S.-sponsored elections, many Iraqi Sunnis feel they have been sidelined. Sunni politicians accuse Maliki of failing to fulfill deals to share power, a charge Maliki's backers dismiss, pointing to Sunnis in key posts.

"This will not complicate or destroy the political process," Saad al-Muttalibi, a leading member of Maliki's State of Law coalition, said of the death sentence on Hashemi. "We refuse to convert this into a political issue. This is a judicial issue."

Maliki has already shown himself to be a tough adversary.

A former Arabic teacher who worked his way up the ranks of the Shi'ite Islamist Dawa party, he has proved adept at playing Iraq's factions against one another, and juggling the tricky balance of the region's diplomacy.

After Hashemi fled the country earlier this year, Maliki survived a short-lived boycott of parliament and the cabinet by the Sunni-backed Iraqiya party, which ended up more fractured, eventually strengthening the Shi'ite leader's hand.

More recently, Maliki exploited splits in Kurdish and Sunni blocs to defeat an attempt by opponents to join forces with some of his Shi'ite allies to force a vote of no-confidence.

Although Iraq is much quieter than at the peak of violence in 2006-07, Sunday's attacks followed a pattern that has emerged since the U.S. troops withdrew at the end of last year: every three or four weeks bombers strike on a massive scale across the country, killing scores of people in coordinated

attacks.

Iraq authorities quickly blamed Sunni insurgents seeking "sectarian pursuits and sedition" for Sunday's attacks that hit security forces and cafes and mosques in Shi'ite districts.

No group claimed responsibility, but Iraqi security forces are battling a lethal mix of Sunni Islamist fighters, including a local al Qaeda wing and former members of Saddam's Baath party, all determined to undermine the Shi'ite-led government.

SYRIAN DIMENSION

While weakened by years of fighting the U.S. forces, al Qaeda's local wing, the Islamic State of Iraq, has begun to benefit from funds and morale as Sunni Islamists have been crossing into neighboring Syria to fight.

"The terrorists may be trying to exacerbate any inter-communal tensions," said John Drake, a security analyst with AKE Group consultancy. "It doesn't show that the terrorists are in league with Hashemi, but it is very likely that they are trying to capitalize on the sectarian sensitivity of his case."

The insurgents aim to tap broader disaffection among Iraqis impatient with government failures to restore full security and even basic services like electricity, more than nine years after the U.S. invasion.

A larger question mark over the Iraq's longer-term stability may lie next door in Syria, where Sunnis are the majority and Sunni Islamists fighters are the core of the insurgency against Assad, whose Alawite minority is an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam and whose family has long been an ally of Shi'ite Iran.

Maliki is also close to Iran, which like Syria gave him refuge after he fled persecution under Saddam, and he has resisted calls from Sunni Arab leaders to take a harder line against Assad. ■

► Prime minister since 2006, Maliki has relied on Tehran's help to shore up domestic Shi'ite support behind him. Tehran and Damascus both backed his fragile new government after an inconclusive parliamentary election in 2010.

Syria is delicate matter for Maliki. Iraqi and Iranian Shi'ite leaders fear a collapse of Assad's government could splinter Syria along sectarian lines, and eventually lead to the rise of a hardline Sunni regime hostile to Baghdad.

When U.S. forces fought al-Qaeda

and Sunni Islamists after the 2003 invasion, Iraqi leaders criticized Damascus for sheltering insurgents who slipped across the border. Baghdad worries former Baathists and other Sunni Islamists could again use Syria as a haven to strike at Iraq under a new regime.

Violence is already washing back from Syria into Iraq. Baghdad officials say Sunni Islamist fighters are crossing into Syria from Iraqi territory, and Syrian rockets hit the Iraqi border town

of al-Qaim this week, killing a young girl.

Along the border, in Iraqi provinces that are a stronghold for Sunnis, many tribes share common ties and sympathies with their Syrian Sunni brethren over the frontier.

"Iraq will have a storm," said Sheikh Hatim Sulaiman, a chieftain of one of Anbar province's largest tribes. "In a few months Syria's crisis will likely end. And what comes next will be difficult for Iraq." ♦

the guardian

september 10, 2012

Iraq's fugitive vice president convicted as attacks kill 92



Citizens and security forces inspect the scene of a car bomb attack in Kirkuk, 290 kilometers (180 miles) north of Baghdad, Iraq, Friday, Sept 7, 2012.



Iraq's Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi speaks to the media as he leaves a meeting with Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, unseen, in Ankara, Turkey, Sunday, Sept. 9, 2012.

By Lara Jakes / Associated Press

BAGHDAD: Iraq's fugitive Sunni vice president was sentenced Sunday to death by hanging on charges he masterminded death squads against rivals.

His trial has fueled sectarian tensions in the country. Underscoring the instability, insurgents unleashed an onslaught of bombings and shootings across Iraq on Sunday, killing at least 92 people in one of the deadliest days this year.

It's unlikely that the attacks in 13 cities were all timed to coincide with the afternoon verdict, which capped a monthslong case against Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi, a longtime foe of Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Still, taken together, the violence and verdict could energize Sunni insurgents bent on returning Iraq to the brink of civil war by target-

ing Shiites and undermining the government.

Al-Hashemi fled to Turkey in the months after the Shiite-led government accused him of playing a role in 150 bombings, assassinations and other attacks from 2005 to 2011 — years when the country was mired in retaliatory sectarian violence that followed the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that ousted Saddam Hussein's Sunni regime. Most of the attacks were allegedly carried out by al-Hashemi's bodyguards and other employees, and largely targeted government officials, security forces and Shiite pilgrims.

The vice president declined to comment about the verdict after meeting with the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu in Ankara. He said he would "tackle this issue in a statement" in coming hours.

The politically charged case — which was announced the day after U.S. troops with-

drew from the country last December — sparked a government crisis and fueled Sunni Muslim and Kurdish resentment against al-Maliki, whom critics say is monopolizing power.

Violence has ebbed significantly, but insurgents continue to stage high-profile bombings and shooting rampages. Al-Qaida's Iraq branch has promised a comeback in predominantly Sunni areas from which it was routed by the U.S. and its local allies after sectarian fighting peaked in 2007.

"These attacks show al-Qaida's ability to hit any place in Iraq and at any time," said Ali Salem, 40, an elementary school teacher in Baghdad. "The lack of security could take us back to zero."

The worst violence on Sunday struck the capital, where bombs pounded a half-dozen neighborhoods — both Sunni and Shiite — throughout the day. But the deadliest attacks in Baghdad hit Shiite areas Sunday evening, hours after the al-Hashemi verdict was announced. In all, 42 people were killed in the capital and 120 wounded, according to police and hospital officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information. □

Dozens of Kurdish journalists face terrorism charges in Turkey

Human rights groups say country's biggest ever media trial is attempt to intimidate press

Constanze Letsch, Istanbul and Luke Harding

The biggest media trial in Turkey's history has begun in what human rights groups say is an attempt by the government to intimidate the press and punish pro-Kurdish activists.

A total of 44 Kurdish journalists appeared in court in Istanbul on various terrorism charges, including accusations that they have supported the KCK, an illegal pan-Kurdish movement that includes the PKK, the armed Kurdistan Workers' party. Of those, 36 have been in pre-trial detention since December.

The hearing was delayed after the defendants made an attempt to defend themselves in Kurdish, their mother language, a request denied by the judge. Twelve of the defendants are said to have led a terrorist organisation and 32 are accused of being members of a terrorist organisation. Prosecutors have demanded prison sentences ranging from seven and a half to 22 and a half years.

The contentious case comes amid an escalation of Turkey's 28-year-old Kurdish insurgency, with renewed clashes between the PKK and Turkish security forces. Over the past 14 months, the country has seen its worst violence since the PKK's leader, Abdullah Öcalan, was captured and jailed in 1999. Since June 2011, at least 708 people have been killed, according to the Brussels-based International Crisis Group. The victims include 405 PKK fighters, 209 soldiers and police, and 84 civilians, it said.

Meanwhile, a peaceful initiative by Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and his ruling Justice and Development party (AKP) to improve Kurdish rights has fizzled out. Instead, thousands of non-violent Kurdish politicians and sympathisers have been arrested and charged with terrorism offences. The journalists are the latest group to go on trial, activists say.

"This is bad for Turkey's international image," said Hüseyin Bağcı, of Ankara's Middle East Technical University's international relations department. Bağcı described Erdogan's Kurdish political initiative – unpopular with many Turks – as dead, but said the government remained divided over how to deal with the worsening insurgency, with no clear strategy.

Human rights groups have repeatedly criticised the Turkish government for the prosecution of pro-Kurdish politicians, activists and journalists who exercise their



Kurdish women protest against the trial of 44 journalists in Istanbul. Photograph: Bulent Kilic / AFP / Getty Images

right to freedom of expression.

Andrew Gardner, Turkey researcher of Amnesty International, said: "[This] prosecution forms a pattern where critical writing, political speeches and participation at peaceful demonstrations are used as evidence of terrorism offences."

More than 100 journalists are currently in jail in Turkey, more than in Iran or China. Many of them work for Kurdish media outlets. About 800 more face charges and many journalists have been fired or have quit their jobs because of direct or indirect pressure from the Turkish government.

In a recent speech, the interior minister, Idris Naim Sahin, compared writers and journalists to PKK fighters, saying that there was "no difference between the bullets fired in [the Kurdish south-east] and the articles written in Ankara".

The government maintains that none of the journalists on trial have been arrested for their work as members of the press. However, the 800-page indictment includes charges for "denigrating the state" against one journalist who wrote about sexual harassment at Turkish Airlines. Özlem Agus, a reporter for the pro-Kurdish Tigris News Agency (DIHA), was singled out for bringing to light sexual abuse of minors in the Pozanti prison in Adana. Other offending articles include interviews with the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy party (BDP) leader Sebahattin Demirtas, and reports on casualties in the fights between the PKK and Turkish armed forces.

"All of the defendants are on trial for doing their jobs," the defence lawyer Meral Danis Bektas said. "A free press and freedom of expression are cornerstones of democracy. Without them, democratic political participation becomes impossible. Erdogan now openly threatens journalists or dictates [what to write]. This attitude creates a terrible climate for press freedom."

A report by the International Crisis Group to be published on Tuesday blames

both sides for the worsening situation. It says the government needs to "reform oppressive laws that jail legitimate Kurdish politicians" and to "make amends" for the excessive behaviour of its security forces. But it adds: "The Kurdish movement, including PKK leaders, must abjure terrorist attacks and publicly commit to realistic political goals. Above all, politicians on all sides must legalise the rights most of Turkey's Kurds seek, including mother-language education, an end to discriminatory laws, fair political representation and more decentralisation."

The report also claims Ankara has "zig-zagged" on its commitments to Kurds' rights. At times it has given "positive signals" including scheduling optional Kurdish lesson in schools. "At others, they appear intent on crushing the PKK militarily, minimise the true extent of fighting, fail to sympathise with Kurdish civilian casualties, openly show their deep distrust of the Kurdish movement, do nothing to stop the arrest of thousands of non-violent activists and generally remain complacent as international partners mute their criticism at a time of Middle East turmoil."

Since 2009, 8,000 pro-Kurdish politicians, lawyers, academics, writers and members of the media have been arrested on terrorism charges.

The new media trial "is clearly political," said the investigative journalist Ertugrul Mavioglu, who faced terrorism charges, dropped last December, for interviewing the KCK's leader Murat Karayilan, who operates from a base in northern Iraq.

Mavioglu said: "The government wants to set an example, it wants to intimidate. Journalists are being told: 'There are limits on what you are allowed to say.'"

• This article was amended on 11 September to correct the English translation of the BDP's name, from the Freedom and Democracy party to the Peace and Democracy party □

Le nucléaire iranien perturbe la relation israélo-américaine

Des révélations sur un raid israélien de 2007 en Syrie relativisent l'influence de Washington

Jérusalem
Correspondant

S'il s'agissait d'un jeu de rôle entre Israéliens et Américains pour convaincre l'Iran et la communauté internationale que l'Etat juif est de plus en plus enclin à recourir à l'option militaire contre les installations nucléaires de Téhéran, la mise en scène serait parfaite. Mais tout porte à croire que la cacophonie qui se développe depuis quelques jours reflète une dissension croissante entre le président américain, Barack Obama, et le premier ministre israélien, Benyamin Nétanyahou.

Dimanche 9 septembre, ce dernier assure que les deux pays discutent de la fixation de « lignes rouges » que l'Iran ne devra pas franchir dans son programme nucléaire, sauf à risquer une attaque militaire contre ses installa-

tions. Cette déclaration rassure un peu : lorsqu'on envisage de fixer à un adversaire des « lignes rouges », c'est qu'une attaque n'est pas imminente.

Mais dès dimanche soir, la secrétaire d'Etat américaine, Hillary Clinton, met les choses au point : « nous ne fixons pas de dates limites » [à l'Iran]. Les négociations, ajoute-t-elle, « sont de loin la meilleure approche ». Lundi 10 septembre, la porte-parole du département d'Etat revient à la charge : le président Obama « a dit de manière univoque qu'il ne laisserait pas l'Iran obtenir l'arme nucléaire (...) mais il n'est pas utile d'établir des dates butoirs, des lignes rouges ».

A Jérusalem, ces mises au point sont ressenties comme des camouflés. Un représentant officiel réagit vertement, estimant que ce type de déclarations ne peut que « faciliter la tâche de l'Iran ».

Enfin, mardi 11 septembre,

M. Nétanyahou choisit de souligner les divergences israélo-américaines : « Le monde dit à Israël d'attendre, parce qu'il y a encore du temps, mais je pose la question : Attendre quoi ? Jusqu'à quand ? Ceux qui, dans la communauté internationale, refusent de fixer une ligne rouge à l'Iran n'ont pas le droit moral d'en fixer une à Israël. »

La menace de recourir à l'option militaire est implicite, mais parfaitement claire. Elle traduit l'exaspération du premier ministre israélien face à ce qu'il considère comme le dangereux attentisme de Washington. Il n'est pas exclu

passés du feu vert des Etats-Unis. Il en a été de même pour la destruction du réacteur syrien d'Al-Kibar, le 5 septembre 2007.

Dans la dernière édition du magazine américain *The New Yorker*, le journaliste David Makovsky apporte des informations inédites sur les circonstances de cette opération, jamais reconnue par l'Etat juif. Il explique que le Mossad, le service de renseignement extérieur, a obtenu la preuve de l'existence de ce réacteur en cambriolant le domicile, à Vienne, d'Ibrahim Othman, chef du service syrien de l'énergie atomique.

Les agents israéliens ont rapporté des photos, qui ont été montrées aux dirigeants américains. Mais le président George Bush, échaudé par la polémique sur les prétendues armes de destruction massive de Saddam Hussein, ne s'est pas laissé convaincre, du moins pas suffisamment pour ordonner une attaque militaire américaine.

David Makovsky relate les tiraillements au sein de l'administration américaine, et explique pourquoi, au bout du compte, Israël a estimé qu'il n'avait plus le temps de tergiverser. Certes, l'Iran n'est pas la Syrie, notamment parce qu'il s'agirait d'une opération militaire infiniment plus complexe, mais les exemples d'Osirak et d'Al-Kibar, ainsi que les propos va-t-en-guerre de M. Nétanyahou, nourrissent une inquiétude non feinte, à Washington et au-delà. ■

LAURENT ZECCHINI

A Jérusalem, les mises au point de la secrétaire d'Etat américaine sont ressenties comme des camouflés

pendant qu'elle participe de cette « stratégie de la tension » poursuivie depuis des mois par Israël pour amener – avec un certain succès – la communauté internationale à accroître ses sanctions contre Téhéran.

Israël pourrait-il passer outre les objections américaines ? C'est la question-clé, à laquelle deux précédents incitent à répondre par l'affirmative. Lorsque l'aviation israélienne a détruit le réacteur nucléaire irakien d'Osirak, le 7 juin 1981, les dirigeants de l'Etat juif se sont

Le Kurdistan irakien confirme la teneur de l'accord sur le brut avec Bagdad

AFP

ERBIL (Irak), 14 septembre 2012 (AFP)

LA RÉGION AUTONOME du Kurdistan irakien, en conflit avec Bagdad sur l'exploitation des hydrocarbures, a confirmé vendredi qu'elle comptait signer un contrat avec le gouvernement irakien par lequel elle s'engage à exporter 200.000 barils de pétrole par jour.

En avril, le Kurdistan, qui réclame de Bagdad 1,5 milliard de dollars d'arriérés de paiement, avait décidé de suspendre ses exportations de pétrole, puis les avait reprises au mois d'août. Le 1er septembre, la région autonome avait annoncé la poursuite de ses exportations jusqu'au 15 septembre.

Jeudi, une réunion organisée dans le bureau du vice-Premier ministre Roz Nouri Chawis avait permis de parvenir à un accord aux termes duquel la région autonome s'engage à exporter 200.000 barils de pétrole par jour jusqu'à la fin de l'année.

Dans un communiqué publié vendredi sur son site internet, le gouvernement d'Erbil a confirmé la teneur de l'accord et ajouté qu'il exporterait 140.000 barils par jour jusqu'à fin septembre, pour passer à 200.000 barils par jour dès le mois d'octobre. Il doit en outre déterminer le volume de pétrole qu'il

exportera l'an prochain et évaluer le montant dû aux compagnies pétrolières étrangères implantées dans la région.

En contrepartie, Bagdad doit verser à la région une "avance" de 833 millions de dollars.

Erbil percevra 17% du pétrole raffiné en Irak et 17% du brut destiné aux centrales électriques dépendant du gouvernement fédéral, selon le texte.

Le contrat, qui doit être signé la semaine prochaine, institue une commission formée de représentants des deux gouvernements afin de suivre la production et le raffinage du brut et les rémunérations des sociétés étrangères travaillant au Kurdistan.

Enfin, une seconde commission aura pour tâche de s'assurer de l'application de l'accord.

Les relations entre Erbil et le gouvernement fédéral se sont considérablement dégradées ces derniers mois en raison de différends sur les contrats pétroliers et des revendications territoriales.

Le Kurdistan a signé des dizaines de contrats pétroliers avec des compagnies étrangères sans l'approbation de Bagdad, qui exige que ce type de négociations passent à travers son ministère du Pétrole et considère illégal tout contrat conclu en dehors de ce circuit.

La France se prépare à affronter une crise syrienne de longue durée

Amman, Beyrouth
Envoyée spéciale

Le ministre de la défense n'envisage pas de fournir d'armes lourdes à l'opposition syrienne

Une nouvelle étape s'ouvre-t-elle dans la gestion de la crise syrienne? Parallèlement à leur travail diplomatique, les pays qui soutiennent l'opposition au régime de Bachar Al-Assad ont décidé, de façon beaucoup plus discrète, de coordonner leurs actions en faveur de la résistance syrienne. Sans parler d'état-major, une structure d'échange de renseignements et de planification est en train d'être instaurée par les États-Unis, la Grande-Bretagne, la France, la Turquie et la Jordanie. Le dispositif inclut des discussions avec les États du Golfe, l'Arabie saoudite et le Qatar.

Paris, qui entend prendre sa place dans cette nouvelle initiative, multiplie les consultations avec ses partenaires. C'est dans cette optique que le ministre de la défense, Jean-Yves Le Drian, s'est rendu à Amman (Jordanie) et Beyrouth (Liban), du 12 au 14 septembre. Les rendez-vous espérés en Turquie n'ont pu avoir lieu. La France essaie « par de nombreux moyens de faire en sorte que l'opposition syrienne s'unifie », a déclaré le ministre français à la presse, jeudi 13 septembre, à Beyrouth. « Si l'on veut préparer le jour d'après, il faut un embryon de ce qui pourrait devenir un gouvernement provisoire. »

Le ministre a par ailleurs confirmé implicitement que les services français avaient aidé le général Manaf Tlass – un ancien intime de Bachar Al-Assad – à s'exfiltrer du pays : « S'il le dit c'est que ce doit être vrai, je ne puis, pour ma part, faire aucun commentaire. »

En raison du statu quo sanglant qui paraît s'installer sur le terrain syrien, la crise est à présent analysée par la défense française dans « le temps long », avec toutes les conséquences que cela implique : il s'agit autant de structurer une alternative politique au régime Assad que de contenir une contagion régionale désastreuse et de planifier d'éventuelles opérations militaires en cas de rupture brutale.

Cette anticipation vise notamment la perte de contrôle éventuelle des armes chimiques syriennes. La menace de leur utilisation par Bachar Al-Assad en juillet a été considérée comme sérieuse. Des doutes existent sur le fait que ces armes aient été déjà utilisées ponc-



Le ministre de la défense français, Jean-Yves Le Drian (au centre), en compagnie d'officiers marocains, visite le camp de réfugiés syriens d'Al-Zaatari, en Jordanie, le 13 septembre. BALKIS PRESS-MOUSSE/ABACA

tuellement. Les États-Unis, le Royaume-Uni et la France travaillent depuis plusieurs mois sur la sécurisation des sites syriens. C'est un domaine de coopération pour les forces spéciales, qui inclut la Jordanie. « Une bonne armée se

Paris n'adhère pas à l'idée d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne : l'importance des moyens mobilisés reviendrait à se placer en état de guerre

prépare à toutes les éventualités », a indiqué à ce propos le roi Abdallah dans la presse jordannienne jeudi.

Le royaume demande d'abord de l'aide civile, car il craint une arrivée massive de réfugiés en raison de la crise humanitaire qui sévit dans le sud de la Syrie, privé d'eau, d'électricité, de transports publics. La Jordanie a accepté de laisser ouvertes ses frontières ; les risques de déstabilisation sont réels. Quelque 200 000 personnes sont déjà entrées sur son territoire.

A la demande du roi Abdallah, l'armée française a déployé en août un groupement médico-chirurgi-

cal dans le camp de Zaatari, qui compte à présent 23 000 Syriens en majorité sunnites. Paris et Aman vont accroître leur coopération en matière de renseignement. Les allées et venues de membres des groupes d'opposition syriens dans le pays sont aussi un atout.

La France a, plus largement, offert de renforcer son aide militaire à Amman. Cette coopération, ancienne, est nourrie depuis que l'armée française a aidé son homologue à constituer ses forces spéciales à la fin des années 1990. La délégation ministérielle comptait un officier général qui fut l'un des artisans de cette coopération.

Au Liban sud, où sont déployés les casques bleus de la Finul, la situation demeure calme dans les fiefs du Hezbollah, bien que le mouvement chiite soit soupçonné de participer aux combats au côté de l'armée syrienne. Les soldats du contingent français de la Finul ont pu entendre l'écho des tirs de canons lors de combats à Damas, en juillet. La force onusienne, que l'Élysée avait mise à l'honneur le 14 juillet, serait en difficulté en cas d'embrasement.

Face aux inquiétudes, Paris martèle que « l'État libanais ne tiendra sa souveraineté que si les forces armées libanaises sont vigoureuses et structurées ». La coopération

militaire a, là aussi, été renforcée.

En revanche, « la France ne fournira pas d'armes » à l'opposition syrienne. Pour Paris, les conditions politiques ne sont pas réunies pour voir des armes lourdes aux mains des insurgés, comme le souhaiteraient certains pays du Golfe. La défense affirme vouloir s'en tenir pour l'heure à du matériel « non létal », ce qui recouvre des moyens de communication et de vision. L'aide pourra aller jusqu'à une aide financière aux régions « autonomes ».

En outre, Paris n'adhère pas à l'idée d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne : l'importance des moyens mobilisés reviendrait à se placer en état de guerre, sans feu vert de l'ONU. En revanche, M. Le Drian a indiqué que des actions de « sécurisation de zones de liberté » étaient à l'étude, après la proposition turque de créer des zones tampons.

De quoi offrir une perspective aux groupes de l'Armée syrienne libre? Le ministre de la défense a précisé que les « préalables » n'étaient pour l'instant pas réunis. Parmi ceux-ci, il a cité « un périmètre de liberté homogène et suffisamment vaste » et « une autorité embryon d'autorité nationale ». ■

NATHALIE GUIBERT

SYRIE : Le poker kurde de Bachar el-Assad



Manifestation de militantes du PYD à Qamishli qui réclament la libération du leader Abdullah Öcalan. (Boris Mabillard)

Par Boris Mabillard de Qamishli et Derik

En jouant une communauté contre les autres, Damas prend le risque d'étendre le conflit à toute la région. Mais les Kurdes syriens ne sont pas dupes. Ils espèrent tirer leur épingle du jeu

Un no man's land sépare les villes jumelles de Qamishli en Syrie et de Nusaybin en Turquie. Les drapeaux turcs et syriens flottent sur les postes de douane respectifs, que plus personne ne traverse. Au loin, arrimé à une citerne en béton qui surplombe Qamishli, un autre drapeau, celui du Kurdistan syrien. Depuis fin juillet, les Kurdes ont hissé leurs couleurs, trois bandes, jaune, rouge et verte, au-dessus de ceux et de celles des quartiers, des villages et des villes du Kurdistan syrien qu'ils ont soustraits à la tutelle de Damas. Après des décennies de ségrégation et de privation de leurs droits, les Kurdes syriens ne boudent pas leur bonheur. Mais du côté turc, on ne partage pas le même sentiment: le gouvernement pointe la région kurde syrienne où, selon lui, des combattants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) se seraient infiltrés et accuse Damas de les manipuler. Avec la question kurde, le conflit syrien déborde sur toute la région et permet à Bachar el-Assad de jouer ses atouts.

Du toit de son immeuble décrépit, un commerçant de Nusaybin montre les miradors turcs qui, de loin en loin, hérissent la ligne-frontière: «Malgré les mines et les barbelés, les contrebandiers réussissaient à se faufiler. Mais c'est fini. Depuis deux mois, l'armée turque a multiplié les patrouilles et les opérations militaires. Ce ne sont pas les

soldats syriens qu'ils pourchassent mais les combattants du PKK.»

Dans un rapport publié mardi 11 septembre, l'institut de recherche International Crisis Group (ICG) établit à plus de 700 le nombre de morts depuis les élections parlementaires turques de juin 2011 dans la guerre que se livrent le PKK et les forces gouvernementales. Ce qui fait de cette période la plus meurtrière depuis l'arrestation du leader historique Abdullah Öcalan en 1999. Et cette tendance s'est significativement accrue ces deux derniers mois.

Le gouvernement du premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, associe la recrudescence des attentats imputés au PKK au conflit syrien. Il accuse Damas et le PKK d'être de mêche et de se servir du très influent Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD) pour couvrir leurs activités. Enfin, il voit derrière l'émancipation des Kurdes de Syrie une tactique du régime de Bachar el-Assad pour le menacer. D'abord, les autorités d'Ankara craignent que la Syrie ne se désintègre en plusieurs entités ethniques, dont une serait kurde, à la manière de ce qui s'est passé en Irak, où les Kurdes jouissent d'une autonomie importante. L'avènement d'une deuxième région kurde autonome pourrait inspirer les 15 millions de Kurdes de Turquie qui réclament plus de droits depuis des années. Ensuite, elles redoutent que le PKK ne s'installe dans de nouvelles zones sous les auspices d'un Etat bienveillant.

Ces appréhensions sont fondées sur le précédent irakien. La première guerre du Golfe en 1991, puis l'invasion de l'Irak en 2003 ont libéré les Kurdes de l'oppression et leur ont donné un pays, à l'intérieur de

l'Irak: la Région autonome du Kurdistan qui borde la Turquie sur toute la longueur de sa frontière avec l'Irak. Son gouvernement (KRG) s'est montré désireux de nouer des relations avec la Turquie mais rechigne à combattre les rebelles du PKK qui ont fait des montagnes de Qandil un sanctuaire d'où leurs militants mènent des opérations transfrontalières en Turquie.

En réaction à l'émancipation des Kurdes en Syrie, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a clairement fait savoir qu'il considérait la création d'une enclave kurde comme une menace à la sécurité et aux intérêts de son pays. «Nous avons un droit naturel à intervenir dans le nord de la Syrie», a-t-il déclaré lors d'une interview télévisée le mercredi 25 juillet. La secrétaire d'Etat américaine, Hillary Clinton, l'a assuré de son soutien en promettant, lors de sa visite à Ankara le 11 août, que la zone ne deviendrait pas «un sanctuaire pour les terroristes du PKK».

Derrière ses parpaings de béton armé, l'hôtel International d'Erbil, la capitale de la Région autonome du Kurdistan, accueille, pour la troisième fois depuis le 9 juillet, les leaders politiques du Kurdistan syrien à l'invitation du président du KRG, Massoud Barzani. A côté des discussions officielles, qui se tiennent depuis le 9 septembre dans le secret des salons privés, Saleh Muslim Mohammed, le coprésident du PYD, reçoit ses invités au lobby, sans chichis. Vêtu d'un costume simple et arborant une moustache fournie, il parle doucement, obligeant ses interlocuteurs à se pencher pour suivre ses propos. Son parti est l'une des composantes principales du Conseil suprême kurde créé le 11 juillet 2012 sous l'impulsion de Massoud Barzani pour réunir tous les partis kurdes syriens. Son idéologie est inspirée d'Abdullah Öcalan, mais il se défend des accusations turques: «Nous n'entretenons aucun lien avec le PKK.»

Lors d'un entretien précédent, Saleh Muslim Mohammed avait expliqué la ligne suivie par son parti: «Nous n'avons pas de relations avec le gouvernement de Damas. Pas non plus avec le Conseil national syrien (CNS) ni avec l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). Nous ne partageons pas le même agenda. D'une part, nous ne nous associons pas à la mouvance islamiste. D'autre part, ils refusent de prendre en compte la reconnaissance de nos droits.»

La porte d'entrée du Kurdistan syrien se trouve à la frontière avec la Région autonome du Kurdistan. Le passage se fait en barge à travers le Tigre, sous l'œil bienveillant des peshmergas, ➤

► les combattants de l'armée kurde d'Irak. De l'autre côté, les bâtiments anciennement tenus par l'armée sont à l'abandon. «Il n'y a pas eu de combat, explique un habitant d'un village voisin. Les soldats sont simplement partis.»

Alors que depuis des années, le gouvernement de Damas opprimait la minorité kurde, représentant 9% de la population syrienne, il s'est montré plus conciliant à leur égard à mesure que la contestation se généralisait. En avril 2011, il promet d'accorder la citoyenneté aux milliers de Kurdes qui vivaient comme des étrangers dans leur propre pays. Puis autorise Saleh Muslim Mohammed à rentrer de son exil forcé. Dernier épisode en date, fin juillet, une partie de l'armée, des services du renseignement intérieur, les moukhabarat, et de la police ont été redéployés vers Alep, laissant ainsi le champ libre aux Kurdes. Ce que Bachar el-Assad refuse ailleurs, il l'a concédé aux Kurdes, non sans arrières-pensées.

Quels sont les buts suivis par les autorités syriennes? Pour Osman Bahadır Dincer, expert pour le Moyen-Orient à l'institut de recherche stratégique USAK, le message est clair: «Il s'agit d'une menace sans ambiguïté à l'encontre du gouvernement turc. Si celui-ci continue à soutenir l'insurrection et à fournir une base arrière aux rebelles, Damas aidera le PKK. Et si les militaires turcs interviennent sur le sol syrien, ils auront contre eux tous les Kurdes.» Dès novembre 2011, Bachar el-Assad menaçait de faire éclater la Syrie en une multitude de factions ethniques et confessionnelles.

La mairie de Qamishli abrite paradoxalement une double administration. Les fonctionnaires dépendent encore de Damas, mais les cadres kurdes des comités populaires se sont invités dans le bâtiment. C'est donc dans un bureau qui n'est pas le sien et sous un portrait de Bachar el-Assad que l'un des responsables locaux du PYD et membre du nouveau conseil de la ville met en garde contre toute tentative de déstabilisation: «Nous avons recruté des volontaires prêts à se battre au sein des Unités de défense du peuple (YPG) pour nous protéger contre les agressions éventuelles des rebelles, des Turcs ou même des forces syriennes.» Combien sont-ils? Qui sont-ils? D'où viennent leurs armes? Mystère. Mais aux abords d'un village éloigné, une séance d'entraînement est encadrée par des combattants manifestement aguerris et portant singulièrement les mêmes treillis que ceux des rebelles du PKK.

En retirant une partie de ses troupes stationnées dans le nord-est pour les redéployer dans la région d'Alep, où l'insurrection fait rage, le régime syrien n'a pas pris beaucoup de risques. Les dirigeants kurdes ont exclu toute alliance avec les rebelles de l'ASL. Une intrusion des militaires turcs liguerait par ailleurs tous les Kurdes dans un front commun contre l'agresseur. Elle remettrait aussi en cause le rapprochement stratégique et économique entre Erbil et Ankara. En conséquence du conflit syrien, de nouvelles alliances ont vu le jour. Les diplomates d'Ankara se sont éloignés de Téhéran et de Bagdad, l'axe chiite, et se sont rapprochés

dans le même temps d'Erbil. Ils ont densifié leur partenariat avec le KRG et signé des accords pétroliers. Conséquence ou pas de la stratégie de Damas, le gouvernement turc qui avait dans un premier temps défendu ardemment une intervention militaire et l'armement des rebelles a montré moins de vigueur ces trois derniers mois.

La partie est loin d'être gagnée pour les Kurdes de Syrie. Si Bachar el-Assad reprendrait le contrôle du pays, pas de doute qu'il reprendrait aussi en main la région kurde. Dans le cas où le régime s'effondrerait, il est improbable que les autorités du nouvel Etat soient disposées à accorder une autonomie relative aux Kurdes. «Les tribus arabes, les chrétiens et les Turkmènes forment plus de la moitié de la population. Les Kurdes devront revoir à la baisse leurs revendications et négocier. Enfin, les importantes ressources pétrolières et gazières que recèle la région seront convoitées par tous, à commencer par la capitale», explique Osman Bahadır Dincer.

Saleh Muslim Mohammed prône la retenue: «Nous voulons rassurer les Arabes et les chrétiens, nous pouvons vivre ensemble. Quant à nos voisins, nous ne voulons pas de confrontation. Jamais le PKK n'utilisera ce territoire pour mener à bien ses attaques en Turquie.» A Qamishli, lors d'une manifestation pour réclamer la libération d'Abdullah Öcalan, mardi 11 septembre, des militantes du PYD n'ont pas montré la même prudence. Elles ont crânement défilé au centre d'un square coincé entre le poste frontière et une base militaire syrienne en activité. ♦

Le Monde 17 septembre 2012

La Turquie affirme avoir tué 500 rebelles kurdes du PKK en un mois

Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a annoncé lundi 17 septembre que l'armée avait tué près de 500 rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) en un mois dans le sud-est de la Turquie. "Dans les seuls dix derniers jours, 123 terroristes ont été neutralisés rien que [dans la province d']Hakkari", aux confins de l'Irak et de l'Iran, a précisé le premier ministre, utilisant le vocable habituel chez les autorités turques de "terroriste"



Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan a multiplié cet été ses attaques contre les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan a multiplié cet été ses attaques contre les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie. | REUTERS

pour désigner le PKK.

Les propos de M. Erdogan interviennent au lendemain de la mort de huit soldats dans l'explosion d'une mine posée, selon des sources locales de sécurité, par le PKK près de la localité de Karliova, dans la province de Bingöl. La veille, quatre autres militaires avaient péri dans des circonstances analogues à Cukurca, dans la province d'Hakkari.

Le PKK a multiplié cet été ses attaques contre les forces de sécurité dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Les forces de sécurité ont riposté en déployant massivement des troupes et en infligeant des pertes sévères chez les rebelles ■



16 septembre 2012

Turquie: 8 policiers tués dans une attaque du PKK

Huit policiers turcs ont été tués et neuf autres blessés dans l'explosion d'une mine dissimulée au bord d'une route, ce dimanche en Anatolie orientale, ont annoncé des responsables de la sécurité. La mine, déclenchée au moment du passage d'un autocar à Karliova dans la province de Bingöl, a sans doute été actionnée par des membres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a-t-on précisé. Samedi, l'attaque d'un convoi militaire par des séparatistes kurdes présumés près de la frontière avec l'Irak a fait quatre morts et cinq blessés chez les soldats turcs.

Samedi toujours, des acti-

vistes



kurdes présumés ont blessés quatre gardes lors d'une attaque contre une société étrangère de prospection pétrolière, au nord d'Hasankeyf dans la province de Batman, a-t-on appris de source proche

des services de sécurité. Il n'a pas été immédiatement possible de vérifier le nom de la société. Dans le cadre de sa grande offensive lancée contre les bases du PKK, l'armée turque a tué 123 activistes kurdes ces dix derniers jours,

selon les services du gouverneur de la province de Hakkari dans le sud-est de la Turquie.

Le conflit entre le gouvernement turc et le PKK a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis que le PKK a pris les armes en 1984 dans le but de créer un Etat kurde indépendant. Plus de 700 personnes ont été tuées depuis les élections législatives de juin dernier. C'est la période la plus meurtrière depuis l'arrestation de l'homme fort du PKK, Abdullah Ocalan en 1999, a indiqué le groupe International Crisis Group (ICG) dans un rapport publié ce mois-ci. (Reuters) ●

Rudaw

27 September 2012

Iranian Kurdish Opposition Groups Drift Closer to Unification

By SAKAR ABDULLAZADA
rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region -- Representatives from the two major Iranian Kurdish parties met in Koya last week in a bid to unify the divided groups.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) are both armed opposition groups of the neighboring Islamic Republic of Iran.

The two groups have refused to meet in recent years but have held talks since mid-September. They previously met at the French Consulate in Erbil.

Before its split, the KDPI was widely known as the largest Iranian Kurdish opposition party.

The talks have sparked hope among Iranian Kurds that the two sides will merge again.

Aram Mudarisi, a member of the central committee of the Revolutionary Society of Iranian Kurdistan's Toilers (Komala), described the talks as a "very good and necessary step."

Komala, a Marxist opposition group, has been split into several groups over the past few years. The KDPI and Komala used to be major rivals before their splits.



Leaders of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI) and the Komala Movement following an agreement signed between both groups in August. Photo Mustafa Hejri/Facebook.

"Kurdish society, especially in Eastern (Iranian) Kurdistan, can hardly accept divisions. People are used to the KDP and Komala and not KDPIs and Komalas," said Mudarisi.

Behruz Ardalan, the head of relations at the Kurdistan Struggle Organization, another Iranian Kurdish opposition party, told Rudaw that divisions in the ranks of Kurdish opposition parties "will negatively affect the Kurdish people and the

liberation movement."

Ahmed Salihi, a member of the central committee of one of the splinter groups from Komala, said, "The democrats don't have political or ideological problems among them. It is all about power and a fight over seats."

The KDPI was founded in 1946 by Qazi Mohammad, the president of the short-lived Republic of Kurdistan in Mahabad. Since its establishment, ⇨

⇒ the group has experienced several splits and divisions.

Asked if the current reunification attempts between the KDP and KDPI will have any impact on Komala and its split, Salihi said, "It will not have any impact on Komala's groups because the problem in Komala is over ideology and political

lines. With the democrats, it was about internal democratic problems."

The KDPI, however, does not recognize the splinter KDP as a proper political party and its members are still referred to as "former comrades" by the KDPI.

Hama Nazif Qadiri, a member of

KDPI's political bureau, told Rudaw, "Our policy as the KDPI is to hold talks and meet with our former comrades. We believe that, in order to resolve the issues and move toward unity, dialogue with our comrades is a political and organizational necessity." ●

Rudaw

20 September 2012

New Statistics Reveal the Size of Turkey's Kurdish Population

By MASHALLAH DAKAK
rudaw.net

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey – The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) recently published the birth records of Kurdish citizens in Turkey.

According to these records, there are 22,691,824 Kurds in Turkey, mostly born in Kurdish cities in the southeast of the country. Therefore, out of Turkey's 74.7 million citizens, more than 30 percent are Kurds. These records only include people who have been registered at official government institutions.

After the founding of the Turkish Republic, the first census was carried out in 1927. According to that census, the Turkish population was 13,464,564. At that time, Serhat was the most populous Kurdish city with 38,000 residents. The second most populous city was Dilok.

Official census records show that the Kurdish population in 1927 was 2,323,359. This number increased to 3,850,723 in 1950, to 5,147,680 in 1960 and to 10,505,672 in 1990.

According to TurkStat, the number of Kurds in Kurdish cities of Turkey in 2000 was 12,751,808; in 2012, this number increased to 14,733,894.

There are 8,902 Kurdish villages, 108 towns and 275 districts, according to TurkStat.

In the 2000 census, only residents of Kurdish cities were taken into account. From 1990 to 1997, under the pretext of security measures, around 4,000 Kurdish villages were evacuated and destroyed. The villagers left for other Turkish towns, and thus were not taken into account in this census.

Rohat Alakom, a researcher and writer, said that there are 102 Kurdish villages in Ankara, 75 in Konya, 44 in Kirsehir, 17 in Aksaray, 41 in Yozgat-



The most populated cities of Turkey are Istanbul, Konya, Urfa, Diyarbakir and Izmir, consecutively. Photo: AFP.

Tokat-Amasya, 23 in Kaysari and 26 in Cankiri and Kizilirmak. There are around 313 Kurdish villages in central Anatolia.

Additionally, a large number of Anatolian Kurds have fled to European countries. There are no official records of the number of the Kurds in central Anatolia, but it is estimated to be no less than 1 million people.

Kurdish researcher and historian Jalili Jalil has presented an important document related to the Gozanogullari that shows a 1888 message from Suleyman Beg, a Gozanogullari member, directed to the Russian ambassador in which he presented himself as a Kurd.

TurkStat also published the number of the migrants. The largest number of migrants appears to be those who left Mardin for Izmir. There are also many Adana migrants in Urfa, and Arzrum migrants in Bursa.

The real number of Kurds cannot be determined with these statistics, but can

give an idea of the actual figures.

Not all those who were born in Kurdish cities are Kurds. There are many other ethnicities who live in Kurdish regions but have been counted as Kurds due to their place of birth.

But, taking 22.7 million as the number of Kurds and adding the 1 million who live in central Anatolia and other regions, then subtracting the number of citizens of other ethnicities who live in the Kurdish regions, leads to an acceptable figure of around 20 million.

Turkstat has published the census records of 81 provinces of Turkey. They include the place of birth and the number of the citizens.

The most populated cities of Turkey are Istanbul, Konya, Urfa, Diyarbakir and Izmir, consecutively. The least populated cities are Yalova, Bayburt and Bilecik. The least populated Kurdish cities are Kilis and Jolemerg. ●

Iraqi official denounces death sentence

BAGHDAD

Sunni vice president, in Turkey, calls verdict politically motivated

BY OMAR AL-JAWOSHY AND MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

A day after being convicted of murder and sentenced to death in a trial conducted in absentia, the Iraqi vice president Tariq al-Hashimi, a prominent Sunni Muslim, on Monday de-

nounced the verdict as “false and unjust,” depicting the court’s finding as “an acquittal, confirming my innocence.”

The verdict, announced on Sunday, coincided with a wave of bombings and insurgent attacks that claimed at least 100 lives, making the day one of the deadliest in Iraq since American troops withdrew last year.

Together, the verdict and the violence threatened to deepen an already intractable political crisis among the country’s ruling factions.

Sunni leaders who support Mr. Hashimi responded angrily to the court’s action, accusing the Shiite-led government of trying to sideline them from a power-sharing arrangement meant to guard against the sectarian violence that continues to plague the country.

TENSIONS RISING IN IRAQ

The murder conviction of the country’s fugitive vice president has inflamed sectarian passions.

Nearly nine months after the withdrawal of U.S. troops, Iraq is still crippled by sectarian politics and insurgent violence. A decision by a panel of judges to sentence a vice president, Tariq al-Hashimi, to death in the killing of two Iraqis is sure to exacerbate those tensions — in Iraq and the wider region.

Mr. Hashimi is a leading Sunni Muslim politician in a country where Shiites are the majority. He fled Iraq after an arrest warrant was issued in December. Initially accused of running a death squad during the worst period of sectarian slaughter after Saddam Hussein was overthrown, he was convicted in absentia on Sunday of the murders of a lawyer and a security official. Mr. Hashimi said the verdict was “false and unjust.”

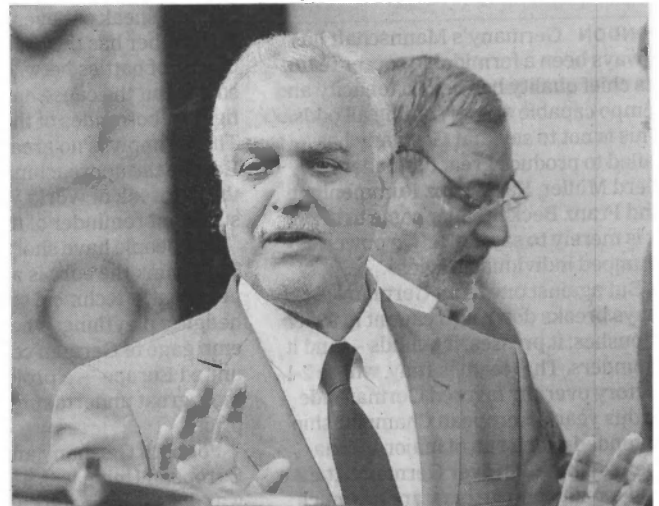
The panel that decided the case included Sunni and Shiite judges. It is hard to weigh the merits of the case from a distance, but given Iraq’s fragility, sentencing Mr. Hashimi — a vocal critic of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki — to jail would have been punishment enough.

Mr. Maliki has shown more interest in reprisals against the Sunni minority than in encouraging inclusion, and he has often interfered with the court. His attempts to monopolize power have led Sunni and Kurdish politicians to try to remove him by a no confidence vote. But opposition groups also deserve blame. They would better serve their constituents by working with Mr. Maliki to carry out the power-sharing deal struck in 2010 and to strengthen democratic institutions.

Iraq’s tensions have reverberated beyond its borders. Turkey is a Sunni-majority state and its support for Mr. Hashimi, who is living there, and for the Sunni rebels seeking to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad of Syria, a member of a Shiite sect, has created bad blood with Mr. Maliki. Turkey sees Mr. Maliki as too close to Iran, Mr. Assad’s closest ally.

Saudi Arabia and Qatar are also backing the Syrian rebels and encouraging the Iraqi opposition. Mr. Maliki worries that he could be the next target of the forces arrayed against Mr. Assad. He is also concerned that a resurgent local Al Qaeda wing could lead to further violence.

The White House is trying to calm the situation by persuading Turkey and Iraq that they share common interests, among them ensuring a cohesive, stable Syria and tamping down sectarian conflict. Mr. Maliki could make a contribution by trying to make political peace with the Sunnis in his own country.



The Iraqi vice president Tariq al-Hashimi in Ankara. Mr. Hashimi, who fled to Turkey in December, called the verdict “false and unjust.”

Speaking in Arabic in a televised news conference in Turkey, where he is in self-exile, Mr. Hashimi declared, “For me, this verdict is an acquittal, confirming my innocence.”

“All the accusations set against me are false and unjust,” he added.

He asserted that the verdict was politically inspired and that he was prepared to be tried by “a just court, but never at a court which is under the influence of” Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, a Shiite.

Mr. Hashimi urged his followers to remain calm and refrain from violence against their adversaries. He described himself as “a symbol of all oppressed, when hundreds of thousands of people remain in prisons.”

He was speaking a day after attacks were reported in at least 10 Iraqi cities, including Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad, where two markets, a restaurant and a crowded square were struck, capped by a car bomb that exploded late Sunday in Sadr City, a Shiite stronghold in the capital.

The attacks underscored the increasing potency of insurgent groups in Iraq, which appear to have blossomed amid the political paralysis that followed the American departure. Their attacks have tended to come in coordinated waves

across the country, including the attacks by Sunni extremists on July 23 that killed about 107 people and appeared to reflect a spillover of sectarian strife from Syria, and the car and roadside bombings of Aug. 16 that killed about 100, including dozens at an amusement park in eastern Baghdad.

The country seemed to be moving toward a sense of normalcy this summer, with an easing of checkpoints in the capital, new buses going into service and women returning to local movies theaters. But the mounting insurgent violence has prompted the government to reimpose security measures and has re-

vived a sense of siege in the cities.

In February, a panel of judges accused Mr. Hashimi of overseeing paramilitary death squads that were responsible for carrying out more than 150 attacks on political opponents, security officials and religious pilgrims over a period of six years. Mr. Hashimi has denied the charges. When an arrest warrant was issued, he fled Iraq for Turkey and remained there while the trial went ahead without him.

Verdict handed down on Sunday did not address the death-squad charges directly but focused narrowly on the

death of two people, a lawyer and a security official. Mr. Hashimi and his son-in-law were convicted of murder in both killings.

No one immediately took responsibility for Sunday's bloodshed, which capped a summer of deadly violence. Lately, Al Qaeda in Iraq, a mainly Sunni insurgent group, has claimed responsibility for most high-profile attacks. The group recently announced on a jihadi Web site that it would try to reassert control over Sunni regions in the country.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune
SEPTEMBER 13, 2012

Syrian stalemate: The lesser of two evils

William Pfaff

PARIS The major threat to international peace in the Middle East is Syria's civil war, not the rhetorical battles between Iran and an Israel that claims to be straining against its American leash.

The Syrian war is the focus of Sunni-Shiite rivalry, the clashing interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia and Qatar, the Russian investment in the Mediterranean and in Syria, and the Israeli-promoted American hostility to Syria and Iran.

Syria's conflict is a war that neither side can win, although, based on the testimony of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, some 27,000 people have now been killed, more than two-thirds of them civilians.

The Syrian government in recent days has systematically bombed successive zones of the country's largest and oldest city, Aleppo, in the northwest. The rebels have no effective defense or counter to the destruction being delivered by the Syrian Air Force. They have no reason to hold the ground they have already taken, as the residents leave out of fear of the air attacks or in despair. Until the war, Aleppo had a population of a little over two million people, mostly Sunnis, but including some quarter of a million Christians. Its Old City is one of the oldest continuously populated settlements on earth, with origins that may stretch back to the sixth millennium B.C. It has been designated a Unesco World Heritage Site.

Under the incessant violence, the country is in serious danger of breakdown, on its way to becoming another Somalia. This was the warning given by the Russian vice minister of foreign affairs, Mikhail Bogdanov, during a visit last weekend to Paris, where he met with Syrian dissidents and French government officials.

The Russian position with respect to

the uprising and repression remains support for the established government of Bashar al-Assad, and for the peace conference former U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan has proposed,

This is not a crisis made for Western intervention. It will have to be solved by the Arab states themselves.

on the model of the Taif agreement in 1989, which ended the civil war in Lebanon. The conference would be composed of representatives of the Syrian regime and the insurgents, together with leaders of the Christian, Druze and Alawite communities (there are still other minorities: Kurds, Turks, Iraqis, Armenians), and of the interested outside parties, which would include Russia and the United States, as well as France, the former colonial power.

Russia has a small naval base in Syria and an interest in Syria's survival that derives from the Cold War years and from the fact that there is now a large Syrian-Russian community as the result of the marriages between Syrians and Russian sailors, officials and others stationed in the country.

Bogdanov also said that Assad has assured Moscow that he is prepared to leave office if an election took place and Syrian voters rejected him. There is no confirmation of this promise from Damascus, and in a sense, it states what would be inevitable were such an election to take place.

However, this offer is part of what Russia seems prepared to bring to the table if the conference proposed by Annan, which is endorsed by the U.N. Security Council, were to be held.

Meanwhile, the United States and its Western allies have been discussing a draft U.N. resolution under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, which would authorize an armed intervention, as was done in Libya last year. But since neither the United States nor any

other government seems willing to carry out such a resolution, it is unlikely to be voted upon or approved. This is just as well because military intervention would make things worse.

U.N. mediation has been resumed by the former Algerian foreign minister Lakhdar Brahimi. He has been in Cairo, where a meeting of Turkish, Saudi Arabian, Iranian and Egyptian officials, under Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi's sponsorship, took place on Monday on the subject of a Syrian cease-fire. Mr. Brahimi now intends to go to Syria and see Assad.

This is important because the Syrian civil war must be understood in the context of the rivalry between Sunnis and Shiites in Iran and their Hezbollah allies in Lebanon, and what now is Shiite-dominated Iraq (thanks to George W. Bush, Richard Cheney, the neoconservatives, Israel and Aipac — all collectively responsible for the invasion and destruction of Sunni Iraq).

The Sunni alignment in the Middle East is led by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, and some of the other Gulf principalities, which are the principal supporters and funders of the Muslim Brotherhood groups in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia that have been the main political beneficiaries of the Arab Awakening.

This is not a crisis made for Western intervention, whatever the opinions voiced in French interventionist circles and during the American presidential campaign. It will have to be solved by the Arab states. The lead taken by Egypt's new president as well as the appointment of an Algerian mediator by the U.N. secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, are positive signs. The very fact that this war approaches stalemate is reassuring. There is nothing to be gained by continuing.

WILLIAM PFAFF is a Paris-based columnist and the author, most recently, of "The Irony of Manifest Destiny: The Tragedy of America's Foreign Policy."

TRIBUNE MEDIA SERVICES

TIME

September 17, 2012

The Making of a Syrian Rebel

The saga of Abboud Barri shows there is no such thing as civility in a civil war

By Rania Abouzeid/Jabal al-Zawya

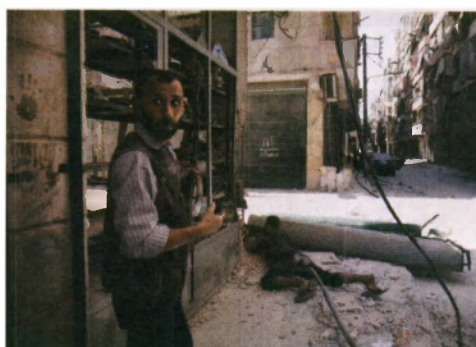


ABBOUD BARRI JIGGLES THE DOG TAGS AS if they belonged to animals being raised in a puppy mill. “I have a lot of these,” Barri says. “Any buyers?” He is joking. The tags belong to human beings, soldiers of the regime who are now held captive or were killed by Barri, a local commander of one of the franchise groups of the rebel Free Syrian Army (FSA). Unlike some other militia leaders, Barri says he isn’t interested in ransom from his captives’ families. He says he keeps the ID tags so those families know “to look for them in hell.”

Barri, along with 20 or so other men from several different FSA units in Idlib, is reclining on deep red cushions spread out on plastic straw mats under a sprawling almond tree in the Jabal al-Zawya region in northern Syria. Some of the men laugh as they recount Barri’s wilder antics, like the time he set out on an extremely perilous but heroic journey to deliver much needed bags required for blood transfusions. Others recall how one respected revolutionary refused to give Barri a gun, fearing what the former agricultural worker might do with it. A few months after that revolutionary died in an ambush, Barri formed a militia, which he now says includes 58 men. “He was always a risk taker,” one man says about Barri. “In the beginning of the revolution, before there was so much destruction, we didn’t want hot-blooded risk takers who didn’t carefully study their actions. Now it doesn’t matter.”

As Barri speaks, one of his phones beeps. Like a few others in his possession, the device belongs to one of his prisoners. It has received a text message from the captive’s father, wishing him a happy ‘Id al-Fitr, the Muslim holiday that marks the end of the holy month of

Ramadan. After several minutes, the phone rings. It is the father. “Read him the fatiha,” Barri says dismissively to the parent, referring to a Muslim prayer often recited for the dead. “May God have mercy on his soul.” Some of the other men, who admire Barri’s bravado, are taken aback by his coldness. “I was very uncomfortable when I heard him say that,” one of the men says. “I was sad for the father.”



On the front line Free Syrian Army rebels in Aleppo

War is dehumanizing, and civil wars in particular can brutalize a society in ways that fundamentally alter its very nature. Neighbors become enemies; differences—social, economic, religious—become magnified as a means to confirm the otherness of the enemy. Local accents and surnames can reveal sectarian identities and, by extension, presumed political views. There is little room for nuance or civility in a civil war.

The longer the conflict persists, the greater the likelihood that Syria’s diverse social and religious fabric will fray, with hatred and fear becoming a part of everyday life, rending Sunni Muslims from minority Christians and Alawites, the Islamic sect to which President Bashar Assad and most of his inner circle belong.

Child’s play now sometimes includes pretending to man a checkpoint and asking passersby for ID. “Are you with the revolution or against?” one child asks as he stands at his front door.

Yet enemies can still easily become friends with a switch of allegiance. Barri recalls with fondness an Alawite lieutenant colonel who defected along with his unit about a year ago. He says he came to like and respect the Alawite officer. “He was a good man. He didn’t leave us his ammunition when he left, but he was a good man.”

Barri admits the war has changed him. “You know,” he says quietly, “I don’t have a heart anymore. I’ve seen so many things. I saw three of my friends killed,

one of them crushed under a government tank. I try to forget sometimes, but I can’t.” In the past five months, he has been wounded three times. He walks with a limp, courtesy of a shrapnel wound. The background on his Nokia phone is a picture of his younger brother Ahmad, who was killed when the government shelled their hometown.

Barri pulls out a notebook with an image of three red roses on its cover that his men confiscated from a checkpoint they captured. There are names and phone numbers. He hands it to an FSA fighter from a different area of Idlib. “Do you know any of them?” Barri asks. “They’re all Alawite. They are responsible for massacres in Idlib.” The man peruses the page. “They’re not all Alawite,” he responds.

Barri doesn’t seem to care for the other pages in the notebook—handwritten poetry. The words could well have been by one of the men whose dog tags jingle in his pocket. On one page, there is a drawing of a high-cheeked woman with hoop earrings, hair falling around her shoulders. Beside it, the following lines: “Whoever challenges me to love you, I accept that challenge. Whoever challenges me for your love, I will eliminate from the earth.”

It was signed, “I love you.”

Arab World: Turkish difficulty, Kurdish opportunity

By JONATHAN SPYER

The PKK is upping attacks in Turkey's south. Is this evidence of a bargain between the movement, Syria and Iran?

A serious escalation is currently under way in the ongoing conflict between the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and the Turkish state.

The renewed clashes come amid claims by Turkish officials that the PKK is increasing pressure on Ankara as part of a renewed alliance between the Kurdish organization and the Assad regime in Syria.

In the latest round of fighting, the PKK last week attacked four Turkish state and security installations in the Sirkat Province of southeastern Turkey. Ten members of the Turkish security forces were killed.

The Turks struck back, launching a major ground and air operation against PKK positions beginning at the end of last week.

Around 2,000 Turkish troops took part in the operation.

While the ground attack was limited to Turkish territory, Turkish aircraft also bombed targets in the Qandil Mountains in northern Iraq. The PKK maintains its main headquarters in this mountainous area adjoining the borders with Turkey and Iran.

The Turkish general staff this week released figures claiming that its forces have killed 373 PKK militants over the past five months. The Turkish statement also acknowledged that 88 members of Turkish security forces were killed.

The PKK, meanwhile, dismissed these figures. The Firat news agency, which is close to the organization, issued a rival statement saying that 1,035 Turkish soldiers and 101 PKK fighters have been killed over the past five months.

The PKK has also issued a number of direct statements in recent weeks alleging that the Turkish authorities are using the bodies of slain PKK fighters for organ harvesting.



Turkish soldier near Iraq border. Photo: REUTERS

Whatever the precise truth regarding casualty figures, the last period has been the bloodiest seen in this conflict since PKK founder and leader Abdullah Öcalan was captured in 1999.

Amidst the ongoing violence and the flurry of claims and counter claims between the Turks and the PKK, a fascinating question remains: why is the PKK choosing to escalate hostilities at the present time? For the Turkish authorities, the reason is very clear: Ankara claims that the Assad regime has in recent months rekindled its long defunct alliance with the organization. Ankara also alleges the existence of a renewed agreement between the PKK and Iran, and claims that the Iranians are actively aiding the Kurds in the latest round of attacks.

Prior to the outbreak of revolt and civil war in Syria, relations between Ankara and Damascus and Teheran had been steadily improving. But Turkey has taken a harsh stance against the Syrian dictator, domiciling the political and military opposition against him and calling for his ouster.

In response, according to Huseyin Celik, deputy leader of the ruling Turkish AKP party, "Assad is pursuing the idea that 'my enemy's enemy is my ally... he's taking the PKK under his wing and using it against Turkey.'" The Turks point to the peaceful ceding by the Assad regime of a number of towns in the Kurdish northeast of Syria as further proof of rapprochement between the PKK and the Syrian

regime.

Control of the towns has passed to the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is the pro-PKK franchise among the Syrian Kurds. Turkish officials have alleged that the Syrian authorities left heavy weapons in the area, which are now under the control of the PYD.

Kurdish sources close to the PKK dismiss claims of a renewed strategic alliance between the organization and the Assad regime. They point to recent instances of violence between PYD militants and the Syrian armed forces.

Three Syrian soldiers were killed this week in the Sheikh Masoud area of Aleppo by PYD militants. This attack was carried out, according to Kurdish media sources, following the killing of 21 Syrian Kurds by Syrian forces in the city.

PYD leaders have made clear, however, that they are opposed to any Turkish military intervention into Syria. PKK leader Murat Karayilan stated clearly that any attempt by Turkish forces to enter areas of Kurdish population in northern Syria would be resisted. This is presented by sources close to the PKK as deriving from the determination of the movement to protect Kurds in Syria from Turkish assault, rather than as an element of a grand bargain between the movement and the Assad regime.

Similarly, the Kurds note that the Assad regime has been arming Arab tribes opposed to Kurdish autonomy in northeast

Syria.

Kurdish sources, in relating to the renewed fighting in southeast Turkey, prefer to focus on Turkey's longstanding failure to address the grievances and demands of the Kurds. They note the failure to rescind discriminatory laws, inadequate political representation and refusal to allow Kurds to educate their children in the Kurdish language as factors ensuring the continuation of conflict.

Kurdish denial notwithstanding, it appears that a certain amount of coordination between the PYD and the Assad regime did take place as the regime prepared to pull out of designated areas of northeast Syria. This, however, may well have been due to a narrow and transient confluence of interests rather than a strategic grand bargain.

Assad is short of men and is therefore reluctant to expend scarce manpower on securing remote parts of Syria's north. The PYD, meanwhile, is glad to take control of a de facto autonomous Kurdish area at almost no cost. Of course, Assad and his father followed for 40 years a policy of brutal repression against Syria's Kurds.

This legacy and account has not been forgotten. A resurgent Assad would have no hesitation in reverting back to type.

Turkey's difficulty is the Kurds' opportunity. Ankara is currently deeply embroiled in the Syrian crisis.

Turkey is facing the possibility of a long civil war just across its south-western border. There is a refugee problem. Turkey is committed to the victory of the rebels against Assad, but this victory does not currently appear imminent.

Even without a formal alliance between Turkey's enemies, it is easy to say why the PKK would find the present time an opportune moment for renewing pressure on the Turks. As for the possibility of a "grand bargain" between Iran, Syria and the PKK – it should not be ruled out, but it would be wise to wait for further clear evidence to emerge beyond statements by the Turkish authorities before drawing any definite conclusions in this regard. ♦

Turkey: 8 police killed in landmine blast



I STANBUL (AP) — Suspected Kurdish rebels detonated a landmine along a highway in eastern Turkey on Sunday, killing eight police officers and wounding nine, Turkish media reported.

The attack occurred in Bingol province, where the rebel Kurdistan Workers'

Party, also known as the PKK, is active. Video posted on the Dogan News Agency website showed the mangled remains of a white minibus with blown-out windows that had been carrying the police. The vehicle lay at a bend in a road, and ambulances and armored vehicles had gathered in the area as part of the rescue mission.

The attack comes amid a surge in fighting between Turkish security forces and Kurdish rebels who seek self-rule in southeastern Turkey. On Saturday, a similar attack on a military convoy killed four soldiers and wounded five in Hakkari province in the southeast, according to the provincial governor's office.

Officials in Hakkari said a total of 123 "terrorists," a reference to Kurdish rebels, had been killed in military operations in the past 10 days. Hakkari borders Iraq, where Kurdish militants have bases from which they launch hit-and-run attacks on Turkish targets.

While Turkey and its Western allies consider the PKK to be a terrorist group, Turkish authorities have sought to address the grievances of many in its Kurdish minority by granting more cultural rights and initiating economic programs in predominantly Kurdish areas. However, Kurdish activists say the measures do not go far enough, and recent fighting has overshadowed such peace initiatives. □

AP Associated Press

Kurdish rebels attack military convoy in southeast Turkey; 10 killed, 70 wounded

September 18, 2012 - Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey - Suspected Kurdish rebels attacked a military convoy in the southeastern province of Bingol with a rocket Tuesday, killing 10 soldiers and wounding more than 70, officials said. It was the second attack on a military vehicle in the region this week.

The convoy, which included a vehicle carrying unarmed conscripts traveling to join their units, was hit on a highway in Bingol, where the rebels of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, are active. Cevdet Yilmaz, the Turkish minister for development, said around 70 soldiers were wounded in the attack.

On Sunday, suspected Kurdish rebels detonated a roadside bomb in Bingol, killing eight police officers.

Private NTV television said the military launched an offensive in Bingol after Tuesday's attack and that police are searching for a vehicle believed to be carrying the assailants.

There has been a surge of fighting in recent months between Turkish security forces and the PKK rebels, who are seeking self-



rule in southeast Turkey. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Monday that as many as 500 Kurdish rebels have been killed or captured in fighting in the past month, and he again urged the PKK to lay down their arms.

The conflict has killed tens of thousands of people since the rebel group — considered a terrorist organization by Turkey and its Western allies — took up arms in 1984. ○



Drawing an Uncertain Kurdish Map

QAMISHLI, September 17, 2012 (IPS) By Karlos Zurutuza

OVER A YELLOWISH MAP, Qehreman Meri draws an oblong surface along the Turkish-Syrian border. “We want an autonomous region with clearly defined boundaries,” says this spokesman from Yeketi (Unity), one of 15 Kurdish political parties in Syria.

“Of course there are differences between us, but we all stand together so our revolution is not stolen by foreign actors,” says the activist.

Many people believe that Arab countries and Jihadist organisations are backing the Free Syrian Army, the main Syrian opposition armed group. Widespread uncertainty over the FSA’s agenda for the region is causing growing concern among the local Kurds.

“We have nothing against them, but they must stick to their area,” Meri says.

Founded in 2000, Yeketi is one of 15 political parties within the Kurdish National Congress (KNC). Masoud Barzani, president of the Autonomous Kurdish region in neighbouring Iraq, sponsored its creation in October 2011, in the wake of the war scenario in Syria.

Last July, and also under Barzani’s direction, the coalition reached an agreement with the dominant Kurdish political force in Syria, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), to set up the Kurdish Supreme Committee. Today, most Syrian Kurds remain under its umbrella.

Azadi (“Freedom”) also follows suit. Majid Hanush, executive leader of this party founded in 2005, agrees on the need for unity towards building a Kurdish autonomous region within a Syrian federal state.

“The Kurds deserve it more than anyone else because we are the main victims of the Sykes-Picot treaty,” says Hanush from his home in Darna in the northeast corner of Syria, five kilometres from the Turkish border. The activist refers to the agreement signed in 1916 by France and Britain that lead to partition of the Ottoman Empire and the division of the Middle East into the still existing borders.

Numbering around 40 million people, the Kurds are the largest stateless ethnic group in the world today. About half are in Turkey, large numbers in Iraq and about two to four million in Syria.

Like most local dissidents, Hassan Syfaldin has endured imprisonment. He claims to have worked for over ten years for the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party of Syria (PDPKS), but he disagrees with his colleagues on the formula to achieve long awaited rights.

“Dividing Syria into autonomous regions would lead to a similar scenario to that in Iraq, or even worse,” says Syfaldin from the party’s newly opened headquarters in Girke Lege town, 700 kilometres northeast of Damascus.

He calls for “building bridges to reach everybody, even outside the Syrian borders.” He refers to the support they have historically received from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, one of the two main political parties in the Iraqi Kurdish Region whose historical leader, Jalal Talabani, is also Iraq’s president since 2005.

“We survived a brutal regime - the Assads - but, today the Kurdish revolution must be done by and for the Kurds,” Ismail Ali Sheref, local leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (PDKS) tells a large crowd in the small town Darna, standing before a portrait of Mustafa Barzani, father of the current president of the Autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq, Massoud Barzani.

But Sheref says the so far successful Iraqi federal model cannot be imported into Syria’s Kurdish north. “Geography is not on our side.



A meeting of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria in Darna town. Credit: Karlos Zurutuza/IPS.

Unlike the Kurds of Iraq, we have no mountains to protect us from Arabs and Turks.”

Several villages in the northeast of the country are for the present under Kurdish control after a series of protests last July. Many like Sheref think this new scenario is the “clear outcome” of a secret truce between the PYD and Syrian President Bashar Al Assad.

In the border city Qamishli, 680 kilometres northeast of Damascus, PYD chairman Salih Muslim strongly denies such claims.

“Damascus knows we just want our constitutional rights, that is why they’re not afraid of us,” Muslim tells IPS.

“We knew Assad would not fall in just two months, so we organised our people into civilian defence committees long ago. Actually, we already had some checkpoints a year ago and the government simply couldn’t do anything about it,” adds Salih Muslim, Syrian Kurdistan’s most prominent leader.

Turkey has repeatedly expressed concern over the growing influence the PYD has in the region. Ankara sees evidence of links between them and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) operating within Turkey.

“Turkey is trying to convince the rest of the world that we are terrorists, simply because they are afraid of us getting our rights,” says Salih Muslim. “We are a Syrian political party with no organic relations whatsoever with the PKK. We’re not even asking for an autonomous region within Syria but just for Constitutional recognition.”

Despite the PYD’s apparently humble demands, analysts do not rule out a possible Turkish military operation in the area, or even Turkey funneling FSA fighters to the region to quell the Kurds’ self rule.

The Organisation for a New Kurdish Society, set up in the heat of the revolt against Assad, strongly rejects such a hypothesis. “We’re waiting for our Syrian brothers from the FSA to come and help us liberate our area,” says executive member Bave Sipan.

Sipan says they have no contact with the PYD, while he talks about a “fluent communication” with the FSA. Unsurprisingly, his residence is the only place in the region where this IPS correspondent spotted the Syrian rebels’ flag: black, white and green stripes with two red stars in the centre.

“The future of Syria is a federal state divided in four autonomous regions: Sunni Arab, Kurdish, Alawite and Druze,” says Sipan.

Azad, a friend of the family, joins the conversation. This 38-year-old oil worker and a member of Avahi (Reconstruction) - a civil organisation “committed with Syria’s Kurdish society” - disagrees with his host.

“Everybody is discussing federalism, but nobody knows exactly what they’re talking about,” says Azad. “Our main priorities are rights, education...we are very poor.” □

Angelina Jolie Meets With Syrian Refugees in Kurdistan Region

rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region— Hollywood Star Angelina Jolie visited Syrian Kurdish refugees at Domiz camp in Duhok on Sunday.

"The most important thing is cooperation from the countries on the (Syrian) border... and to make sure these borders in all countries stay open," said Jolie, AFP reported.

Jolie, who is UN refugee agency's special envoy, visited the camp accompanied by Duhok governor Temer Ramazn.

"I've been of course very encouraged to be here and hear the government speak of continuing this wonderful, life-saving open border policy," Jolie told reporters.

Since the start of anti-government protests in Syria last year, which soon turned into an armed revolt, hundreds of Kurdish families have escaped Syria, among them defected soldiers and they are settled in camps set up by Kurdish authorities in Duhok province.

Barzan Bahram, a member of the Domiz camp managing committee told Rudaw, "During her visit Angelina Jolie



A Kurdish boy from Syria waves a poster of Angelina Jolie at Duhok province's Domiz camp for Syrian refugees. Photo: Rudaw.



(Hollywood star and UNHCR special envoy Angelina Jolie meets with Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirwan Barzani to discuss the situation of Syrian refugees at Domiz camp.)

saw firsthand the conditions of Syrian Kurdish refugees and listened to their concerns. The refugees asked Jolie to bring their voice to the world,"

Bahram said that a children's music band from Qamishli dressed up in colorful dresses and welcomed the Hollywood star with Kurdish music.

According to an AFP report, UN statistics puts the number of Syrian refugees registered in Kurdistan at 16,833 with thousands more awaiting registration.

Jolie's visit to the Kurdistan Region was part of a tour to Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan to meet with Syrian refugees.

"With the continuation of the bloodshed in Syria, we have to all be prepared for a greater influx (of refugees), and I'm so happy to hear that the government is continuing to commit to these people," Jolie told the media in Kurdistan. ●



Iraq, Kurdistan end oil dispute, exports continue

By Suadad al-Salhy | Reuters – Thu, Sep 13, 2012

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - Iraq's central government and the country's autonomous Kurdistan agreed to end an oil payment dispute after Kurdistan pledged to continue exports and Baghdad said it would pay foreign companies working there, a senior Iraqi official said on Thursday.

The decision resolves part of a broader feud between Baghdad and Kurdistan about control over oil and territory that has involved major companies including Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Total.

Deputy Prime Minister Rosh Nuri al-Shawish, a Kurd who is part of the central government negotiating team, said Kurdistan would keep pumping its share of national oil exports, and Baghdad would pay foreign companies in the Kurdish region.

"The two delegations agreed to resolve all disagreements and pay the foreign oil companies working in Kurdistan based on the budget law," Shawish's office said in a statement.

"The two sides agreed to continuing oil exports from the region

through the Iraqi oil pipeline and to work to increase production to 200,000 barrels per day as a first stage."

Current shipments from the Kurdistan region as part of national oil exports are around 120,000 bpd, though Baghdad says the agreed amount should be 175,000 bpd. The statement gave no details on when the increase to 200,000 bpd would occur.

Kurdistan in April halted shipments of its oil in protest over what it said were payments due from the central government to companies in the Kurdish region. It restarted shipments later, but said it would cut them off again by September 15 if there was no agreement on payment.

Baghdad and Kurdistan are still caught in a dispute over major oil companies like Exxon Mobil and Chevron who have agreed to sign exploration deals with the Kurdistan Regional Government, contracts the central government says are illegal.

Kurdistan, autonomous with its own regional authority and armed forces since 1991, gets central government funding and uses national pipelines to ship its oil. Baghdad says only the central government has the right to ship oil and gas produced in the country.

The Kurdish region has been looking for more energy autonomy. Already Kurdistan is shipping liquid fuel bi-products to Turkey in exchange for diesel and kerosene for the region's power plants.

A draft national oil law that aims to resolve the disputes over crude has been caught in political infighting for years, though both Baghdad and Kurdistan say that there is progress on reaching an agreement on that legislation. ●

Kurdish violence undermines Turkey's stance on Syria

By Nick Tattersall | Reuters

ANKARA (Reuters) - An explosion of separatist violence in Turkey's Kurdish southeast is fuelling criticism of the government's bellicose rhetoric on Syria and dampening what little public appetite there is for intervention in its crisis-torn neighbor.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has been one of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's harshest critics, accusing him of creating a "terrorist state", allowing the Syrian opposition to organize on Turkish soil, and pushing for a foreign-protected safe zone inside Syria.

Washington sees Turkey as the key player both in supporting Syria's opposition and in planning for what U.S. officials say is the inevitable collapse of the Assad government.

But with soldiers engaged in some of the heaviest fighting in more than a decade with Kurdish militants in the mountainous southeast, public sentiment is swinging against deeper Turkish involvement in Syria. A televised procession of military funerals has turned the focus of national feeling inward.

"I think the Turkish people have now made the connection, rightly or wrong, between the government's ambitiously assertive policy on Syria and the rise in PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) terrorism," said Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat and chairman of the Centre for Economic and Foreign Policy Studies think-tank.

"It is very clear that it is going to be even more unpopular going forward if the government continues to scale up the rhetoric (on Syria) at a time when, egregiously in a way, it is unable to deal with Turkey's own security problems."

Militants from the PKK - considered a terrorist organization by Ankara, the United States and European Union - have ambushed military convoys, kidnapped government officials and laid roadside bombs in recent weeks.

The military has responded by bombarding PKK camps with fighter jets and attack helicopters, in some of the heaviest fighting since the PKK took up arms in 1984 with the aim of carving out a Kurdish state.

Turkish analysts suspect Assad of allowing a major Syrian Kurdish movement believed to be linked to the PKK to seize control of security in some towns in northern Syria to prevent locals from joining the rebel Free Syrian Army.

Assad has denied allowing the PKK to oper-

ate on Syrian soil.

"The Syrian administration has a history of supporting terrorist organizations, including the PKK, and using terrorism as a tool for its politics and diplomacy," a Turkish foreign ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

"We have some information or evidence that an active link has been re-established," the official said, declining to comment further.

Ankara has warned it could take military action if the PKK were to launch attacks from Syrian soil and has conducted military exercises on the border in a clear warning to Damascus.

But the idea of sending Turkish troops into majority Kurdish northern Syria, even under any sort of international mandate, would risk inflaming public sentiment further while Turkey battles to contain the PKK on its own soil.

"The current terrorism in Turkey is heavily influenced by the government's Syria, Iraq and Iran policies," Faruk Logoglu, vice chairman of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), told Reuters.

"Both its domestic policies and foreign policies are contributing to the escalation in violence."

POSTURING

Erdogan's ruling AK Party enjoys wide popularity and public demonstrations of anger over its Syria policy have been rare. But frustrations are growing, not least in the southern border province of Hatay, which has absorbed a large proportion of the 80,000 Syrian refugees who have fled to Turkey.

Riot police fired teargas to disperse hundreds of demonstrators protesting the government's Syria policies in the provincial capital Antakya on Sunday. Several dozen more chanted slogans against U.S. policy in Syria outside the U.S. Embassy in Ankara the same day.

Erdogan has called on domestic media to limit their coverage of PKK attacks on soldiers. Turkish TV networks barely mentioned an ambush on Tuesday in which 10 troops were killed, though several newspapers carried pictures.

A cartoon in Wednesday's opposition Cumhuriyet newspaper showed Erdogan reading a blank newspaper and commenting: "There's no news or analysis, just as I wanted it."

Ankara has repeatedly denied it is supplying any weapons to Syria's rebels, but countries including Saudi Arabia and

Qatar have been directing vital military and communications aid to them through Turkey, Gulf sources have said.

The lack of international consensus on Syria has further piqued public sentiment, fuelling a sense that Turkey, increasingly isolated, is being used by Western powers eager to see Assad's regime fall but reluctant to intervene themselves.

"The Turkish government doesn't have its own policy in Syria, Western countries do, and the AK Party acts like their spare wheel," said Ilker Yucel, president of the Turkish Youth Association, who took part in the demonstration in Antakya.

Taken together, rising public skepticism at home and a lack of consensus abroad could lead the Turkish government to tone down its rhetoric on Syria, Ulgen said.

"The combination of these two elements would certainly militate for a change in posturing on the Turkish side, but so far we have not seen signs of this ... I think there is mounting pressure for the government to scale down its ambitions."

"UNCOMFORTABLE POSITION"

Erdogan has been passionate in defending his stance.

"We are a country with a 910 kilometer common border, connected by relatives. For Syria, we are not the USA, nor are we England, nor Iran, nor Russia. A country in Asia can remain indifferent over Syria but Turkey does not have this luxury," he told an AK Party meeting this month.

"While Syria is boiling and exposed to brutal killings, we could not, and did not, turn our backs."

The stance is damaging fragile relations with Iran and Iraq.

Some fear it could also fan sectarian tensions in Sunni Muslim Turkey, which has Alawite and other minorities.

Syria's mainly Sunni Muslim rebels are supported by Gulf Arab states in their struggle to topple Assad, whose minority Alawite faith is an offshoot of Shi'ite Islam. Shi'ite Iran has been Assad's staunchest ally.

"Turkey finds itself in the uncomfortable position of taking sides with Sunnis. We have to take ourselves back from this perception," one source close to the government told Reuters recently, saying the international community had underestimated the extent of Assad's support.

"Alawites, Christians, Kurds are supporting him not because they love him but because they see the alternative as chaos."♦

Syrian war deflates Turkey's high hopes

ISTANBUL

BY TIM ARANGO

As the war in Syria rages next door, Turks have grown increasingly weary of almost-daily reports of troubles at home: Iranian spies working with Kurdish insurgents, soldiers ambushed and killed, millions spent caring for a flood of refugees, lost trade and havoc in border villages.

"This is how we start our morning," Mehmet Krasuleymanoglu, a bookseller in a narrow alley in central Istanbul, said recently as he laid out several newspapers, each with a blaring headline about an explosion at a munitions depot that killed more than two dozen soldiers. The government called it an accident, but in the current environment, many Turks, including Mr. Krasuleymanoglu, are not so sure.

"What do we have to do with Syria?" he said. "The prime minister and his wife used to go there for tea and coffee."

The Turkish government is facing a spasm of reproach from its own people over its policy of supporting Syria's uprising; hosting fighters in the south, opposition figures in Istanbul and refugees on the border; and helping ferry arms to the opposition. While many Turks at first supported the policy as a stand for democracy and change, many now believe that it is leading to instability at home, undermining Turkey's own economy and security.

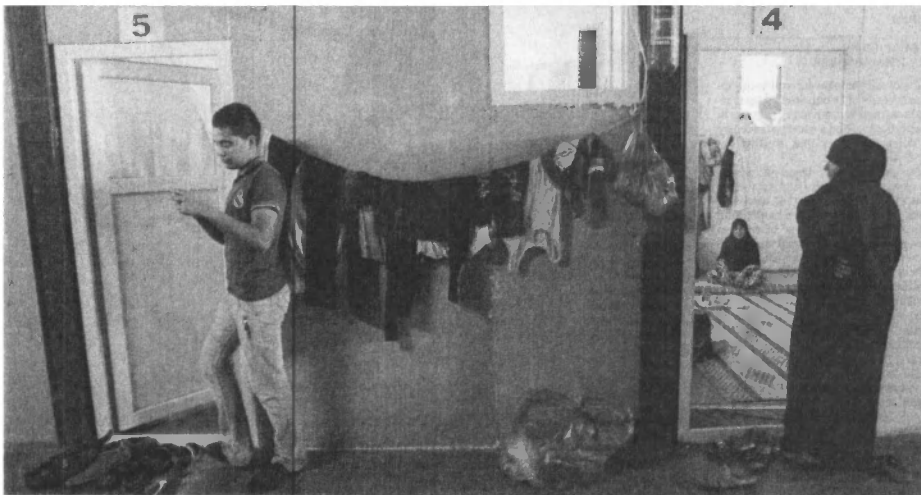
Turkey's call for military intervention, which much of the international community opposes, has only added to the domestic frustration. Now, in the wake of the anti-American protests that have convulsed the Muslim world in reaction to a film that denigrated Islam, it seems less likely that Turkey will find partners in the West to join its call for military action in Syria.

The souring mood presents the first obvious setback for the foreign policy of Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has ridden the turmoil of the Arab Spring to promote Turkey's influence abroad and his standing at home.

Suddenly, Turkey appears vulnerable on multiple fronts.

"A lot of Turks are seeing this as a direct result of Turkey's aggressive posture against Assad," said Soner Cagaptay, the director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, referring to the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.

In the face of criticism from columnists and opposition politicians, and signs of rising public opposition to its



Syrian refugees on Tuesday at a camp at Altinozu, a Turkish border town in Hatay Province. The government in Ankara is facing a backlash on its support of the Syrian uprising.

Syria policy, the country is being compelled to reassess its overall strategy for spreading its influence and interests across the Middle East, including Egypt, Iraq and Iran. Increasingly frustrated with its efforts to join the European Union, Turkey turned noticeably toward regaining and elevating its standing in the Muslim world, especially amid the chaos and reordering of alliances caused by the Arab Spring.

"Turkey's Syria policy has failed," wrote Dogan Heper, a columnist for the newspaper Milliyet. "It has turned our neighbors into enemies. We have been left alone in the world."

Selcuk Unal, the spokesman for the Foreign Ministry, acknowledged that the Syria policy had become a domestic policy issue. Even though it may not be popular, he said, "that doesn't mean it is wrong."

"I don't think we are wrong so far," Mr. Unal said. "Turkey is on the right side of history on this."

Before the Arab uprisings, economic and political engagement with Syria was a centerpiece of Turkey's regional strategy, which some described as an effort to integrate the Middle East along the lines of the E.U. Visa restrictions were lifted and trade increased. Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Assad even vacationed together. Initially, Turkey urged dialogue and reform in Syria, but as the killing increased, Turkey turned against the government.

That shift was part of its broader regional strategy. Last year Mr. Erdogan toured Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, offering Turkey's support for the democratic aspirations of the Arab world's revolutionaries, and holding up Turkey's mix of Islam, democracy and economic

prosperity as an inspiration for those countries in turmoil.

Turkey, it seemed, was ascendant, and the public was largely supportive.

"We loved it," said Soli Ozel, an academic and columnist. "It was like, we're back. The empire is back."

Perhaps causing the greatest unease for Turks these days is an increase in violence by Turkey's separatist Kurdistan Workers Party, or P.K.K., which seems emboldened by the success of Syria's Kurds in gaining territory. The P.K.K. has waged an insurgency against Turkey since the 1980s in a conflict that has claimed an estimated 40,000 lives. More than 700 people have died in the past 14 months, the deadliest level in 13 years, according to a report published last week by the International Crisis Group.

The P.K.K. has now set up daylight checkpoints in villages in the southeast, carried out deadly ambushes against Turkish forces and kidnapped lawmakers. Recently, the Turkish military carried out an offensive involving F-16 fighter jets and 2,000 soldiers, Reuters reported. On Tuesday, assailants suspected of being P.K.K. rebels struck a military convoy with a rocket in the Bingol Province, in the southeast, killing 7 soldiers and wounding more than 60. The Associated Press reported from Ankara, citing officials.

The Assad government has effectively ceded some territory near the Turkish border to Syria's Kurds, who have not joined the opposition in large numbers. These gains have fanned the flames of Kurds' historical ambitions for an independent state that would include Kurdish areas in Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran, analysts say.

"There has been a thunderbolt in the

minds of people there," said Sezgin Tanrikulu, a Kurdish member of the Turkish Parliament, referring to Kurdish areas in southeast Turkey. P.K.K. fighters have become more visible, he said.

An influx of refugees — more than 100,000 Syrians have sought safety in Turkey — has tested government resources and raised tensions in border areas, prompting the Turkish government to try to relocate refugees further inland. The government says it has spent \$500 million providing for refugees and has complained of a lack of support from the international community.

According to Mr. Cagaptay of the Turkish Research Program, Turkey remains "the only country that is economically and politically stable in the region." Turkey's ambitious Middle East policy has been centered on Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu's much-heralded vision of "no problems" with neighbors. But that approach has stalled amid the hard realities of the re-

"Turkey's policy has failed. It has turned our neighbors into enemies. We have been left alone in the world."

gion and the limits of Turkish power, most evident in its policy in Syria, where nearly 23,000 people have been killed and the Assad government clings to power. Now the joke is that there are "no neighbors without problems."

Last year Mr. Davutoglu spoke expansively about a political, economic and military alliance with Egypt that could serve as a linchpin of a new regional order. Almost nothing has come of that, although a spokesman for Mr. Davutoglu said Turkey would soon begin a high-level dialogue with the government of Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's new president, who was a member of the Sunni Islamist Muslim Brotherhood.

Now, the talk is more about a rivalry between Egypt and Turkey over which will become the region's power broker.

"Egypt will try to restore its central role in Arab affairs, and it will be interesting to see Morsi and Erdogan compete for influence in the region," Mr. Cagaptay said.

Mr. Ozel, the columnist, was more emphatic. "The fact of the matter is that when all is said and done, Turks are Turks and Arabs are Arabs," he said. "Egypt believes it is the crown jewel of the Arab world, and it will not share the

spotlight with anyone, including Turks."

Analysts say Turkey has hardened sectarian divisions in the region by working with Saudi Arabia and Qatar in backing Syria's Sunni rebels against Mr. Assad's Alawite sect, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, and by supporting Sunnis in Iraq against the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, a Shiite. Tensions with Iran, the region's largest Shiite power, have been heightened since Turkey agreed to allow NATO to place a radar station on its territory as part of a missile defense system.

To its credit, analysts say, Turkey will quickly shift from policies it deems mistaken. For example, it opposed NATO intervention in Libya and then swiftly changed tack.

But it may be too late to change course on Syria. "They are stuck in this conflict so deeply, there is no way out," said Mr. Tanrikulu, the Kurdish lawmaker.

Sebnem Arsu contributed reporting.



Kurds expect Baghdad's first oil payment next week

- First payment will be more than \$850 million
- Exports to be 200,000 bpd in October, rising in 2013
- Oil, gas pipelines to Turkey to be completed in 2014

September 24, 2012 (Reuters) -By Ayla Jean Yackley

ISTANBUL — Iraqi Kurdistan expects an initial payment of 1 trillion dinars (\$858 million) from Baghdad to clear next week after the two sides settled their dispute over payments to oil producers, Oil Minister Ashti Hawrami said on Monday.

The autonomous region's exports will resume in October at 200,000 barrels per day and continue at that rate until the end of 2012, then rising again, Hawrami told reporters at an energy conference in Istanbul.

"By 2015, we are looking at 1 million barrels per day. We're on track, regardless of whether exports stop again," he said.

Baghdad and Kurdistan agreed earlier this month to end an oil payment dispute after the latter pledged to continue exports and Baghdad said it would pay foreign companies working there.

Increased production from Kurdistan, as well as from oilfields further south controlled by Baghdad, in the coming years means that Iraq needs a new pipeline to Turkey to handle combined output that could reach 6 or 7 million barrels per day (bpd), Hawrami said.

An oil pipeline with a capacity of 1 million barrels per day and a gas

pipeline whose capacity is yet to be determined will both be built to Turkey in the first half of 2014, he said.

The KRG plans to eventually supply Turkey with 15 billion cubic metres of gas. Beyond that, "we will be looking at additional gas that can transit via Turkey to Europe, whether by pipeline or an LNG plant at Ceyhan," Hawrami added.

Kurdistan in April temporarily halted shipments of its oil in protest over what it said were payments due from the central government to companies in the Kurdish region.

Small oil producers like London-based Genel Energy and DNO of Norway have been in the region for about a decade. Majors including Exxon Mobil, Chevron and Total are newer arrivals.

The dispute over the exports is part of a broader feud about control over oil and territory. A draft national oil law that aims to resolve the disputes over crude has been caught up in political infighting for years.

"The deal reached with Baghdad is a temporary deal before we have an oil and gas law. It allows the oil companies to be compensated according to their oil contracts, then the surplus revenue will go to Baghdad, which we will all benefit from under the budget allocations," Hawrami said.

"The agreement is designed as such so that exports are not disrupted... The previous problem was it was not expressly stated in the budget," he continued.

Kurdistan, with its own regional authority and armed forces since 1991, gets central government funding and uses national pipelines to ship oil. Baghdad says only the central government has the right to ship oil and gas produced in the country.

Hawrami said next year the KRG would double oil refining capacity from about 70,000 bpd now, making it self-sufficient.

"We will no longer need products from Baghdad by early next year," he told the conference. ●

Le nord de la Syrie sous un tapis de bombes

Gaziantep (Turquie)

Envoyé spécial

Il n'y a plus un village, plus un hameau du nord de la Syrie qui échappe à la punition du pouvoir syrien. Maisons détruites, populations tuées : pendant que les forces gouvernementales continuent d'affronter l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) dans Alep, la politique de terre brûlée menée par les forces de Damas s'étend à l'ensemble des zones où se trouvent les insurgés.

Après la ville, les campagnes. Entre Alep et Idlib, et jusqu'à Homs, ou leurs environs, ce ne sont plus les bombardements sporadiques des mois passés, quand l'ASL prenait pied dans les zones rurales, mais des tapis de bombes à l'échelle d'une région. En témoigne Donatella Rovera, d'Amnesty International, qui revient d'un séjour de plusieurs semaines « dans les régions dont l'armée syrienne a été chassée par les forces de l'opposition », au nord-ouest de la Syrie.

L'Iran reconnaît la présence de Pasdaran en Syrie

L'Iran a admis, dimanche 16 septembre, pour la première fois, avoir envoyé des membres des Gardiens de la révolution en Syrie pour aider le régime face à la rébellion. « Un certain nombre de membres des forces Al-Qods sont présents en Syrie et au Liban », a déclaré le général Mohammad Ali Jafari, commandant en chef des Gardiens de la révolution (Pasdaran), la garde prétorienne du régime iranien.

Cette zone, selon la chercheuse, est soumise à « une politique de bombardements aériens, à l'aide d'armes imprécises, destinées normalement à des champs de bataille, mais utilisées contre des zones résidentielles, avec des conséquences désastreuses pour la population civile. Dans chacun des villages et villes que j'ai visités dans les semaines passées, les bombardements aériens, les tirs au canon ou au mortier sont devenus une réalité quotidienne pour la population. Les victimes sont invariablement civiles et beaucoup sont des enfants ».

D'autres villes insurgées de Syrie, ou leurs environs, de Deraa à Deir-Ez-Zor, sont aussi sous les bombes. Mais dans le nord de la Syrie, de la frontière turque à celle du Liban, dans un large ovale où l'armée syrienne, depuis le mois de mai, a été progressivement chassée, elle fait son retour par le ciel, partout où il lui est possible de bombarder. C'est le premier objectif de cette campagne de bombardement stratégique : faute d'at-

teindre l'ennemi, il faut détruire ses ressources vitales. Cela revient à viser la population avec des canons, des avions et des hélicoptères. Les forces loyalistes bénéficient du contrôle absolu du ciel, mais s'appuient également sur des positions militaires au milieu de zones insurgées. Des hélicoptères décollent ainsi de la base de Meneg, tout près d'Azaz, une ville où la concentration de troupes ASL est forte. Cinq minutes de vol leur suffisent pour mitrailler des véhicules sur les routes avoisinantes ou bombarder des marchés et des maisons au hasard. L'ASL a tenté à plusieurs reprises de prendre d'assaut Meneg, sans succès. Comme elle a échoué à prendre ou à détruire les aéroports de la région d'Alep et d'Idlib. Sans parler de bases militaires comme l'académie militaire d'Al-Ramoussa, ou le camp d'Al-Mouchat, dit des « rangers », juste au nord d'Alep, depuis lequel l'armée syrienne utilise son artillerie contre les villages avoisinants tenus par l'ASL.



Des douilles d'obus, le 12 septembre, dans une rue du village de Saraqib, au nord de la Syrie, près d'Idlib. REUTERS

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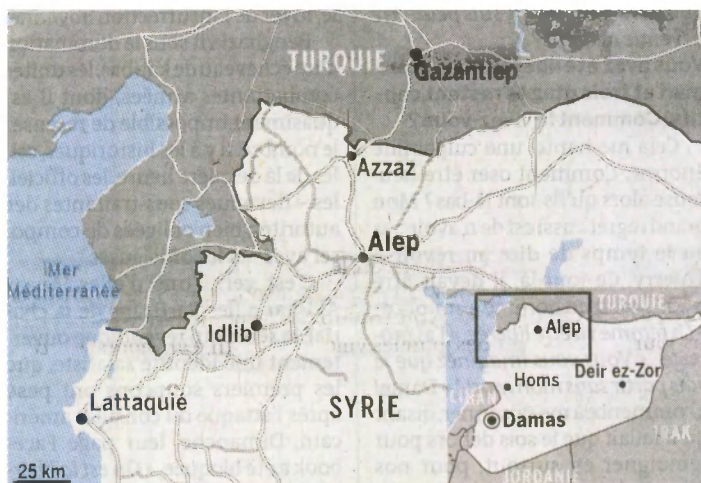
D'autres parties de la Syrie insurgée se trouvent aussi sous les bombes. Mais Alep est particulièrement visée, parce qu'il reste encore beaucoup à détruire, et que la résistance de l'ASL y est implantée sur une large bande. A Damas, la capitale, l'ASL était parvenue à infiltrer des armes et des combattants, mais leurs forces s'y sont heurtées à une armée déterminée, capable de reprendre des quartiers

maison par maison et d'y rester.

A Alep, l'armée piétine, faute de troupes solides que requiert la guerre urbaine, et pour conserver ses meilleures unités pour la « Syrie utile », à commencer par la capitale. Lorsque l'ASL a infiltré Alep, vers le mois de mai, il s'agissait de préparer le terrain pour des unités rebelles constituées dans les localités des environs, avant de lancer un assaut conjoint sur la ville, vers le 20 juillet. La grande bataille dans la capitale économique syrienne était supposée faire vaciller le régime. Des katibas (brigades) aguerries avaient fait le voyage d'Idlib ou encore d'Hama. Avec l'appui de combattants étrangers, Alep est devenu un carrefour de la guerre.

Début août, l'armée annonçait une offensive majeure pour reprendre la ville. Elle a échoué. Une guerre d'usures s'est instaurée, dont l'armée syrienne tente de sortir en faisant le vide dans les zones insurgées. Faute de pouvoir reprendre la moitié est d'Alep, le pouvoir syrien en poursuit la destruction méthodique, étendant cette méthode au nord insurgé.

Les Comités de coordination locaux (LCC), une organisation de militants ayant établi un réseau de correspondants à travers le pays, disent avoir recensé 167 victimes à travers la Syrie, dimanche 16 septembre, dont 50 à Alep. Sur des vidéos, on distingue les morts du jour, des cadavres méconnaissables, empilés sur le sol, devant l'un



des hôpitaux d'Alep.

Le choc est d'autant plus dur que « la ville s'est retrouvée du jour au lendemain dans la guerre civile », remarque Thomas Pierret, chercheur au centre d'études de l'islam et du Moyen-Orient (Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies) à l'université d'Edimbourg. Quel est l'état d'esprit des habitants, à la fois dans les zones ASL, et dans la partie ouest de la ville, où se trouvent les classes les plus favorisées et l'administration? Une source familière de la ville évoque des membres de l'élite d'Alep, qui « ont donné des fonds à l'opposition, dans le plus grand secret », mais commencent « à se poser des questions en réalisant que la guerre s'approche de chez eux et qu'avec elle, c'est la destruction qui menace ».

La présence de l'ASL dans une zone implique désormais sa destruction à l'aveugle par les bombardements. Selon Peter Harling, directeur du projet Moyen-Orient à l'International Crisis Group (ICG), « le régime syrien lutte d'une façon qui rend toute victoire impossible, en procédant à une escalade des formes et des niveaux de violence, dans l'espoir de rétablir son pouvoir grâce à la peur ».

Cette peur au sein de la population semble difficile à réinstaller au sein d'un nombre croissant de familles dont des proches ou le domicile ont été emportés par les bombes et qui, au sens littéral, n'ont plus rien à perdre. En détruisant une partie du pays, le pouvoir ne peut convaincre qu'il s'attachera à la sécurité de ses habitants et à leur bien-être en cas de victoire.

Mais ce piège guette aussi les forces de l'ASL, qui échouent à faire la

Le pouvoir ne peut plus convaincre qu'il s'attachera à la sécurité de ses habitants en cas de victoire

démonstration qu'elles peuvent protéger les zones où elles opèrent.

L'ASL peut-elle gagner la bataille de la capitale d'une économie dévastée? La guerre d'usure n'exclut pas les retournements. En attendant, les quartiers est de la ville continuent de se vider, vers des villages désormais sous

les bombes ou vers les quartiers ouest, encore épargnés. Selon le ministère de l'éducation syrien, il y a actuellement des déplacés installés dans plus de 800 écoles à travers le pays. L'Unicef a dénombré 2 000 écoles détruites ou endommagées par des combats ou des bombardements. A Homs, un demi-million de déplacés vivent dans cent bâtiments publics. L'ONU espère distribuer de la nourriture à la moitié d'entre eux.

« Dix-sept mois de bain de sang et de destruction n'ont pas été suffisants pour que le pouvoir ou l'opposition parviennent à trouver une solution qui n'implique pas l'éradication de l'autre », analyse le dernier rapport d'ICG sur la guerre en Syrie. ■

JEAN-PHILIPPE RÉMY



18 septembre 2012

10 soldats tués et 70 blessés dans une embuscade du PKK

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), (AFP) — Dix soldats turcs ont été tués et 70 blessés mardi au cours d'une embuscade tendue par des rebelles séparatistes kurdes contre un convoi militaire dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a-t-on appris de source sécuritaire locale.

Un précédent bilan de cette attaque fourni par un responsable local faisait état de sept morts et de 58 militaires blessés.

L'attaque des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) s'est produite sur une route entre les provinces de Bingöl et celle voisine de Mus, ont précisé ces sources.

Les rebelles ont pris pour cible avec des lance-roquettes un convoi qui transportait 200 soldats à bord de véhicules civils sous l'escorte d'un blindé, a déclaré le gouverneur de Bingöl Hakan Güvençer, cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Généralement, le PKK utilise des mines télécommandées contre les véhicules militaires, plus rarement des lance-roquettes.

"C'est nous qui aurons le dernier mot après cette attaque par trahison en nettoyant au plus vite Bingöl de ces assassins", a déclaré M. Güvençer, soulignant qu'une opération avait été lancée impliquant des policiers et des membres des forces spéciales de la gendarmerie.



L'attaque des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du... (PHOTO REUTERS)

Elle dispose également d'un soutien aérien, selon Anatolie.

Le PKK a multiplié depuis cet été ses attaques contre les forces de sécurité turques dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Les troupes d'Ankara y ont répondu par des déploiements de troupes massifs et de nombreuses opérations impliquant les forces aériennes.

Lundi, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé que l'armée avait tué environ 500 rebelles kurdes en un mois dans le Sud-Est, peuplé en majorité

de Kurdes.

Il a aussi une nouvelle fois appelé les rebelles à déposer les armes et promis que dans ce cas l'armée cesserait ses opérations.

Les séparatistes kurdes n'ont pour leur part communiqué aucun bilan.

Le PKK, classé comme organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays, a ouvert les hostilités en 1984 dans le sud-est de la Turquie, déclenchant un conflit qui a fait plus de 45.000 morts.

Turkey Hit by Wave of Attacks as Syria Fallout Emboldens PKK

By Selcan Hacaoglu

Turkey's war with Kurdish militants has entered its bloodiest phase in more than a decade, with attacks on soldiers and police almost every day and a breakdown in ties with neighbors that had helped to contain the threat.

On Sept. 18, an army convoy in the largely Kurdish southeast was ambushed, leaving 10 dead. Two days earlier, eight police were killed when a mine blew up their minibus, and the day before four soldiers died in a similar blast. Police defused a bomb today near the airport in Diyarbakir, the largest city in the southeast, while the state-run Anatolia agency reported an attack on a Netherlands-based energy company in southeast Turkey that injured four earlier this week. The army has killed 500 members of the Kurdistan Workers' Party or PKK since February, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan says.

Turkey's fraying ties with Syria, Iran and Iraq, neighbors with their own Kurdish minorities that have collaborated against the PKK, offer new openings for the group. Erdogan, who had vowed to end the Kurdish conflict, now risks presiding over an escalation that could undermine the \$800 billion economy and encourage a backlash by Turkish nationalists.

"It certainly is the broadest PKK challenge since the late 1980s," said Michael Rubin, a Middle East scholar at the American Enterprise Institute. "With events in Syria, Iraqi Kurdistan's growing wealth, and tension between Iran and Turkey, there has never been a better time for the PKK to stake its claim."

BACKING REBELS

The Kurdish conflict has killed almost 40,000 people over three decades, and cost more than \$300 billion according to official estimates. Fighting peaked in the first half of the 1990s and eased after the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan,

now in solitary confinement in a Turkish prison, in 1999

Turkey's relations with Syria have been hostile since Erdogan backed the rebels fighting President Bashar al-Assad, allowing some to shelter on Turkish soil. A Turkish plane crashed into the east Mediterranean in June after it was fired on from Syria.

The collapse of ties gave Kurdish militants more freedom to operate over a 911-kilometer (566-mile) border where Turkey and Syria had previously staged joint exercises.

When Assad's troops withdrew from parts of north Syria in July, Kurdish groups seized control of several towns. Front-page stories in Turkish newspapers said that the area was being administered by the PKK. Those reports were exaggerated, Deputy Prime Minister Besir Atalay said in an interview last week.

BLOODY HANDED

After a car-bomb killed nine people in the southern city of Gaziantep last month, government ministers raised the possibility that Syria may have collaborated with the PKK in the attack.

The Syrian conflict has hurt Turkey's ties with Iran, an Assad ally. Its friendship with Iraq has been strained by the presence in Istanbul of fugitive Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi, sentenced to death in his homeland for running death squads, and made welcome in Turkey. Kurds control northern Iraq and account for much of the population in nearby parts of Syria and Iran.

Nine Turkish citizens were arrested last month on charges of working for Iranian intelligence, Today's Zaman newspaper reported on Sept. 7. The suspects were also accused of relaying positions of Turkish forces to the PKK, Today's Zaman reported, citing security forces.

NEW PROCESS

Erdogan, speaking in the western city of Denizli on Sept. 17, said Turkish security forces would only halt operations if the PKK, classified as a terrorist organization by the U.S. and European Union, lays down its weapons. He promised to pursue economic growth at the same time as "fighting the bloody handed terrorist organization."

Kurdish politicians supportive of the PKK argue that there can only be progress if the Turkish army also halts operations.

"Both sides should pull their fingers from the trigger, without any conditions," Selahattin Demirtas, co-leader of the legal Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, said this week. "If they can do that then we can build a new negotiation process."

His party also calls for Ocalan's release so

that he can join in peace talks. The PKK's commander in the field, Murat Karayilan, said this week that "the time has come" for Ocalan's freedom, and vowed to respond in kind to the Turkish army's drive against the group, according to the Kurdish Firat news agency.

So far, the latest wave of violence hasn't affected financial markets, because attacks were viewed as isolated incidents that would not threaten political stability, said Inan Demir, chief economist at Finansbank AS in Istanbul.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Turkey's benchmark stock index is up 31 percent this year, and yields on two-year bonds have slid more than four percentage points, nearing a record low. While growth has eased after last year's 8.5 percent boom, the economy still expanded at an annual 2.9 percent rate in the second quarter.

An escalation to the level of conflict seen in the 1990s would "threaten Turkey's human capital," Demir said. "Less importantly, but unmistakably, it would weigh on fiscal balances and jeopardize the public debt dynamics."

Erdogan's government has invested \$30 billion in the southeast, building hospitals, schools and airports, since coming to power in November 2002, Atalay said at his Ankara office. He cited an airport project in Yuksekova, a town in the largely Kurdish region, as an example of the difficulties. "They are burning down construction machines, harassing the contractor there," Atalay said.

PIPELINE ATTACK

Militants fired on a helicopter on Sept. 15, wounding four security personnel working for Netherlands-based NV Turkse Perenco, which is searching for oil in the southeast, the Anatolia agency said today, citing the company. The helicopter came under attack as it took off from an oil exploration site in Batman province, Anatolia said.

An attack on a pipeline in the southeast briefly cut oil flow from northern Iraq on Sept. 16, prompting the government to step up security, Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said. The PKK has targeted energy and construction workers, threatening investment in the region, which has Turkey's lowest employment rates.

Earlier in his premiership, Erdogan raised expectations in the southeast by removing some restrictions on the Kurdish language in education and media, part of a promised "opening" to a group that accounts for as much as 20 percent of Turkey's 75 million people.

PARLIAMENTARY IMMUNITY

In the past three years, the government ➤

➤ has taken a tougher line.

About 8,000 people are under arrest on charges of belonging to the PKK's urban arm, the Peace and Democracy Party's Demirtas said this week.

The government has threatened to strip some of the party's lawmakers of their parliamentary immunity, so that they can be charged and jailed for being PKK supporters. One of them, Sebahat Tuncel, was

sentenced to eight years and nine months in prison on Sept. 18, though she won't serve the sentence unless her immunity is lifted.

Adding to local grievances was a botched air attack in December, which was aimed at the PKK and instead killed 34 Kurdish villagers smuggling goods from Iraq.

"Erdogan is currently indicating that he believes this can be solved by military and

security policies alone," said Hugh Pope, an analyst for the International Crisis Group in Istanbul, which published a report on the conflict this week. "Previous administrations have tried and failed with this strategy."

TheNational

September 20, 2012

Kurdistan looks to awaken giant

Florian Neuhofer and April Yee

DUBAI and LONDON // Through war and peace, northern Iraq's Kirkuk oilfield - endowed with 10 billion barrels of reserves, equal to half of America's total - has effectively lain fallow.

Proposals have been floated to revive today's anaemic production of 280,000 barrels per day (bpd) but progress has been blocked by a disagreement over whether the federal government or the Kurdistan regional government has rights to the land.

"Years passed and still we are in limbo," says Ali Salhi, the chairman of the oil and economic development council of the Kirkuk governorate. Today, his hopes are buoyed by the success of Kurdistan, which has partnered the world's biggest oil companies in the face of opposition from Baghdad.

"With this new era and new Kirkuk and new Kurdistan - with these huge resources - the local people should become a beneficiary," Mr Salhi said at a conference in Dubai.

Kirkuk is the next battleground in the spat between Baghdad and Erbil, the Kurdish capital.

This year, the Iraqi oil ministry hosted BP executives in Kirkuk to evaluate the possibility of doubling production to 600,000 bpd.

The Kurdish oil ministry said such a deal would require its approval. It is planning to award a contract to a major to treble output at the Khurmala dome, one of three geological formations in the Kirkuk field. Such moves exacerbate long-running tensions over the fate of Kirkuk. In Tamim, the province that is home to the field, a referendum over whether to join Kurdistan or remain federally governed has been

*Development of the Kirkuk oilfield, above, has been blocked by a disagreement over whether the federal government or the Kurdistan regional government has rights to the land.
Marwan Ibrahim / AFP*



delayed since 2007. For Mr Salhi, Kurdistan has already won.

"I am very optimistic [for] all the companies working in the north - all the rights and the contracts they have will be [made legitimate]," he said.

In the past year, ExxonMobil, Chevron and Total have all signed agreements to explore acreage in Kurdistan, in spite of the central government policy of excluding companies operating there from future licensing rounds in the south. Oil majors complain the onerous terms imposed on them by Baghdad leave little room for profitability.

This week, Iraq's central government ratified an agreement that releases payments to international oil companies in Kurdistan.

Oil exports, which were suspended last month over the payment dispute, will now resume at previous levels of 140,000 bpd, said Ashti Hawrami, the Kurdish minister for natural resources. Exports will rise to 200,000 bpd next month, and increase to at least 250,000 bpd next year. Kurdistan is also forcing the central government's hand with a planned 1 million bpd export pipeline to Turkey next year, which will allow it to export crude without using infrastructure controlled by Baghdad. A limited amount of oil product is already flo-

wing into Turkey from Kurdistan in exchange for petrol, signalling that Ankara is supportive of the Kurdistan regional government's efforts.

The Kurds believe their ambitious production targets give them additional leverage against the central government.

"When you have a volume increase, everybody is forced to make the right decision," Mr Hawrami said at a conference in London.

A national oil law enshrining the legitimacy of the profitable contracts signed by the Kurdish regional government and oil companies, including those owned by the UAE, could be signed by the end of the year. A committee including Mr Hawrami and his Baghdad counterpart is being set up to revive efforts to revive the long-stalled law, said the minister.

"I believe this export initiative and companies being paid according to their contracts is a big breakthrough to pave the way to get the draft oil and gas law working," said Mr Hawrami. ♦

500 Kurdish rebels killed or captured in past month, says Turkish PM

Recep Tayyip Erdogan says military offensives against PKK will end only after rebels lay down arms

Associated Press in Ankara

Turkish security forces have killed or captured almost 500 Kurdish rebels in the past month, the prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has said.

Erdogan said military offensives against the Kurdistan Workers' party, or PKK, would end only after the rebels laid down arms. The group is fighting for self-rule in the Kurdish-dominated south-east of Turkey.

An upsurge in violence between government forces and the PKK has dimmed hopes of a resolution to the conflict, which has killed tens of thousands since



1984. In the latest violence, suspected Kurdish rebels detonated a roadside bomb in eastern Turkey on Sunday, killing eight police officers.

The military said last week it had launched a large-scale operation invol-

ving seven battalions – several thousand troops – near the border with Iraq, from where the rebels launch hit-and-run attacks on Turkish targets.

Erdogan said 500 Kurdish rebels had been "rendered ineffective" in south-east Turkey since mid-August, including at least 123 PKK fighters who were killed in fighting near the border with Iraq in the past week. An aide said the prime minister was referring to hundreds of rebels either killed or captured by the security forces.

Turkey and its western allies consider the PKK to be a terrorist organisation. □

REUTERS

Fighting in Turkey kills soldier, three Kurdish militants

TUNCELI, Turkey - September 23, 2012 (Reuters)

CLASHES IN Turkey overnight killed one soldier and three Kurdish militants, the latest in the heaviest fighting the country has seen in more than a decade, security sources said on Sunday.

Fighting erupted outside the southeastern town of Tunceli after two groups of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) fighters simultaneously attacked two military outposts, the sources said.

More than 700 people have been killed since national elections in

June last year, making this the deadliest period since the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1999, the International Crisis Group said in a report this month.

The upsurge in violence has been linked by some to the failure of secret peace talks, thought to be held in 2010, between the PKK and Turkish intelligence officers in Oslo.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan accuses neighboring Syria of arming the rebels, who are mainly based in northern Iraq. Erdogan has been an outspoken critic of President Bashar al-Assad's 18-month-old crackdown on a popular uprising.

The PKK took up arms against the Turkish state in 1984 to establish an ethnic homeland. More than 40,000 people, mainly Kurds, have died in the violence. The PKK has since scaled back its demands to greater political autonomy and cultural rights for Turkey's 15 million ethnic Kurds. ●

REUTERS

Kurdistan seals oil products deal with Baghdad

BAGHDAD (Reuters) - September 20, 2012

IRAQ'S autonomous Kurdistan said on Thursday it will receive 147,000 barrels of oil products per day, as part of a deal concluded with Baghdad to end a dispute over oil payments.

The deal, which was first outlined last week, will solve only few points of a broader feud between Baghdad and Kurdistan over oil exports, energy policy and territory which have become increasingly contentious topics.

"This deal cannot solve all the problems currently but it is considered a good step," Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani said in a statement posted on the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) website on Thursday.

Under the terms, the federal government in Baghdad will send 17 percent of its oil products to Kurdistan, which works out at 147,000

barrels per day, the statement said.

Baghdad and Kurdistan have been feuding over major oil companies like Exxon and Chevron who have signed exploration deals with the Kurdistan Regional Government, contracts the central government says are illegal.

Kurdistan, autonomous with its own government and armed forces since 1991, gets central government funding and uses national pipelines to ship its oil. Baghdad says only the central government has the right to ship oil and gas.

Barzani said Kurdistan had formed a committee to calculate oil contract revenues and expenses in Kurdistan. He said a report on this would be published at a later date.

Kurdistan has said it will keep its oil production for export at 140,000 barrels per day this month before raising it to 200,000 bpd for the rest of the year. It also said Baghdad would pay 1 trillion Iraqi dinars or around \$857 million for foreign companies working in the Kurdish region.

Kurdistan halted shipments of its oil in April in protest over what it said were payments due from Baghdad to companies. It restarted shipments later, but had said it would halt them again by September 15 if there was no agreement on payment. ●

In Iraq pullout, White House fell short on several main goals

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON

The request was an unusual one, and President Barack Obama himself made the confidential phone call to Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi president.

Mr. Obama asked Mr. Talabani, a consummate political survivor of years of upheaval in Iraq, to give up the presidency. It was Nov. 4, 2010, and the United States hoped that Ayad Allawi would take Mr. Talabani's place.

Under Mr. Allawi, a secular Shiite and the leader of a bloc with broad Sunni support, the Obama administration calculated, Iraq would have a more inclusive government and would counter the worrisome drift toward authoritarianism under Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

But Mr. Obama did not succeed.

"They were afraid what would happen if the different groups of Iraq did not reach an agreement," recalled Mr. Talabani, who turned down Mr. Obama's request.

Mr. Obama has pointed to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq as proof that he has fulfilled his promise to end the Iraq war. But winding down a conflict, it turns out, entails far more than extracting troops.

In the case of Iraq, the U.S. goal has been to leave a stable and representative government, to avoid a power vacuum that neighboring states and terrorists could exploit and to maintain sufficient influence so that Iraq would be a partner, or at a minimum not an opponent, in the Middle East.

But the U.S. government has fallen short of some of those objectives.

The attempt by Mr. Obama and his senior aides to fashion an extraordinary power-sharing arrangement between Mr. Maliki and Mr. Allawi never materialized. Nor did an agreement that would have kept a small U.S. force in Iraq to train the Iraqi military and to patrol the country's skies. A plan to use U.S. civilians to train the Iraqi police has been severely cut back. The result is an Iraq that is less stable domestically and less reliable internationally than the United States had envisioned.

The story of these efforts has received little attention in the United States, a country that is weary of the conflict in Iraq, and U.S. officials have rarely talked about them. This account is based on interviews with many of the principals, in Washington and Baghdad.

White House officials portray their exit strategy as a success, asserting that the number of civilian fatalities in



In 2011, the White House sought an agreement that would enable U.S. forces to stay in Iraq beyond that year, but talks collapsed, ending hopes for a continued U.S. military presence.

Iraq is low compared with 2006, when the Iraq war was at its height. Politics, not violence, has become the principal means for Iraqis to resolve their differences, they say.

"Recent news coverage of Iraq would suggest that as our troops departed, American influence went with them and our administration shifted its focus away from Iraq," Antony Blinken, national security adviser to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., said in March. "The fact is, our engagements have increased."

To many Iraqis, the United States' influence is greatly diminished. "American policy is very weak," said Fuad Hussein, the chief of staff to Massoud Barzani, the president of the semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq. "It is not clear to us how they have defined their interests in Iraq," Mr. Hussein said. "They are picking events and reacting on the basis of events. That is the policy."

CAMPAIGN VS. REALITY

As a presidential candidate in 2008, Mr. Obama had one basic position on Iraq: He was going to bring a "responsible end" to the conflict. He vowed to re-

move all U.S. combat brigades within 16 months, a deadline that enabled him to outflank his main rival in the Democratic primary, Hillary Rodham Clinton, but that the military said was too risky.

Once in office, he adjusted the schedule for withdrawing a U.S. presence in Iraq, keeping U.S. brigades in place longer but making their primary mission to advise Iraqi forces.

All U.S. forces were to leave Iraq by the end of 2011, the departure date set in an agreement signed by President George W. Bush and Mr. Maliki in 2008. Even so, Mr. Obama left the door open to keeping U.S. troops in Iraq, to train Iraqi forces, if an agreement could be negotiated.

The situation the Obama administration inherited was complex. Many Iraqi politicians were worried that Mr. Maliki, a Shiite, was amassing too much power and overstepping the Iraqi Constitution by bypassing the formal military chain of command and seeding intelligence agencies with loyalists. Those concerns mounted with the political gridlock that plagued Baghdad after the elections of March 2010.

Convening a videoconference on Oct. 6, 2010, Mr. Biden and other U.S. officials

reviewed the options. He favored a plan that would keep Mr. Maliki as prime minister but that involved installing his main rival, Mr. Allawi, leader of the Iraqiya bloc, near the top of the political pyramid.

To make way for Mr. Allawi, Mr. Biden suggested that Mr. Talabani, an ethnic Kurd, be shifted from the presidency and given another position. "Let's make him foreign minister," Mr. Biden said, according to the notes of the meeting.

"Thanks a lot, Joe," Mrs. Clinton said, noting that Mr. Biden had cast the Foreign Ministry as a consolation prize.

Concerned about the need to seat an Iraqi government, Mr. Obama decided not to oppose Mr. Maliki as prime minister while pursuing a deal that would bring Mr. Allawi and other members of his Iraqiya bloc into the fold. But engineering a power-sharing arrangement was not easy. After Mr. Talabani rebuffed Mr. Obama's request, the White House decided to go around him.

In a letter to Mr. Barzani, Mr. Obama again argued that Mr. Talabani should give up the presidency and highlighted the help that the United States would continue to provide to the Kurds. But Mr. Barzani rejected the proposal, complaining that he was being asked to solve a problem between Shiite and Sunni Arabs at the expense of the Kurds.

The United States had a fallback position: a new council on strategic policy would be established, with Mr. Allawi in charge. But Mr. Maliki and Mr. Allawi wrangled over what powers the new council would have, and it was never formed.

Some members of Mr. Allawi's party secured prominent government posts. But the most important feature the White House had sought in a power-sharing arrangement existed only on paper. The White House, a spokeswoman said, had not been "wedded" to any specific option and had achieved an "inclusive government."

INTERNAL DEBATES

As the process of forming a new Iraqi government dragged on, the Obama administration began in January 2011 to turn its attention to negotiating an agreement that would enable U.S. forces to stay in Iraq beyond 2011.

The first talks U.S. officials had were among themselves. Saudi Arabia and other Arab states had told Pentagon officials they were worried that the United States was pulling back from the region.

Adm. Mike Mullen, the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates favored leaving 16,000 troops to train the Iraqi forces, prepare them to carry out counterterrorism missions, protect Iraqi airspace, tamp down Arab and Kurdish tensions and to maintain U.S. influence in the region.

But the White House, which was wary of big military missions and also looking ahead to Mr. Obama's re-election campaign, had a lower number in mind. At a

meeting on April 29, Thomas E. Donilon, Mr. Obama's national security adviser, asked Mr. Gates whether he could accept up to 10,000 troops. Mr. Gates agreed.

ANOTHER OBSTACLE

In a videoconference meeting with Mr. Maliki on June 2, Mr. Obama emphasized that any agreement would need to be ratified by the Iraqi Parliament. But not everybody in the U.S. camp agreed with this stipulation.

Brett H. McGurk, an aide in the administration of George W. Bush whom the Obama administration had asked to

return to Baghdad to help with the talks, thought that a bruising parliamentary battle could be avoided by working out an understanding under an existing umbrella agreement on economic and security cooperation — an approach Mr. Maliki himself had suggested several times. But the White House wanted airtight immunities for any U.S. troops staying in Iraq, which U.S. government lawyers, the Iraqi chief justice and James F. Jeffrey, the U.S. ambassador in Baghdad, all said would require a new agreement endorsed by the Iraqi Parliament.

Mrs. Clinton and Leon E. Panetta, who succeeded Mr. Gates as U.S. defense secretary, argued that talks should continue and that the goal, as before, should be to keep a force of up to 10,000.

On Aug. 13, Mr. Obama settled the matter in a conference call in which he ruled out the 10,000 troop option and a smaller 7,000 variant. The talks would proceed but the size of the force the United States might keep in Iraq was reduced: The new goal would be a continuous presence of about 3,500 troops, a rotating force of up to 1,500 and half a dozen F-16 fighter jets.

But there was no agreement. Some experts say that given the Iraqis' concerns about sovereignty, and Iranian pressure, the politicians in Baghdad were simply not prepared to make the hard decisions that were needed to secure parliamentary approval. Others say the Iraqis sensed the Americans' ambivalence and were being asked to make unpopular political decisions for a modest military benefit.

On Oct. 21, Mr. Obama held another videoconference with Mr. Maliki — his first such discussion since the talks began in June. The negotiations were over, and all of the U.S. troops would be coming home.

The White House insisted that the collapse of the talks was not a setback.

"As we reviewed the 10,000 option, we came to the conclusion that achieving the goal of a security partnership was not dependent on the size of our footprint in-country, and that stability in Iraq did not depend on the presence of U.S. forces," a senior U.S. official said.

It is too soon to fully assess that prediction. But tensions have increased to the point that Mr. Barzani has insisted that Mr. Maliki be replaced and Iraq's only Sunni vice president has fled to Turkey to avoid arrest.

Iranian group wins fight for removal from terrorist list

WASHINGTON

BY SCOTT SHANE

An Iranian opposition group that mounted an extraordinary lobbying campaign to get off the State Department's list of terrorist organizations has succeeded in meeting that goal, officials said Friday.

The decision, by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, was based in part on the recent cooperation of the group, the Mujahedeen Khalq, or People's Mujahedeen, in completing a move of more than 3,000 of its members out of its longtime location in Iraq, known as Camp Ashraf, said two officials who spoke on condition of anonymity in advance of an official announcement. A final convoy of 680 people from Ashraf arrived at Camp Liberty, near the Baghdad airport, on Sept. 16.

The group, known as the M.E.K., carried out terrorist attacks in the 1970s and 1980s, first against the government of the Shah of Iran and later against the clerical rulers who overthrew him. Several Americans were among those killed. In the 1980s, it allied with Saddam Hussein, who permitted it to operate from Camp Ashraf.

But by most accounts, the M.E.K. has not carried out violent attacks for many years. While it is described by some critics as cultlike and unpopular with Iranians, the group has been able to gather crowds at U.S. and European rallies to press its bid to reverse the U.S. terrorist designation, imposed in 1997.

Over the last two years, the M.E.K. has enlisted an array of prominent American politicians and former military officers to help make its case that it has abandoned violence and should be removed from the terrorist list.

Without U.S. forces to train and assist Iraqi commandos, Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, the homegrown Qaeda affiliate in Iraq, is still active in the country and increasingly involved in Syria.

With no U.S. aircraft to patrol Iraqi airspace, Iraq has become a corridor for Iranian flights of military supplies to the Syrian government of President Bashar al-Assad, U.S. officials say. It is also a potential avenue for an Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear installations, something the White House is seeking to avoid.

This article is adapted from "The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, from George W. Bush to Barack Obama," by Michael R. Gordon and retired Lt. Gen. Bernard E. Trainor, to be published on Tuesday.

ARBIL ASPIRES TO BE A REGIONAL HUB

Authorities in Kurdistan are seeking foreign investment in tourism and infrastructure projects

By Layelle Saad, GCC/Middle East Editor

While Iraqi Kurdistan is reaping the benefits of massive oil reserves, estimated at 45 billion barrels, there has been a strategic push from its leaders to develop other sectors of the territory — specifically tourism, investment and infrastructure projects. While much of the country still lags behind in terms of modern infrastructure, there are visible indications of rapid development.

In Arbil, the capital of Kurdistan, with a population of 2 million, housing developments are sprouting everywhere from undeveloped lands, paved roads are modern with traffic lights and police providing organisation, and five star hotels are emerging. As foreign investors are slowly beginning to distinguish between Kurdistan and Iraq, they become more comfortable and at ease to invest in Iraq's northern and more secure territory. Proof of this is the growing number of international flights opening up, the most recent of which was Emirates Airlines — making it the third city after Baghdad and Basra.

Kurdistan's progress has not been an overnight venture but, in fact, began in 2006 after a government initiative put in place a comprehensive development plan to see the region through the next few decades with the goal of opening up its tourism industry and to model Arbil as a regional hub for investment, entertainment and business.

Speaking to Gulf News, Andrew Jones, commercial development advisor for the Arbil International Airport, says he envisions the airport to be an international and regional hub, modelled much after Dubai's airport. Surely, with its location between Europe and Asia and its close proximity to Turkey, Iran and Syria, the potential for revenue is enormous. However, the main obstacle the Kurdish government faces is to dispel the fear factor surrounding Iraq and promote itself as a modern and safe territory amidst a turbulent region.

To be certain, Kurdistan has first and foremost invested in security, with multiple checkpoints, searches and scans at the airport. Five star hotels also have checkpoints for luggage at the entrance. Also, it was clear that police were heavily deployed, both in uniform and plain-clothed, in Arbil and near tourist areas in the countryside. While seemingly over-the-top, the level of security could comfort developers who wish to join the current wave of investment.

IMPACT OF WAR ON TOURISM

While much of Kurdistan still lags behind in terms of modern infrastructure, there are visible indications of rapid development in Arbil, the capital city. Foreign investors are slowly beginning to distinguish between Kurdistan and Iraq.
Image Credit: Layelle Saad/Gulf News



In fact, northern Iraq (now Kurdistan) was one of the prime tourist destinations in the region during the '60s and '70s, with many Gulf nationals visiting its scenic mountainside on vacation. With the Iraq-Iran war in the '80s and the US invasion in 2003, Iraq lost billions in tourism revenue and investments.

Maulawy Jabar Wahab, the head of the Tourism Board, told Gulf News that slowly Kurdistan is attracting tourists again, mainly from its neighbours Iran, Turkey and Syria. Many Arab Iraqis also choose to vacation there — and view it as a safe haven. As more and more Gulf airlines are operating flights to Arbil, Kurdistan also hopes to gain back the interest of Gulf nationals. Surely, with popular destinations for Gulf nationals become increasingly unstable, such as Lebanon, Syria and Egypt, Kurdistan could become a popular alternative quickly.

During Eid holidays, Wahab says that 90 per cent of hotels in the city of Arbil were booked. He estimates \$1 billion (Dh3.67 billion) in tourism revenue this year. "We are working hard to attract Gulf residents to Kurdistan by increasing the number of travel companies and advertisements in the Gulf," he said. "Our marketing team has been studying the needs of different nationalities to attract them," Wahab added.

However, because only two five star hotels are currently open in Arbil, prices are exorbitant, with a room starting at \$450 at the Rotana. The other five star hotel is the Turkish-owned Divan hotel, where prices reach up to \$10,000 a night for deluxe suites. However, prices could go down in the future as new five star hotels have been approved for construction, including the Kempinski, Hilton, Sheraton and Marriott. Currently, tourism revenue makes up for 6.7 per cent of Kurdistan's GDP but the tourism board is working towards the goal of doubling this share.

Not only does Kurdistan hope to attract tourists through its luxury hotels but unlike other more modern cities, it offers the charm of remnants of ancient civilisations, such as the citadel which sits in the city centre and is the oldest continuously inhabited town in the world. Arbil has hosted many different civilisations dating back from the Ur III civilisation 6,000 years ago. It has also been ruled by Neo-Assyrians and Mongols. And during the Sassanian and Abbasid periods, it has been an important centre for Christianity.

TOURIST APPEAL

An excavation in the Zagros mountains outside of Arbil in 1957 by a team from Colombia University found the first adult Neanderthal skeletons in Iraq dating back 80,000 years. This and other historical sites could peak the interest of archaeological tourists worldwide. But a lot of groundwork has to be done to attract these tourists.

To be sure, Arbil and the surrounding areas in the countryside have a long way to go in terms of tourist appeal. There is little nightlife in the city as most places close extremely early and the options are few. If marketed properly, Arbil could be an attractive destination for the party scene as it has very lax laws related to alcohol licensing. The most attractive shopping mall, called Family Mall, does little to entice foreign tourists — as it pales in comparison to malls in other surrounding countries such as Lebanon and Turkey. The lack of available outlets for tourists to shop and party could be a chief obstacle to its growth.

That is where the investment board comes in. While 80 per cent of investment in Kurdistan has been domestic, it is hoping to attract foreign investment too. Foreign investment in Kurdistan is still young and makes up only 14 per cent of the total investment in the region. Lebanese, Turkish, Egyptian and →

⇒ German companies are the biggest foreign investors, involved mostly in housing development projects.

Lebanon, meanwhile, has a unique edge in the banking sector. Currently, the Emirati Trojan Company is working on a housing development project and will be completed in three years. UAE-based Deyaar is also in discussions with the investment board in Arbil to develop a project to attract medical tourism.

The prime focus of the investment board is to developing housing and infrastructure as a starting point to attract future investments.

Kurdistan has a long way to go but with a booming oil industry and a sharp marketing strategy, investors will surely see Kurdistan's potential. Already many Kurdish citizens have lived in Western countries and have brought back a unique perspective on how the future of their country should look. Kurds have the

added advantage of being culturally close with a broad range of nationalities such as Arabs, Turks, Iranians and Europeans. This could make for a more welcoming and tolerant environment to attract expatriates wanting to invest in its economy. The UAE model could work in Kurdistan but it must be followed through with smart leadership and proper management of its resources. ♦

THE HUFFINGTON POST

25 September 2012

Looking for Friends in the Middle East: Try the Kurds



David L. Phillips

*Director, Program on Peace-building and Rights,
Columbia University Institute for the Study of
Human Rights*

Angry mobs recently attacked U.S. diplomatic facilities in dozens of countries, but not everyone in the Muslim world hates America. More than 25 million Kurds in Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey are largely secular and pro-Western. Kurds understand that democracy and individual rights are compatible with Islamic values. The United States should take steps to consolidate friendly relations with the Kurds. U.S.-Kurdish rapprochement would serve as a counter-weight to political demagoguery and Islamist extremism. It can also leverage reforms in countries where Kurds reside.

A steely-eyed approach is needed towards governments in the region. Iraq's Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has shunned U.S. interests. He also pursues polarizing policies, which fuel sectarian and ethnic conflict between Iraqis. Baghdad scorns Iraq's constitution, preferring confrontation to power-sharing. It systematically encroaches on Kurdish territory, inflaming tensions along "disputed internal boundaries." The Iraqi Government uses its security apparatus to trample the rights of Iraq's Sunnis and target political opponents. Acting as a proxy for Iran, it facilitates the transfer of weapons from Tehran to Syria.

In contrast, Iraqi Kurds are unabashedly pro-American. Not a single American has died in Iraqi Kurdistan since Saddam's overthrow in 2003. Iraqi Kurdistan has functioning democratic institutions, a vibrant civil society and an independent media. While corruption is still a problem, Iraqi Kurdistan is less corrupt than most neighbors.

Iraqi Kurds are America's best and only friends in Iraq. To further strengthen U.S.-Kurdish amity, the United States should deepen security cooperation with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). While Baghdad rejected a status of forces agreement with the United States, the KRG welcomes it. The Pentagon should cancel its sale of Abrams-A1 tanks and F-16 fighter jets to Baghdad. Such weapons will most likely be used against Iraqis, rather than to protect Iraq from Iran and other rogue regimes with which Baghdad has cozy relations.

The KRG's relations with Turkey have vastly improved since it started sharing intelligence on the PKK, a terrorist organization with remote bases in the mountains of Iraqi Kurdistan. Working hand-in-hand with Turkey, Iraqi Kurdistan may one day become the Eastern flank of NATO.

The United States also stands to gain economically by partnering

with the KRG. Iraqi Kurdistan has a booming economy and huge energy reserves, including 45 billion barrels of oil. U.S. energy companies should be encouraged to develop Iraqi Kurdistan's oil and natural gas fields notwithstanding Baghdad's objections.

When it comes to Syria, KRG President Masoud Barzani is playing a helpful role bridging gaps between Syrian Kurds. In the 1990s, Kurdish controlled territory in the northeast of Syria was a staging ground for the PKK, which the U.S. and EU consider a terrorist organization. To prevent a recurrence, the Obama administration should pro-actively engage factions of Syrian Kurds to establish a secular, pro-Western platform within Syria. Kurdish democratic aspirations can be realized peacefully, in cooperation with Turkey and the West.

Regardless of the outcome to Syria's civil war, the United States will have no friends in Syria except the Kurds. The Alawites deeply resent the West for abandoning them. Arab Sunni rebels feel let down by the United States; Washington is rightly reluctant to arm the Muslim Brotherhood lest its weapons eventually target U.S. interests.

In Iran, more can be done to provide political support to the Kurdish Iranian opposition. Iranian Kurds want to replace Iran's theocracy with a federal democratic state. They supported the 2009 Green Revolution and have links to both the Iranian opposition and oppressed minorities -- Arabs, Baluchis, and Azeris. Deposing the mullahs is the best to ensure that Iran does not cross the nuclear threshold.

U.S.-Kurdish regional rapprochement will be deeply unsettling to Turkey. The Obama administration will have to bend over backwards to reassure Turkey that its affinity for Kurds does not imply support for "Greater Kurdistan" or compromise its strategic partnership between Turkey and the United States.

Focusing on the Kurds might ultimately create conditions benefiting Turkey. Prime Minister Erdogan announced a "Democracy Opening" in 2010, aimed at addressing Kurdish grievances. However, he failed to deliver on promises for greater political and cultural rights. When Washington makes Kurdish issues a priority in the region, Erdogan might decide it is expedient to renew his commitment to Kurdish cultural and political rights, addressing the root causes of conflict and draining the swamp of support for the PKK.

Iraqi Kurds are proven, reliable partners. Washington should also nurture the pro-Western affinities of other Kurds. The United States must not take its friends for granted, while trying to placate its enemies. ●

SYRIE : Lutte d'influence dans le Kurdistan



A Qamishli, des jeunes intrépides narguent les militaires syriens avec le nouveau drapeau kurde. (Boris Mabillard)

Par Boris Mabillard
de Qamishli et Derik

En Syrie, les Kurdes ne sont plus prisonniers, mais pas encore vraiment libres. Après des décennies d'exclusion, les Kurdes veulent devenir des citoyens à part entière. Dans les territoires libérés du nord de la Syrie, ils goûtent à une certaine liberté. Mais le principal parti kurde ne tolère déjà pas la critique. Reportage à Qamishli et à Derik

Karim s'apprête à plier bagage. Ce fonctionnaire de police syrien quitte le village où, à une dizaine de kilomètres de la frontière irakienne, il vivait depuis près de cinq ans avec sa famille. Karim est un nom d'emprunt «car, dit-il, il pourrait être exécuté si ses supérieurs apprenaient qu'il s'était entretenu avec des journalistes». Son arme, il l'a déjà donnée aux miliciens kurdes qui sont arrivés fin juillet dans le village. Derrière ce qui ressemble à une passation de pouvoirs en douceur se déroule, en sous-main, une bataille complexe pour le contrôle de la région. Les partis kurdes prétendent la tenir, pourtant leur autorité est relative. Est bien réel en revanche le vent de liberté qui depuis l'été balaie le Kurdistan syrien.

La zone kurde a été largement épargnée par les violences. Les miliciens kurdes ont simplement remplacé policiers et militaires syriens lorsque ceux-ci se redéployaient. Si les autorités de Damas conservent néan-

moins la plupart de leurs prérogatives, l'état s'est desserré dans plusieurs localités et la ville de Derik, Al-Malikiya en arabe, échappe désormais à l'emprise gouvernementale.

Le buste d'Hafez el-Assad veille encore sur le rond-point principal de Derik mais, non loin de là, une avenue a été rebaptisée square Azadi («liberté» en kurde). Le mot est dans toutes les bouches. Avec la fin des persécutions, une ère nouvelle peut commencer. «Nous voulons vivre comme des citoyens à part entière, ne plus avoir peur», clame Mohammed pour couvrir le chahut de la fête: un mariage qui bat son plein, avec des centaines de convives, et une musique entraînante. C'est la saison des mariages, comme si la guerre n'avait pas lieu. Les nouvelles autorités de Derik veulent imprimer la marque du changement dès maintenant, même si la tâche est colossale et que l'ancienne administration continue de fonctionner, mais au ralenti. Tout le paradoxe est là: officiellement rien n'a changé, mais la vacance du pouvoir donne de facto aux Kurdes la liberté de s'autogérer. Une des premières conquêtes, éminemment symbolique, concerne la langue kurde, dont le gouvernement interdisait jusqu'alors l'enseignement. Dans les écoles primaires de la ville, en attendant la rentrée des classes, chaque jour en fin d'après-midi des volontaires proposent des cours de kurde.

Hemrin Ibrahim Ibrahim a offert son aide, mais elle ne maîtrise pas encore assez bien l'écrit: «En nous privant de notre langue, le gouvernement nous a coupés de nos racines.» Elle étudiait la pétrochimie à l'Université de Homs, mais les violences

l'ont contrainte à revenir à Derik: «Je voudrais terminer mes études, devenir ingénieur, contribuer à la prospérité du pays. Pas seulement pour les Kurdes, mais pour tous les Syriens.»

A une dizaine de kilomètres de Derik, sur la route de Qamishli, on aperçoit les premières torchères des champs gaziers. Pour l'instant, Damas conserve la mainmise sur toutes les installations ainsi qu'une présence militaire aux alentours. Sur la piste en terre qui permet d'éviter le barrage de police, personne ne se cache vraiment. Fonctionnaires syriens et militants kurdes cohabitent mieux que s'ils avaient signé un partenariat.

Même à Qamishli, le chef-lieu kurde, où le régime maintient les symboles de son emprise sur la société (services de sécurité, garnison, portraits monumentaux du président), le voisinage des militants kurdes ne provoque aucun accroc. Réunis dans une échoppe au cœur du quartier kurde de la ville, trois jeunes informaticiens nuancent le tableau: «Tout paraît calme, mais les partis, les factions sont pris dans une lutte d'influence. Les Arabes et les chrétiens contre les Kurdes, et surtout les partis politiques contre le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD).» L'irruption d'un membre du PYD met fin à la confidence. Il signale deux occupants d'une Mercedes blanche stationnée de l'autre côté de la route, «des moukhabarat [service de sécurité], ils veulent qu'on les remarque, un signal pour nous effrayer».

Mieux organisé que les autres partis politiques, le PYD occupe le terrain, multiplie les comités, celui des femmes, des martyrs, de la culture. Les liens qu'il entretient avec les militants armés lui donnent un autre avantage. Si, officiellement, les Unités de défense du peuple (YPG) dépendent du Conseil suprême kurde où sont représentés d'autres partis politiques, c'est le PYD qui règne sur la milice composée pour une part de ses propres combattants, ainsi que de transfuges du PKK, de déserteurs de l'armée régulière et de 600 nouveaux venus entraînés dans la Région autonome du Kurdistan, en Irak, par les peshmergas de Massoud Barzani. Ali Ibrahim, le représentant du Parti démocratique kurde de Syrie à Derik, ne cache pas ses désaccords: ➤

➤ «La transition devrait se faire par des moyens démocratiques uniquement et sans armes.»

Le PYD en appelle à l'unité en cette période révolutionnaire et qualifie de traîtres ceux qui s'adonnent à la critique. Dans un communiqué de presse du 15 septembre, le parti s'en prend aux politiciens réticents: «Ils facilitent le travail de sape des puissances régionales qui n'entendent rien céder aux Kurdes.» La majorité des Kurdes de Syrie ne prêtent pas l'oreille aux querelles de chapelle. Ils ont pour principale préoccupation la sécurité. En face de

la nouvelle église syriaque orthodoxe à Derik, Yacoub, au milieu d'un groupe de jeunes, tous chrétiens, avertit: «Pour l'instant, les milices kurdes nous protègent contre les Arabes, mais cela ne doit pas durer. Nous ne voulons pas vivre sous l'autorité des Kurdes. Nous voulons garder notre président, Bachar el-Assad.» «C'est le meilleur», ajoute son voisin.

Alors que Karim s'appête à partir, d'autres arrivent dans le village. Une famille des environs de Damas s'est installée pour fuir les violences: «Qu'allons-nous faire ici? Il n'y a pas de travail. Si la situation redeve-

nait normale, nous retournerions chez nous.» Beaucoup, même parmi les opposants à Bachar el-Assad, voudraient préserver la coexistence pacifique de toutes les communautés. Karim, le fonctionnaire de police, quitte un village qui l'a chaleureusement accueilli, alors qu'il est Arabe: «Si les Kurdes prenaient le pouvoir et s'ils nous laissaient rester, alors je resterais. On ne peut pas séparer les peuples les uns des autres.» ♦

L'EXPRESS 25 septembre 2012

Turquie: sept morts dans un attentat contre un véhicule de l'armée

Sept personnes, six soldats turcs et un civil, ont été tuées mardi lors de l'explosion d'une bombe au passage d'un véhicule de l'armée turque dans la ville de Tunceli, dans l'est de la Turquie, selon un nouveau bilan communiqué de sources hospitalières.

L'engin a explosé à la sortie de l'agglomération de Tunceli, incendiant un véhicule de l'armée (bien de l'armée) et endommageant également un minibus civil, a-t-on indiqué de sources sécuritaires locales.

Une autre personne a également été blessée lors de cette explosion, a précisé de son côté le bureau du gouverneur de la province cité par l'agence de presse Anatolie. "Sept personnes ont perdu la vie selon les premières constatations et une autre a été blessée", a-t-on ajouté sans autre précision.

La chaîne de télévision privée turque NTV a diffusé des images montrant des pompiers tentant d'éteindre des flammes s'élevant d'un amas de tôles et d'un minibus dont un côté était enfoncé.

De nombreux véhicules militaires et des ambulances étaient visibles sur ces images. Un hélicoptère de l'armée était également en patrouille autour du lieu de l'explosion, a indiqué NTV.

Les autorités turques n'ont pas immédiatement fait de commentaires sur les auteurs possibles de cette attaque, qui n'a pas non plus été



Un véhicule de l'armée turque en feu à Tunceli, dans l'est de la Turquie, le 25 septembre 2012

revendiquée.

Elle intervient cependant dans un contexte d'intensification des combats entre les forces de sécurité et les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes.

Le PKK a fréquemment recours à des engins explosifs commandés à distance dans ses attaques contre l'armée.

La semaine dernière dans la province de Bingöl, voisine de celle de Tunceli, dix soldats ont été tués par les rebelles séparatistes qui ont pris pour cible avec des lance-roquettes leur convoi.

Le Premier ministre turc Recep

Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé la semaine dernière que l'armée avait tué environ 500 rebelles kurdes en un mois dans le sud-est. Il a aussi une nouvelle fois appelé les rebelles du PKK à déposer les armes en échange d'une suspension des opérations de l'armée.

Les séparatistes kurdes n'ont pour leur part communiqué aucun bilan.

Le PKK, classé comme organisation terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays, a ouvert les hostilités en 1984 dans le sud-est de la Turquie, déclenchant un conflit qui a fait plus de 45.000 morts. □

Lourdes condamnations contre des militaires turcs

Le procès du « Balyoz » témoigne des tensions entre l'armée et le pouvoir islamo-conservateur

Istanbul
Correspondance

Des jets de bouteilles d'eau, des crises de nerfs et des évanouissements ont ponctué la lecture d'un verdict fleuve au tribunal spécial de Silivri, à 50 km d'Istanbul. Le procès de dizaines de militaires accusés de tentative de coup d'Etat contre le gouvernement de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, un complot baptisé « Balyoz » (masse de forgeron), s'est achevé vendredi soir par la condamnation de 326 d'entre eux à de lourdes peines de prison.

Trois généraux - Cetin Dogan,

ancien commandant de la première armée, Özden Örnek et Ibrahim Firtina, les chefs de la marine et de l'armée de l'air, considérés comme les principaux cerveaux du complot - ont chacun été condamnés à 20 ans d'emprisonnement pour « tentative d'entraver par la force l'action du gouvernement de la République » et sont repartis vers le centre de détention.

Les autres officiers écopent de peines allant de 12 à 18 ans de réclusion. C'est notamment le cas de Sükrü Sariisik, ancien secrétaire général du Conseil national de sécurité (MGK), la plus haute institution turque, ou encore du géné-

ral à la retraite Engin Alan, élu député du parti ultranationaliste (MHP) et qui n'a jamais pu siéger à l'Assemblée nationale.

L'épilogue de l'affaire Balyoz, du nom du plan de déstabilisation qui aurait été fomenté dans les rangs de l'armée en 2003 pour renverser le pouvoir islamo-conservateur, a été accueilli avec stupeur dans les milieux kémalistes et pro-

militaires. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, le chef du principal parti d'opposition, (CHP, kémaliste), a dénoncé « un procès politique ».

Les soutiens du gouvernement y ont vu au contraire une avancée de la démocratie et la fin de l'impunité des généraux, auteurs de quatre coups d'Etat dans les cinquante dernières années et acteurs omniprésents de la vie politique. « Le point final n'a pas encore été placé, le processus continue », a déclaré vendredi soir M. Erdogan. Les accusés, tous des adversaires du parti au pouvoir, avaient imaginé un plan de déstabilisation du pays articulé autour d'un incident aérien provo-

qué avec la Grèce et de faux attentats contre des mosquées, dans le but de faire intervenir l'armée. Des documents étaient parvenus au siège du journal *Taraf* attestant de ce complot. Les accusés ont tous démenti, certifiant qu'il ne s'agissait que d'un exercice théorique.

Comme le souligne Dani Rodrik, économiste à l'université de Harvard et gendre de Cetin Dogan, les preuves sur lesquelles se fondent ces jugements semblent extrêmement minces. Principale incohérence, le fichier informatique contenant le plan de coup d'Etat, censé avoir été rédigé en 2003, aurait utilisé un logiciel qui n'existait pas encore.

Pour nombre d'observateurs, l'affaire Balyoz est le signe d'un vaste règlement de compte au sommet du pouvoir. Depuis 2007, près de 400 personnes, dont des militaires, sont jugées dans une autre affaire de coup d'Etat présumé, le procès du réseau Erge-
nekon. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Courrier

27 septembre 2012

Kirkouk, une ville et quatre langues

Dans un Moyen-Orient déchiré par les querelles ethniques et religieuses, la ville irakienne est devenue un symbole de coexistence entre quatre groupes ethniques, chacun parlant la langue de l'autre.

Karouan Al-Salehi

Assis dans la salle d'attente, il se demande s'il arrivera à expliquer sa maladie au médecin. « Je pensais que j'allais devoir me débrouiller en arabe, que je parle mal. Mais, quand mon tour est venu, j'ai entendu le docteur parler en kurde au téléphone. J'allais déjà mieux, puisque cela voulait dire que je pouvais lui parler dans la seule langue que je maîtrise vraiment », raconte Arass Ahmad, un Kurde de 27 ans résidant dans les environs de Kirkouk. « En général, quand je viens en ville, je ne m'inquiète pas trop, ajoute-t-il aussitôt. Je sais que je peux me faire comprendre, puisque tout le monde parle et comprend la langue des uns et des autres. » Kirkouk, l'une des grandes villes du nord de l'Irak, vieille de plus de cinq mille ans [et revendiquée aujourd'hui par les Kurdes, les Turkmènes et les Arabes], se compose essentiellement de quatre groupes linguistiques, à savoir les Kurdes, les Turkmènes, les Arabes et les Assyriens [chrétiens d'Irak]. Auxquels s'ajoutent la petite minorité [religieuse] des sabéens, désignés aussi sous le nom de mandéens, ainsi que quelques familles juives. Loin de

créer des divisions, cette diversité n'a pas empêché les gens de se rapprocher les uns des autres, ni même les mariages mixtes. Mohamed Jebari, 33 ans, a fondé un foyer avec son épouse arabe il y a quatre ans. « Moi et ma belle-famille étions voisins. Nous nous fréquentions et parlions aussi bien en arabe qu'en kurde. C'est pour cela qu'on a pu se marier. » De son côté, la jeune Turkmène Sarah Khalil explique qu'elle parle trois langues grâce à son mariage avec un jeune chrétien arabe. Elle ajoute : « Chaque fois que quelqu'un nous parle dans notre langue alors qu'il n'est pas turkmène, cela nous fait chaud au cœur. C'est ainsi qu'on entretient les liens de convivialité. » On dit de Kirkouk que c'est la ville aux quatre visages et que ses habitants ont tous un peu de sang des uns et des autres. « Ceux qui se moquent ainsi de nous sont juste jaloux de ne pas avoir autant de compétences linguistiques que nous », proteste Hafel Chaoul, Assyrien chrétien et fameux champion irakien de basket. « Chaque habitant de la ville doit parler les quatre langues, parce que c'est là-dessus que repose la bonne entente entre les communautés. » Hicham Atallah est enseignant dans une école kurde alors que lui-même est arabe : « J'arrive à bien me faire com-

prendre de mes élèves. » Quant à Mourad Ali, étudiant à la faculté d'anglais et d'origine turkmène, il explique que la plupart des professeurs sont des Kurdes et des Arabes, mais qu'il leur arrive de répondre à la question d'un étudiant turkmène dans sa langue. Lui-même ne parle « pas nécessairement tout le temps en turkmène. Avec certains, je peux aussi bien parler en kurde ou en arabe. » De même, Amina Karim, professeur kurde en sciences de l'éducation, estime qu'« un des facteurs de la cohabitation est le langage de la tolérance. Les gens s'entendent dans quelque langue que ce soit, sans s'arrêter sur les différences ethniques. » Et d'affirmer qu'entre amis et voisins, qu'ils soient turkmènes ou arabes, on parle alternativement la langue de l'un ou de l'autre. « A l'université, moi et une collègue et amie chrétienne, nous parlons en kurde ou en arabe. Et souvent nous répondons à la question d'un étudiant dans les quatre langues. » Selon le sociologue Satar Jebbar, la connaissance linguistique est un facteur important de bonne cohabitation : « En cas de coexistence de plusieurs groupes linguistiques, une seule chose permet la bonne entente entre eux : que chacun parle et comprenne la langue de l'autre. »

Hard lessons for Obama in Arab Spring



President Barack Obama spoke by telephone with President Hosni Mubarak on Feb. 1, 2011, as senior aides and members of the national security team worked in the Oval Office.

WASHINGTON

BY HELENE COOPER
AND ROBERT F. WORTH

President Hosni Mubarak did not even wait for President Obama's words to be translated before he interrupted and shot back.

"You don't understand this part of the world," the Egyptian leader broke in, sounding increasingly hostile. "You're young."

Mr. Obama, during a tense telephone call in the early evening of Feb. 1, 2011, a Tuesday, had just told Mr. Mubarak that his speech, broadcast to a crowd of hundreds of thousands of protesters converged in Cairo, in Tahrir Square, had not gone far enough. Mr. Mubarak had to step down, Mr. Obama said.

Minutes later, at 6:44 p.m., a grim Mr. Obama appeared before hastily summoned cameras in the Grand Foyer of the White House. The end of Mr. Mubarak's 30-year rule, Mr. Obama

His bold backing of change could not be sustained in light of U.S. security interests and his own pragmatism.

said, "must begin now." With those words, Mr. Obama upended three decades of American relations with its most stalwart ally in the Arab world, putting the weight of the United States squarely on the side of the Arab street.

It was a bold move by a young U.S. president, flying in the face of advice from elders on his staff at the State Department and at the Pentagon, who had spent decades nursing the autocratic,

but staunchly pro-American, Egyptian government.

Nineteen months later, Mr. Obama was at the State Department consoling some of the very officials he had overruled. Anti-American protests in Egypt and Libya had led to the deaths of four Americans, including the U.S. ambassador to Libya, J. Christopher Stevens. A new Egyptian government run by the Muslim Brotherhood delayed in condemning attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Cairo.

Television sets in the United States were filled with images of Arabs, angry over a video made in the United States that ridiculed the Prophet Muhammad, burning American flags and even effigies of Mr. Obama.

Speaking privately to grieving State Department workers, the president tried to make sense of the unfolding events. He talked about how he had been a child abroad, taught to appreciate American diplomats who put their lives at risk for their country. That work, and the outreach to the Arab world, he said, must continue, even in the face of mob violence that called into question what the United States can accomplish in a turbulent region.

In many ways, Mr. Obama's remarks at the State Department last Wednesday reflected hard lessons the president had learned over almost two years of political turmoil in the Arab world: Bold words and support for democratic aspirations are not enough to engender good will in this region, especially not when hampered by America's own national security interests.

In fact, Mr. Obama's staunch defense of democracy protesters in Egypt last year soon drew him into a historic upheaval that would test his judgment, his nerve and his diplomatic skill.

Even as the uprisings spread to Libya, Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria, the president's sympathy for the protesters infuriated U.S. allies in the conservative and oil-rich Gulf states.

In mid-March, the Saudis moved decisively to crush the democracy protests in Bahrain, sending a convoy of tanks and heavy artillery across the 25 kilometers, or 16 miles, of the King Fahd Causeway.

That blunt show of force confronted Mr. Obama with the limits of his ability, or his willingness, to midwife democratic change. Despite a global outcry over the shooting and tear-gassing of peaceful protesters in Bahrain — where the United States maintains a naval base seen as crucial for maintaining the flow of oil from the region — the president largely turned a blind eye.

His realism and reluctance to be drawn into foreign quagmires has held sway ever since, notably in Syria, where many critics continue to call for a more aggressive U.S. response to the brutality of President Bashar al-Assad's rule.

Mr. Obama's journey from Cairo to the Causeway took just 44 days. In part, it reflected the vastly different circumstances in the countries where protests broke out, despite their common origins and slogans. But his handling of the uprisings also demonstrates the gap between the two poles of his political persona: his sense of himself as a historic bridge-builder who could redeem America's image abroad, and his more cautious adherence to long-term U.S. interests in security and affordable oil.

To some, the stark difference between the outcomes in Cairo and Bahrain illustrates something else, too: his impatience with back-room diplomacy, and his corresponding failure to build close personal relationships with foreign leaders that can, especially in the

Middle East, help the White House to influence decisions made abroad.

In many ways, Mr. Obama's decision to throw U.S. support behind change in the Arab world was made well before a Tunisian street vendor set himself on fire and ignited the broadest challenge to the region in decades.

Mr. Obama, whose campaign for the presidency was in part inspired by his

early opposition to the Iraq war, came into office in January 2009 determined not to repeat what he viewed as the mistakes of his predecessor in pushing a "freedom agenda" in Iraq and other parts of the Arab world, according to senior administration officials.

Instead, Mr. Obama focused on mutual respect and understanding. During a speech to the Arab world in 2009 from Cairo, the president did talk about the importance of governments "that reflect the will of the people." But, he added pointedly, "there is no straight line to realize this promise."

Two weeks later, as street protests broke out in Iran after a disputed presidential election, Mr. Obama initially followed a low-key script, criticizing violence but saying he did not want to be seen as meddling in Iranian politics.

Months later, administration officials said, Mr. Obama expressed regret about his muted stance on Iran. "There was a feeling of 'we ain't gonna be behind the curve on this again,'" one senior administration official said. He, like almost two dozen administration officials and Arab and U.S. diplomats interviewed for this article, spoke on the condition of anonymity.

By the time the Tunisian protests erupted in January 2011 — an angry Mr. Obama accused his staff of being caught "flat-footed," officials said — he publicly backed the protesters. But the real test of the new posture came 11 days later, when thousands of Egyptians converged on Tahrir Square for a "day of rage."

Mr. Obama was keenly aware, one aide said, of the need for the United States, and for he himself, to stand as a moral example.

"He knows that the protesters want to hear from the American president, but not just any American president," a senior aide to Mr. Obama said as the protests in Tahrir Square grew larger. "They want to hear from this American president."

In other words, they wanted to hear from the first black president of the United States, a symbol of the possibility of change.

If the president felt a kinship with the youthful protesters, he seems to have had little rapport with Egypt's aging president, or, for that matter, any other Arab leaders. In part, this was a function of time: he was still new to the presidency, and had not built the kind of cozy relationship that the Bush family, for instance, had with the Saudis.

But Mr. Obama has struggled with little success to build better relationships with key foreign leaders like Ham-

id Karzai, the Afghan president, and King Abdullah, the Saudi ruler.

In any case, after an awkward phone call between the U.S. and Egyptian presidents on Jan. 28, Mr. Obama sent a senior diplomat with long experience in Egypt, Frank G. Wisner, to make a personal appeal to the Egyptian leader. But Mr. Mubarak balked. Meanwhile, the rising anger in Cairo's streets led to a new moment of reckoning for Mr. Obama.

On the afternoon of Feb. 1 at the White House, top national security officials were holding a meeting in the Situation Room to decide what to do about the deteriorating situation in Egypt. Thirty minutes into it, the door opened, and the president walked in, crashing what was supposed to be a principles meeting.

Attending were Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr.; Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates; the Joint Chiefs of Staff chairman, Adm. Mike Mullen; and the national security adviser, Tom Donilon. Margaret Scobey, the ambassador in Cairo, appeared on the video conference screen.

The question on the table was one that would have been unthinkable just a week before. Should Mr. Obama call for Mr. Mubarak to step down?

Midway through the meeting, an aide walked in and handed a note to Mr. Donilon, who read it aloud. "Mubarak is on," he said.

The Egyptian leader was making his much-anticipated address to the country. Every screen in the Situation Room was turned to Al Jazeera. The Egyptian leader said he would not run again, but did not offer to step down.

In the Situation Room, there was silence. Then Mr. Obama spoke: "That's not going to cut it."

If this were Hollywood, the story of Barack Obama and the Arab Spring would end there, with the young American president standing with the protesters against the counsel of his own advisers, and hastening the end of the entrenched old guard in Egypt. In the Situation Room, Mr. Gates, Admiral Mullen, Jeffrey D. Feltman, then an assistant secretary of state, and others balked at the inclusion in Mr. Obama's planned remarks that Mr. Mubarak's "transition must begin now," arguing that it was too aggressive.

Mr. Mubarak had stood by the United States in the face of opposition from his own public, they said. The president, officials said, countered swiftly: "If 'now' is not in my remarks, there's no point in me going out there and talking."

John O. Brennan, chief counterterrorism adviser to Mr. Obama, said the president saw early on what others did not: that the Arab Spring movement had legs.

"A lot of people were in a state of denial that this had an inevitability to it," Mr. Brennan said in an interview. "And I think that's what the president clearly saw, that there was an inevitability to it

His message to Arab allies was this: "If you are governing these countries, you've got to get out ahead of change."

that would clearly not be turned back and it would only be delayed by suppression and bloodshed."

So "now" stayed in Mr. Obama's statement. Ten days later, Mr. Mubarak was out. Even after Mr. Obama's remarks, Mrs. Clinton was still publicly cautioning that removing Mr. Mubarak too hastily could threaten the country's transition to democracy.

In the end, many of the advisers who initially opposed Mr. Obama's stance now give him credit for prescience. But there were consequences, and they were soon making themselves felt.

On Feb. 14, in Bahrain, Internet calls for a "day of rage" led to street rallies and violent clashes with the police. The next day at a news conference in Washington, Mr. Obama seemed to suggest that this revolt was much like the others. His message to Arab allies, he said, was this: "If you are governing these countries, you've got to get out ahead of change."

But in the following weeks, Mr. Obama fell silent. Away from the public eye, the president was coming under furious assault from leaders in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, even Israel.

Angry at the treatment of Mr. Mubarak, which officials from the Gulf states feared could forecast their own abandonment, Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E. drew a line in the sand. Some U.S. and Arab diplomats say this angry response could have been prevented if Mr. Obama had worked behind the scenes to ease out Mr. Mubarak, rather than going public.

On March 14, White House officials awoke to a nasty surprise: the Saudis had led a military incursion into Bahrain, followed by a violent crackdown in the capital in which the security forces cleared Pearl Square by force. The moves were widely deplored as a blunt act of repression, but Mr. Obama and Mrs. Clinton offered only veiled criticisms, calling for "calm and restraint on all sides" and "political dialogue."

The reasons for Mr. Obama's reticence were clear: Bahrain sits just off the Saudi coast, and the Saudis were never going to allow a sudden flowering of democracy next door, especially in light of the island's sectarian makeup. Bahrain's people are mostly Shi'ite, and they have long been seen as a cat's paw for Iranian influence by the Sunni rulers of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

Moreover, there was the U.S. Navy base in Bahrain, seen as a critical bulwark against Iran.

"At that stage, we realized that the possibility of anything happening in Saudi Arabia was one that couldn't become a reality," said William M. Daley, Mr. Obama's chief of staff at the time.

Iranian, in U.S., denigrates Israel

NEW YORK

BY RICK GLADSTONE
AND NEIL MACFARQUHAR

Defying a warning by the U.N. secretary general against inflammatory remarks, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran said Monday that Israelis had no historical roots in the Middle East and that the existence of Israel was just a passing phase in the region's long history.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, who arrived in New York on Sunday for the annual General Assembly meeting, made the remarks in a breakfast session with selected members of the news media. He said the Israelis had been around the region for only 60 or 70 years, in contrast to the Iranians, whose civilization had existed for thousands of years.

"They have no roots there in history," Mr. Ahmadinejad said of the Israelis, according to Reuters. "They do not even enter the equation for Iran."

In a meeting with Iranian expatriates in New York on Sunday evening, Mr. Ahmadinejad belittled Israel's significance and the military threats Israel has made against his country over its disputed nuclear program. "A number of uncultured Zionists that threaten the Iranian nation today are never counted and are never paid any attention in the equations of the Iranian nation," he said, according to a summary of his remarks on his English-language Web site.

Mr. Ahmadinejad, known for incendiary language against Israel, is in the last nine months of his final term in office, and there had been widespread expectations that he would use his remaining appearance at the General Assembly to excoriate and provoke Iran's enemies, who suspect that Iran is developing the ability to make nuclear weapons. Iran has repeatedly denied that its nuclear energy program is for military use.

The secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, who has repeatedly admonished Iranian leaders against making anti-Israel and anti-Semitic remarks, had a conversation with Mr. Ahmadinejad on Sunday to reiterate the warning that such language could cause "potentially harmful consequences," Mr. Ban's press office said in a statement.

Mr. Ahmadinejad's speech on Monday came during a one-day high-level conference on effecting universal standards of law. In his comments, he sounded many of the themes that have run through all his past appearances.

Without mentioning any country by name, he lashed out at the United States for ignoring Israel's nuclear arsenal

while trying to shut down Iran's nuclear program. "Some members of the Security Council with veto rights have chosen silence with regard to the nuclear warheads of a fake regime, while at the same time they impede the scientific progress of other nations," he said.

He also indirectly attacked the United States and others for defending freedom of speech even when it defames religion, a reference to the online video attacking the Prophet Muhammad that incited demonstrations around the Muslim world, including Iran, over the past three weeks.

Mr. Ahmadinejad is scheduled to deliver his General Assembly speech on Wednesday, which coincides with Yom Kippur, the holiest day in Judaism.

Negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program will be a focus at the world body, where about 120 world leaders will converge, but intractable diplomatic problems will share the stage at the U.N. General Debate, a weeklong event that began on Monday.

They include the spread of Al Qaeda across the Western Sahara; the slow negotiations over the Iranian nuclear program; global riots prompted by religious intolerance; and sharp new tensions in Asia over competing claims to small, potentially mineral-rich islands.

And, of course, the raging conflict in Syria will be front and center.

Lakhdar Brahimi, the newly appointed Syria peace envoy, gave a bleak assessment of the stalemated war there on Monday. He told Security Council diplomats that the government of President Bashar al-Assad had no wish to change and that there was no immediate prospect for a diplomatic breakthrough.

The assessment by Mr. Brahimi, a veteran United Nations diplomat and former Algerian foreign minister who represents the United Nations and the Arab League, was his first to the Security Council since he took over the position at the end of August from Kofi Annan, who resigned in frustration.

The Security Council meeting was held in private, but diplomats told reporters afterward that Mr. Brahimi had told them that Mr. Assad's government appeared entrenched in its belief that the Syria conflict was a foreign-instigated plot and that Mr. Assad wanted to return the country to the political structure that existed before the uprising against him broke out in March 2011.

Speaking to reporters later outside the council chambers, Mr. Brahimi said: "all I can tell you is that the situation is indeed extremely difficult. There is a stalemate, there is no prospect today or tomorrow to move forward."

"For the global economy, this couldn't happen. Yes, it was treated differently from Egypt. It was a different situation."

Some analysts give Mr. Obama credit for recognizing early on that strategic priorities trumped whatever sympathy he had for the protesters. Others, however, say the administration could have played a more effective mediating role between the Bahraini government and the protesters, largely Shiite, and thereby avoided what has become a dangerous sectarian standoff in one of the world's most volatile places.

If Mr. Obama had cultivated a closer relationship with the Saudis, he might have gained time for negotiations between the Bahraini authorities and the chief Shiite opposition party, al Wefaq, according to one U.S. diplomat who was there at the time. Instead, the Saudis gave virtually no warning when their forces rolled across the causeway linking Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and the ensuing crackdown destroyed all hopes for a peaceful resolution.

The lingering resentment over the way Mr. Mubarak's ouster was handled had another apparent consequence. Mrs. Clinton's criticism, during a television interview in Paris, of the military intervention angered the Emiratis, whose military was also involved in the Bahrain operation and who shared the Saudis' anger about the Mubarak episode.

Officials of the U.A.E. threatened to withdraw from the coalition that was then being assembled to support a NATO-led strike against Libyan leader, Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi. The Emiratis knew their presence was needed to give the coalition legitimacy. They quickly named their price for staying on board, according to Arab and Western diplomats familiar with the incident: Mrs. Clinton must issue a statement that would pull back from any criticism of the Bahrain operation.

The statement, hastily drafted and vetted by Emirati and U.S. officials, appeared soon afterward, in the guise of a communiqué on Libya.

The tensions between Mr. Obama and the Gulf states, U.S. and Arab diplomats say, derive from an Obama character trait: he has not built many personal relationships with foreign leaders.

"He's not good with personal relationships — that's not what interests him," said one U.S. diplomat with long experience in the region. "But in the Middle East, those relationships are essential. The lack of them deprives D.C. of the ability to influence leadership decisions."

Turkey blast 'kills seven' in Tunceli

A LARGE EXPLOSION has rocked the Turkish city of Tunceli, killing seven people, mainly security personnel.

The blast targeted a vehicle carrying security forces.

The city is near the country's Kurdish area and suspicion will automatically fall upon Kurdish rebel group the PKK, says the BBC's Istanbul correspondent James Reynolds.

Fighting between Turkish troops and the PKK - the Kurdistan Workers' Party - has escalated in recent months.

Six members of the security forces and one civilian died in the attack in the Ataturk neighbourhood, said local media and hospital sources.

Turkish TV stations showed pictures of workers trying to put out fires in two burnt-out vehicles.

Reports said a vehicle carrying explosives was remotely detonated as an armoured vehicle carrying security forces passed by, sending a huge plume of dark smoke over



the city.

Some reports said a civilian vehicle was also damaged in the explosion.

One report, in Turkey's Hurriyet Daily News, said security forces arriving on the scene clashed with suspected PKK militants, with one militant killed.

No-one has yet said they carried out the attack, but Kurdish rebels are active in the city, which is the capital of the province of Tunceli.

'Hundreds dead'

This incident comes amid a surge in fighting in the three-decade conflict between the military and the PKK which in total has killed more than 40,000 people.

In mid-September, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said 500 Kurdish rebels had been "rendered ineffective" by Turkish forces in the space of a month.

Many have died in Turkish aerial campaigns against suspected PKK hideouts in the south-east of the country.

PKK fighters killed 17 Turkish soldiers and injured scores over three days in Bingol province last week.

Earlier this month, one soldier and three Kurdish militants were killed when insurgents attacked army outposts in Tunceli.

This has become the most violent period in fighting with the Kurds since the capture of the PKK's leader, Abdullah Ocalan, in 1999, our correspondent says. ■

PUK and Gorran Meet for First Time in Six Years

By HEVIDAR AHMED
rudaw.net

SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region — The leaders of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Change Movement (Gorran) met on Sunday for the first time in six years.

Nawshirwan Mustafa visited Iraqi President and PUK leader Jalal Talabani after years of tension and rivalry between the two sides. Mustafa was Talabani's deputy in the PUK until he split and formed his own Gorran party in 2009.

The visit came after Talabani returned from receiving treatment in Germany where he was hospitalized for around three months.

"We have had meetings and open channels of communication for nearly a year," said Azad Jundiyan, PUK's spokesman. "Some social figures mediated and, as a



The leader of the Change Movement (Gorran)-left-visits Jalal Talabani, the secretary general of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) following his return from Europe. Photo: kurdsat.

result, Mr. Mustafa and his delegation decided to visit Mr. Talabani."

Following the meeting, both leaders told journalists that they shared identical views on many issues in Iraqi and Kurdish politics.

They also added that the draft version of Kurdistan's constitution, ratified last year by MPs, needs to be returned to the chamber for further amendment and that some other laws "with a national dimension" need to be revised by parliament.

President Talabani said that the power-sharing "strategic agreement" that exists between the PUK and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) needs to be adjusted as well. The KDP and PUK are the two ruling parties in Kurdistan's government.

There has been speculation that the KDP might be alarmed by the recent rapprochement between the PUK and Gorran.

But Gorran leaders say they have informed the KDP about their meeting with the PUK.

Fazil Mirani, a senior KDP politician, apparently told Gorran leaders that his party "has no suspicions about the relations between the PUK and Gorran."

During the Kurdistan Region's parliamentary elections in July 2009, Gorran emerged as a major power, taking over PUK stronghold Sulaimani and forming the opposition. ●



Turquie: décès d'un procureur blessé dans une attaque attribuée au PKK

DIYIRBAKIR (Turquie), 20 septembre 2012 (AFP)

UN PROCUREUR d'une zone kurde de l'est de la Turquie, grièvement blessé mercredi dans une attaque attribuée par les autorités aux séparatistes kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), est décédé jeudi, a-t-on appris de source sécuritaire.

Murat Uzun, procureur général de la ville d'Ovacik, dans la province de Tunceli, avait été atteint mercredi d'un coup de feu tiré en pleine tête. Conduit à l'hôpital dans un état critique, il est mort jeudi des suites de ses blessures, a précisé cette source à l'AFP.

Les auteurs de l'attaque, un homme et une femme membres du PKK selon

cette même source, étaient toujours en fuite jeudi.

La police et l'armée sont les cibles privilégiées des actions attribuées au PKK, les magistrats étant plus rarement visés.

Les séparatistes kurdes ont multiplié depuis l'été leurs attaques contre les forces de sécurité turques dans le sud-est du pays. L'armée a riposté par des opérations massives impliquant les forces aériennes.

Lundi, le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a affirmé que l'armée avait tué environ 500 rebelles kurdes en un mois.

Mardi, dix soldats ont été tués dans l'attaque de leur convoi dans le sud-est anatolien. ○



Un militant kurde assassiné dans le nord est de la Syrie

DAMAS, 21 septembre 2012 (AFP)

UN MILITANT KURDE connu, Mahmoud Wali, alias Abou Ghandi, a été tué par balles par un inconnu dans le nord-est de la Syrie, ont annoncé des militants vendredi.

Mahmoud Wali, une figure du Conseil national kurde et un dirigeant du "Mouvement des jeunes de la Révolution", hostile au régime du président Bachar al-Assad, a été assassiné jeudi par un homme masqué circulant sur une moto, qui a lui tiré deux balles dans la tête, ont-ils indiqué.

L'assassinat a eu lieu devant le bureau du Conseil national à Ras al-Ain,

une ville de la province de Hassaké à majorité kurde, ont précisé l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH) et des militants.

Wali, qui avait reçu des menaces de mort, se cachait, apparaissant uniquement pour participer à des manifestations.

Nombre de militants et d'intellectuels ont été attaqués par le régime d'Assad depuis le début de la révolte en mars 2011, qui s'est militarisée depuis, face à la violente répression menée par le pouvoir.

En août 2011, le caricaturiste Ali Ferzat, dont les dessins satiriques sont dénoncés par le régime, avait été violemment battu par les forces de sécurité et les milices pro-régime.

Le militant Adnane Wehbé a été assassiné en juin dans son cabinet médical près de Damas, par un agent de la sécurité habillé en civil, selon des militants. Et le chanteur de la Révolution, Ibrahim Qashoush, a été retrouvé mort en juin 2011, les cordes vocales arrachées. ○

L'EXPRESS 28 septembre 2012

Conflit kurde en Turquie: le chef emprisonné du PKK appelle à l'apaisement

Le chef emprisonné des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), Abdullah Öcalan, a appelé ses troupes à l'apaisement alors que les affrontements avec les forces de sécurité se sont multipliés cet été, a affirmé son frère cité vendredi par le quotidien Taraf.

"Lors de notre dernier entretien, il m'a confié ce message: «désormais, plus aucun soldat, policier ou guérillero ne doit mourir. Mon seul souhait est que le sang cesse (de couler), que cette question soit réglée», a déclaré à Taraf Mehmet Öcalan après avoir vu son frère sur l'île-prison d'Imrali (nord-ouest).

Mehmet Öcalan n'a pas donné de détails sur la date de cette rencontre, mais selon le journal à grand tirage Hürriyet, celle-ci a eu lieu vendredi dernier.

Ces appels au calme du chef historique du PKK interviennent alors que les combats entre les rebelles et l'armée turque se sont intensifiés au cours des derniers mois dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, pour atteindre une de leurs phases les plus meurtrières de la dernière décennie.

Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip



Un Kurde lors d'une manifestation pour la libération du chef du PKK Abdullah Öcalan, le 14 juillet 2012 à Diyarbakir

afp.com

Erdogan a affirmé mercredi que 144 membres des forces de sécurité et 239 rebelles kurdes avaient été tués depuis le début de l'année.

Il a également indiqué qu'il était prêt à relancer des négociations avec le PKK, comme celles qu'il avait organisées entre 2009 et 2011 à Oslo, qui avaient capoté. "Si (des) entretiens nous permettent de régler quelque chose, faisons-le. Si ça doit être à Oslo, alors à Oslo", a-t-il dit.

M. Erdogan a également mentionné le fait qu'il avait encouragé la tenue d'une

rencontre entre Abdullah Öcalan et son frère, pour faire taire les rumeurs propagées selon lui par le PKK sur un possible décès du chef rebelle.

Le chef historique du PKK a été capturé par des agents turcs à Nairobi puis transféré en Turquie et condamné à mort pour trahison en 1999, une peine commuée en prison à vie.

Il est privé depuis plus d'un an de la visite de ses avocats, qu'il recevait auparavant régulièrement et par le biais desquels il communiquait avec l'extérieur. **Par AFP** □

Syrie : les preuves de l'implication militaire iranienne s'accumulent

Hommes, armes... Téhéran s'engage de plus en plus ouvertement auprès de Damas pour sauver son principal allié arabe, enfermé dans une répression sanglante

C'est une simple tombe du grand cimetière Beheshte Zahra, à Téhéran. La tombe d'un pasdar, un gardien de la révolution, mort en martyr pour la patrie. A côté de la date de son décès, le 19 janvier 2012, à l'âge de 33 ans, figure un nom de lieu : Damas. C'est le site iranien Vahid Online qui a mis en ligne la photo ; elle est la première preuve tangible de l'aide militaire du régime iranien à son homologue et allié syrien. Une recherche plus poussée a permis au *Monde* de trouver, sur le site de la mairie de Téhéran, des photos des funérailles de Moharram Tork, enterré avec les honneurs officiels et des banderoles à l'effigie du Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, premier personnage de la République islamique.

Dernière pièce du puzzle, le texte d'un blogueur prorégime présent aux funérailles. « Il paraît que Moharram Tork est mort en martyr lors d'un entraînement organisé par les Gardiens de la révolution, [ou pasdarans], lorsqu'une grenade lui a explosé dans la main », écrit-il. On y apprend également que le soldat Tork, ancien membre des

bassidjis, une milice intérieure, est devenu gardien de la révolution à la fin des années 1990.

Le corps d'élite des pasdarans est en première ligne dans l'aide iranienne à la Syrie. Leur commandant en chef, Mohammad Ali Jafari, a confirmé ce secret de Polichinelle, le 16 septembre, précisant – sans convaincre – qu'il s'agissait d'une aide non militaire. Lors de cette conférence de presse, le responsable iranien a menacé d'une intervention de Téhéran aux côtés de Damas si les « circonstances » le nécessitaient. Un message on ne peut plus clair à l'attention de l'Ara-

Washington vers un geste en faveur d'opposants iraniens

Deux parlementaires américains ont annoncé, vendredi 21 septembre, que les Etats-Unis vont rayer les Moudjahidine du peuple, une formation d'opposition iranienne en exil, de leur liste des organisations « terroristes ». La décision doit être prise par Washington avant le 1^{er} octobre et consacrer l'évacuation, réclamée par l'ONU et les Etats-

Unis, du camp d'Achraf, que les Moudjahidine du peuple occupent depuis des années en Irak. Ces opposants s'y étaient installés pendant la guerre Iran-Irak (1980-1988), avec le soutien du régime de Saddam Hussein, pour mener des actions armées et des attentats en Iran. L'Europe a retiré cette organisation de sa liste en 2009. – (AFP.)

bie saoudite, du Qatar et de la Turquie, qui aident et financent les insurgés syriens, sur les limites à ne pas franchir.

Le lendemain, M. Jafari a été démenti par le ministère des affaires étrangères iranien, en plein effort pour obtenir du « groupe de contact » quadripartite (Iran, Arabie saoudite, Egypte et Turquie) l'envoi d'observateurs internationaux. Cette manœuvre diplomatique, visant à obtenir un « règlement pacifique » et « un arrêt de l'aide financière et militaire à l'opposition syrienne », a peu de chance d'aboutir tant ces quatre pays paraissent divisés sur le règlement de la crise syrienne et l'avenir du pays. Un démenti peu convaincant, la question syrienne, essentielle dans le dispositif stratégique régional iranien, relevant plus du Guide suprême, par ailleurs chef des pasdarans, que du gouvernement.

L'alliance, tissée en 1980 et renforcée depuis l'émergence du Hezbollah libanais, ne s'est jamais démentie

Deux jours plus tard, le chef de la diplomatie iranienne, Ali Akbar Salehi, était à Damas pour rendre visite au président syrien Bachar Al-Assad et l'assurer de nouveau du soutien de Téhéran. Les émissaires iraniens se succèdent à un rythme soutenu dans la capitale syrienne. Depuis le début du soulèvement syrien, l'Iran ne ménage pas son soutien à son meilleur allié dans le monde arabe : l'alliance, tissée en 1980 et renforcée depuis l'émergence du Hezbollah libanais, ne s'est jamais démentie.

« Dans un premier temps, l'aide iranienne a consisté à donner des moyens de détection et de surveillance téléphonique et Internet, résume David Rigoulet-Roze, chercheur à l'Institut français d'analyse stratégique (IFAS). Puis, quand les choses sont devenues plus sérieu-

ses, en mai 2011, Téhéran a fourni son savoir-faire en matière de répression urbaine. » Ahmad Reza Radan, numéro deux de la police antiémeute à Téhéran et impliqué dans la répression des manifestations de juin 2009, aurait fait le voyage de Damas. « A la fin de 2011, quand l'Armée syrienne libre a commencé à vraiment émerger, on a basculé dans l'aide militaire. »

Le général Qassem Souleimani, chef de la force Al-Qods, chargée des opérations extérieures au sein des pasdarans, serait venu à



Image diffusée sur le site iranien Vahid Online : dans le grand cimetière Beheshte Zahra, à Téhéran, la tombe d'un gardien de la révolution, Moharram Tork, « mort en martyr pour la patrie » à Damas. DR

Damas au mois de janvier. L'Iran aurait alors offert d'entraîner l'armée syrienne, mais aussi proposé des tireurs embusqués, qu'elle a formés en grande quantité, tout comme elle produit des fusils de précision Dragonov en grande quantité sous licence russe.

Une nouvelle étape est franchie après l'attentat du 18 juillet, qui décapite la cellule de crise syrienne en tuant quatre hauts responsables sécuritaires, dont Assef Chawkat, le beau-frère de Bachar Al-Assad. Dans le même temps, l'insurrection armée a gagné Damas et Alep. Saïd Jalili, l'envoyé spécial du Guide, vient sur place. Selon des sources informées, l'accord de défense mutuelle, signé en 2006 et renforcé par un protocole additionnel secret en 2008, aurait été invoqué : Damas se serait engagé à ouvrir un deuxième front en cas d'attaque israélienne contre l'Iran, en échange d'un soutien « illimité » de Téhéran à Bachar Al-Assad afin qu'il reste au pouvoir.

C'est à cette époque qu'une cinquantaine de pasdarans présumés ont été kidnappés par la rébellion syrienne à Damas. Mais l'effort iranien ne s'est pas démenti. Que ce soit à travers l'envoi de militaires et d'armes par des vols civils bénéficiant de la complicité passive de l'Irak, au grand dam de Washington, comme l'a révélé un rapport de services de renseignements occidentaux dévoilé récemment par l'agence Reuters. Ou par l'envoi de

Iran

Téhéran accusé de ravitailler le régime Assad en armes via l'Irak

NATIONS UNIES. L'Iran a utilisé des avions civils pour transporter en Syrie des militaires et de grandes quantités d'armes via l'espace aérien irakien, dans le but d'aider son allié, Bachar Al-Assad, à réprimer les insurgés, affirme un rapport des services de renseignements occidentaux, révélé jeudi 20 septembre par l'agence Reuters. « Des avions se rendent presque tous les jours d'Iran en Syrie en passant par l'Irak, avec à leur bord des Gardiens de la révolution iraniens, et des dizaines de tonnes d'armes destinées aux forces de sécurité syriennes et aux milices qui combattent les insurgés », indique le document, dont une copie a été obtenue grâce à une source onusienne. — (Reuters.) ■

centaines de gradés des gardiens de la révolution, chargés de restructurer les forces restées fidèles au président Assad.

David Rigoulet-Roze y voit un projet de mettre sur pied « une force équivalente aux pasdarans » en fondant la IV^e division de l'armée, commandée par le frère du président Maher Al-Assad, la Garde républicaine et les troupes d'élite aéroportées. Une armée dans l'armée, dévouée au seul régime. Un projet similaire serait en cours avec la transformation des chabiha (civils armés pro-Assad) en miliciens de type bassidj.

Selon l'Organisation des moudjahidines du peuple iranien

(OMPI), un groupe d'opposition radical en exil, le soutien de la République islamique va plus loin et touche quasiment à tous les aspects du conflit : la protection des frontières pour empêcher l'approvisionnement en armes et combattants, la surveillance par des drones, la protection des hauts personnalités, l'assistance technique à l'artillerie. L'OMPI a identifié le général de brigade iranien Hossein Hamedani comme le principal officier de liaison iranien à Damas. C'est elle qui avait identifié le général Abedine Khoram parmi les 48 otages iraniens, une information confirmée depuis par le « mouvement vert » (opposition) en Iran.

Cette aide iranienne, renforcée

par le Hezbollah libanais et la milice chiite irakienne Badr, coïncide avec un effort particulier de la Russie dans les secteurs de l'aviation, des radars et de la sécurisation des télécommunications. D'où les progrès récents de l'armée syrienne, qui a entrepris un bombardement systématique des quartiers d'Alep et des localités du Nord tombés aux mains des insurgés. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD ET ASSAL REZA

L'opposant Moussavi victime d'une purge photographique

Celui qui s'éloigne des yeux, finira par partir du cœur. » Le proverbe persan, équivalent du « loin des yeux loin du cœur » français, ne s'applique pas qu'aux histoires d'amour qui s'effacent avec le temps et la distance. C'est en tout cas ce que semblent espérer les autorités iraniennes en éliminant Mir Hossein Moussavi, principal dirigeant de l'opposition, de la photo du gouvernement en 1981 dans les manuels scolaires destinés aux élèves de troisième.

Deux ans après la révolution islamique en 1979, le candidat malheureux à la présidentielle de 2009 occupait le poste de ministre des affaires étrangères. Sur la photo originale, rééditée dans le manuel de sciences sociales, il figure à l'extrémité droite

de l'image ; ce qui a sûrement facilité la tâche des censeurs, qui l'ont simplement coupé, lui et la personne qui se tenait debout derrière lui.

Mir Hossein Moussavi est assigné à résidence à Téhéran depuis février 2011, ainsi que sa femme Zahra Rahnavard. Très peu de nouvelles filtrent à son sujet, si ce n'est son hospitalisation en août, suite à un malaise cardiaque. Candidat réformateur contre Mahmoud Ahmadinejad à la présidentielle de juin 2009, M. Moussavi a été vaincu dès le premier tour selon les résultats officiels. Quand la contestation a envahi la rue iranienne le 13 juin 2009, il a été intronisé chef de l'opposition, aux côtés de l'autre candidat réformateur, Mehdi Karoubi.

Avant sa « détention »,

M. Moussavi n'a eu de cesse de critiquer le pouvoir en place et ses méthodes, qu'il qualifiait de « staliniennes ».

Au rythme des épurations

« Ce genre de propagande [contre Mehdi Karoubi et lui-même] appartient au temps passé et [le régime] utilise les mêmes méthodes que celles mises en œuvre par les régimes totalitaires comme l'URSS de l'époque Staline ou la Roumanie sous Ceausescu », avait accusé Mir Hossein Moussavi en janvier 2011, dans un de ses derniers entretiens avant sa mise au secret.

La dernière manœuvre de l'Etat iranien pour faire oublier cet homme politique tombé en disgrâce s'apparente aux méthodes en vigueur sous Staline desti-

nées à réécrire l'histoire et la mémoire collective. Ce n'est pas une nouveauté en République islamique d'Iran, où même les photos de l'arrivée de l'imam Khomeyni à l'aéroport de Téhéran, en février 1979, ont été modifiées au fil des années et au rythme des épurations.

Ironie du sort, le nom de Staline a été évoqué par le numéro un du régime iranien, Ali Khamenei, lors d'une rencontre avec des étudiants bassidjis au cours de l'été. « Je ne suis pas [comme] Staline qui disait des choses et qui faisait venir des gens pour les théoriser », a expliqué le Guide suprême. Cette citation, rapportée par deux étudiants dimanche 16 septembre, ne figure pas sur le site officiel du Guide suprême. ■

C. A.

Turkey's Kurdish Calculus

Ankara re-embraces its old allies in Washington, at the expense of Tehran and Damascus.

By SONER CAGAPTAY

The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, has made a bloody comeback in Turkey. According to a recent report by the International Crisis Group, PKK-related violence has killed some 700 people since the summer of 2011. This deadly toll recalls the horrors of the 1990s, when thousands of civilians were killed in PKK terror attacks and a brutal war in eastern Turkey between the government and Kurdish militants.

The resurgence of PKK violence is no accident. It is directly related to Turkey's defiant posture in support of the Syrian uprising and against the Assad regime and its patrons in Iran. The upside for the West is that Ankara is starting to re-embrace its old friends in Washington.

The breakdown in Turkish-Syrian ties began in the summer of 2011. Since then, Damascus has once again allowed the PKK to operate in Syria. Meanwhile, to punish Ankara for its Syria policy, Iran's leaders have made peace with the Kurdish rebels they had been fighting, letting the PKK focus its energy against Turkey.

This was not Ankara's plan. When the Syrian uprising began in spring 2011, Turkish leaders initially encouraged Bashar Assad's regime to reform. In August 2011, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu spent six hours in Damascus asking Assad to stop killing civilians.

The Syrian tyrant not only disregarded Turkey's pleas; he also sent tanks into Hama hours after Mr. Davutoglu left the capital. Thereafter, Ankara broke from Assad and began calling for his ouster.

Turkey began providing safe haven to Syrian opposition groups, and media reports have even indicated that Ankara has been arming the Syrian rebels.

Assad responded by letting the PKK operate in Syria after keeping a lid on the group for more than a decade. In 1998, Assad's father had cracked down on the longtime presence of Kurdish militants in Syria, after Turkey threatened to invade if Syria continued to harbor the PKK. This spring, Assad allowed the PKK to move some 2,000 militants into Syria from their mountain enclave in northern Iraq. Assad, in effect, signaled to Ankara: "Help my enemy, and I will help yours."

The Iranian regime has spoken in similar tones. In September 2011, immediately after Ankara started to confront the Assad regime, Tehran reconciled with the PKK's Iranian franchise, the Party for Freedom and Life in Kurdistan. Tehran had been fighting its Kurdish rebels since 2003, as part of a strategy to take advantage of the rift between Turkey and the U.S. at the onset of the Iraq War. By helping Turkey defeat Kurdish militias, Iran had hoped to win Ankara's favor at the expense of its own archenemy: Washington. But Iran flipped this posture last year, and by making peace with Kurdish militants, it gave the PKK freedom to target Turkey.

The new stance on the PKK could not have worked so well against Turkey had the Syrian uprising not excited Kurds across the Middle East, including in Turkey. As Syrian rebels eroded the regime's power in northern Syria this summer, Kurds started taking control of cities there, just across the border with Turkey.

Encouraged by this development, the PKK has tried to wrest control of Turkish towns, targeting especially vulnerable spots in the country's rugged and isolated southernmost Hakkari province, which borders Iraq and Iran. Although the PKK has not yet secured any territory, the battle for Hakkari has caused hundreds of casualties over recent months.

Iran appears to be complicit in this new PKK assault, at least in part. Last month

Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc told reporters that the government had "received information that [PKK] terrorists infiltrated from the Iranian side of the border" before launching a massive assault on the town of Semdinli in Hakkari. Tehran denies this.

Rejuvenated by its welcome in Syria and Iran, and also by Ankara's stunted "Kurdish Opening"—an aborted effort in 2009 that had aimed to improve Kurds' rights in Turkey—the PKK is now spreading tension beyond the Kurdish-majority areas of southeastern Turkey. On Aug. 20, the group killed nine people with a car bomb in Gaziantep, a prosperous and mixed Turkish-Kurdish city that had been spared from PKK violence. Once again, the Syrian-Iranian axis cast its shadow over the assault: Turkish officials alleged Syrian complicity in the Gaziantep attack, and when Iranian nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili met with Turkey's prime minister in Istanbul on Sept. 18, he was also reportedly admonished.

Ankara's Middle East policy rests on one basic premise: that anyone who supports the PKK is Turkey's enemy. It follows that Ankara has a problem with Damascus until Assad falls, and a long-term problem with Tehran even after Assad falls.

Accordingly, these shifting stones in the Middle East are also bringing Ankara closer to its longtime ally the U.S. Turkey has agreed to host NATO's missile-defense system, which aims to protect members of the Western alliance from Iranian and other nuclear threats.

After weeks of attacks and riots against their embassies elsewhere in the Middle East, Americans may well be wondering if the Arab Spring has had any positive consequences at all for the U.S. The severing of Turkish-Iranian ties, at least, can count as one.

Mr. Cagaptay is a Beyer Family Fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Syria war exposes Iraq's weaknesses

BAGHDAD

BY TIM ARANGO

The civil war in Syria is testing Iraq's fragile society and fledgling democracy, worsening sectarian tensions, pushing Iraq closer to Iran, and highlighting security shortcomings just nine months after U.S. forces ended their long and costly occupation.

Fearing that insurgents in Iraq will unite with extremists in Syria to wage a two-front battle for Sunni dominance, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki recently ordered guards at the western border to block adult men, even husbands and fathers with families in tow, from crossing into Iraq along with thousands of refugees seeking to escape the war next door.

Farther north, Iraqi officials have another concern, also related to the fighting across the border. Turkish warplanes have stepped up attacks on the mountain hide-outs of Kurdish insurgents galvanized by the war in Syria, underscoring Iraq's inability to control its own airspace.

The hardening of the antagonists' positions in Syria — reverberating across Iraq — was made clear on Monday at the United Nations when the new special envoy for Syria, Lakhdar Brahimi, gave a bleak appraisal of the conflict to the Security Council and said he saw no prospect for a breakthrough anytime soon.

The Syrian war's spillover has called attention to uncomfortable realities for U.S. officials: Despite nearly nine years of military engagement — an effort that continues with a \$19 billion weapons sales program — Iraq's security is uncertain and its alliance with the theocratic government in Tehran is growing. Iraq's Shiite-dominated leadership is so worried about a victory by Sunni radicals in Syria that it has moved closer to Iran, which shares a similar interest in supporting the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad.

There is some indication that Sunni insurgents in Iraq have tried to coordinate with Syrian fighters to set off a regional sectarian war, Iraqi tribal leaders said.

"Fighters from Anbar went there to support their sect, the Sunnis," said Sheik Hamid al-Hayes, a tribal leader in Anbar Province, in western Iraq. He once led a group of former insurgents who switched sides and joined the Americans in fighting Al Qaeda in Iraq.

In response, the United States has tried to secure its interests in Iraq. It has unsuccessfully pressed Iraq to halt flights from Iran that traverse Iraqi air-

space to ferry weapons and fighters to the Assad government, although The Associated Press reported that over the weekend a government spokesman said Iraq would begin random searches of Iranian aircraft.

While some U.S. lawmakers have threatened to cut off aid to Iraq if the flights do not stop, the United States is trying to speed weapons sales to Iraq to secure it as an ally, said Lt. Gen. Robert L. Caslen Jr., the U.S. commander in charge of that effort. As regional security deteriorates, the United States is finding it hard to deliver the weapons — especially anti-aircraft systems —



THAHER AL-SUDANI/REUTERS

A Syrian woman at a refugee camp at the Iraqi town of al-Qaim, Anbar province.

quickly enough to satisfy the Iraqis, who in some cases are looking elsewhere, including Russia.

"Although they want a strategic partnership with the United States, they recognize the vulnerability, and they are interested in going with the nation that will be able to provide them, and meet their need, their capabilities gap, as quickly as possible," said General Caslen, who oversees a Pentagon office in Baghdad, under the authority of the U.S. Embassy, that brokers weapons sales to Iraq.

The United States is providing Iraq with refurbished anti-aircraft guns, free, but they will not arrive until June. In the meantime, the Iraqis have collected Cold War-era missiles found in a junkyard north of Baghdad, and they are trying to get them in working order. Iraq is negotiating with Russia to buy air defense systems that could be delivered much more quickly than those bought from the United States.

"Iraq recognizes they don't control their airspace, and they are very sensitive to that," General Caslen said. Each time Turkish fighter jets enter Iraqi airspace to bomb Kurdish targets, he said, Iraqi officials "see it, they know it, and

they resent it."

Iskander Witwit, a former Iraqi Air Force officer who is now a member of Parliament's security committee, said, "God willing, we will be arming Iraq with weapons to be able to shoot down those planes."

The U.S. military withdrew at the end of last year after negotiations for an extended troop presence collapsed because the Iraqis would not agree to extend legal immunities to any remaining force. Once the Americans left, Iraq celebrated its sovereignty, even as military

"Iraq recognizes they don't control their airspace."

officials in both countries fretted about the deficiencies of the Iraqi military and sought ways to work together that would not require a public debate about immunities.

So even as the country leans closer to Iran and contemplates buying weapons from Russia, it still seeks the military support of the United States. This is because Iraq is still facing a potent insurgency whose frequent recent attacks have raised questions about the ability of Iraq's counterterrorism forces to face the threat.

In Anbar, said Mr. Hayes, the tribal leader, insurgents have created Qaeda-affiliated units under the name the Free Iraqi Army, to mimic the banner under which Syrian Sunnis are fighting. "They are having meetings and are recruiting," he said. The group also has a Twitter account and a Facebook page.

Similar units have sprouted in Diyala Province, and they have used a call to arms in Syria as a recruitment tool, according to local officials. When fighters die in Syria, local families hold funerals in secret so as not to alert the Shiite-dominated security forces that they have sent their sons to Syria.

As Western policy makers consider intervention in Syria, they worry that country's war could turn into a full-blown sectarian conflict like the one that engulfed Iraq from 2005 to 2007. For Iraqis who fled to Syria and are now returning, not by choice but to save their own lives, Syria already is Iraq.

"It's exactly like it was in Iraq," said Zina Ritha, 29, who returned to Baghdad after several years in Damascus. Referring to the Free Syrian Army, Ms. Ritha said: "The F.S.A. is destroying Shia houses. They are kidnapping people, especially the Iraqis and the Shia."

Duraïd Adnan, Yasir Ghazi and Omar al-Jawoshy contributed reporting from Baghdad, and an employee of The New York Times from Diyala Province.

Kurds Prepare to Pursue More Autonomy in a Fallen Syria

By TIM ARANGO

DOHUK, Iraq — Just off a main highway that stretches east of this city and slices through a moonscape of craggy hills, a few hundred Syrian Kurds men have been training for battle, marching through scrub brush and practicing rifle drills.

The men, many of them defectors from the Syrian Army living in white trailers dotting a hillside camp, are not here to join the armed uprising against President Bashar al-Assad's government. They are preparing for the fight they expect to come after, when Mr. Assad falls and there is a scramble across Syria for power and turf.

These men want an autonomous Kurdish region in what is now Syria, a prospect they see as a step toward fulfilling a centuries-old dream of linking the Kurdish minorities in Iraq, Turkey and Iran into an independent nation.

But that desire, to right a historical grievance for a people divided and oppressed through generations, also threatens to draw a violent reaction from those other nations. They have signaled a willingness to take extreme actions to prevent the loss of territory to a greater Kurdistan.

The first step is already in motion, as the Iraqi Kurds provide haven, training and arms to the would-be militia. "They are being trained for after the fall, for the security vacuum that will come after the Assad government collapses," said Mahmood Sabir, one of a number of Syrian Kurdish opposition figures operating in Iraq.

That the Kurds are arming themselves for a fight, one that could prove decisive in shaping post-revolutionary Syria, adds another element of volatility to the conflict. It suggests that the government's fall would not lead to peace — but, instead, an all-out sectarian war that could drag in neighboring countries.

Against the backdrop of the raging civil war, Syrian Kurds have already etched out a measure of autonomy in their territories — not because they have taken up arms against the government, but because the government has relinquished Kurdish communities to local control, allowing the Kurds to gain a head start on self-rule. Kurdish flags fly over former government buildings in those areas, and schools have opened that teach in the

Kurdish language, something the Assad government had prohibited.

"We are organizing our society, a Kurdish society," said Saleh Mohammed, the leader of the Democratic Union Party, or P.Y.D., which is viewed with deep suspicion by other Kurdish groups for its ties to Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K.

The P.K.K. is considered a terrorist organization by the United States and Europe and has lately stepped up its guerrilla attacks in Turkey.

The Kurds say they are girding for a fight, should the government try to reclaim Kurdish cities or if the Sunni-dominated militias, loosely organized under the banner of the Free Syrian Army and fighting to bring down the government, try to move into Kurdish areas.

"Of course, we'll defend ourselves," Mr. Mohammed said. "According to Kurdish tradition, we have weapons in our houses. Every house should have its own weapon."

Much of the Syrian Kurds' efforts are being guided by Masoud Barzani, the head of Iraq's northern Kurdish region, whose autonomy and relative prosperity serves as a model for Syrian Kurds. The men at the camp are being trained and provided weapons by an Iraqi Kurdish special forces unit that is linked to Mr. Barzani's political party.

Mr. Barzani has sought to play a king-maker role with his Syrian brethren by uniting the various factions, like he has in the sectarian and ethnic tinderbox of Iraqi politics. In July he reached a deal to organize more than a dozen Kurdish parties under the Kurdish Supreme Council, and many of the officials work out of an office in Erbil, in a mixed-use complex of cul-de-sacs and tidy subdivisions called the Italian Village.

Oppressed for decades under Arab autocrats, denied rights by one post-Ottoman Turkish leader after another, and betrayed after World War I by Allied powers who had once promised Kurdish independence, this time the Kurds are determined to seize the upheaval of the Arab Spring and bend history to their will.

The civil war in Syria, whose nearly two million Kurds are mostly clustered near its northeastern border with Turkey, has excited the aspirations for statehood that the Kurds have held for centuries. These dreams have been kept in abeyance



since the Western victors of World War I set down arbitrary new borders for the Middle East that divided the Kurdish people among four nations: Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran.

"It's a historical moment for the Kurds to take advantage of, to achieve change," said Kawa Azizi, a Syrian who is a professor of politics and a Kurdish opposition politician. He works out of Erbil, the capital of Iraq's Kurdish region, serving now as a hub for the Syrian Kurdish militia and civilian activities.

When the uprising began nearly 18 months ago, some observers worried that the Kurds could make common cause with Mr. Assad in exchange for more rights and autonomy. Many described the Kurds as sitting on the fence, waiting to choose sides. Many Kurds dispute that analysis. They say they have always hated President Assad.

In ceding control of the Kurdish cities, the Assad government has been able to focus its heavy weapons on the fight with the Sunni-led opposition. The move has also antagonized Turkey, which has supported the opposition but worries that an autonomous Kurdish region in Syria could become a free zone for Kurdish insurgents to launch attacks on Turkey.

In Turkey, the fight with the P.K.K. has recently resulted in casualties at a level not seen since the late 1990s, according to a recent report published by the International Crisis Group.

Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has suggested that Turkey has a right to intervene in Syria's Kurdish areas if it believes Turkey's security is under threat.

The Kurds of Syria, divided among more than a dozen factions of shifting alliances, seem united in at least two respects: they are opposed to the Assad government, but deeply suspicious of

the ambitions of the Free Syrian Army. "First of all, they are Arabs," Mr. Azizi said of the Free Syrian Army. "We do not want the Arabs to control us."

While there is little fighting in the Syrian Kurdish towns, and officials interviewed in Iraq say that a measure of calm has settled over the areas, Kurdish refugees are steadily streaming into northern Iraq. Refugees say government intelligence operatives are still harassing Kurds, and threatening them if they do not join the government's army.

Food and medical supplies are also running low, contributing to the exodus of refugees. At the Domiz refugee camp near Dohuk, a tent city of nearly 25,000 people, about 150 to 200 new refugees arrive each day. "The only place we could come was Kurdistan in Iraq," said Jawan Suleiman, 32, who has lived at the camp since April.

Mr. Suleiman earns money selling snacks and cigarettes to other camp resi-

dents. In his home, a concrete husk with a tented roof, he hangs a placard of Mr. Barzani's late father, Mullah Mustafa Barzani, a famous Kurdish military and political leader. As Mr. Suleiman drank peach nectar and smoked cigarette after cigarette, he explained that the Kurds were never on the fence in Syria's uprising.

"We suffered a lot," he said. "Now it's time that we stand and have our own region so we can get our rights."

The Syrian military has kept a low profile in Kurdish areas. For now, with the focus on Syria, Kurdish leaders acknowledge the ambition of an independent nation that unites the Kurdish communities in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Iraq, but they say they will settle for independence within a united Syria — as an interim step.

In the Middle East, historical grievances are never fully in the past, but only prologue to current circumstances. As some Kurds see it, the historical roots of

their oppression stretch back centuries, to the exploits of a Muslim Kurdish warrior named Saladin, the first sultan of Egypt, who achieved victory over European crusaders in the 12th century.

Some Kurds believe that what followed in the 20th century — the denial of a Kurdish state by the allies after World War I, support by the international community for Arab autocrats who shunned Kurds as second-class citizens, policies of forcibly removing Kurds from their lands and resettling Arabs, the gassing of the Kurds by Saddam Hussein — was cosmic retribution for Saladin's victories.

Mr. Azizi, the professor and politician, said: "The West had been punishing us for what he did. Now I think that punishment is over." ■

Duraid Adnan and an Iraqi employee of The New York Times contributed reporting from Dohuk and Erbil.

Turkish PM: Gov't taking risks to solve Kurdish issue

ANKARA - Hürriyet Daily News

The Turkish government is taking risks to attempt to solve the country's long-standing Kurdish problem, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said yesterday during a televised interview with the private NTV news channel.

"Our intelligence service can take this kind of step when it needs to be taken," Erdoğan said.

Amid ongoing clashes between the Turkish security forces and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), Erdoğan also said the jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan could participate in a new negotiation process to end the bloody battle.

"Meetings concerning İmralı can take place again," he said, referring to the Marmara island on which Öcalan is incarcerated. "We are ready to do whatever is necessary to [find] a solution," Erdoğan said Sept. 26, but added that the PKK must completely disarm itself rather than just call a cease-fire. "If talks enable us to resolve something, let's do it."

Erdoğan also said a rumor campaign suggesting that Öcalan had either died or had been killed was proven to be untrue after the PKK leader's brother, Mehmet Öcalan, went to İmralı.

If the PKK militants lay their arms

down, then the operations by the Turkish



'How did we break from the status quo? We broke from it by sending our adviser to the island, by sending [him] to Oslo,' Erdoğan says in a televised interview.

DAILY NEWS photo, Selahattin SÖNMEZ

military will cease, Erdoğan said even as fresh fighting in the east claimed many lives. At least two soldiers and 13 PKK militants died in fighting in the eastern province of Hakkari.

Erdoğan, however, said the talks actually collapsed after the content of the Oslo talks was leaked on the Internet in

September 2011.

Erdoğan was referring to talks between the National Intelligence Organization (MİT) chief Hakan Fidan and Öcalan, who is jailed in a prison on İmralı Island in the Marmara Sea. At the time, Fidan had been deputy undersecretary at the Prime Ministry. He was also referring to talks among MİT officials, including Fidan, who later became the chief of the agency, and representatives of the outlawed PKK that were held abroad between 2009 and 2011 in a series of meetings publicly known as the "Oslo talks." The talks were known to have collapsed after a PKK attack killed 13 soldiers near Silvan, Diyarbakır, in July 2011.

"We are ready to do whatever is necessary to [find] a solution," Erdoğan said, but added that the militants who have been fighting the Turkish state since 1984 must lay down their weapons entirely, rather than merely suspending fighting, which is called "silencing the weapons."

"If talks enable us to resolve something, let's do it," he said, suggesting that talks could again be held in Oslo.

"If the separatist terror organization [PKK] is still holding their arms, then this is a provocative action. If the terror organization leaves its arms, then we will minimize the [military] operations," he said.

"If our friends have gone to İmralı and Oslo for a solution, these are the most decisive steps that are being taken for a solution," he added. □

Syrie : l'Assemblée générale de l'ONU paralysée

New York (Nations unies)
Correspondante

La Syrie est la priorité de mon agenda», assurait, il y a quelques jours, le secrétaire général de l'ONU, Ban Ki-moon, en allusion aux réunions bilatérales qu'il aura avec les chefs d'Etat, les premiers ministres et les ministres de plus de 120 Etats-membres en marge de la 67^e session annuelle de l'Assemblée générale des Nations unies, qui s'ouvre mardi 25 septembre.

Le conflit syrien, avec ses 29 000 victimes, ses 250 000 réfugiés et ses 2,5 millions de civils dans le besoin, devrait être présent dans tous les esprits lors de ce grand raout diplomatique. Aucune réunion de haut niveau ne lui sera pourtant formellement consacrée. La crise malienne et, plus largement, la crise sahélienne, la région des Grands Lacs – avec notamment la résurgence de combats à l'est de la République démocratique du Congo –, la coexistence entre les deux Soudans ou encore le dossier nucléaire iranien auront l'attention de la communauté internationale le temps d'une conférence ou d'un sommet.

La Syrie, elle, sera évoquée en coulisses ou en marge de l'Assemblée. Le Conseil de sécurité, seul organe des Nations unies à même d'imposer des sanctions et d'autoriser une action militaire, a préféré organiser une session ministérielle plus générale sur le « printemps arabe ».

Les trois veto mis par la Russie et la Chine à des projets de résolution qui ne faisaient que condamner ou menacer de sanctions le régime syrien ont eu raison de la mobilisation des Occidentaux. « Une réunion sur la Syrie n'aurait fait qu'enfoncer le clou », déclare un diplomate européen, convaincu qu'un tel rendez-vous aurait « exacerbé la polarisation » dont souffre le Conseil de sécurité depuis 18 mois, et se serait révélé « contre-productif ».

L'organe exécutif des Nations unies n'a plus les moyens de sa politique. Sur la Syrie, il est contraint de déroger à son mandat de garant de la paix et de la sécurité dans le monde. C'est l'aveu d'un

échec. « Un de plus, ce ne sera pas la première fois », déclare, cynique, un diplomate, qui rappelle l'impuissance de l'ONU quant au processus de paix au Proche-Orient et au conflit en Afghanistan.

La seule vraie concertation sur le drame syrien sera celle des Amis de la Syrie, qui regroupe des dizaines de pays occidentaux et arabes, déterminés à soutenir l'opposition syrienne. Cette absence d'initiative à haut niveau sur la Syrie, alors que les violences font désormais plus de 1 000 morts par semaine selon les ONG, est une aubaine pour le président syrien Bachar Al-Assad : divisée, la communauté internationale n'a même plus la force d'être simplement menaçante.

Ce conflit sera sans aucun doute au centre des discours prononcés à la tribune de l'Assemblée. Les responsables occidentaux pourront, à tour de rôle, y aller de leurs diatribes ou cris du cœur contre le régime syrien, auteur de crimes contre l'humanité. Mais aucune décision n'est à attendre.

Après le 3^e double veto russo-chinois en juillet, l'ambassadrice américaine, Susan Rice, avait fait miroiter la possibilité d'une action « hors cadre ONU », assurant que Washington avait l'intention « d'intensifier ses efforts avec différents partenaires hors du Conseil de sécurité pour faire pression sur le régime Assad et fournir de l'aide à ceux qui en ont besoin ».

L'administration Obama a, depuis, défini une « ligne rouge » au-delà de laquelle – et seulement au-delà de laquelle – les Etats-Unis pourraient envisager une

Les trois veto
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riposte militaire : le recours aux armes chimiques par le régime syrien. « Cette menace est à double tranchant », estime un diplomate arabe, les Américains prévenant Bachar Al-Assad qu'ils n'interviendront pas, sauf à ce qu'il utilise des armes chimiques



Un immeuble à Alep détruit par les bombes des forces du régime, le 23 septembre. MIGUEL MEDINA/AFP

contre son peuple. Les forces syriennes peuvent continuer leur sinistre besogne.

Le dilemme des Américains, soulignent des diplomates européens à New York, est qu'ils ne peuvent ni se permettre d'apparaître trop faibles face à la répression, ni s'embarquer dans une nouvelle guerre en pleine période électorale. Le président sortant et candidat à sa réélection, Barack Obama, ne fera d'ailleurs qu'un passage éclair au siège de l'ONU, mardi 25 septembre. Aucune réunion bilatérale ne figure à son agenda. « Le sort de la Syrie ne se décidera pas à New York », insiste une source occidentale.

Alors que son pays présidait le Conseil de sécurité en août, l'ambassadeur de France, Gérard Araud, n'a eu de cesse de mettre en garde contre les conséquences d'une inaction s'inscrivant dans la durée, citant le risque d'une « radicalisation de l'opposition syrienne ». Aux Russes et aux Chinois, qui assurent qu'ils n'aiment pas particulièrement le président Assad mais le préfèrent aux islamistes radicaux, le représentant permanent répond qu'avec leur politique d'obstruction, « nous allons avoir d'abord Assad, puis les islamistes radicaux ! »

Si des experts soutiennent qu'Al-Qaïda n'est pas présent en Syrie en tant que force organisée, des rapports font état depuis plusieurs mois de l'arrivée par la Turquie de combattants djihadistes, en provenance notamment d'Algérie ou de Tchétchénie. Est-il trop tard ?

Au Conseil de sécurité, les Occidentaux se plaignent de l'impossibilité de dialoguer avec les Russes, allant jusqu'à parler de « confrontation violente ». L'appel lancé par Ban Ki-moon aux dirigeants mondiaux pour qu'ils assument leur responsabilité collective en présentant un front uni sur la Syrie a peu de chances d'être entendu lors de cette 67^e session. Le représentant spécial de l'ONU et de la Ligue arabe pour la Syrie, Lakhdar Brahimi, de retour de sa première visite à Damas, sera-t-il plus convaincant, lundi 24 septembre, devant les 15 pays membres du Conseil ? « Il n'a pas le quart d'une idée de la stratégie à adopter, lâchait la veille un diplomate occidental, sa nomination permet juste à l'ONU de faire acte de présence » sur le dossier syrien. Un service minimum. ■

ALEXANDRA GENESTE

Les Kurdes syriens profitent de la guerre pour faire avancer leurs revendications

Rencontré à Paris, Saleh Muslim, le chef de la principale formation kurde syrienne, défend

Dans la Syrie d'aujourd'hui, où l'avenir de tout responsable politique paraît ne tenir qu'à un fil, il est l'un des rares à pouvoir se targuer d'être là pour longtemps. Saleh Muslim, 61 ans, est le chef du PYD, le principal parti kurde syrien. A la faveur de la révolution syrienne, sa formation a pris le contrôle d'une bonne part des territoires kurdes, désertés par les forces armées gouvernementales, trop occupées à mater le soulèvement. L'homme, petit, mat et râblé fait moins que ses 61 ans. Il offre une vague ressemblance avec Abdullah Öcalan, le fondateur du PKK, le parti kurde de Turquie, en guerre contre Ankara depuis 1984. Pour la plupart des observateurs, le PYD n'est que la branche syrienne du PKK.

Depuis le début de la révolution syrienne, le PYD joue sa partition en solo. Un - petit - pied dans la révolution, un autre avec le régime à Damas, il manœuvre pour en cueillir les fruits sans en faire les frais. Dans les faits, le PYD a évité toute confrontation avec le régime syrien, obsédé avant tout par son ennemi turc. Rencontré lundi 24 septembre à Paris, Saleh Muslim insiste aujourd'hui sur l'engagement de son mouvement dans la révolution syrienne, déclenchée le 15 mars 2011, et qu'il voit comme « la continuation du soulèvement kurde de 2004 ».

En fait, le président Bachar Al-Assad a tout fait pour « neutraliser » les Kurdes en général, et le PYD en particulier, dès les premiers jours de l'insurrection, en raison de leur fort potentiel militaire. Il a promis de délivrer des papiers d'identité aux centaines de milliers de Kurdes syriens privés de nationalité depuis les années 1960, a veillé à réprimer « avec mesure » les manifestations au Kurdistan syrien et a levé la condamnation par contumace visant Saleh Muslim, qui peut aller et venir sans être inquiété. En échange, le PYD a rejoint la Coordination nationale pour le changement démocratique (CNC), une coalition d'opposants de l'intérieur jugés acceptables par Damas et enclins au compromis.

Au Kurdistan, le PYD a été accusé d'encadrer les manifestations antirégime, voire de les réprimer lorsqu'apparaissaient des slogans

une stratégie qui lui a permis de prendre le contrôle de certaines villes des régions kurdes du pays



Des manifestants brandissent des drapeaux kurdes et de l'opposition syrienne, le 31 août, à Kobané, près d'Alep. REUTERS

appelant à sa chute. En échange, il a bénéficié d'une totale liberté pour se réorganiser et s'implanter, au grand dam de la dizaine d'autres partis kurdes regroupés dans le Conseil national kurde (CNK), aux inclinations nettement plus antirégime.

Saleh Muslim explique sa stratégie par la prudence : « Dès le début, nous n'avons pas voulu d'une révolution armée pour empêcher que la région kurde ne se transforme en champ de bataille. » D'où sa volonté de se tenir aussi éloigné que possible de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) et du Conseil national syrien (CNS), la plus importante coalition de l'opposition syrienne, à qui il reproche d'être une création de la Turquie et du Qatar, tous deux

opposés aux droits des Kurdes. Pour lui, c'est « la militarisation de la révolution, poussée par des intérêts étrangers, qui est la cause de l'impasse actuelle ».

« Sans cela, le régime n'aurait pas tenu six mois, assure-t-il. Aujourd'hui, à cause des ingérences étrangères, le destin des Syriens n'est plus entre leurs mains. Dans ces conditions, les Kurdes doivent se protéger eux-mêmes par tous les moyens. » Il entend par là la prise en main politique, administrative et militaire des régions kurdes.

C'est ce qui s'est passé dans les faits à la mi-juillet, quand le régime, ébranlé par l'attentat de Damas et l'offensive de l'ASL dans la capitale et à Alep, a laissé le Kurdistan s'émanciper sans résister.

Les 19, 20 et 22 juillet, le PYD a pris possession de Kobané, Afrin et Derik, trois importantes villes kurdes, où il règne en maître. « Nous n'avons pas souhaité nous emparer de Ras Al-Ain et de Qamichlé [la « capitale » des Kurdes de Syrie] pour ne pas heurter les populations arabes et certaines sensibilités », concède M. Muslim.

Sur le terrain, les forces de sécurité sont là mais ne sortent plus des casernes et commissariats. L'armée syrienne est non grata, tout comme l'ASL. Quant aux administrations, elles continuent de fonctionner, mais sous la houlette du PYD, qui perçoit même des taxes et distribue le gaz. Venu réclamer de l'aide à Paris, où il n'est pas

Au Kurdistan, le PYD a été accusé d'encadrer les manifestations antirégime, voire de les réprimer

prévu de rencontre officielle, Saleh Muslim regrette que les régions kurdes ne fassent pas partie des « zones libérées » que la France envisage d'aider.

Les autres partis kurdes craignent une hégémonie du PYD, même si pour l'instant règne une fragile entente, conclue le 11 juillet 2012 à Erbil, sous le patronage du chef kurde irakien Massoud Barzani. L'ensemble des forces kurdes de Syrie sont regroupées au sein du Conseil suprême kurde, mais l'intégration des forces armées est loin d'être une réalité.

Cette indépendance de facto pose la question du modèle souhaité par Saleh Muslim ? « Nous voulons une reconnaissance constitutionnelle des droits des Kurdes au sein d'une Syrie unie, démocratique et laïque. Nous ne sommes pas pour le modèle d'autonomie à l'irakienne, avec des frontières intérieures. Les frontières sont sources de problème. » En attendant cet hypothétique futur, il ne donne « pas plus d'un ou deux ans de survie au régime de Bachar Al-Assad... Mais pas moins de dix ans de guerre civile en Syrie ». ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Iran Ayatollah Is Poster Boy for Influence in Iraq



By LARA JAKES / Associated Press

BAGHDAD — After years of growing influence, a new sign of Iran's presence in Iraq has hit the streets. Thousands of signs, that is, depicting Iran's supreme leader gently smiling to a population once mobilized against the Islamic Republic in eight years of war.

The campaign underscores widespread doubts over just how independent Iraq and its majority Shiite Muslim population can remain from its eastern neighbor, the region's Shiite heavyweight, now that U.S. troops have left the country.

The posters of Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei first appeared in at least six Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad and across Iraq's Shiite-dominated south in August, as part of an annual pro-Palestinian observance started years ago by Iran. They have conspicuously remained up since then.

"When I see these pictures, I feel I am in Tehran, not Baghdad," said Asim Salman, 44, a Shiite and owner of a Baghdad cafe. "Authorities must remove these posters, which make us angry."

In Basra, located 550 kilometers (340 miles) south of the capital, they hang near donation boxes decorated with scripts in both countries' languages — Arabic and Farsi.

A senior official in Baghdad's local government said municipal workers fear retribution from Shiite militias loyal to Iran in if they take them down. He himself spoke on condition anonymity out of concerns for his safety.

One such militia, Asaib Ahl al-Haq, even boasted that it launched the poster campaign, part of a trend that's chipping away at nearly a decade's worth of U.S.-led

efforts to bring a Western-style democracy here.

Sheik Ali al-Zaidi, a senior official in the militia, said they distributed some 20,000 posters of Khamenei across Iraq. He said Khamenei "enjoys public support all over the world" including Iraq, where he "is hailed as a political and religious leader."

Asaib Ahl al-Haq, or Band of the People of Righteousness, carried out deadly attacks against U.S. troops before their withdrawal last year. This month, the group threatened U.S. interests in Iraq as part of the backlash over a film mocking the Prophet Muhammad.

Iraqi and U.S. intelligence officials have estimated that Iran sends the militia about \$5 million in cash and weapons each month. The officials believe there are fewer than 1,000 Asaib Ahl al-Haq militiamen, and that their leaders live in Iran.

Tensions between Iraq and Iran have never fully dissipated over their 1980-1988 war that left nearly half a million dead. But Iran's clout with Iraq's Shiites picked up after Saddam Hussein's fall from power in 2003, and, in many ways, accelerated since the U.S. military pulled out.

Iran has backed at least three Shiite militias in Iraq with weapons, training and millions of dollars in funding. Billion-dollar trade pacts have emerged between Tehran and Baghdad, and Iran has opened at least two banks in Iraq that are blacklisted by the United States.

Religious ties also have been renewed, with thousands of Iranian pilgrims visiting holy Shiite sites in Iraq daily, including in Najaf, where Iranian rials are as common a currency as Iraqi dinars, and Farsi is easily understood.

The posters may reflect a push among

some Shiite groups for a clerical system similar to Iran's. Tehran is widely believed to be lobbying for a member of its ruling theocracy, Grand Ayatollah Mahmoud Hashemi Shahroudi, to succeed Iraq's 81-year-old Shiite spiritual leader, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

Al-Sistani opposes a formal political role for Iraq's religious establishment, while Shahroudi is part of Iran's system of "velayat-e-faqih," or rule by Islamic clerics. Iraq's Sunnis and Kurds, however, have no taste for blurring Shiite politics and religion.

Ever since the ouster of Saddam's Sunni-dominated regime, political leaders in Iraq have sought to rebuild and strengthen relations with Iran, which has responded in kind. Many of Iraq's Shiites sought sanctuary in Iran during Saddam's reign, and some now hold key government posts.

Tehran has not been shy about wielding its influence. It was at Iran's urging that hardline Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr grudgingly threw his political support behind longtime foe Nouri al-Maliki, allowing him to remain prime minister in 2010 after falling short in national elections.

In return, al-Maliki last year all but ignored Iranian military incursions on Kurdish lands in northern Iraq. The government also has delayed, and in al-Sadr's case, quashed, arrest warrants on militants backed by Iranian forces and financiers.

Still, even some Iraqi Shiites, like the cleric al-Sadr and the cafe owner Salman, advocate retaining strong Iraqi nationalism and their Arab identity instead of becoming a Persian outpost.

Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh condemned the Khamenei posters and said they could add to the already-strained political unrest in the country. But he said the federal government is powerless to remove them.

"These posters are adding a new dispute in Iraq's politics and they might lead to a negative impact," al-Dabbagh said. "The local governments should deal with such situations," he said.

Sunnis were less diplomatic in their assessment.

Hamid al-Mutlaq, a leading lawmaker, blasted the poster campaign, which he said shows Iran's efforts to amass power in Iraq. Raad Abdul-Rahman, a government worker, said the posters prove that Iraq is becoming "a total Iranian stooge."

"In the past, we used to encounter the pictures of the Arab dictator Saddam," Abdul-Rahman said, referring to the posters and statues of the former president that used to be ubiquitous across Baghdad and the rest of the country. "But now pictures of the Persian dictator are taking over." ■

Ankara s'enlise dans le conflit kurde

Éclairage D'embuscades en raids aériens, d'attentats en funérailles, la guerre que se livrent la Turquie et les séparatistes kurdes est tombée dans une des ses phases les plus meurtrières depuis dix ans, éloignant chaque jour un peu plus la perspective d'une paix négociée. Depuis des semaines, en effet, les combats sont quotidiens et les morts se comptent par dizaines, dans les deux camps. Mardi encore, six membres des forces de sécurité et un civil sont morts dans l'explosion d'une bombe à Tunceli. La semaine dernière, une vingtaine de soldats ou policiers ont été tués dans des attaques similaires, attribuées au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

Comme en riposte, le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a affirmé que ses troupes avaient éliminé 500 « terroristes » du PKK en un seul mois. Invérifiable, douteux même, mais ce bilan et la rhétorique guerrière qui l'accompagne témoignent d'un progressif retour du pays vers les heures sombres des années 1990.

Ankara a en outre accusé le régime du président Bachar el-Assad d'être à l'origine de

ce regain de violence par son soutien aux Kurdes, en riposte au soutien affiché par les Turcs aux rebelles qui ont juré sa perte.

De fait, la dégradation récente des relations entre la Turquie et la Syrie, l'Irak et l'Iran, qui abritent de fortes minorités kurdes et lui ont souvent prêté main-forte contre le PKK, a offert une ouverture aux séparatistes kurdes de Turquie. « Le PKK a compris ce nouvel environnement comme une opportunité », juge Hugh Pope, de l'International Crisis Group. Mais cette conjonction n'explique pas tout. « Nous en serions au même point sans la Syrie », assure la députée du Parti pour la paix et de la démocratie (BDP, prokurde) Gülten Kisanak, rappelant que « le PKK avait prévenu qu'il intensifierait sa guerre en cas d'échec des négociations avec le gouvernement ».

IMMUNITÉ PERDUE

Arrivé en 2003 à la tête du gouvernement, M. Erdogan avait annoncé sa volonté de mettre un terme à un conflit qui, depuis 1984, a fait 45 000 morts. De 2009 à 2011, son gouvernement a négocié avec le PKK. Mais ces discussions

ont capoté. Depuis un an maintenant, la guerre a donc repris ses droits. Aux offensives des rebelles et à leur nouvelle stratégie d'occupation du terrain répondent les opérations de représailles musclées de l'armée. L'heure est à la fermeté. « Notre combat contre le terrorisme continuera sans aucune hésitation », a martelé le chef du gouvernement la semaine dernière, affirmant que « les terroristes doivent savoir que les opérations de l'armée dans le pays ne cesseront que s'ils déposent les armes ».

Sur une ligne extrême, le Parti nationaliste (MHP) encourage le pouvoir à durcir le ton. Dénonçant « la négligence et l'apathie du gouvernement », son chef Devlet Bahçeli l'a même exhorté à décréter la loi martiale. Le chef du principal parti d'opposition, le Parti républicain populaire (CHP), Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, a lui aussi rejeté toute discussion sur une éventuelle autonomie des régions à majorité kurde « avec l'organisation terroriste ». La guerre a gagné le terrain judiciaire, avec l'emprisonnement de milliers de personnes jugées proches du PKK. Des

députés du BDP sont également menacés de perdre leur immunité parlementaire pour avoir été filmés en train de donner l'accolade à des rebelles du PKK.

Une politique qui inquiète les défenseurs des droits de l'homme. « Il faut que le gouvernement mette un terme aux abus de la législation anti-terroriste et aux internements de masse, estime Emma Webb Sinclair de Human Rights Watch, sinon il ne fera qu'alimenter la violence. » « Le gouvernement a choisi une option militaire qui a toujours échoué, insiste Hugh Pope, c'est un piège, sa seule chance est de faire des réformes qui donneront aux Kurdes le sentiment qu'ils sont traités équitablement. » « Nous souhaitons simplement la levée de l'embargo qui frappe les droits des Kurdes », affirme Mme Kisanak, et « si le gouvernement fait le choix de négocier, le PKK n'aura pas d'autre choix que de le suivre ».

(Source : AFP)

Premier attentat-suicide dans une région kurde de la Syrie

Un attentat-suicide à la voiture piégée a secoué dimanche 30 septembre la ville à majorité kurde de Qamichli, située à quelque 680 km au nord-est de Damas, dans l'extrême nord de la Syrie, faisant au moins quatre morts et plusieurs blessés, a indiqué la télévision d'État syrienne.

C'est le premier attentat du genre dans cette ville, a indiqué à Beyrouth le chef

de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH), Rami Abdel Rahmane. Son organisation a confirmé une attaque contre le siège des forces de sécurité et fait état d'au moins huit morts et de plus de quinze blessés parmi les membres de ces forces.

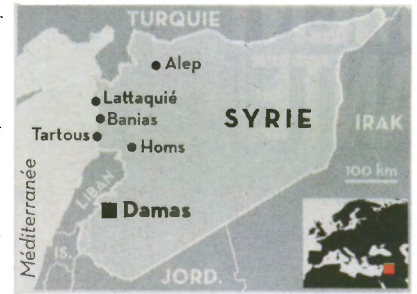
Selon Rami Abdel Rahmane, l'armée s'est retirée il y a plusieurs mois des régions kurdes du nord et le bâtiment

visé par l'attentat est le siège principal de la Sécurité pour l'ensemble de la zone kurde. L'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), principale composante de l'opposition armée, n'est pas présente dans cette région qui ne compte que quelques groupes rebelles autonomes.

Cette ville est habitée en grande majorité par des Kurdes qui se sont prudemment engagés dans la révolte contre le régime syrien, cherchant surtout à tenir leur région à l'abri des violences. ●



Syrie : « Nous, alaouites, allons être tués deux fois »



La minorité dont est issu le clan de Bachar al-Assad craint des représailles. De nombreux jeunes fuient le pays pour éviter de rejoindre l'armée.

Par HALA KODMANI

Lattaquié, Jableh, Banias et Tartous : les quatre villes étendent du Nord au Sud leurs plages de sable blanc, leurs palmiers et leurs corniches bondées tout l'été de promeneurs et ornées de portraits de Bachar al-Assad, seul ou en famille. «Tartous, c'est Monaco!» affirme Kamal, un médecin originaire de la région – qui connaît les deux –, en décrivant la marina, les piscines, le spa, les restaurants de poissons et les jolies filles bronzées de «Porto Tartous», le tout récent complexe touristique de la ville. Chrétiens, alaouites et même sunnites : dans cette région, toute la mosaïque communautaire syrienne est représentée. Étonnés, fascinés ou indignés par le contraste entre ce qu'ils ont vu sur place et l'actualité de la Syrie que rapportent les médias internationaux, la plupart des visiteurs ont adopté le discours local. Ils dénoncent la «propagande» et le «complot» contre le pays. Ils ont rencontré la «Syrie heureuse», stable et sûre, celle des patriotes «amoureux d'Al-Assad», fiers des exploits de leur «armée arabe syrienne» qui pourchasse les «terroristes» et qui est sur le point de les vaincre.

SURVIE. Chez les «gens de la côte», comme on désigne, en syrien politiquement correct, les habitants du fief du régime de Bachar al-Assad tout porte à croire que l'issue de la bataille est proche et certaine. «C'est fini! Et demain sera plus beau», disent les graffitis dans les rues ou sur les 4 x 4 des *chabiha* (sbires du régime) qui sont ici chez eux. Mais, derrière le triomphalisme, on ne cache plus que la guerre contre «les terroristes à la solde d'Israël», qui s'est intensifiée ces dernières semaines à Alep, Damas ou sur les routes de Hama ou Homs, site dur et coûteux. Les portraits des «martyrs» en tenue réglementaire de la Garde républicaine ou des services de sécurité sont accrochés aux murs des villages ou publiés sur les pages Facebook locales. Des rendez-vous sont donnés à la population pour les funérailles et les hommages aux «héros de la patrie», largement couverts par les médias officiels. Autant d'occasions de serrer les dents et les rangs autour de la lutte pour la pérennité du régime, devenue synonyme, parmi les alaouites, d'une lutte pour leur propre survie. «Ils veulent nous éliminer!» assure

au téléphone Souad, de retour à Abou Dhabi où travaille son mari, après un séjour dans sa famille près de Jableh. Elle désigne «les mercenaires salafistes à la solde de l'Arabie Saoudite et du Qatar, guidés par les appels des cheikhs sunnites contre les *nussayri* [appellation historique des alaouites, ndlr]». Et elle cite les raids ciblés de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) contre des villages alaouites ou des embuscades dans la campagne autour de Lattaquié. Ces attaques, parfois confirmées par les groupes de l'ASL, «en représailles» aux tirs de l'armée

TÉMOIGNAGES

depuis ces localités, se multiplient, tandis que des rumeurs de règlements de comptes et de massacres sont amplifiées. Les réserves et les hésitations de certains à soutenir le combat de Bachar al-Assad n'ont plus leur place. Le frère de Souad, qui avait «une sympathie pour la révolution au début», s'est retourné il y a quelques mois, après que «trois de ses plus proches amis

«Les alaouites tiennent tous les postes administratifs et pratiquent ouvertement la discrimination depuis l'époque de Hafez al-Assad.»

Mohamed un commerçant sunnite

dans les services ont été tués dans des actes de pure vengeance».

La conviction grandit parmi les alaouites qu'ils sont visés en tant que tels et non parce que partisans du régime, y compris dans leur région, où les sunnites comptent pour plus de la moitié de la population. «Quiconque a grandi à Lattaquié a été élevé dans le confessionnalisme, reconnaît Mohamed, commerçant sunnite joint par Skype, parce que les alaouites ont toujours raisonné en ces termes. Ils tiennent tous les postes administratifs et pratiquent ouvertement la discrimination depuis l'époque de Hafez al-Assad. Notre attitude est une réaction à leur communautarisme. Pour nous, aujourd'hui, le conflit est celui du régime contre la révolution, mais, pour eux, c'est les alaouites contre les sunnites.»

Les uns et les autres s'accusent mutuellement de pousser vers une confrontation confessionnelle qu'ils jugent inévitable, même s'ils disent la regretter. Cette exacerbation identitaire, mobilisatrice pour les deux parties, se traduit par une peur de plus en plus forte chez la minorité alaouite. Peur anticipée et entretenue par le régime qui, depuis des mois, distribue des armes

à chaque maison et dans chaque village de la région côtière. «Les hommes de ma famille, qui ont longtemps refusé ces armes offertes, viennent d'accepter quelques kalachnikovs à la maison», raconte Souad, qui précise que les siens n'ont jamais apprécié les Al-Assad.

«ÉMIGRATION». Ces dernières semaines, l'appel aux réservistes pour rejoindre l'armée a fait monter la pression, d'autant plus que le recrutement s'adresse surtout aux chrétiens et aux alaouites. Les premiers, qui comptent pour 20% de la population de la région de Tartous, «sont en train de faire fuir leurs jeunes vers le Liban notamment», indique Georges, l'un d'entre eux, arrivé en France il y a peu.

Ces départs provoquent, en outre, des tensions au sein du bastion du régime, comme en témoigne une réflexion sur la page Facebook de Banias : «Tandis que les fils de pauvres sont alignés devant les bureaux de recrutement de l'armée de la patrie, les fils de riches font la queue dans les services de l'émigration et des passeports pour quitter la patrie!» Ramy, 32 ans, fait partie de ces derniers. Arrivé à Dubaï il y a quelques jours, ce descendant d'une grande famille alaouite de

Jableh se défend d'avoir fui le pays. Il dit qu'il est venu régler quelques formalités bancaires pour le compte de sa société d'import-export, car les virements internationaux sont devenus impossibles avec la Syrie. Il n'a pour tant pas fixé la date de son retour et reconnaît qu'il a entrepris son voyage après que son jeune frère, tout juste diplômé de la faculté de Lattaquié, a été appelé sous les drapeaux. «Compte tenu des batailles meurtrières qui se déroulent et de l'augmentation du nombre de soldats tués, il faut avoir la conviction pour y aller», observe Georges.

L'hémorragie de jeunes alaouites inquiète de plus en plus fortement le régime, qui «se met à tricher sur le nombre de tués et cache parfois leur mort aux familles, surtout quand il s'agit de *chabiha*», affirme Mohamed. Quand ils perdent des hommes, certains alaouites commencent à se plaindre du régime qui les a entraînés jusque-là. Le prolongement et l'aggravation du conflit n'épargne plus personne. «Nous, alaouites, allons être tués deux fois, soupire Ramy. La première pour défendre le régime, et la deuxième parce que les sunnites vont se venger de nous quand il va tomber!»

Turkey's Erdogan signals talks with Kurdish militants possible

by Daren Butler

STANBUL (Reuters) - Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan signalled that new talks between the state and Kurdish militants might be possible as his government faces an upsurge in separatist violence in the country's southeast.

Turkish intelligence officials have maintained contact with senior figures from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in recent years to try to end a conflict that has claimed more than 40,000 lives, but discussions have broken down.

"Regarding Imrali, there could be more talks," Erdogan said in a televised interview with broadcaster Kanal 7 late on Wednesday, referring to the island south of Istanbul where PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan is imprisoned.

"There is a military dimension to this, a security dimension which is separate and will continue. But beside this there is a diplomatic, socio-economic and psychological dimension," he said.

Erdogan spoke after Turkey's main pro-Kurdish party called for the resumption of talks between the state and the PKK to prevent a further escalation of violence.



Turkey's Prime Minister and leader of Justice and Development Party (AKP) Tayyip Erdogan makes a speech during a party meeting in Istanbul September 22, 2012. REUTERS/Murad Sezer

Clashes in recent months between Turkey's armed forces and militants from the PKK - considered a terrorist organisation by Ankara, the United States and European Union - have been among the heaviest since the group took up arms 28 years ago.

Ankara has also linked the surge in violence to the unrest in neighbouring Syria. Erdogan has accused President Bashar al-Assad of arming the PKK militants, and raised the possibility of military intervention in Syria if the PKK were to launch attacks from Syrian soil.

The head of Turkey's armed forces said in a newspaper interview on Wednesday the

military also had the capability to launch a sustained operation against the PKK in northern Iraq.

Erdogan gave the interview days before his ruling AK Party's congress where he is expected to set out the party's future as it goes through its biggest overhaul since coming to power a decade ago.

Since elections in June 2011, the conflict with the PKK has killed more than 700 people, according to the International Crisis Group, the highest toll in a 15-month period since Ocalan was captured and jailed in 1999. □

FIRAT NEWS AGENCY28 SEPTEMBER 2012

KCK: No talks in hand in the current situation

Kurdish Communities Union (KCK) Executive Council Presidency has released a statement in response to Turkish authorities' most recent statements on Kurdish Leader Abdullah Öcalan and new talks with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) movement.

KCK evaluated recent statements of government authorities as a "new tactical move" and underlined that "Our movement is currently not having any talks or conducting negotiations with the Turkish state".

The purpose of the statements on the possibility of new talks is to lead to an expectation among the Kurdish people, not to find a solution to the problem, stated KCK and added that "The Turkish government should expect a response from Kurds after taking concrete and evident steps so that Mr. Öcalan can play his role in the process of dialogue and negotiation.

Denying Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan's statements which



claimed that Kurdish guerrillas have been pushed into their "caves" by means of military operations in the Kurdish region, KCK said that, "The PM's statements about the ongoing conflict and war environment in Kurdistan don't reflect the truth as the guerrilla domination in the region continues to expand every day in the midst of intense aerial attacks of the Turkish army. Our movement's new "area domination tactics" is being advanced in not only emdinli but also many other parts of the country." ♦

132 students apply for Kurdish elective course in Diyarbakır

TODAY'S ZAMAN, İSTANBUL

Following a new education law introducing elective courses for the Kurdish language, the Quran and the life of the Prophet Muhammad at schools for the first time this year, the number of students who have applied for the Kurdish course in the Kurdish-populated province of Diyarbakır is 132, while 19,627 high school students applied for the other two elective courses in the same province.

According to figures released by Emin Zararsız, Education Ministry undersecretary, the elective course that was chosen by most students across Turkey is mathematical practices, with 495,000 students. The mathematical practices course was followed by a foreign language course, with 410,000 students choosing to study English, French, German, Arabic, Chinese or Russian, and the Quran course, for which 400,000 students have applied. The number of students applying for the course on the life of the Prophet Muhammad was found to be 256,000, while

21,000 students chose the Kurdish language course.

Zararsız said that the application process for the elective courses ended on Friday.

The government's decision to designate Kurdish as an elective course in secondary education has been met with enthusiasm among representatives of nongovernmental organizations and universities in southeast Turkey as they believe the decision will take the country a step further on the path of democratization. "This is one of the most important steps taken so far in Turkey. We appreciate it," said Fahrettin Akyıl, president of the Diyarbakır Commodity Exchange. But the number of students applying for the course in Turkey has proved to be lower than expected. Zararsız explained that it is normal to have such a figure, because only certain people in certain regions will opt for that course.

The educational changes made with the new law also made it possible for religious imam-hatip high schools to open middle schools, accomplished by transforming some

regular schools into imam-hatips. According to statistics, 108,000 students started in imam-hatip middle schools, while 125,000 freshmen started imam-hatip high schools. The total number of imam-hatip middle schools is 1,105.

The new law, passed in Parliament in March and approved by President Abdullah Gül within weeks, increased the current duration of compulsory education from an uninterrupted eight years to 12 years and divided it into three four-year stages -- primary school, middle school and high school -- and is popularly known as the "4+4+4" education law. The changes also increased the age of starting school to 66 months -- about 5.5 years of age -- which most pedagogues have vehemently opposed, saying most children at that age have not reached the level of mental and motor development needed for school.

The new school year started on Monday with the amendments being implemented for the first time.

Commander of Iran's Quds Force Visits Erbil

rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — The commander of Iran's Quds Force, Qasem Soleimani, visited Erbil this week and met with top officials from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), among them Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani.

A source from the Erbil International Airport told Rudaw on condition of anonymity that Soleimani's plane arrived from Sulaimani where the Iranian commander had met with officials from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Barzani's press secretary told the media that the PM has received an official invitation to visit the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"The prime minister received an invitation from the Islamic Republic to visit Tehran and meet with top Iranian officials, but he has not set a date for his visit yet," Sami Argushi, the PM's press secretary said.

Political analysts believe this visit by Major General Soleimani, who commands



Major General Qasem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Quds Force. Photo ISNA.

important wing of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, alongside other visits between Iranian and Kurdish officials, is a sign of strengthening relations between Iran and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP).

According to Argushi, the prime minister's visit will be to "strengthen mutual relations between Kurdistan and

the Islamic Republic."

"The prime minister will also discuss the current political situation in Iraq," Argushi said.

Relations between Iran and the KDP deteriorated after Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani attempted to withdraw confidence from Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, seen as a close ally of Iran.

However, a recent agreement between Erbil and Baghdad over oil and gas issues seems to have eased tensions.

Relations between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Tehran are often affected by political disagreements between Erbil and Baghdad. Soleimani's visit to Kurdistan may indicate a change in Iran's attitude towards Erbil.

"The KRG and the prime minister are eager to maintain good relations with the neighboring countries," Argushi said. "And as a neighbor, Iran has been valuable to the Kurdistan Region in many aspects."

The source at the airport told Rudaw that the head of the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), Muhammad Faraj, boarded Soleimani's plane to embark on an official visit to Tehran.

The Islamic Union's new leader announced earlier that he had a standing invitation from Iran to visit.●

LES KURDES DE SYRIE RENFORCENT LE CONTRÔLE DE LEUR RÉGION

● **Au nord de la Syrie, à la frontière turque, les Kurdes syriens contrôlent leur territoire, épaulés par le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) de Turquie.**

● **Ils ne revendiquent pas l'indépendance, mais une certaine autonomie dans une future Syrie qui ne serait pas seulement arabe.**

● **Le leader kurde d'Irak, Massoud Barzani, tente de fédérer les Kurdes de Syrie.**

.....
Agnès Rotivel, à Afrin (Syrie)
.....

Les champs d'oliviers s'étendent à perte de vue sur les collines d'Afrin. Cette ville porte bien son nom. En kurde, Afrin évoque « la délicieuse eau fraîche ». Les terres sont riches, tout pousse, des arbres fruitiers aux légumes. La récolte des olives a commencé ; les tracteurs vont et viennent entre les champs et l'huilerie comme si rien ne se passait autour. Et pourtant, à 13 kilomètres d'Afrin, la ville d'Azzaz est submergée de déplacés de la guerre en Syrie et les murs portent les traces des combats de ces derniers mois entre l'opposition et l'armée syrienne.

Afrin a été épargnée par la guerre. Ville kurde, entourée de villages majoritairement kurdes, c'est une oasis de tranquillité sur une terre syrienne à feu et à sang. La mairie, qui date du mandat français, tient toujours sur ses fondations. Dans le bureau du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), formation kurde armée réputée proche des rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) qui combat le régime turc, Mohamed Djornass nie tout accord secret passé avec le régime de Bachar Al Assad qui aurait permis aux Kurdes de prendre les commandes de zones peuplées de Kurdes et d'y planter leur drapeau. « On ne peut pas soutenir un homme qui se bat contre son peuple », assène-t-il.

Comment expliquer, alors, que la région soit épargnée par les combats ? « À l'inverse de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), nous sommes très organisés et déterminés. Bachar Al Assad ne peut tout simplement pas se battre contre nous. Il a suffisamment à faire ailleurs. »

ABDULLAH ÖCALAN, HÔTE DE DAMAS

Pourtant, en avril, afin de s'assurer la neutralité des Kurdes, Bachar Al Assad a accordé la nationalité syrienne à 300 000 Kurdes qui avaient été privés de leurs droits pendant quarante ans. Il a aussi libéré quelques milliers de prisonniers kurdes, principalement du PYD. Et il a laissé entrer sur le territoire syrien des combattants du PKK. Il leur aurait également promis un certain degré d'autonomie. « Si Bachar reste au pouvoir, on traitera avec lui, s'il quitte le pouvoir, on négociera avec les autres ! », lâche Ahmad Daoud, ancien instituteur, en charge de la coordination des questions culturelles et artistiques à Afrin.

Les relations entre la Syrie et le PKK ont connu des hauts et des bas. Pendant des années, Abdullah Öcalan, le leader de la guérilla anti-turque a été l'hôte de Damas. Mais en octobre 1998, après un accord syro-turc et des pressions américaines, Hafez Al Assad, le père de Bachar, fit savoir à Abdullah Öcalan, que sa présence ainsi que celle du PKK sur son territoire n'était plus souhaitée. Il fut arrêté quelques mois plus tard, le 15 février 1999 au Kenya, au cours d'une opération menée par les services secrets turcs, américains et israéliens.

À travers le PYD, c'est le PKK qui fait un retour remarqué en Syrie. Au quartier général de la sécurité, la porte-parole est une femme qui, suspicieuse, refuse de donner son nom. Vêtue à l'occidentale, elle parle kurde mais avec un accent turc qui n'échappe pas au traducteur syrien. Nul doute qu'il s'agit d'une des combattantes du PKK.

REVENDICTIONS KURDES

Retour dans le bureau de Mohamed Djornass. De petite taille, il semble

écrasé par le portrait d'Abdullah Öcalan, suspendu au-dessus de lui. « L'armée syrienne libre (ASL) est tout à fait légitime, mais nous ne voulons pas qu'elle se serve de notre territoire comme base arrière et nous ne nous battons pas à ses côtés contre le régime ». « Mensonge, riposte un opposant kurde de la ville. On sait que certains membres du PYD rencontrent les combattants de l'ASL et leur donnent un coup de main pour attaquer les forces de Bachar à Idlib », au sud-ouest d'Afrin.

Ce jeune kurde syrien, étudiant à Alep, militant de la révolution syrienne, n'admet pas la mainmise du PYD, qu'il décrit comme un parti « doctrinaire qui ne tolère aucune opposition. Il muselle la ville. Le PYD ne vaut pas mieux que Bachar Al Assad. Opportuniste, il attend de voir qui remportera la guerre et se tiendra à ses côtés ».

Jusqu'où iront les revendications des Kurdes en Syrie ? Une autonomie ? « Nous voulons plus de décentralisation et d'autonomie de décisions dans une future république syrienne qui ne serait plus seulement "arabe" », poursuit Mohamed Djornass. Les nouvelles autorités de la ville ont déjà mis en place des cours en kurde, le samedi pour les enfants, mais manquent de livres. Et dans les bureaux administratifs, les cartes, auparavant en arabe, sont en kurde. « Sous Bachar, parler kurde en public était passible de cinq ans de prison », rappelle Ahmad Daoud.

« En tant que Kurdes, nous appartenons à une nation kurde, quel que soit le pays dans lequel nous vivons. Nous ne voulons pas nous séparer de la Syrie. Nous avons toujours le rêve d'un pays kurde indépendant. Mais il est encore trop tôt », ajoute Mohamed Djornass. Qui cependant parle désormais de la Syrie kurde comme du « Kurdistan de l'ouest ».

UN PIED DANS CHAQUE CAMP

Si le PYD règne en maître à Afrin et dans sa région, en revanche, plus à l'est de la Syrie, dans la grande ville de Qamishli, près de la frontière avec le Kurdistan irakien, le PYD ne fait ➤

► pas l'unanimité chez les Kurdes où les divisions sont nombreuses.

Aussi, pour tenter de fédérer les Kurdes de Syrie, Massoud Barzani, président du Kurdistan irakien et chef du parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) a pris l'initiative de convier début juillet tous les partis kurdes syriens à une réunion à Erbil. Cette rencontre a débouché sur un accord entre

le PYD et la douzaine de partis kurdes réunis dans le « conseil national kurde », favorable au renversement de Damas.

« Les Kurdes de Syrie n'aiment pas le régime syrien, mais ils craignent encore plus l'arrivée au pouvoir des Frères musulmans, majoritaires dans les rangs des révolutionnaires, tempère le jeune opposant kurde. En février 1982, lors

de la répression de l'insurrection des Frères musulmans contre le régime de Damas, dans la ville de Hama, les Kurdes étaient restés à l'écart. Les Frères ne l'ont pas oublié. »

Un pied dans chaque camp, tout en affirmant leur neutralité, c'est le difficile exercice d'équilibriste auquel se prêtent les Kurdes de Syrie. ●



Erdogan accuse Paris et Berlin de ne pas aider la Turquie à lutter contre le PKK

ANKARA, 27 septembre 2012 (AFP)

LE PREMIER MINISTRE turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a accusé jeudi soir la France et l'Allemagne de ne pas aider la Turquie à lutter contre les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et répété qu'il était prêt à rouvrir des négociations avec le mouvement séparatiste.

Lors d'un entretien télévisé accordé à la chaîne privée NTV, M. Erdogan a accusé, comme il en a l'habitude, les Européens d'accueillir et de protéger certains responsables du PKK sur leur territoire mais il a cette fois particulièrement mis en cause la France et l'Allemagne.

"Les Occidentaux ne veulent pas que nous réglions ce problème. Je le dis clairement, l'Allemagne ne le veut pas, la France ne le veut pas et elles ne nous aident pas sur cette question", a déclaré M. Erdogan.

"Les pays scandinaves accueillent sans restriction (le PKK)", a dénoncé M. Erdogan, "D'un côté ils s'expriment devant l'Union européenne et classent le PKK dans leur liste des organisations terroristes et de l'autre ils autorisent leurs représentants à circuler librement dans leurs pays", a-t-il déploré.

Comme il l'avait fait la veille sur une autre chaîne privée turque, Kanal-7, M. Erdogan a répété jeudi soir qu'il était éventuellement prêt à rouvrir des négociations avec le PKK. "Nous prendrons ce type de décision lorsque ce sera le bon moment (...) lorsque nous l'estimerons nécessaire", a-t-il indiqué.

Mercredi soir, le chef du gouvernement turc avait déjà évoqué la possibilité d'une reprise des discussions avec le PKK. "Si (des) entretiens nous permettent de régler quelque chose, faisons-le", avait-il dit, "nous sommes prêts à faire tout ce qui est nécessaire pour (trouver) une solution".

Arrivé à la tête du pays en 2003 avec la promesse de régler le conflit kurde,

qui a fait près de 45.000 morts depuis 1984, M. Erdogan a engagé des négociations avec le PKK en 2009. Mais ces discussions ont échoué en 2011.

Depuis, les combats entre rebelles du PKK et l'armée turque ont repris de plus belle dans le sud-est de la Turquie, pour atteindre, ces derniers mois, une de leurs phases les plus meurtrières.

M. Erdogan a indiqué mercredi que 144 membres des forces de sécurité et 239 rebelles kurdes avaient été tués depuis le début de l'année.

Le Premier ministre a une nouvelle fois indiqué jeudi soir que les opérations de représailles de l'armée ne cesseraient que si les rebelles déposaient les armes. "Nous les limiterons si le PKK dépose les armes", a-t-il dit.

Le chef de file des nationalistes au Parlement turc, Devlet Bahçeli, a dénoncé jeudi la volonté de M. Erdogan de dialoguer avec les rebelles, parlant de "folie impardonnable".

Le principal parti turc pro-kurde (BDP, Parti pour la paix et la démocratie) a appelé ces dernières semaines à la reprise des discussions avec le PKK pour éviter une escalade de la violence. Plusieurs de ses députés sont menacés de perdre leur immunité parlementaire pour avoir donné l'accolade à des sympathisants présumés du PKK.

"Je ne suis plus en situation de négocier avec les bras politiques (du PKK)", a dit jeudi soir M. Erdogan, qui s'est toutefois refusé à envisager la dissolution du BDP. "Je suis contre l'interdiction des partis", a-t-il assuré, "mais quiconque commet une faute doit en payer le prix".

Le parti du Premier ministre, le Parti pour la justice et le développement (AKP), tient son congrès annuel dimanche. La non-résolution du conflit kurde est considérée comme l'un de ses principaux échecs depuis son arrivée au pouvoir. ○



Deux soldats, 13 rebelles tués dans des combats dans le sud-est de la Turquie

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 27 septembre 2012 (AFP)

DEUX SOLDATS turcs et 13 rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont été tués depuis le lancement mercredi par l'armée d'une opération près de la frontière irakienne, dans le sud-est de la Turquie, ont affirmé jeudi des sources locales de sécurité.

Les forces de sécurité mènent depuis mercredi une opération contre le PKK dans la vallée de Kazan et la région de Kavusak, des zones montagneuses proches de la localité de Cukurca (province de Hakkari), où des commandos ont été acheminés par des hélicoptères, ont indiqué ces sources.

Des avions de combat F-16 ont également bombardé des objectifs dans la zone de l'opération tandis que des drones ont été déployés pour fournir

du renseignement aux troupes au sol, ont-elles ajouté.

Les combats, qui se poursuivaient jeudi, ont également fait quatre blessés dans les rangs des militaires, ont-elles précisé.

Ces nouveaux combats interviennent alors que le PKK a multiplié cet été ses attaques contre les forces de sécurité, qui ont répondu par des déploiements de troupes massifs, de vastes opérations et des bombardements de positions des rebelles dans le nord de l'Irak.

Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan a affirmé mercredi soir que 144 membres des forces de sécurité et 239 rebelles du PKK avaient été tués depuis le début de l'année.

Le PKK, classé comme terroriste par la Turquie et de nombreux pays, a ouvert les hostilités dans le sud-est de la Turquie, peuplé en majorité de Kurdes, en 1984, déclenchant un conflit qui a fait jusqu'ici 45.000 morts. ○

ENTRE LES GROUPES REBELLES, C'EST LE CHACUN-POUR-SOI

Assad peut-il encore gagner ?

Face à une opposition affaiblie par ses divisions politiques comme par les rivalités de ses mouvements armés, le régime estime que le temps joue en sa faveur. Et la communauté internationale reste paralysée

Dans la province d'Idlib, la région du nord de la Syrie sous le contrôle presque exclusif de l'opposition au régime de Bachar al-Assad, ils font flotter leurs drapeaux noirs. Combatants d'Al-Qaïda, extrémistes religieux, ils se sont fait, petit à petit, une place à côté des combattants laïques de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL). Parce qu'ils sont les plus riches, les mieux armés et les plus déterminés, il faut désormais composer avec eux. Comme à Saraqib où les tribunaux religieux rendent dorénavant la justice à côté des tribunaux traditionnels, malgré l'opposition du conseil municipal démocratiquement élu.

A Londres, il y a quelques jours, au cours d'une réunion qui rassemblait, au Foreign Office, plusieurs hommes politiques syriens, l'un des responsables du mouvement des Frères musulmans syriens, Ali al-Bayanouni, a reproché au représentant britannique auprès de l'opposition syrienne, Jon Wilks, de privilégier systématiquement l'ASL au détriment du groupe armé de son mouvement. A présent, l'opposition politique syrienne n'a plus l'apanage des querelles et des dissensions: le torchon brûle aussi entre les différents groupes armés, lancés dans la course aux

financements. Les clivages entre militaires recourent d'ailleurs ceux qui opposent les politiques entre eux: entre séculiers et religieux, comme entre ceux dont le commandement se trouve en Syrie et ceux qui sont dirigés de l'étranger.

« Sur le terrain, les groupes armés se multiplient mais les financements ne sont pas extensibles, explique Khaled Issa, du Comité national pour le Changement démocratique (CNCD), et les plus riches, bien sûr, sont les groupes salafistes qui reçoivent directement l'argent de l'Arabie saoudite et des centres de charité musulmans. » Issa raconte qu'il vient justement d'être contacté par le chef d'un groupe armé qui réclame un soutien financier. « Ce militaire m'a expliqué qu'il craignait que, faute d'argent, ses hommes n'aillent rejoindre les groupes les plus extrémistes ou même, pire, deviennent des bandits », dit-il. Signe de la tournure confessionnelle que commence à prendre la guerre civile, on trouve aujourd'hui des milices chrétiennes qui dépendent des Eglises d'Alep, des brigades druzes ou turkmènes dont chacune défend sa communauté et marque son territoire dans la perspective de l'après-Assad. Certaines milices concluent des pactes de non-agression, entre

Kurdes et Druzes, par exemple, mais d'autres groupes sont en compétition ouverte et parfois violente.

Depuis que le Conseil national syrien (CNS) a échoué à mettre en place un conseil de défense chargé de chapeauter l'opposition armée et d'organiser son financement, la règle est celle du chacun-pour-soi. Certains groupes armés prennent leurs distances vis-à-vis de l'état-major de l'ASL réfugié en Turquie. Et pour éviter que le contrôle de l'ASL lui échappe, le général Riad al-Asaad vient de déplacer son centre de commandement dans les zones « libérées » à l'intérieur de la Syrie. C'est aussi pour y voir plus clair dans cette myriade de groupuscules armés que les Américains tentent de séparer le bon grain de l'ivraie fondamentaliste. Car l'administration Obama ne voudrait pas, comme le lui reprochent déjà les républicains, que les armes fournies à la rébellion par un canal ou un autre finissent par atterrir entre les mains des djihadistes. A commencer par ceux du Front Al-Nousra pour la Protection du Levant, un groupe affilié à Al-Qaïda, mais dont il se dit qu'il est sans doute manipulé par le régime et qui a revendiqué les attentats meurtriers d'Alep en février dernier.

De son côté, l'opposition politique a toujours autant de difficultés à s'unir. Malgré l'engagement du gouvernement français d'une reconnaissance officielle, aucun conseil représentatif regroupant les différentes composantes n'a encore vu le jour. « Ils ne cessent de médire les uns des autres, ●●●

●●● s'agace un diplomate. *Pourtant, on ne leur demande même pas de s'accorder sur un projet politique, juste d'élire un comité transitoire...* »

Dernière manifestation symptomatique de ces divisions: la réunion des Amis de la Syrie au Caire le 3 juillet a fini, au sens propre, en bagarre générale. Délicieux spectacle pour les alliés du régime de Bachar al-Assad! L'opposition, loin de réunir ses forces, en est venue aux mains. Coups de poing échangés, chaises qui volent, femmes en larmes..., ce représentant kurde n'est pas près d'oublier la réunion censée sceller la réconciliation des frères ennemis de l'opposition, laïques et religieux, Kurdes et Arabes, partisans de la lutte armée et pacifistes. Pomme de discorde: la question de la reconnaissance du peuple kurde. Une idée impossible à accepter pour les Frères musulmans du Conseil, comme pour les représentants du gouvernement turc qui participent activement à toutes les réunions de l'opposition. « *Nous voulions reprendre le slogan du congrès syrien de 1913: "La religion pour Dieu et la patrie pour tous", explique l'un des participants, mais le représentant des Frères musulmans a refusé en prétextant que c'était insulter le peuple de Syrie...* »

De rage, Haytham al-Manaa, porte-parole du Comité national pour le Changement démocratique, organisation rivale du Conseil national syrien, a déchiré les documents qui devaient marquer la reconnaissance du peuple kurde et les prémices de sa réconciliation avec le Conseil. Résultat, les États-Unis ont pris leurs distances avec le CNS, que les Occidentaux considéraient jusqu'ici comme la structure la plus solide, en constatant qu'il restait dominé par les Frères musulmans, incapable de faire taire ses divisions pour élire une instance représentative et, surtout, sans grande influence sur la rébellion armée. Figure centrale du CNS depuis sa création, la chercheuse Bassma Kodmani, elle-même acculée à la démission, admet que le Conseil n'a pas su établir de véritables ponts avec l'opposition de l'intérieur. Elle décrit aussi une formation dominée par les Frères musulmans, dont la diaspora a fait fortune dans le Golfe et qui ne rendaient pas compte des contacts directs qu'ils nouaient avec l'opposition armée.



Faut-il en conclure que la Syrie d'après Bachar al-Assad sera forcément fondamentaliste? « *Certainement pas, répond la chercheuse, mais si vous me demandez si les Frères musulmans, qui sont les plus déterminés d'entre nous, joueront un rôle important dans la Syrie de demain, oui, j'en suis sûre!* » Pourtant, l'ancienne vice-présidente du CNS s'applique encore à défendre un Conseil qui ne serait pas, selon elle, tellement plus divisé que la communauté internationale elle-même. « *Un jour, la France défend l'idée d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne, le lendemain, elle l'abandonne... C'est pourquoi les négociations diplomatiques entreprises depuis le début de la crise n'ont pas infléchi d'un iota le cours de la guerre sur le terrain!* » Une analyse confirmée par ce diplomate qui déplore le manque de cohésion des Occidentaux: « *D'un côté, il y a la France, qui soutient le Conseil national syrien, de l'autre, les États-Unis et les Britanniques, qui s'en méfient...* » Bassma Kodmani raconte que, pendant des mois, elle a fait le tour du monde, parfois au rythme de deux pays par jour, car tout le monde voulait se rapprocher du CNS. « *On nous répétait sur tous les tons: "Unissez-vous! Unissez-vous!" Mais s'unir pour quoi faire? s'interroge-t-elle aujourd'hui. Nous avons perdu neuf mois à chercher une solution arabe qui s'est soldée par un échec. Puis on nous a dit que la situation humanitaire allait entraîner une réaction et dénouer la crise. Aujourd'hui, avec 2,5 millions de personnes déplacées, rien n'a bougé, et la Syrie continue de se décomposer...* »

Les pays arabes ont aussi de sérieuses divergences sur le dossier syrien. Les États du Golfe, par exemple, qui voient surtout dans la

crise syrienne un moyen d'affaiblir les Iraniens, arment les groupes les plus fondamentalistes sans se soucier des souffrances de la population civile, victime des représailles du régime de Damas. Tandis que la Jordanie, elle, refuse que des armes transitent par son territoire par crainte de voir les extrémistes qui se battent en Syrie se retourner bientôt contre le royaume hachémite.

Même la Russie, principal soutien du régime de Bachar al-Assad, semble à son tour gagnée par les divisions. L'ambassadeur russe à l'ONU a l'air de plus en plus désolé chaque fois qu'il doit opposer son veto aux résolutions du Conseil de Sécurité. Vladimir Poutine semble terrifié par la montée de l'islam qu'il entend gronder à ses portes. Et Mikhaïl Bodganov, le vice-ministre russe des Affaires étrangères, appelle à un « *Taëf syrien* », du nom de l'accord qui avait mis fin à la guerre du Liban en confortant les fractures confessionnelles du pays et en le plaçant sous la tutelle de la Syrie. Des accords comparables – malgré l'évidente nocivité qu'avaient eue ceux de Taëf au Liban – pourraient, selon Bassma Kodmani, obtenir l'aval du gouvernement syrien: « *Si le régime parvient à préserver sur une portion du territoire l'appareil sécuritaire qui le maintient en vie, il pourra considérer cela comme une victoire.* » Selon un diplomate en contact avec le président syrien et son entourage, « *pour l'instant, le régime considère qu'il va gagner et, malheureusement, je ne suis pas sûr qu'il ait complètement tort.* » Et cet expert des dictatures arabes estime, au contraire de l'opposition qui croit à un effondrement du pouvoir, que la guerre peut continuer pendant des mois. Et que la majorité silencieuse du pays, bien qu'épuisée par un conflit qui a déjà fait entre 20 000 et 30 000 morts, reste indécise. Mais quelle que soit la durée de la guerre, Bassma Kodmani met en garde la communauté internationale: « *Le monde a regardé, impuissant, la Syrie s'enfoncer dans le chaos, mais il devra gérer l'après-Assad, et envoyer des casques bleus pour contenir la crise régionale. Car la Syrie ne fera pas l'économie du pire.* » Sur ce point, il semble que tout le monde, pour une fois, soit d'accord.

SARA DANIEL