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### IRAQI KURDISTAN: THE NEXT ELECTIONS SET FOR SEPTEMBER 2013

**T**he next presidential elections in Iraq's Kurdistan Region have been set by the Iraqi High Election commission for the 21<sup>st</sup> September 2013. These elections will be taking place in a political period in which the issue of a power vacuum and of succession are raised on all sides.

The Kurdish party in which the situation regarding its leadership is most uncertain is, of course, that of Jalal Talabani's PUK, since its president has not reappeared in public since his stroke last December. An Iranian press agency has even mentioned his "*very recent recovery from his coma*". This has been denied by his doctor, Najmaldin Karim, who states that the Iraqi President regained consciousness some months ago.

Wishing to cut short the rumours in the Kurdish media of his "concealed death", those around him have issued pictures showing the Iraqi President seated at a table in the garden of his health centre in Germany, wearing town clothes and surrounded by doctors.

However, while there is now no doubt that Jalal Talabani is still alive, the absence of any video or interview has only stimulated the questions regarding his real state of health and his ability to resume his duties as President of Iraq and leader of the PUK. For the moment everything seems to be in the hands of his *politburo* which has decided, this time to take part in the Kurdistan parliamentary elections independently, separately from its ally, Massud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party.

The PUK perhaps hopes to win back some votes that had, hitherto, gone to Goran, considering that its alliance with the KDP had lost it some of its electorate. This, at any rate, is what is said by Muhammad Rauf, who leads the Kurdistan Islamic Union. Muhammad Rauf, also insinuates that there have been secret attempts to try and reunite Goran and the PUK — or at least to form an electoral alliance against the KDP.

However it is certain that, in the Behdinan region, traditionally fully behind the Barzanis, neither Goran nor the PUK can endanger the KDP's hegemony, the party coming second in Duhok Province being the Kurdistan Islamic Union. In Suleimaniyah Province the contest is just between the PUK and

Goran — and, if allied, they would win it hands down. The only electoral uncertainty is in Erbil Province, which lies at the border of the two political zones.

What is the Kurdish opposition and what does it represent in terms of seats in the Kurdistan Parliament?

The Movement for Change, Goran, is the most powerful and popular, but only in the PUK strongholds, since it is composed of dissident former members. Goran's political line is secular and Left.

There come the two religious parties, the Kurdistan Islamic Group, which, since 2009 has been allied to two Left wing secular parties to form the Service and Reform List (13 seats) and the Kurdistan Islamic Union that has two seats on its own, since it was unable to reach an agreement with the Islamic Group.

In all, the opposition has 34 seats out of 111 in the Kurdistan Parliament. The two government Parties have 59 seats and 11 seats are ex-officio allocated to Christians (Assyrians, Chaldeans or Armenians) or Turcomenians. Finally there is the group of small Left wing parties, communists or social-democrats, who, in order to have any elected representatives, have to ally themselves with other organisations to form very heterogeneous lists like that of Service and Reform.

The sharpest discussion at this start of the campaign is the possible re-election of Massud Barzani, the present President of the Kurdistan Region.

In the first week of April meeting took place between the KDP and PUK leaders to discuss the presidential parliamentary and

provincial elections but the opposition parties quickly accused the two major parties of making "arrangements" of their own to enable Massud Barzani to stand again or to extend his term of office by one or two years (at the moment it is a four year term).

Omêd Sabah, one of the Presidency spokesmen had stated the controversy as early as 30 March by stating, on the independent Kurdish NRT channel that "*Massud Barzani had asked or was likely to ask for an extension of his term or office*".

That was all that was needed to arouse the Goran opposition, that made this its key issue, especially as its campaign for a renewal of the political personnel and the fight against corruption it launched in 2009 have begun to lose impact.

However, the opposition is far from unanimous on this issue. While Mohammad Tewfiq Rahim, speaking for Goran, in the Monitor, immediately attacked any such extension of the term of office, Salah ad-Din Bakir, Assistant General Secretary of the Islamic Union pointed out that his party would meet to study the possibility of lengthening the Presidential term of office as did Amar Qadir of the Islamic Group.

While the Kurdistan Democratic Party, obviously, is in favour of such an extension, what would be the stand of the PUK that, this time, is campaigning independently in the parliamentary elections, at least? For the moment its *politburo* has not raised any objections. In fact it has not made any clear reference to this issue, which could suggest that it is not opposed to it.

However, it might be rather difficult for the PUK to ask its elec-

torate (and especially its own activists) take part in a campaign that, from the KDP point of view, would be largely centred on a third term of office for Massud Barzani and so would look like a referendum. Indeed, some PUK leaders consider that this alliance has, for many years past, favoured their former rivals, especially in view of the internal struggles of their own party — divisions that have increased with the power vacuum that began when Jalal Talabani took office as President of Iraq and is at present increased as a result of his withdrawal, whether temporary or permanent, from active political life.

Caught between two fires, with an electorate disinclined to support Massud Barzani on the one hand and the advantages the PUK gains from its alliance in office with the KDP, the leaders of this party, who have enjoyed this power sharing since 2005, may not oppose fresh term of office for Barzani but do it in a neutral mannerly abstaining from this controversy. Although the PUK has decided to present its own candidates for parliament (estimating that it can win votes from Goran) it could well, after the elections form a fresh coalition government with the KDP.

Replying to Goran in the middle of April, the KDP pointed out that the debate was not about an extension of the term of office but on whether or not a President in office had the right to stand as a candidate for election for a third time. There is, indeed, an ambiguity regarding Massud Barzani's first term of office since he was not directly elected by popular vote but by parliament in 2005. It was only in the draft constitution approved by Parliament in 2009 that it was laid down that the President of the Kurdistan Region

be directly elected by universal suffrage for two terms only.

The opposition holds that the first term of office (voted by Parliament) is valid while the pro-Barzani consider that only the first election by direct suffrage should be taken into account, which would entitle him to stand for a third term of office.

In the end, Massud Barzani rejected, in an official communiqué, the bulk of the accusations being made in the opposition press:

*"I have not asked for any alteration in the law regarding the Region's Presidency, I have not asked for any extension of my term of office as President or allowed any amendment of the law to allow me to stand again as the region's President".*

Immediately, a flood of comments and analyses in the press and on Internet dissected all the possible meanings of this statement as well as many it didn't have. The fact that Massud Barzani had not "asked" for anything did not mean, according to some, that he would not accept to stand if pressed to do so by his party or a majority of the electors. Others noted that the President did not need to change the law, since all that was needed was to disregard his first term as being prior to the constitution.

However, what confirmed the opposition in its doubts was the second part of the presidential statement regarding the legitimacy of the draft constitution itself as it was adopted by Parliament in 2009, in circumstances that the opposition had already considered illegal since the Parliaments term of office had already expired.

Indeed, the Constitution was passed by Parliament on 24 June 2009 by 96 votes of the 111 M.P.s

— but only 97 of them were present. Goran had boycotted the session, alleging that Parliaments legality had expired on 4 June 2009. In fact, the parliamentary elections planned to take place in May 2009 had been postponed to 25 July for technical and budgetary reasons that were of the resort of the Iraqi High Electoral Commission.

Hitherto the two parties in office had not considered a direct popular vote necessary and it was only five years later that Massud Barzani felt any need to settle this issue by proposing a referendum as with the Iraqi Constitution of 2005.

"The Constitution was not voted by referendum for several reasons. The process of drafting the Constitution had taken place normally and all the stages had been observed. Now it is the people who have the right to decide whether to approve this constitution or not.

*Expecting the political parties to decide the constitution has no legal basis (the three opposition parties had, indeed, demanded that the document be re-examined). This is in opposition to the faith and will of the people and runs counter to the very concept of democracy".*

Submitting the Constitution to a referendum would give it a strong legitimacy against demands for its revision by the opposition (that could hardly go against the people's will) and also because a constitution approved by referendum could more easily ratify the legality of a third term for Barzani. Indeed, if the Kurdistan regional Government was an independent state, people would be talking about a "Third Republic" (after those of 1992 and 2005) which could lead to the possibility of Barzani standing for what

would then be his "second term or office" in a more presidential and less parliamentary regime (unlike the previous periods), which would have begun in 2009, not 2005.

In a more "political" perspective, if the constitution were approved by a considerable majority by the citizens of Kurdistan, this would appear like a vote of confidence in the sitting president and unquestionably indicate his re-election.

The Goran Party was not fooled and one of its members, Yusuf Muhammad, stated publicly within hours of the Presidents statement, that this draft constitution had been drawn up with the purpose of prolonging "Barzani's absolute power and that of his family, this allowing them to monopolise, for themselves and their subordinates, the essential position in the executive, the judiciary, the police and the Peshmergas of Kurdistan's administration and economy".

However, the other opposition parties are not opposed to the KDP's proposals. Thus the leader of the Kurdistan Socialist party, Mohammed Haj Mahmoud, explained that in addition to supporting the KDP's proposal to have the constitution passed by referendum, he was against Goran's wish to return to a more parliamentary regime, in which the M.P.s elected the President as in 2005. This was because of the overwhelming domination of the KDP and PUK, which he considered would only result in their co-opting the Presidency through internal agreements and so designate some candidate or other.

*"Thus the chances of a democratic competition would be reduced to zero. During the last Presidential elections, which took place with the*

direct vote of the people, there had been a chance to compete and a certain number of competitors did appear in various regions of Kurdistan — at Kefri, Koy, Sanjaq

and Erbil, each one receiving a portion of the votes. That is real democracy, which gives equal chances to all the citizens without exception. We are in favour of this democratic

formula because the presidency is not to be the reserve of any particular party or alliance of parties — it is a position that concerns all members of the public”.

## IRAQ:

### AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN ERBIL AND BAGHDAD SIGNED AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF VIOLENCE

**A**t the beginning of April, the first cargo of crude oil from the Kurdistan Regional government and exported via Turkey, was sold on the international market for about \$ 22 million. At the same time, a Kurdish delegation flew to Washington to discuss the situation of conflict in Iraq with some American leaders. This delegation consisted of Fuad Hussein, the chief of staff of Massud Barzani's Presidential Office and Ashti Hawrami, Minister of Natural Resources and Falah Mustafa. Kurdistan's Foreign Minister.

According to information that leaked out a week later, the Kurds insisted, at these meetings that the United States remains “neutral” in their conflict with Baghdad — neutrality also desired and demanded by Turkey. On 19 April, the Prime Minister of the latter reaffirmed that Ankara had the right to establish “any kind of relation with Northern Iraq (i.e. the Kurdish Region) within the limits set by the constitution. Our current approaches remain in this context”.

Whereas John Kerry, the US Secretary of State, is said to have insisted to Barzani that such fuel and power agreements should not be reached, Erdogan retorted to both John Kerry and Barack Obama that “they (the Turks) had mutual interests in Iraq (i.e. with the Kurds) just as much as they (the USA) had”.

Towards the end of April, the political climate between the

Kurds and the Arab government not having improved, Nuri al-Maliki replaced “provisionally” the two Kurdish Ministers who had been boycotting the Council of Ministers since March — namely Hoshyar Zebari (Foreign Minister) and replaced by Hussein Sharistani and the present Minister of Justice also took charge of the Ministry of Trade previously held by Khayrullah Hassan Babaker.

On 29 April, the Kurdish NRT television channel announced that 14 Kurdish senior officers had been stripped of their field commands (the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Divisions) by the direct order of the Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, and been transferred to the Baghdad offices of the Ministry of Defence. According to NRT, citing an anonymous source, that as the Sunni Arab regions were also up in arms, Maliki no longer could trust the Kurdish officers of his own army.

Indeed, Iraq is again faced with the danger of civil war following the events in Hawija, a Sunni Arab town in which 53 demonstrators, who were demanding the resignation of Nuri al-Maliki, were killed by the Iraqi armed forces on 23 April. The disturbances then spread to the Qara Tapa, Jalawla, Suleiman Beg, Tuz Khormato, and Mosul regions.

Four days later, the Kurdish Peshmergas were deployed a little more widely in the Kirkuk

region, while the hospitals of the city of Kirkuk and of the Kurdistan Regional Government received the wounded coming from the virtually insurgent towns. The commander of the Iraqi forces in the field, General Ali Ghaidan Majeed, then accused the Kurds of using the events as an excuse for “reaching the oil fields” of Kirkuk and put the Iraqi Army on alert.

Just as the events are thus becoming most acrimonious at the month's end, the Kurdish Member of Parliament announced the visit of Kurdish Prime Minister Nêçirvan Barzani to Baghdad on the 30<sup>th</sup> to discuss all the differences and the latest conflicts. The Kurdish delegation that accompanied Nêçirvan Barzani included a number of leading members of the Kurdish government as well as the Kurdish governor of Kirkuk, Najmaddin Karim. In addition to meeting Nuri al-Maliki, the delegation was due to meet the Speaker of Parliament, a Sunni Arab from Mosul, Osama Noujafi, and several leaders of parliamentary groups and political parties.

This time the negotiations were not long drawn out with fruitless travelling back and forth. Both the Kurds and the Iraqis wanted to avoid further enflaming an already burning military situation. Consequently an agreement (yet another!) was rapidly signed and Mahmoud Othman, head of the Kurdish list in the Baghdad Parliament announced, in the

course of this, the return of the Kurdish Ministers to their posts and of the Kurdish M.P.s, who had been boycotting it, to the Iraqi national Assembly.

The agreement seems essentially to be based on the setting up of state organs and commissions charged with resolving the controversial points of Article 140, (which covers the return of regions detached from Kurdistan by Saddam Hussein) the wages of the Peshmergas, that the Kurds want to be paid by the federal Government, the issue of hydro-carbon management and all the conflicts that had divided Erbil and Baghdad for the last few years.

The question remains is whether this agreement will be more effective than the one the same parties signed in Erbil 3 years ago. This time, the Kurdish Prime minister stated that Nuri Maliki had assured him that several "important" laws would be voted to resolve all the disputes, including the 2013 budget. However, basically it only means setting up commissions, as had been proposed last December, to again try and reach a compromise on issues about which the Kurds and Arabs seem unwilling to give way.

Meanwhile the Erbil government, by means of a law passed by its parliament, has now authorised itself to raise funds from the sale of its crude oil and gas exports

until such a time as the central government will have paid its debts to the Kurdish region. This law comes into effect within 90 days, as Ashti Hawrami has just announced. The aim of this law is, as the Minister of Natural Resources clearly stated, to give the Kurds "a political and legal lever in their constitutional struggle with Baghdad".

Following closely on this, the law also requires the Central Government to pay compensation to the Kurdish victims of Saddam's crimes. This demand was transmitted by Nêçirvan Barzani, who recalled in passing "Baghdad's legal obligation to carry out the decision of the Iraqi High Criminal Court regarding compensation to the victims of the genocide crimes of the former regime".

This double aspect of the new Kurdish Law is based on some articles that already exist in the Iraqi Constitution, that provides that "an allowance for a period to be determined" be paid to those regions damaged by Saddam's government "or having suffered war damage".

According to the Kurdish Prime Minister, the destruction inflicted on Kurdistan's agriculture and infra structures amount to \$ 9 billion, to which should be added \$ 6 billion in wages for the Peshmergas and \$ 4 billion due to the oil companies active in the Region who are supplying oil to

the rest of Iraq — in all some \$ 20 billion claimed by Erbil.

As it is unlikely that Baghdad will comply, the main aim of this law could be to allow the Kurds to continue to advance towards a financial autonomy — an aim that a Kurdish Member of the Baghdad Parliament, Muhsin Al-Saadoun, had envisaged in March, and which the Minister of Natural Resources, Ashti Hawrami, barely bothered to conceal in replying to criticism from some of the opposition who accused him of throwing oil onto the fire:

*"Baghdad daily threatens to deprive us of our share of the Federal budget. We are trying to create our own fiscal policy".*

At the beginning of the year 2013, Mahmoud Othman had already expressed little optimism on the viability of any negotiations that did not result from a direct meeting between the Iraqi Prime Minister and the Kurdish President:

*"The problems can only be resolved in one way, this is by making Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and President Massud Barzani meet at the same table".*

A meeting between the two leaders was, indeed, envisaged on Nêçirvasn Barzani's return to Erbil, but for the moment the 2013 version of the Baghdad agreement does not seem any less fragile or less uncertain in its application than the one at Erbil in 2010.

## TURKEY:

### A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION ON THE 2012 REPORT REGARDING TURKEY'S JOINING THE EU

**O**n 18 April, the European Parliament passed a resolution submitted by the Foreign Affairs Commission with 451 votes for, 105 against and 45 abstentions on the report of the 2012 regarding Turkey's progress.

Parliament considers that a reciprocal commitment renewed by negotiation is needed to preserve a constructive relationship and dialogue based on shared values, namely democracy, a State of Laws and respect for Human Rights. The M.E.P.s

stressed the strategic role played by Turkey both strategically and geographically and call for the strengthening of political dialogue with the European Union and Turkey regarding the choices and objectives of foreign policy. They deplore the fact that

Turkey's alignment with the declarations on foreign policy and shared security was weak during 2012 and urge Turkey to develop its foreign policy in the context of dialogue and co-ordination with the European Union.

The Copenhagen Criteria: Parliament supports the Commission in its new approach, which consists of opening Chapter 23, dealing with the judicial apparatus and fundamental rights, as well as Chapter 24 on Justice, freedom and security at an early stage in the negotiation process and of closing the above chapters at the very end of it.

In consequence, it calls on the Council for renewed efforts with a view too opening these chapters.

Parliament congratulates the Commission for Constitutional Consultation for its commitment in favour of a new Constitution and for the process of consultation of civil society as a whole but remains concerned by the visibly slow progress achieved by the Commission so far. It urges the Commission to pursue its work and to look into such fundamental issues as:

- i) the separation of powers and a suitable system for balancing powers;
- ii) relations between the State, society and religion;
- iii) a system of governance that includes guaranteeing fundamental rights of all the citizens, and finally;
- iv) an inclusive concept of citizenship.

The resolution stresses the fact that the reform of the judicial system is essential for strengthening democracy and recalls that freedom of expression and pluralism of the media, including

Internet, are at the heart of European values. It stresses, moreover, the necessity of achieving greater progress regarding labour laws and trade union rights.

The MEPs welcome the efforts undertaken by Turkey at all levels in the fight against "honour crimes", domestic violence and the phenomena of forced marriages and of minors being promised in marriage. It remains, however, concerned by the fact that, despite these efforts, violence against women continues to be regularly perpetrated. It also points out that the draft law on the struggle against discrimination does not cover discrimination based on sexual orientation or identity.

Parliament welcomes the direct political dialogue that the Turkish Government has engaged with Abdullah Ocalan and urges both parties, as soon as possible, to convert these discussions into structured negotiations capable of leading to a historic agreement to settle the Kurdish conflict in a peaceful and democratic manner. It condemns the acts of terrorist violence perpetrated by the PKK and calls on all member states to strengthen cooperation with Turkey and Europol in the struggle against terrorism and organised crime as a source of financing terrorism

Regarding developing good neighbour relations. The MEPs think that Turkey has lost an important opportunity for starting a process leading to the normalising of relations with Cyprus during the Cypriot Presidency of the European Union Council. Indeed, progress towards normalisation of relations between Turkey and

Cyprus are urgently needed to give a fresh impetus to the negotiations for Turkey's membership. This resolution urges the Turkish government to ratify the UN Convention on maritime Law, signed by the European Union, while recalling the full legitimacy of the exclusive economic zone of the Republic of Cyprus.

Progress in EU-Turkey cooperation. Parliament deplores Turkey's refusal to fulfil its obligations to apply to member States as a whole the additional protocol of agreement of association in a full and non-discriminatory manner. It recalls that this refusal continues to have deep repercussions on the negotiations.

The resolution welcomes Turkey's commitment alongside the democratic forces in Syria as well as the humanitarian aid supplied to the growing number of Syrians who are fleeing their country. It asks the Commission, the member States and the international community to continue to support Turkey in its efforts to manage the humanitarian dimension that is increasingly present in the Syrian crisis. Over and above the humanitarian aid, the MEPs consider that the EU and Turkey should strive to arrive at a common strategic vision so as to exert a greater leverage effect in order to bring an end to this crisis from which Syria is suffering.

Finally, given Turkey's strategic role and its considerable renewable energy resources, the MEPs call for engaging in thought on the importance of opening negotiations on Chapter 15 regarding fuel and power so as to deepen the strategic dialogue between the European Union and Turkey in the field of energy.



## IRAN: THE "KURD MEN FOR EQUALITY" CAMPAIGN STARTS A WORLDWIDE "BUZZ"

**A** judge of the Kurdish town of Mariwan, an average town (100,000 inhabitants) in province of Iranian Kurdistan, has sparked off an international campaign on Internet after passing an unusual sentence in the form of "public humiliation".

On 15 April, an offender found guilty of minor offences was paraded round the town under police guard disguised with the red chador worn by women in Mariwan.

The town immediately reacted against the judge and the Kurdish Women's Association of Mariwan demonstrated against the contemptuous and sexist character of the sentence that made the feminine gender a sign of humiliation and inferiority — and of Kurdish women in particular since the clothes he was forced to wear are traditional dress. The police intervened brutally to disperse the hundreds of demonstrators and, according to witnesses, several of the women were seriously injured.

However, the broadcasting on the web of a video showing the police parading the sentenced man shown wearing a chador aroused indignation well beyond Meriwan and even Iran and became, in the course of a few days an international "buzz". This gave rise to a campaign started, this time, by male Kurds and called "Kurd Men for Equality". An Iranian Kurd, Massoud Fatihpour, first of all had his photo taken wearing women's clothes and holding up a banner saying "Being a woman is not a way to humiliate or punish anyone". Hundreds of others followed suite and posed

similarly dressed with the same banner, on their Facebook pages and with other similar statements.

Probably neither the judge nor the Mariwan feminists had foreseen the extent taken by this campaign, which soon went well beyond Kurdish circles. In a matter of days nearly 10,000 photos had been published on the Facebook page of "Kurd Men for Equality" and Kurds were soon joined by men from all countries and of all origins having themselves photographed in women's clothes and waving the same message.

At the same time, while all demonstrations in the Kurdish regions of Iran were being severely repressed by the authorities, the appearance in public of young Kurds wearing women's clothes were taking place in several of Kurdistan's town as proven by pictures they sent onto the social networks.

A similar campaign had already occurred in 2009, when an Iranian student, Majid Tavakoli, one of the leaders of the Green Revolution, arrested on 7 December, was photographed attired by the Pasdaran in a woman's veil in an attempt to ridicule him. The Guardians of the Revolution accused him of trying to escape disguised as a woman — which was denied by those who had witnessed his arrest.

The photo had been published by the pro-government Fars Press news agency, which drew a parallel with the case of Banisadr, the first President of the Islamic Republic, who had also been accused of having fled

in women's clothes. However, far from discrediting Tavakoli the picture was immediately diverted from its original aim by hundreds of Iranians throughout the world, having themselves photographed on their Facebook pager or on Twitter filmed in videos broadcast on You Tube wearing chadors and with the message "We are all Majids". There were a number of well known public figures among them, like Hamid Dabashi, a Professor at Columbia University or Ahmad Batebi, the leader of the 1999 student revolts, who now lives in the United States. Finally pictures of Khamenei and Ahmedinjad were also circulated wearing the same chador.

The specific factor of the Kurd Men for Equality campaign is its protest against the contempt with which women are treated in the Iranian Republic — but also against its treatment of ethnic minorities, including the Kurds, who are especially repressed, as well as the Baluchis and the Arabs of Khuzistan. The Iranian government understood this action, describing it as "ridiculous" and conducted by "separatists under the pretext of defending Kurdish women".

The coming Presidential elections in Iran will take place on 14 July. The candidates must register for their candidature to be examined and approved by the Council of Guardians of the Constitution. In defiance, about thirty Iranian women are standing as candidates and have registered with the Ministry of the Interior, even though the Islamic Republic does not allow women to stand for the Presidency.



**CULTURE:**  
**ESTELLE AMY DE LA BRETÈQUE'S BOOK "PAROLES MÉLODISÉES"**  
**(MELODIC SPEECH: YEZIDI EPIC TALES AND LAMENTATIONS)**  
**HAS JUST BEEN PUBLISHED**

**T**he ethno-musicologist, Estelle Amy de la Bretèque, who is a specialist in the Yezidis of Armenia, has just brought out a work *"Paroles mélodisées. Récits épiques et lamentations chez les yézidi"* (Melodic speech: Yezidi epic tales and lamentations). This is published by Garnier Classique, and is based on her ethnological doctoral thesis presented at the University of Paris-Ouest in November 2010.

"This work covers a mode of enunciation in which the normal intonation of speech is replaced by melodic elaborations. Amongst the Kurdish-speakers of Armenia, and especially the Yezidis, speech this rendered melodically is always linked with the evocation of nostalgia, of exile, of self-sacrifice and of

heroism. It appears in some ritual contexts, in the epic cantos or simply in the course of a phase in everyday conversations. Basing herself on unpublished field studies, available on line on the French Ethno-musicological Society's web site, the author shows that melodic speech plays a central role for the Yezidis in building up an ideal of life linking the living to those absent or deceased".

According to Estelle Amy de la Bretèque "the melodic speech of the Yezidis of Armenia covers a particular register of the use of sound that the Yezidis call "speech on" (kilamê şer) and that they place at the border of music and language. It is, in the first instance, a way of making speech melodic to express sad feelings in ritual contexts (such as funerals) on in everyday conversations. The term is also applied to

oboe playing. This mode of enunciation is a subject of special interest within the community and although the Yezidis do not consider it as "musical", this "kilamê şer" can frequently be found recorded on disks and cassettes in the local market.

The analysis of the formal and performance characteristics of "kilamê şer" enables one to show how this particular use of speech builds an area of sharing of emotions. At heart, the Yezidi concepts of exile are linked to those of sacrifice, of heroism and mourning. Over and above the individual catharsis, this melodic speech is a pivot whereby absence becomes presence and the dead are integrated with life".

A presentation/discussion of the book and the work will take place at the Kurdish Institute in Paris in June by the author.

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# L'Irak, dix ans après : une ébauche de renaissance inespérée

Par **KENDAL NEZAN**  
Président de  
l'Institut kurde de  
Paris

Dans chaque guerre, chaque rupture politique majeure, il y a des gagnants et des perdants. Dans le cas de l'Irak, les gagnants incontestables sont les Kurdes et les

chiïtes qui, ensemble, forment plus de 80% de la population irakienne.

Contrôlant déjà une grande partie de leur territoire, les Kurdes, avec le soutien aérien américain, ont libéré tout l'Irak du Nord, y compris les deux grandes villes de Kirkouk et de Mossoul. Tout en participant au processus de reconstruction de l'Irak, ils ont saisi la chance historique qui leur était offerte de reprendre leur destin en main et d'édifier une société démocratique et prospère, susceptible de servir de modèle au reste de l'Irak et aux 30 millions de Kurdes des pays voisins.

La sécurisation du pays, le développement des infrastructures dont deux aéroports internationaux et des centrales électriques assurant l'autosuffisance énergétique, l'adoption par le Parlement du Kurdistan d'une législation *business friendly* n'ont pas tardé à attirer des investisseurs internationaux. Tous les enfants sont scolarisés et on compte une

vingtaine d'universités dont deux dispensent leur enseignement en anglais. 48% des étudiants sont des étudiantes, et les femmes représentent 30% des membres du Parlement.

Le «boom» économique profite à toute la population même s'il est parasité par des phénomènes de corruption et de népotisme que dénoncent régulièrement une opposition parlementaire robuste et des médias indépendants. Le pluralisme politique, culturel et confessionnel est assuré. Le Kurdistan est le

seul pays du Proche-Orient qui ne compte aucun prisonnier politique et l'une des rares régions du monde musulman où les chrétiens vivent en paix, pratiquent leur religion et construisent de nouvelles églises sans entrave. Plus de 100 000 chrétiens irakiens menacés ont pu trouver refuge au Kurdistan où d'autres minorités religieuses comme les yézidites sont aussi protégées.

En construisant une société pluraliste et prospère – dans un pays dont 90% des villages et une vingtaine de villes avaient été détruits par les armées de Saddam Hussein qui avaient, rien que dans la campagne d'Anfal, entre 1987 et 1988, massacré 182 000 civils kurdes et interné 1,5 million d'autres dans les

campus –, les Kurdes irakiens démontrent que leur peuple est capable de se gouverner, et que l'islam n'est pas incompatible avec la démocratie.

Vingt-cinq ans après le gazage des milliers de Kurdes à Halabja, qui bouleversa la conscience universelle mais ne fut condamné ni par l'ONU ni par aucun Etat occidental, pas même la France, on assiste donc à la résurrection d'un peuple victime des frontières arbitraires dessinées après la Grande Guerre par Londres et Paris, martyrisé tout au long du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Les Arabes chiïtes, avec 55% de la population irakienne, accèdent pour la première fois au pouvoir, grâce au libre jeu du suffrage universel mis en place par la nouvelle constitution de 2005. Citoyens de seconde classe, ils fournissaient jusqu'au milieu des années 60 le gros des bataillons du Parti communiste irakien, alors le plus puissant du monde arabe. Le soutien de l'URSS aux dictateurs irakiens successifs et l'onde de choc de la révolution iranienne de 1979 les ont poussés vers les partis chiïtes confessionnels. Lors de la guerre du Golfe de 1991, tout comme les Kurdes, ils s'étaient soulevés à l'appel de la coalition alliée et avaient libéré leurs provinces. Ce premier «printemps arabe» aurait pu déboucher sur la chute de Saddam Hussein, mais les alliés ont dé-

**Le Kurdistan est le seul pays du Proche-Orient qui ne compte aucun prisonnier politique et l'une des rares régions du monde musulman où les chrétiens vivent en paix.**

cidé de ne pas marcher sur Bagdad et de laisser libre cours à l'armée irakienne pour écraser dans le sang la révolte populaire. La répression a fait près de 300 000 victimes dans les rangs chiïtes, tandis que près de 2 millions de Kurdes prenaient les routes de l'exode vers la Turquie et l'Iran.

Sous la pression de l'opinion publique internationale et à l'initiative du président Mitterrand, une «zone de protection kurde» a été créée par l'ONU pour permettre le retour des réfugiés kurdes dans leur foyer, zone qui a évolué vers un Kurdistan autonome.

Les chiïtes, eux, ont été abandonnés à leur sort et à leur amertume envers les Occidentaux. Comme partout dans le monde arabe, les chiïtes irakiens ont voté pour des partis religieux. L'alliance chiïte regroupant ces divers partis dirige une coalition gouvernementale incluant aussi des partis kurdes laïcs et des Arabes sunnites. La plupart des provinces chiïtes sont pacifiées et engagées dans un vaste programme de reconstruction. Le niveau de vie s'est amélioré en dix ans, les salaires ont été multipliés par vingt. La pratique du culte chiïte, jadis sévèrement restreint, est totalement libre. Le pluralisme politique s'exprime à travers une multitude de journaux, télévisions et associations. Les nouvelles générations sont en quête de références autres que confessionnelles. En dépit de problèmes d'infrastructures, d'électricité, d'insécurité persistants, les chiïtes savourent une liberté nouvelle.

La minorité arabe sunnite, qui a fourni au régime de Saddam Hussein l'essentiel de ses cadres militaires, politiques, policiers et bureaucratiques, a été durement

affectée par des mesures de «débaasisation» [du parti Baas, l'ancien parti du pouvoir, *nldr*], comme la dissolution de l'armée et des services de sécurité ainsi que l'épuration dans l'administration. Cette politique a été édictée par le haut-commissaire américain en Irak, Paul Bremer, à la demande et avec le soutien des dirigeants chiïtes. Ainsi, du jour au lendemain, un demi-million d'officiers et de fonctionnaires se sont retrouvés révoqués, sans indemnités ni pensions de retraite. Les réseaux baasistes, alliés avec les jihadistes d'Al-Qaeda affluant par les frontières mal protégées de la Syrie et de la Jordanie, n'ont eu aucune difficulté à recruter au sein de ce gigantesque vivier pour combattre «l'armée des croisés américains et leurs collaborateurs chiïtes impies».

Cette guerre civile, soutenue par des pays arabes sunnites mais aussi par l'Iran, menée à coups d'attentats aveugles a fait, en dix ans, entre 100 000 et 130 000 victimes civiles irakiennes, dans leur immense majorité chiïtes. Quelque 24 000 militaires irakiens et insurgés ont également péri. Ces chiffres effroyables sont à comparer avec les 200 000 morts de la guerre civile en Algérie et les 70 000 morts du conflit syrien en seulement deux ans. Les pertes totales des Américains depuis le début de leur intervention en Irak s'élevaient à 4 484 morts.

La violence subsiste encore, des attentats dans des villes à la population mixte ont, en 2012, causé la mort de 4 471 civils, un «score» qui reste inférieur au bilan des violences au Pakistan, au Mexique ou en Colombie, pour ne prendre que quelques exemples non arabes. Dans le Kurdistan autonome, le dernier attentat meurtrier a eu lieu en février 2004. L'expérience kurde inspire des dirigeants sunnites qui revendiquent maintenant un statut de région fédérée pour leur territoire, comme cela est prévu dans la Constitution. Certains partis chiïtes préconisent également la création d'une ou deux régions fédérées chiïtes. Le fédéralisme accompagné par le partage équitable des revenus de \*\*\*

\*\*\* plus en plus conséquents des exportations pétrolières permettrait de maintenir, au sein d'un même Etat, trois communautés possédant chacune leur propre culture, leur propre histoire et décidées à gérer leurs propres affaires. Ce serait la meilleure façon de mettre en œuvre une Constitution fédérale approuvée par plus de 80% des électeurs lors du référendum d'octobre 2005, et qui cependant n'est guère respectée par le Premier ministre Al-Maliki et ses partisans rêvant d'un Etat unitaire centralisé dominé par les chiïtes.

En termes géopolitiques, le bilan est plus difficile à établir. La Turquie, dont les entreprises tirent le plus gros avantage du marché de la reconstruction irakienne, et l'Iran, avec ses amis chiïtes arrivés au pouvoir après la pendaison de Saddam Hussein, font figure de gagnants majeurs, du moins jusqu'à présent. Cependant la démocratisation de l'Irak, le statut fédéral obtenu par les Kurdes ont des répercussions régionales insoupçonnées sur ceux des pays voisins, bien sûr, mais aussi sur les peuples non persans qui, ensemble, forment près de 60% de la population de l'empire iranien. La Turquie a dû assouplir sa politique kurde et engager des réformes; le futur Iran sera démocratique et fédéral ou implosera, tout comme la Syrie. L'Irak est devenu le pays arabe le plus démocratique du Proche-Orient et n'est plus une source de menaces pour ses voisins. La chute de Saddam Hussein a frappé l'esprit des peuples arabes et a contribué à leur soulèvement contre leur propre dictateur quelques années plus tard.

En dix ans, l'Irak est passé d'une société pauvre, gouvernée par la terreur, - où la possession d'une simple machine à écrire, d'un photocopieur nécessitait une autorisation de la police politique, où tous les médias étaient contrôlés par l'Etat et où un seul parti politique était autorisé -, à une société ouverte, pluraliste où le pouvoir d'achat a été multiplié par 20, où le PIB a connu en 2012 une croissance de 10,2%. Un indicateur parmi d'autres : de 80 000 téléphones mobiles en 2002, on est passé à 23 millions en 2011 pour une population de 27 millions; à la place des deux chaînes étatiques de télévision, on en compte plus d'une centaine représentant toutes les sensibilités culturelles et politiques.

Le pluralisme est bien enraciné dans le pays. Cependant, les institutions démocratiques restent fragiles, la situation sécuritaire précaire dans l'Irak arabe, les lignes de fracture confessionnelles et ethniques menaçantes et la corruption endémique. L'Irak reste un Etat rentier dont 98% des exportations proviennent du pétrole. Ses réserves estimées à 143 milliards de barils peuvent lui assurer pendant encore un siècle des revenus confortables.

Inventé de toutes pièces par les Anglais dans les années 20, l'Irak est resté unifié par la poigne des dictatures successives. Livré à lui-même et au libre jeu de la démocratie, il garde son unité grâce au partage des revenus de son pétrole. Il appartient aux Irakiens de prendre en mains leur destin collectif.



Sawoushka Ahmed and Kurdish fighters in Sheikh Maksoud, Aleppo, on March 30. Sebastiano Tomada Sawoushka Ahmed and Kurdish fighters in Sheikh Maksoud, Aleppo, on March 30.

## THE KURDISH FACTOR

By MATTHIEU AIKINS

**A**LEPPO, Syria — On Saturday I trudged across the grassy ravine that separates Sheikh Maksoud, a majority-Kurdish neighborhood on a hilltop, from the rebel-held portions of the city. Beside me were rebel fighters carrying weapons and ammunition. Civilians were coming the opposite way, whole families laden with the few possessions they could carry on their backs. Everyone was jogging across the open ground, fearful of snipers.

“The regime has told us we have 24 hours to leave,” an elderly woman, who gave her name as Umm Riyadh, told me as we crouched, panting, behind a stone wall. “They are going to bomb the neighborhood.”

At the top of the hill near the area’s main mosque, groups of rebels mingled, in newfound amity, with Kurdish fighters from the local People’s Defense Units, the armed wing of Syria’s main Kurdish group, the Democratic Union Party (P.Y.D.). Until Friday, this area had been controlled by Kurdish fighters but was frequently visited by militias and intelligence agents from the regime of Bashar al-Assad. On Friday, though, in an event that

may have momentous consequences for the course of the civil war, the Kurds switched sides, and with their help the rebels overran Sheikh Maksoud, which commands strategic high ground north of the city’s center.

“We made the decision on Thursday night to help the rebels,” said Sawoushka Ahmed, a local Kurdish fighter. She explained that there had been discussions about this within the group for several weeks, as its uneasy relation with the Assad regime had deteriorated to the point that the neighborhood would sometimes be shelled and raided at night. The Kurds’ hand may also have been forced by the rebels: Earlier in the week, I had spoken to rebel commanders who said they were preparing to take Sheikh Maksoud by force.

Whatever the precise motivation, the crucial question now — which the Kurdish fighters I spoke to over the past few days weren’t prepared to answer — is whether the P.Y.D.’s shift in Sheikh Maksoud represents a countrywide change in the Kurds’ alliances. If so, it could represent a major development in the course of the war in Syria.

The realignment in Aleppo comes only one week after the Kurdish leader

Abdullah Ocalan announced, from his jail cell in Istanbul, a cease-fire between Kurdish rebels in Turkey and the Turkish government. The unprecedented truce is widely seen as the first stage in a deal between Ocalan and Turkey’s ambitious prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, that would finally end the long-running Kurdish insurgency in Turkey.

Ocalan once waged his war against the Turkish government, which began in 1984, from inside Syria. For a time the government in Damascus used him and his guerillas as leverage with Turkey, especially in disputes over water. Then in 1998, seeking rapprochement with Ankara, the Syrians forced Ocalan to leave. He was eventually kidnapped by Turkish intelligence agents in Kenya and brought to Turkey, where he is serving a life sentence.

The Syrian regime tried to reactivate the Kurdish threat in 2011 when Turkey lent its support to the rebels seeking to overthrow Assad. It provided safe havens in Syria for various guerillas, including Saleh Muslim, the exiled head of the P.Y.D. (which is the local affiliate of Ocalan’s Kurdistan Workers’ Party). The regime also pulled back government forces from Kurdish areas in the north and northeast of Syria — by the Turkish border — allowing the Kurds to govern themselves in exchange for their remaining neutral in the government’s conflict with the rebels.

The Assad regime had apparently hoped that the presence of Muslim’s group, like Ocalan’s in the 1990s, would dissuade Turkey from escalating its support to the rebels. But last week’s reversal in Sheikh Maksoud suggests that Erdogan’s recent overtures to Ocalan are already bearing fruit in his struggle with Assad.

Although the Kurdish groups in Syria are not very significant militarily, their cooperation would free the Turkish government’s hands by allowing it to increase its support for the rebels in Syria without fear that the Assad regime could stoke the Kurdish insurgency inside Turkey in response.

It remains to be seen whether the Kurds’ newfound cooperation with the rebels in Aleppo is part of a larger realignment by the P.Y.D. But if over the weeks ahead government forces are pushed out of their remaining bases in Kurdish areas, like oil-rich Hasakah in the northeast, then the fall of Sheikh Maksoud on Friday will have marked the beginning of a dramatic shift in Syria’s civil war. □

**LE FIGARO**  
mardi 2 avril 2013

# L'Iran forme des milices pour l'après-Assad

Ces factions entraînées avec l'aide du Hezbollah défendront ses intérêts en cas de changement de régime.

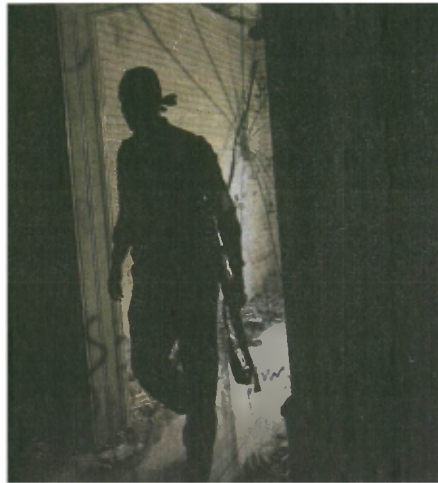
**GEORGES MALBRUNOT**  
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**MOYEN-ORIENT** Ses promoteurs l'ont pompeusement appelée « l'Armée du peuple » (Jaych al-Chaabi). Elle est composée de cinquante mille hommes environ, des Syriens pour la plupart, issus des minorités chiïte, comme les Iraniens, ou alaouite, comme le président Bachar el-Assad, que tous ces supplétifs ont pour objectif immédiat de protéger face aux rebelles sunnites, qui cherchent à renverser le pouvoir à Damas.

Ces combattants ont été choisis parmi les Comités de défense populaire ou les chabihias, ces milices engagées aux côtés d'une armée qui ne peut plus combattre tous les fronts de la rébellion en même temps. Les meilleurs ont été entraînés par des membres du Hezbollah libanais et de la Force al-Qods, la branche extérieure des gardiens de la révolution iranienne, de plus en plus présents en Syrie pour soutenir Assad.

Cette « Armée du peuple » est apparue sur les radars américains en août dernier. Leon Panetta, secrétaire à la Défense, faisait état de signes indiquant « que l'Iran cherche à développer et entraîner une milice à l'intérieur de la Syrie pour combattre en son nom ». Un mois après, le patron des gardiens de la révolution, le général Mohammad Ali Jafari, affirmait au cours d'une conférence de presse que son allié syrien « n'a pas besoin de soutien extérieur pour préserver la sécurité en Syrie, puisqu'il y a 50 000 hommes qui luttent à ses côtés au sein de l'Armée du peuple ».

En décembre, cependant, les accusations sont devenues suffisamment précises pour que le ministère du Trésor américain inscrive le Jaych al-Chaabi sur la liste des entités syriennes sanctionnées. Depuis, Washington accuse la Force al-Qods « d'entraîner, de livrer des équipements et de financer à hauteur de plusieurs



Un combattant rebelle à Alep, le 27 mars.

millions de dollars » cette milice pro-iranienne, bâtie sur le modèle des bassidjis, ces va-nu-pieds chargés de protéger la République islamique contre ses ennemis, comme ce fut le cas en 2009 après les manifestations populaires déclenchées par la réélection truquée de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad à la présidence de la République.

Outre des cadres du Hezbollah, les instructeurs sont également issus des mouvements chiïtes irakiens liés à l'Iran. Ce sont eux qui aident à la défense des villages chiïtes assiégés depuis plusieurs mois par des rebelles sunnites, comme à Zahra et Nabhoul au nord de la Syrie, dans la province d'Alep, où les fanions jaunes du Hezbollah ont fait leur apparition. Car au-delà

du répit que cette milice peut offrir au dictateur, l'Armée du peuple a été conçue comme un vecteur de l'influence iranienne en Syrie, quand bien même Assad viendrait à perdre le pouvoir. Même si l'Iran écarte officiellement une telle hypothèse, le régime des mollahs, cynique mais pragmatique, cherche à se constituer un réseau d'affidés prêts à dé-

fendre ses intérêts dans une Syrie dominée par des sunnites proches de l'Arabie saoudite et du Qatar, les deux bêtes noires de Téhéran dans le monde arabe.

## Israël sur ses gardes

L'Iran s'est déjà trouvé dans une situation semblable à partir de 2003, dans l'Irak de l'après-Saddam. À l'époque, elle avait noué des contacts avec une nébuleuse d'organisations, pas toutes chiïtes d'ailleurs, invitées à combattre l'occupant américain. En Syrie, il s'agirait d'aider une insurrection contre un pouvoir devenu hostile, aussi bien à l'égard de Téhéran que du Hezbollah, qui a besoin de Damas pour ses approvisionnements en armes. Et ce n'est sans doute pas un hasard si les choses s'accroissent.

Ces derniers mois, le lent affaiblissement de l'appareil sécuritaire syrien a renforcé la main des Iraniens, désormais présents dans l'organisation de la sécurité de Bachar el-Assad lui-même, après avoir aidé à la professionnalisation des Comités de défense populaire, décidée par le président syrien au début de cette année. Auparavant, Téhéran avait offert son expertise en matière de contrôle d'Internet et de surveillance des communications, avant d'accroître ces derniers mois le rythme des livraisons d'armes à Damas, via l'espace aérien irakien.

Cet entrisme accru de Téhéran est surveillé de près par les Israéliens, qui n'ont pas hésité à liquider en février Hassan Chateri, un des hommes clés de l'implication iranienne en Syrie et auprès du Hezbollah, tombé dans une embuscade sur la route entre Damas et Beyrouth. Haut responsable des gardiens de la révolution, Chateri était en liaison étroite avec Mohammad Reza Zahedi, le commandant de la force al-Qods à Damas, qu'il venait de rencontrer le 5 février. Juste avant de disparaître, quelques kilomètres plus loin, dans un traquenard. ■

**50 000**  
supplétifs  
se seraient enrôlés  
dans  
l'Armée du peuple

## Le lycée français d'Alep vandalisé

SITUÉ à quinze kilomètres au sud-ouest d'Alep, dans une zone tenue par les insurgés, le lycée français de la ville a été vandalisé, apprend-on de source syrienne. « Les faits remontent à plusieurs mois, mais nous ne le savons que depuis trois ou quatre semaines », affirme un parent d'élève. « Les ordinateurs ont été dérobés, ajoute-t-il, et le carrelage a été démonté pour

être revendu. » Menacé, le comptable de l'établissement, géré par la Mission laïque française, a dû récemment prendre la fuite. Inauguré en 1997 dans la grande ville du nord de la Syrie, le lycée français d'Alep n'avait pas rouvert ses portes à la rentrée de septembre, en raison des violences entre l'armée de Bachar el-Assad et les rebelles qui tentent de conquérir

la capitale économique de la Syrie. Il aurait été probablement l'un des premiers établissements scolaires à rouvrir en cas de victoire des rebelles sur tout le nord du pays. À Damas, en revanche, le lycée français accueille toujours quelque 230 élèves. Il s'autogère, depuis que l'État français a choisi de ne plus y envoyer d'enseignants. G. M.



## Turquie/PKK: Ankara annonce la création d'un comité de "sages"

ANKARA, 03 avril 2013 (AFP)

**LE VICE-PREMIER ministre turc Bülent Arınç a annoncé mercredi la création d'un comité de "sages" chargé de promouvoir le processus de paix en cours avec les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).**

"Une délégation de sages a été formée (...) Elle est composée de gens connus et appréciés en Turquie, ouverts au dialogue, qu'ils soient artistes, avec une identité politique, hommes d'affaires, dirigeants ou spécialistes d'ONG ou de centres de réflexion", a-t-il déclaré à des journalistes en marge d'une conférence à Ankara.

Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui a constitué la liste des 63 "sages", rencontrera le comité jeudi soir à Istanbul pour évoquer ses missions.

"Après ça, ils se mettront au travail pendant un mois dans toutes les régions de Turquie, avec pour but de présenter, d'informer et d'éclairer la population sur le processus de résolution" de la question kurde, a indiqué M. Arınç.

"Ils ont été répartis dans des groupes de travail constitués pour chacune des sept régions de Turquie. Un président, un vice-président et un porte-parole ont été désignés", a-t-il précisé.

L'annonce a été suivie par le départ d'une délégation de trois députés kurdes vers l'île-prison d'Imrali, dans le nord-ouest de la Turquie, où le chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, purge une peine de prison à vie, a rapporté la chaîne NTV.

Les autorités turques sont en discussion depuis plusieurs mois avec M. Öcalan

pour mettre fin au conflit kurde, qui a fait quelque 45.000 morts en 29 ans.

Trois délégations d'élus kurdes se sont déjà rendues à Imrali depuis le début de l'année pour jouer un rôle de messagers entre le leader kurde et son organisation.

Selon les médias turcs, cette quatrième visite pourrait avoir pour but de transmettre un message de M. Öcalan, qui serait lu jeudi, à l'occasion des 65 ans du chef rebelle, à Ömerli, son village de naissance dans la province de Sanliurfa (sud-est).

M. Öcalan a accompli un geste important en appelant le 21 mars ses troupes au cessez-le-feu et à se retirer de Turquie, vraisemblablement vers les bases arrières du PKK dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

La direction militaire du PKK a officiellement décrété la trêve deux jours plus tard mais a prévenu qu'elle n'entamerait le retrait que si les autorités turques créaient "les commissions et les institutions nécessaires" pour encadrer le processus.

Parmi les personnalités retenues dans le groupe des "sages" figurent des artistes populaires comme le chanteur Orhan Gencebay ou l'actrice Hülya Koçyigit et de puissants entrepreneurs comme l'ancienne représentante du patronat Arzuhan Dogan Yalçındag, selon la liste publiée par les services du Premier ministre.

Le groupe comprend de nombreux universitaires et journalistes, avec une forte représentation des courants islamo-conservateurs, proches du gouvernement, et libéraux. ○



## A Alep, derrière l'entente entre Kurdes et rebelles, la méfiance pointe

ALEP (Syrie), 7 avril 2013 (AFP)

**A CHEIKH MAQSOU, quartier à majorité kurde d'Alep dans le nord syrien, rebelles arabes et combattants kurdes assurent lutter ensemble l'armée de Bachar al-Assad mais la réalité sur le terrain est plus compliquée.**

A l'entrée du quartier, Abou Ahmed arbore un foulard jaune, rouge et vert, aux couleurs du drapeau kurde qui trône à côté de celui de la révolution syrienne. "Je porte les couleurs de nos frères kurdes, même si je suis Arabe", dit fièrement ce commandant rebelle.

Selon lui, les comités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), bras armé du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), leur ont "fourni des munitions et leurs combattants montent en première ligne contre le régime".

Depuis le début de la révolte il y a deux ans, les Kurdes (10% de la population), présents dans le Nord, ont tenté de garder leurs régions à l'abri des violences. A l'été 2012, l'armée régulière s'en est retirée sans combat et le YPG y assure la sécurité.

Si les kurdes sont hostiles au pouvoir qui les a réprimés pendant des décennies, ils ont essayé aussi d'empêcher les rebelles de pénétrer dans leurs régions pour éviter des représailles des troupes régulières, suscitant des soupçons de collusion avec le régime.

Ainsi, à Ras Al-Aïn, à l'extrémité nord-est du pays, des combats avaient opposé rebelles et kurdes quand des insurgés islamistes avaient voulu s'emparer de la ville.

Mais à Cheikh Maqsoud, où se joue selon les rebelles "la plus grande bataille d'Alep", les hostilités du passé semblent avoir été mis de côté et des kurdes se sont joints aux insurgés pour combattre l'armée.

Grâce à leur aide, "on a coupé la route de l'approvisionnement et des renforts de l'armée vers l'hôpital al-Kindi et la prison centrale" dans le nord d'Alep, affirme Abou Abdallah, qui commande une brigade de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), principale composante de la rébellion. "Maintenant, le régime n'a plus que ses avions pour approvisionner ses troupes".

Depuis l'entrée des rebelles dans le quartier, l'armée pilonne la zone. Samedi, son aviation y a bombardé un secteur (15 morts, dont neuf enfants), s'attirant une riposte des combattants kurdes qui ont attaqué un barrage, tuant cinq soldats.

"Il n'y a aucune différence entre nous", assure Abou Jouan, un combattant du YPG. "Nous combattons ensemble le même ennemi: le régime".

### Suspensions

"C'est une question de conscience, nous combattons l'oppression du régime", renchérit, à ses côtés, un autre kurde.

Toutefois, la méfiance demeure.

A un check-point kurde du YPG sont rassemblés des dizaines d'hommes armés portant l'uniforme de la milice, frappé de l'étoile jaune sur fond rouge. Ils sont disciplinés et organisés en contraste avec les barrages routiers de l'ASL à Alep souvent tenus par quelques jeunes débraillés.

Là, un chef du mouvement explique que la priorité des kurdes est "l'auto-défense": "Nous sommes là pour protéger notre peuple et les habitants de Cheikh Maqsoud où le PYD est implanté depuis des années".

"Il y a des rebelles de l'ASL qui sont respectables et il y en a d'autres qui ne sont là que pour voler. Ils viennent dans les entreprises et pillent les machines", dit-il.

Pour cela, les combattants sont bien répartis à Cheikh Maqsoud: les Arabes surveillent les zones résidentielles et l'YPG la zone industrielle.

L'ASL redoute, quant à elle, que les habitants kurdes fournissent des renseignements sur ses hommes à l'armée.

"Au début, on laissait beaucoup de civils rentrer. Mais on a vu les bombardements redoubler et maintenant nous sommes plus vigilants", explique Abou Abdallah, dans ce secteur devenu quasiment un quartier fantôme.

A la périphérie nord de Cheikh Maqsoud, des files de civils fuient en courant, certains chargeant tapis, matelas et électroménager à bord de pick-up. "On fuit les bombardements", lâche l'un d'eux alors que démarre la camionnette sur laquelle il est juché. ○

# Whatever you think of the Iraq War, for the Kurds it was a liberation

Talk of 'invasion' and 'occupation' ignores the effect on a long-suffering minority

Julie Lenarz

When I walked towards the memorial in Halabja in Iraqi Kurdistan a fortnight ago to attend the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the genocide, I passed by a seemingly endless stream of images. Men. Women. Children. Entire families. All of them victims of Saddam Hussein's crime regime. The walls inside the monument are engraved with their names - a bridge between the past and the present.

On March 16, 1988, life was forever changed beyond recognition for the people of Kurdistan. In the early hours of Friday evening, a strange smell filled the air over Halabja. It resembled the scent of fresh apples. What actually rained down was a toxic cocktail of mustard gas and nerve agents.

The perfect weapon. The invisible death.

Before they knew the truth, birds were falling from the sky and bodies started piling up in the streets. Some died in their sleep. Others suffocated at work. Still others were found sitting up as if only lost in thought. Some just dropped dead.

Others painfully choked on their own vomit or suffered severe burning and blistering. Children sought the shelter of their mothers' arms but there was no escape. Two days of conventional artillery attacks had destroyed all sanctuaries. The thanatophoric gas was everywhere, mercilessly and indiscriminately filling the lungs of the infants, young and old.

5000 Iraqi Kurds died within seconds. Thousands more were disfigured. The overwhelming majority of them were civilians. They had attacked no one. Their only "crime" was to be Kurdish.

Halabja became a ghost town and it was as if the human race had been eradicated.

The attack was part of the wider genocidal Al-Anfal campaign, initiated by the Iraqi Ba'athists, which claimed over 182,000 lives. Out of 4,655 villages roughly 90% were destroyed and between April 1987 and August 1988, 250 towns and villages were exposed to chemical weapons. It was the first time a government used such weapons against its own civilian population.

Saddam Hussein was a modern-day Hitler. When I visited one of his concentration camps, the Red House in



A 1988 photograph shows a Kurdish father holding his baby in Halabja, northeastern Iraq. Both were killed in an Iraqi chemical attack on the city.



Sulaymaniyah, it starkly reminded me of Auschwitz. Women were gang-raped for hours in what the prison guards called "party rooms"; men faced mutilation and death in the most barbaric fashion in the notorious torture chambers; foetuses and babies were burnt in incinerators.

The Kurds have experienced their own Holocaust. The crusade against them was not simply a by-product of the Iraq-Iran war but a deliberate act of genocide – the crime of all crimes – the aim to annihilate an entire people.

25 years later, the people of Kurdistan are struggling with their bloody past. It will always be a scar on the soul of the Kurdish nation and will forever be embedded in their collective identity. But there is reason for hope. Their hearts have not been consumed by darkness. While they are still grieving and hurting, they have little appetite for vengeance. The Kurds have learnt an essential lesson: hatred only leads to more suffering and death.

Such spirit was reflected in the motto of the anniversary celebrations – "From Denial To Recognition. From Destruction

To Construction. From Tears To Hope". Kurdistan is now the most prosperous and democratic part of Iraq. As British-Kurdish Member of Parliament Nadhim Zahawi - a speaker at the genocide conference in Erbil - pointed out, Kurdistan has become one of the safest places for Christians in the Middle East. Business is booming. New houses are being built on every corner. The peace is fragile, life is not perfect, but when you talk to ordinary people you realise just how far the region has come.

Whatever you may think of the controversial war in 2003, for the Kurds it came as liberation rather than an invasion or occupation. The vast majority hold no animosity towards America or Britain. In fact, they are grateful for the roles we played in the removal of Saddam Hussein.

To say that he possessed no WMDs is not a popular thing to say with people still suffering from the consequences of the very same weapons; and the argument, made by some of the opponents of the war, that the Ba'athist regime someone provided stability and contained Iran is perceived as a hideous excuse and apology for genocide and ethnic-cleansing.

Ten years later, the opinion of Iraqis is virtually absent from the debate in the West. If we ever want to gain a balanced and nuanced view of the complexities of the lead-up to the war, it is time to give the victims of Saddam Hussein's reign of terror the attention they deserve.



# Amid Syria's Atrocities, Kurds Scratch Out a Home

By JONATHAN SPYER  
www.theatlantic.com

In northeast Syria, Kurdish militias have carved out a zone of control independent from both the Assad regime and the Syrian rebels. The power on the ground in this area is the Syrian franchise of the PKK guerrilla organization, a militant nationalist Kurdish movement that has been waging war against Turkey since 1984.

The Syrian Kurds are determined to preserve their fragile autonomy, but rebels, backed by the Turkish government, are equally committed to nullifying it.

One of the side effects of the turmoil in the Middle East over the last decade has been the significant improvement in the strategic position of the Kurds. The Kurds were the main losers of the Middle East states system that emerged following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, when the area of Kurdish population was divided up between four new states - Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran.

In recent decades, the survival of brutal, repressive military-nationalist regimes in key Arab states prevented change in the Arab world. Among these states were two of the main sites of Kurdish residence - Iraq and Syria.

In the last ten years, two processes have changed this situation. First, the U.S. destruction of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq enabled the emergence of a quasi-sovereign Kurdish entity in northern Iraq. The Kurdish Regional Government is today the most flourishing and stable part of what was once Saddam's domain.

Secondly, the rebellion that broke out in Syria in March 2011 has led to the contraction of the Bashar Assad regime and its departure from most of Kurdish-majority northeast Syria. The result has been the emergence of a second Kurdish de facto self-governing area.

This new area of Kurdish quasi-independence is a far more fragile construct than the well-established KRG in northern Iraq. It is the subject of the unwelcome attention of both remaining regime forces and elements among the Syrian rebels. Its survival has important implications, both for the Kurds themselves and for the future of Syria

In mid-February, I traveled into the Kurdish controlled part of Syria. I wanted to get a sense of the true relations between this uneasy new enclave, the forces of the rising, mainly Islamist



Syrian Kurdish demonstrators hold flags and portraits of jailed Kurdistan Workers Party leader Abdullah Ocalan during a protest in Derik, Hasakah on November 1, 2012. (Thaier Al-Sudani/Reuters)

rebels and the declining regime.

I entered from the KRG-controlled part of northern Iraq. The KRG is an example of what the Kurds can achieve when they are permitted to develop independently by neighboring political forces. It offers a kind of reminder of what might come into being in northeast Syria, if political and military conditions permit.

Massoud Barazani's Kurdish entity in north Iraq is not without problems, of course. Critics cite widespread nepotism and corruption in governance. But for all that, the KRG is a success story, its capital Erbil a boom town. I had visited once before, in 2010. Since then, the oil companies have begun to arrive, attracted by the combination of relative political stability and large amounts of crude oil under the ground. New hotels are springing up. Well-heeled young people in shiny new cars are everywhere.

All this is only a distant dream for the Kurds of Syria, of course. Even entering the Kurdish controlled part of Syria requires taking account of political complexities. The KRG is ruled by the Kurdish Democratic Party - a conservative, Western-oriented movement with a burgeoning relationship with Turkey.

Kurdish northeast Syria, however, is dominated by the PYD (Democratic Union Party), the Syrian franchise of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party), which has been conducting an insurgency against Turkey since 1984.

Relations between the two movements are complex. They are the two main competitors for the leadership of the Kurds. The PYD is secular, leftist,

and quasi-Marxist. The KDP is conservative, patriarchal, and linked to traditional clan and tribal structures.

The result is that Iraqi Kurdistan maintains an arms-length relationship with the Syrian Kurdish enclave. This extends to the border area, which remains closed to foreign journalists. Prime Minister Barazani has no special desire to take responsibility for what might happen to such travelers inside Syria, which has become notoriously dangerous territory for media professionals over the last year or so.

So to get to northeast Syria from the KRG area required an illegal border crossing. I went in accompanying a squad of fighters of the YPG (Popular Defense Committees), the armed group established by the PYD and other Kurdish parties that maintain security in the Kurdish enclave.

The YPG fighters were a mixed male and female group. They were fit, serious and knew their business, moving efficiently and silently across the territory like trained infantry soldiers.

We crossed the Tigris river, finally reaching a YPG position close to the dawn. I was taken to a tiny village of houses built out of dried mud and logs, called Wadi Souss. The next day, we drove into the town of Derik with three PYD activists heading there. Of the three activists, only two spoke Arabic. The third, a young woman who had good English, knew no Arabic, but she spoke Kurdish, Turkish and English fluently.

This was the first evidence I would find of the very marked presence of PKK activists in Syrian Kurdistan. There would be many other indications in the days that followed. Syrian Kurdistan today is a tightly organized, staunchly defended space. The guiding hand behind this is the PKK.

The PYD likes to say that it has no formal or organizational ties to the PKK, for fairly obvious reasons. The PKK is an organization designated as terrorist by the U.S. and the EU. Also, the PYD officially is in favor of Kurdish self-rule within Syria. Links to a pan-Kurdish group would be likely to raise the suspicions of Arab rebels who are already deeply suspicious of developments in the Kurdish area.

So the PYD's denials of alliance with the PKK are understandable, but not plausible.

After Derik, I took the road westwards. I was heading for Sere Kaniyeh/Ras al Ain, on the edge of ➤

➤ the Kurdish controlled area. This is the point where the ambitions of Kurds and Syrian Arab rebels collide.

Twice, in November and mid-January, fighting has erupted in Sere Kaniyeh between Islamist rebels seeking to take control of the town and YPG militants determined to preserve the Kurdish ascendancy there. The YPG has succeeded, limiting the men of Jabhat al-Nusra and Ghuraba al-Sham to two remaining neighborhoods.

Sere Kaniyeh was like a ghost town on the day we entered. Most of the civilians have left to avoid the fighting. Those that have stayed tend not to leave their homes.

I visited a frontline position of the YPG and spoke to some of the fighters there. One of the organization's best known commanders, Jamshid Osman, spoke to me in a house lit only by white torches, with his fighters around him. "We'll fight anyone who tries to make us slaves," Osman said, maintaining that Turkey was financing the jihadis that came to Sere Kaniyeh.

Turkey, he added, sees two things in northeast Syria: oil and Kurdish freedom. (The area is home to the greater part of Syria's modest oil reserves.) Ankara wants to possess the first, and to destroy the second.

There are still regime roadblocks on the road back from Sere Kaniyeh to

Qamishly. Assad's men control a border crossing into Turkey just outside the city. Though this was my third trip into Syria, I had never seen the regime's men up close before, so going through their positions interested me.

I caught a glimpse of the regime soldiers from the corner of my eye as they wearily and indifferently waved us through. They didn't look much like imperial storm troopers. Actually, they looked like Free Syrian Army men. The same patterned camouflage. The same AK-47s. The same fatigues. The only difference was the livid red regime flag flying above them.

Luckily, after a few days in Syria, I acquire a nondescript, unshaven, slightly threadbare local appearance perfectly suited for the roadblocks of the Syrian Arab Army.

Afterward, I visited the oil town of Rumeilan, a noisy, dusty place surrounded by inactive oil wells close to Derik, near the border with Iraq.

Everywhere there was poverty, memories of oppression, and fierce hope. A farmer in the village of Tel Khanzir recalled his family being registered by the regime as foreigners in 1964 to reduce any claims to autonomy or rights they might make. A student from Damascus University remembered when the PYD offices in Derik were home to Assad's political intelligence branch.

There are concerns among Syrian

Kurds who are not members of the PYD that what is being created in northeast Syria may not be all that different from the Syrian regime. One man I spoke to in Erbil, a leading member of the Azadi party, which is a rival to the PYD, said, "they are worse than the regime. They are suppressing other Kurdish forces."

Another Syrian Kurd, a young woman in Derik, said that the PYD was empowering the wrong people, and that newly empowered, uneducated Kurds from poor backgrounds were using their new positions to abuse Kurds who had a more secure economic status.

The justice of the Kurdish cause does not mean that liberal democracy is about to be born in northeast Syria (any more so than in any other part of this blighted country and region).

But as with northern Iraq, if Syria is to split, the Kurdish part of it stands a fair chance of emerging as the most stable, peaceful part of the country.

The most one can perhaps legitimately hope for is that the PYD ascendancy in northeast Syria will secure a way for Syria's Kurds and the other minorities that live among them to avoid the worst atrocities of the civil war in Syria, for as long as it lasts by securing their area of control, and continuing to deny entrance to regime and rebels alike.



## Kurdish rebel leader urges unarmed withdrawal- paper

ISTANBUL, April 4, 2013 (Reuters) -

**JAILED KURDISH militant leader Abdullah Ocalan called on his fighters to withdraw from Turkey without their weapons under a peace process to end a decades-old insurgency, the Yeni Safak daily reported on Thursday.**

A weapons-free withdrawal by Ocalan's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), as sought by the government, would be a significant step towards ending a conflict which has killed more than 40,000 people

The paper, which is close to the government, said Ocalan gave the message on Wednesday to a delegation from the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) which visited him in his prison on Imrali island, south of Istanbul.

Ocalan's call, which is to be delivered to the PKK leadership in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq, would come despite the party's opposition to the terms of the pullout laid down by Ankara.

"The delegation returned with a call to 'withdraw without arms'. Once the message has been delivered to Qandil the withdrawal process is expected to begin on April 18," Yeni Safak said.

The report could not immediately be confirmed.

The PKK declared a ceasefire with Turkey last month in response to an order from Ocalan after months of talks with Ankara to halt a

conflict that began in 1984.

The group has demanded legal protection to prevent military attacks on its fighters during their planned departure to their northern Iraqi bases, a condition rejected by the government.

Hundreds of PKK militants are estimated to have been killed in clashes with security forces during a previous withdrawal in 1999 after Ocalan's capture and conviction for treason.

Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan has said he guarantees there will be no repeat of such fighting. But he opposes legislation, instead saying the rebels should disarm before heading for Iraq to remove the risk of firefights with Turkish forces.

Yeni Safak said the pullout would begin in Tokat and Tunceli, the areas most distant from the Iraqi border where PKK fighters are located. The withdrawal will be monitored by the Turkish intelligence agency and the Kurdistan regional government, it said.

Erdogan will meet on Thursday evening with the members of a new 63-strong 'wise people commission', made up of academics, journalists and performing artists, established by the government to promote the process nationwide.

A deputy from his ruling AK Party presented on Wednesday a proposal to form a parliamentary commission to assess the peace process.

The PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union, launched its insurgency with the aim of carving out an independent state in mainly Kurdish southeast Turkey, but later moderated its goal to autonomy.

Pro-Kurdish politicians are focused on expanding minority rights and stronger local government for the Kurds, who make up about 20 percent of Turkey's population of 75 million people. ●

# Öcalan appelle les rebelles kurdes à quitter la Turquie

ISTANBUL 4 avril 2013 (Reuters), par Daren Butler

**LE CHEF KURDE emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan a appelé les militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) à quitter la Turquie sans leurs armes dans le cadre du processus de paix avec Ankara, rapporte jeudi le quotidien turc Yeni Safak.**

Ces informations ont toutefois été démenties par la vitrine politique du PKK. Ce retrait sans armes des rebelles du PKK, tel qu'il est voulu par le gouvernement d'Ankara, constituerait une avancée significative dans le règlement d'un conflit qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

Yeni Safak, proche du pouvoir, précise qu'Öcalan a transmis ce message mercredi à une délégation du Parti de la paix et de la démocratie (BDP, pro-kurde) qui lui a rendu visite dans sa prison de l'île d'Imrali, en mer de Marmara.

Ce message doit être remis aux cadres du mouvement séparatiste établis dans les monts Kandil, dans le nord de l'Irak, qui réclament des garanties de sécurité avant de rappeler leurs effectifs en Turquie.

"La délégation est repartie avec un appel 'au retrait sans armes'. Une fois qu'il aura été remis à Kandil, le retrait devrait commencer le 18 avril", écrit l'auteur de l'article, dont les informations n'ont pu être confirmées.

Le BDP, vitrine politique du PKK, a opposé jeudi un démenti aux informations du quotidien Yeni Safak. Selahattin Demirtas, co-dirigeant du BDP qui faisait partie de la délégation reçue mercredi à Imrali, a affirmé qu'Öcalan avait bien préparé une lettre à ce sujet sans toutefois transmettre de message.

"Il nous a dit avoir rédigé une lettre sur ce point qui devrait nous parvenir dans un ou deux jours", a-t-il confié à la chaîne de télévision kurde Nuce TV. "Toutes les précisions, nous a-t-il dit, sont contenues dans cette missive".

On ignore si cette lettre est adressée au PKK ou à d'autres interlocuteurs mais Selahattin Demirtas a indiqué qu'une réponse parviendrait à Imrali d'ici une semaine.

## MESSAGE À SES PARTISANS

Seuls Abdullah Öcalan et une poignée de responsables turcs ont une connaissance directe du processus de réconciliation dont les détails n'ont jusqu'ici filtrés que par le biais de médias proches du gouvernement d'Ankara.

Le PKK a proclamé un cessez-le-feu fin mars à la demande d'Öcalan, qui négociait depuis octobre avec les services de renseignement turcs. Le retrait est donc l'étape suivante, mais le PKK demande au préalable l'assurance écrite que ses hommes pourront quitter la Turquie en toute sécurité.

Plusieurs centaines de combattants séparatistes ont été tués en 1999 alors qu'ils cherchaient à quitter l'est de la Turquie après l'arrestation d'Abdullah Öcalan.



**Militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) à Sulaimaniya, côté irakien à la frontière avec la Turquie. Le chef kurde emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan a appelé les rebelles kurdes à quitter la Turquie sans leurs armes dans le cadre du processus de paix avec Ankara. /Photo prise le 24 mars 2013/REUTERS/Azad LashkariAfficher la photo**

Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, s'est engagé verbalement à ce que pareil épisode ne se reproduise pas, mais s'oppose à toute législation sur ce sujet. Il insiste en revanche pour que les militants du PKK déposent les armes avant de franchir la frontière afin d'éviter tout malentendu.

Le chef du gouvernement devait recevoir dans la soirée les 63 "sages" de la commission mise sur pied pour promouvoir le processus de paix.

Dans un message lu mercredi soir en son nom à ses partisans rassemblés dans le sud-est de la Turquie à l'occasion du 65e anniversaire d'"Apo" (L'Oncle, surnom du chef kurde), ce dernier les a invités à soutenir le processus de réconciliation tout en affirmant qu'il a rempli son rôle.

"J'appelle ici chacun, qu'il soit un homme d'honneur, riche, pauvre, homme ou femme, jeune ou vieux, à respecter et à amplifier ce processus", rapporte l'agence de presse kurde Firat

"J'espère que pas une goutte de sang ne sera versée alors que se met en place ce processus. Chacun doit apporter sa pierre avec amour".

D'après le quotidien Yeni Safak, le retrait du PKK devrait débiter à Tokat et Unceli, les deux secteurs les plus éloignés de la frontière irakienne où sont stationnés des "peshmerga" du PKK. L'opération d'évacuation sera supervisée par les services de renseignement turcs et le gouvernement régional kurde.●

# Turquie : la paix avec le PKK marchandée au Kurdistan

Par Joséphine Dedet

**R**ecip Tayyip Erdogan, le Premier ministre turc, reconnaît qu'il parle avec Abdullah Öcalan, le chef historique du PKK emprisonné depuis 1999. Ce dernier appelle ses combattants à cesser le feu. Espoir de paix ou jeu de dupes ?

Ils envisagent de faire taire les armes après trente ans d'un conflit qui a fait 45 000 morts : 8 000 militaires turcs et, pour l'essentiel, des combattants de la guérilla kurde du PKK. Ils ? Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Premier ministre et leader du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP), d'un côté ; Abdullah Öcalan, 64 ans, alias « Apo », le chef historique du PKK, de l'autre.

L'un rêve de se faire élire président en 2014. L'autre, condamné à la prison à perpétuité, et à l'isolement total dans l'île-prison d'Imrali, en mer de Marmara, depuis 1999, espère se voir sinon libéré un jour, du moins assigné à résidence. Pour parvenir à ces objectifs, l'islamiste relooké et le marxiste-léniniste vieillissant avaient tout intérêt à s'entendre. C'est chose faite. En confirmant, fin 2012, que les services secrets parlementaient avec l'ennemi public numéro un, le « terroriste », le « tueur d'enfants » avec qui il était officiellement exclu de négocier, Erdogan a levé un tabou. En appelant ses guérilleros, le 21 mars, à cesser le feu et à quitter le territoire turc, Öcalan a scellé le principe d'une réconciliation.

Cette évolution a de quoi surprendre. Jusque-là, Erdogan, le « démocrate-musulman », refusait de recevoir les députés du BDP, le parti prokurde, pourtant légalement élus, tandis que des vagues d'arrestations décimaient l'élite kurde. Maires, députés,

intellectuels, journalistes... Ils sont près de 15 000 à avoir été jetés en prison, dans l'intention manifeste de « casser » le dynamisme de cette minorité de 23 millions de personnes qui réclame une autonomie régionale et d'élémentaires droits démocratiques, rejointe en cela par d'autres segments de la société civile, au premier rang desquels les libéraux turcs.

Mais entre-temps, le contexte régional a changé. D'ami intime de Bachar al-Assad, Erdogan s'est mué en virulent détracteur du raïs syrien, s'attirant du même coup la sourde hostilité de Téhéran, allié de Damas. Le PKK bénéficie aujourd'hui d'un soutien logistique du régime Assad et dispose de bases arrières dans le nord du pays, tenu par le Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD, son alter ego syrien). En 2011, la Turquie a soupçonné l'Iran - qui réprime sa propre minorité kurde - d'avoir arrêté puis relâché Murat Karayilan, le numéro deux du PKK, le laissant rejoindre les montagnes de Kandil, dans le nord de l'Irak, à partir desquelles 2 000 combattants kurdes lancent des raids meurtriers en territoire turc.

## Autonome

Déstabilisée par la guerre en Syrie, harcelée sur son territoire et cernée à ses frontières, la Turquie redoute plus que jamais la création d'un État kurde. Déjà, depuis l'invasion américaine de 2003, les Kurdes d'Irak possèdent leur propre gouvernement autonome, de vastes gisements de pétrole et même une université attrayante, à Erbil. Ankara a fini par s'en accommoder pour se livrer à un business effréné, mais n'a pas la moindre intention de laisser ce modèle s'étendre et menacer son intégrité territoriale. Il était donc urgent de calmer le jeu, à l'intérieur.



Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. © AFP

Loin de ces considérations géostratégiques, la tactique politicienne entre elle aussi en ligne de compte. Erdogan a besoin de l'appui des 36 députés du BDP pour faire adopter une nouvelle Constitution instaurant un régime présidentiel taillé à sa mesure. Öcalan, après avoir reçu quelques visites (son frère, ses avocats, des élus du BDP) et un poste de télévision, espère voir s'améliorer son ordinaire.

” L'islamiste relooké et le marxiste-léniniste vieillissant avaient tout intérêt à s'entendre.

Avec son idéologie marxiste-léniniste dépassée, son culte du chef anachronique et ses combattants épuisés par des années de lutte stérile, le PKK a tout intérêt à se renouveler pour être en phase avec les aspirations pacifiques des Kurdes : reconnaissance de leur identité, accès à l'éducation dans leur langue maternelle, octroi d'un certain degré d'autonomie. Le Premier ministre est-il prêt à leur accorder tout cela ? Le peut-il, face à une armée et à des milieux kémalistes pour qui le caractère unitaire et centralisateur de l'État est un dogme ?

« Ce marchandage risque de

tourner au marché de dupes. Erdogan va diriger le pays de manière de plus en plus autocratique, et Öcalan aura vendu à la fois les Kurdes et les démocrates turcs », estime le politologue Erol Özkoray. Déjà, plusieurs commandants du PKK, s'ils obtempèrent aux ordres d'Apo, demandent des garanties du gouvernement et du Parlement avant de désarmer leurs hommes. Ce vieux conflit est en effet jalonné de cessez-le-feu rompus et de tentatives de dialogue avortées. Lancées par l'AKP en 2009 et en 2010, les deux dernières n'avaient d'ailleurs abouti qu'à la recrudescence de la guérilla : 700 morts entre mai 2011 et septembre 2012.

## Nuisance

Autre écueil redoutable pour la paix, la capacité de nuisance des extrémistes des deux camps (ultranationalistes turcs, jusqu'au-boutistes kurdes), qui ne reculent devant aucune provocation. Si les auteurs de l'assassinat à Paris, en janvier, de trois militantes kurdes, dont deux étaient appelées à jouer un rôle clé dans le processus de réconciliation, n'ont toujours pas été identifiés, leur mobile ne fait aucun doute : saborder la paix.

Comment s'assurer que le processus entamé aujourd'hui sera durable ? Les conditions dans lesquelles s'opérera le retrait des combattants du PKK du territoire turc (calendrier, garanties de sécurité, etc.) donneront une première indication. À moyen terme, l'orientation du régime sera déterminante : Erdogan s'engagera-t-il enfin sur la voie des réformes démocratiques ? Ou profitera-t-il de cette trêve pour en engranger le bénéfice politique et accroître son emprise sur les rouages du pouvoir ? À moins qu'Abdullah Gül, jusqu'ici son fidèle bras droit, déjoue ses plans en s'accrochant à son fauteuil de président. ○

# Government selects prominent figures for 'wise people' list to help on peace process

ANKARA

**Journalists dominated a government list of 'wise people' who will meet with PM Erdoğan to discuss the further efforts to solve the Kurdish issue**

Artists, a musician, a large group of journalists, academics, intellectuals and representatives from non-governmental organizations, were included on a long-awaited list of "wise people," a government initiative that will take an active role in the country's recent efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue.

The 63 prominent names on the list were carefully picked by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç said after a press meeting today.

The seven groups of wise people, each of which will represent one of the seven geographical regions in Turkey, are set to meet with Erdoğan in Istanbul on April 4.

Several Turkish celebrities, including actors Kadir İnanır, Lale Mansur, Yılmaz Erdoğan, Hülya Koçyiğit and musician Orhan Gencebay, were named in a government list published on daily Hürriyet's website.

Turkish Union of Chambers and Commodities Exchanges (TOBB) Chairman Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu, Doğan TV Holding Chairwoman Arzuhan Doğan Yalçındağ and prominent academic Murat



ORHAN  
GENCEBAY



ARZUHAN  
DOĞAN YALÇINDAĞ



HÜLYA  
KOÇYIĞIT



LALE  
MANSUR



MURAT  
BELGE



KADIR  
İNANIR

Belge are some of the other figures on the list.

Each group has a president, a vice president and a secretary and consists of nine

people. Meeting with opinion leaders; holding symposiums, panels and conferences; making one-on-one contacts; and getting in touch with local, national and international media are among the things the commission members are expected to do, according to Erdoğan.

## Hardships

Professor Doğu Ergil, a member of the Central Anatolia group, raised questions about the method in a phone interview with the Hürriyet Daily News. "It will not be easy to say that people who were presented as traitors until today are also the people of this country," he said.

Abdurahman Dilipak, a columnist at Yeni Akit, said the group's target was mediation. "Hopefully we will contribute to peace," he said. Muhsin Kızılkaya, a Kurdish-origin writer in the Mediterranean group believes in the benefits of the initiative. "This is a very good combination as it considers all levels of society," he told the Daily News. Singer-songwriter Gencebay, part of the Black Sea group, said he would do all he could with a positive look. "Of course I said yes when I was invited, because I love my country. I believe that I am a good patriot," he said.

Two declared figures have announced that they will not take part in today's meeting. Vedat Ahsen Coşar, the head of Turkey's Bar Association (TBB), said he had not accepted the offer. State-run Anatolia news agency quoted sources as saying later in the day that Yeni Akit columnist Hasan Karakaya would replace Coşar.

The Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions (DİSK) Deputy Chairman Ali Rıza Osmanoğlu said the umbrella organization's president, Erol Ekici, had resigned from his seat. "As we do not know about the authority and responsibilities of the group, we will not attend this meeting," he said.

DİSK is at odds with the government as some of its members were detained in operations on the Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP/C), the outlawed organization.

Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) deputy leader Haluk Koç mocked the group, saying it would act like companies or agencies that were running the government's electoral campaigns. "The group looks like a cadre of public servants, to act like a bridge to carry the prime minister's views to the public," he said.

CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has appointed Akif Hamzaçebi, the party's deputy parliamentary group chair, to refocus attention on the party's previous suggestions on the Kurdish issue, ➡

## Heads of wise people groups

The head of the Mediterranean Region Committee, M. Rifat Hisarcıklıoğlu is the President of The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), which is the largest non-profit business organization in Turkey, covering 365 Chambers and Commodity Exchanges.

The head of the Eastern Anatolia Region Committee, Can Paker, is the chairman of the board of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV). Until last year he was also the chairman of the board of the Open Society Institute's Istanbul branch from 2002.

The head of the Aegean Region Committee, Tarhan Erdem, is a columnist for daily Radikal and founded the KONDA Research and Consultancy organization in 1987. Erdem was a Member of Parliament for the Republican People's Party (CHP) in 1977.

The head of the Southeastern Anatolia Region Committee, Yılmaz Ensaroğlu, is currently working as the Director of Law and Human Rights Department of SETA (Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research).

The head of the Central Anatolia Region Committee, Ahmet Taşgetiren, is a columnist for daily Bugün and an author. He also has several programs on radios and TV channels.

The head of the Marmara Region Committee, Deniz Ülke Anboğan, is a member of the Board of Trustees at Istanbul Bilgi University and is currently continuing her academic works in the fields of international relations and political science. She is also a columnist for the daily Akşam.

The head of the Black Sea Region Committee, Prof. Dr. Yusuf Sevki Hakyemez, is the Deputy Rector of the Black Sea Technical University, and a professor of public law.

» sources said. Speaking during his party's central executive board meeting in Ankara, Kılıçdaroğlu called for several issues, including a proposal to lower the election threshold and demine areas in the southeast, to be brought to Parliament, they also said.

Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) co-chair Gültan Kışanak also criticized the formation of the list, saying that it did not have a sufficient number of females, aca-

demics and people who could help the Kurdish people express themselves directly.

Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) deputy parliamentary group chair Oktay Vural likened the group to the body that was formed by the Armistice of Mudros after World War I, which aimed at preventing an Anatolian uprising against the invaders.

Meanwhile, many prominent figures,

mainly journalists, have been subject to "wise people" jokes, with fake calls from government officials inviting them to join the group. As the announcement came only two days after April Fools' Day, the joke was widespread, especially among those in the capital city of Ankara. Nevertheless, journalists still make up a sizable portion of the actual list.

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The New York Times April 5, 2013

# The Curse of Ataturk



*A Turkish flag with the portrait of Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, floats above thousands of people celebrating Republic Day in Ankara on Oct. 29, 2012. Adem Altan/Agence France-Presse*

By ANDREW FINKEL

**I**STANBUL — "How happy is the one who says 'I am a Turk,'" said Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, speaking in an emotional finale of a speech in 1933 — a time when Turkey was still trying to forge a national identity out of the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. The notion seemed simple enough: If you think you're Turkish, then you are.

Of course, it's not that straightforward. On the one hand, Article 66 of the 1982 Constitution defines a Turk as someone who feels the bonds and benefits of citizenship rather than in terms of ethnicity or race. On the other hand, Article 3 states that Turkish is the country's sole official language, and Article 24 makes religious education compulsory. Throughout the document, as well as in political discourse and popular parlance, the notion of "Turkishness" is both ill-defined and staunchly defended.

This is a problem especially because the 1982 Constitution, written while Turkey was under martial law, is infamously a charter for authoritarianism: It is designed to defend the ideological core of the state, not individual rights.

Turkish officialdom has found it almost

impossible to accept that non-Muslims like Armenians and Jews could be loyal to the state. But with non-Muslims accounting for just 0.5 percent Turkey's population, discrimination against them has been, in effect, a minor issue. The real problem is the Kurds. They are Muslim, yes, but many insist on an identity of their own, and there are too many of them — 18 percent of the population, according to one estimate — to ignore.

During the last election the government pledged to change this, and it is now hammering out a new Constitution. The stakes are high: This is happening as Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan tries to end a long campaign by Kurdish nationalists, sometimes peaceful and sometimes not, calling for a devolution of power and the right to think of themselves not as Turks but as Kurds.

The Kurds, reasonably, are asking that the expression of their cultural difference no longer be interpreted as an attack on the integrity of the state. So the Constitution's protections for "Turkishness" have to go.

But this push leaves many who are happy to call themselves Turks otherwise miserable. Some 300 prominent intellectuals have signed a declaration protesting any attempt to expunge reference to the

republic's Turkish character. They claim the deletion would threaten the nation-state founded by Ataturk, "which represents the uninterrupted sovereignty of the Turkish nation in Anatolia beginning with the Seljuks and continuing under the Ottomans." This is an old guard defending an outdated national myth, but they represent a powerful force — some journalists have likened them to the 300 Spartans holding out at Thermopylae.

Even pro-government columnists who support revisions to the Constitution are complaining about an ambient "allergy to Turkishness." If we can "make reference to Kurdish intellectuals, Kurdish people and Kurdish issue, why should we avoid using the notion of Turk?" This makes logical sense, but a more sympathetic and perhaps more historically minded view is that Kurdish nationalism, its excesses included, was a response to Turkish nationalism.

Ataturk, in short, did too good a job of unifying his young republic around the idea of Turkishness. The country today needs another rallying cry.

President Abdullah Gul recently suggested a sensible approach. Although he sits in an office whose symbol is an emblem with 16 stars, each representing one historic Turkish kingdom — arguably an expression of Turkishness that teeters on the hubristic — he said that it wasn't the business of a constitution to define the identity of its citizens.

The Ottoman Empire may have been a Turkish state, he said, "but that didn't mean every single one of its citizens was a Turk." Taking pride in your country is a good thing, but it is something you do out of choice.

Andrew Finkel has been a foreign correspondent in Istanbul for over 20 years, as well as a columnist for Turkish-language newspapers. He is the author of the book "Turkey: What Everyone Needs to Know."

# Turkey Seeks Ottoman Sphere Of Influence

By: Kadri Gursel for Al-Monitor

Looking from the outside, one could get the impression that Turkey was running amok in the Middle East in the second half of 2011. During that period, there were few countries or actors Ankara did not confront, even threaten.

There were even occasions when Turkey's foreign policy leaders had separately, but on the same day, defied Israel and Iran, two nations hostile to each other.

On the morning of Sept. 2, a day after the UN panel report on the flotilla affair was leaked to The New York Times with a pro-Israel slant, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu announced a five-item sanctions list that quickly put relations with Israel on a "cold war" footing: Diplomatic relations would be lowered to the minimum level, and all military agreements would be suspended; Turkey would take all measures necessary to ensure safety of navigation in the eastern Mediterranean; Turkey would not recognize Israel's blockade of Gaza; All support will be given to flotilla victims to claim their rights.

In the later hours of the same day, in contrast to the agitated and stiff Davutoglu statement, the Turkish foreign ministry in a written response to a question announced that Turkey had agreed to deployment on its territory of the radar elements of a NATO ballistic missile-defense system.

This step, which posed a strategic challenge to Iran, also meant the collapse of the "zero problems" policy Turkey had applied in relation to that country.

Also that September, Turkey blew up all bridges to the Baath regime in Syria, and initiated action to bring down that regime and have it replaced by a regime of Muslim Brothers considered friendlier to Turkey.

In the same month, Ankara threatened the Greek Cypriot government, recognized by the entire world as the Republic of Cyprus, with sending Turkish gunboats and frigates because of the hydrocarbon exploration that Greeks were carrying out on the island's continental shelf.

The summer and fall of 2011 was also the period when the Ankara government stepped up its war against the Kurdish movement on all fronts. Hundreds of Kurdish activists were detained, PKK leader Ocalan was placed in isolation at his prison and military operations against the PKK were escalated.

September 2011 went on record as an inte-



*[Turkey's prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, arrives for a news conference flanked by Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu (L) and other officials before his flight to Denmark for an official visit, at Esenboga Airport in Ankara, March 19, 2013. (photo by REUTERS/Umit Bektas )]*

resting period when Turkey engaged in altercations with all actors except the Arab Spring countries of Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, where Sunni Islamists had gained much power, and the Sunni monarchies.

Until a few weeks ago, Turkey was a country at variance with nearly all powers and actors in the region except Sunni and Sunni Islamist ones. That the vast majority of Turkey's Kurds were Sunnis didn't count as an exception because Ankara's main foe, the mainstream PKK, was pro-secular.

Turkey, a NATO member and candidate for EU membership, pursued Islamist, pro-Sunni and even Neo-Ottoman policies and, as a consequence, established itself firmly on the Sunni side of the Shiite-Sunni fault line that divides the Middle East.

This trend of shaping new fronts is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. On the contrary, the ruling AKP rule is structuring Turkey as a Sunni power that would spearhead the birth of a new order in the region.

This Ottoman Middle East policy preferred by the AKP is the bitter truth that boils the blood of those who want to see Turkey solving its internal problems with a pluralist democracy compatible with EU perspectives, and thus becoming a modern and normal country that will be an example to the region.

There are two variables that will make Turkey even more powerful: relations with Israel and the Kurds.

Two major developments on these two issues occurred on two successive days in sharp contrast to the events of September

2011. In his historic message read out to hundreds of thousands of people filling the square in Turkey's largest Kurdish province, Diyarbakir, to observe Nowruz celebrations, Abdullah Ocalan confirmed his commitment to the peace process and said armed elements of the PKK would have to leave Turkey. The next day, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu called his Turkish counterpart, Prime Minister Erdogan, on the phone and apologized to the Turkish people for the deaths he said were caused by Israel's operational mistakes in the flotilla affair. He also said Israel has agreed to pay compensation to the relatives of the victims, and Erdogan accepted the apology.

One should not look at Turkey's moves to normalize relations with the Kurds and Israel and think that Ankara has made a major shift in its Middle East policy. These are actually moves that would reinforce the basic threads of Turkey's current Middle East policy.

Let's start with Turkey's reconciliation with its own Kurds. No doubt this development runs contrary to the interests of the Tehran-Baghdad-Damascus axis.

Any robust steps Turkey would take toward a lasting peace and solution with its own Kurds would mean that Syrian Kurds will move closer to Turkey, and therefore to the Syrian opposition. Anyhow, we have been observing developments along this line for the past few months.

Second, and more importantly, Turkey's ties with Iraqi Kurdistan would become deeper, and economic integration between the two would gain momentum. The option for the Kurdistan Regional Government to market its oil and natural gas via Turkey, independent of Baghdad, would be even more feasible. This, in turn, would do nothing if not strengthen the dynamics that would divide Iraq.

In sum, peace with the PKK goes beyond denying the Shiite axis an important card it could use against Turkey.

As to Israel's apology: Nobody should expect Turkey-Israel relations to return to the pre-2009 Davos affair days. An important feature of the new dominant neo-Islamist political culture in Turkey is to oppose Israel. This will not change.

Yes, Israel is a pragmatic country; yes, Israel is known for being without ego, but in its public opinion, an "Erdogan-Davutoglu hatred" has taken root analogous to their disappointment with the Erdogan-Davutoglu team. The psychology of mutual hostility and lack of confidence between the two countries will continue for a long time, no matter what is done.

To expect Turkey to resume its trusted mediator role between Israel and the Arabs would be excessively optimistic.

Israel under Netanyahu continues

with actions against Palestinians that will infuriate the Erdogan-Davutoglu duo.

A possible outcome of the process that began with the apology may be in the energy field. Turkey is the natural bridge to move the natural gas to be produced from Tamar and Leviathan fields. But for this you would need predictable, assured and stable relations, which won't be easy to achieve under current leadership.

Turkish and Israel intelligence services can cooperate on Syria but this will never become an open cooperation. Turkey has a strategic interest in keeping Israel from interfering in Syria.

Normalization of ties with the Kurds and Israel have empowered Turkey in its implementation of an Ottoman sphere of influence and enabled it to defy the Shiite axis. ■

Kadri Gürsel is a contributing writer for *Al-Monitor's Turkey Pulse* and has written a column for the Turkish daily *Milliyet* since 2007. He focuses primarily on Turkish foreign policy, international affairs and Turkey's Kurdish question, as well as Turkey's evolving political Islam.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL APRIL 5, 2013

# Turkish Minister Makes Economic Case for Peace With Kurds

By JOE PARKINSON

ISTANBUL—Turkey's finance minister on Friday made the economic case for a rapprochement with Turkey's Kurdish minority, saying it could free up billions in military spending and spur tax cuts for all Turks.

Speaking with *The Wall Street Journal* in an interview conducted on social-networking site Twitter, Mehmet Simsek said that ending the three-decade conflict with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, would dramatically improve economic efficiency by closing loopholes in Turkey's informal economy. It would also enrich Turkey's middle classes, many of whom remain deeply skeptical about the monthslong peace process.

"Successful reconciliation means allocating \$300 billion spent on fighting terrorism to education, infrastructure, R&D," the minister tweeted in response to questions from *Journal* reporters, referring to one estimate of the total cost of the conflict to the economy. He said in a tweet that the reconciliation process would help efforts to fight money laundering and the shadow economy and may result in lower taxes.

Analysts said that the discussion of possible tax cuts signaled how Ankara was shifting its messaging on the dividends of peace to show wealthier Turkish voters they would also benefit significantly.

"This is the first time we get to hear about a reassessment of direct taxes. If there is a move to cut income taxes it would be a measure that would cater to the Turks," said Sinan Ulgen, a former Turkish diplomat now at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"So far the government has been very hesitant in explaining what the economic



Finance Minister Mehmet Simsek being interviewed on Twitter at *The Wall Street Journal* bureau in Istanbul

impact of this settlement plan should be, but now they're talking in more specific terms what that peace dividend would be and how that would improve economic conditions of Turks and Turkish businesses in particular," he said.

Since the peace negotiations began at the turn of the year, Turkey has hoped a peace deal would alter the power dynamics in a region of the world being reshaped by uprisings and a reduced U.S. military presence, and further Ankara's aspiration to be a model for nascent Muslim democracies emerging from the Arab Spring.

But the comments come as the jubilant mood which met Kurdish militants' February call to lay down arms has in recent weeks been replaced by a more complex reality: an uncertainty over which party should take the next step in the peace process, and what that step should be.

The leadership of the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party has demanded that Turkey's parliament pass laws to ensure the safety of their fighters during withdrawal, and to avoid the recurrence of the bloodbath in 1999, when Turkish sol-

diers attacked PKK fighters as they emerged from hide-outs in Turkey to cross the Iraqi border after the capture of militant leader Abdullah Ocalan. Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has thus far been reluctant to involve parliament in the process.

The finance minister, a former top banker at Merrill Lynch who returned to Turkey as a treasury minister in 2007, was born in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast and is well placed to understand how economic malaise has hampered the Kurdish regions over three decades of conflict and how economic potential could be unlocked by a settlement.

A 2009 per capita income survey estimated that annual income in the southeast is below \$1,500—less than one-fifth of the \$8,200 national figure. In the broader southeast, half the population live in poverty and 15% to 20% are unemployed, according to a report by the International Crisis Group. Young men are forced to go to western Turkey for seasonal jobs four to five months at a time, and Diyarbakir, the biggest city in the southeast, relies heavily on their remittances.

Businesses in the southeast—conscious of how a deal could offer a windfall in investment—have strongly backed the peace talks, but many Turkish businesses across other parts of the country have been more circumspect, after a series of previous bids have collapsed and sparked further violence.

Beyond the potential financial benefits of peace, Mr. Simsek stressed that Turkey's economy in recent months has started to pick up steam after a sharp slowdown in growth in 2012 following two years of expansion which rivaled China. Turkey can expect a fourfold increase in privatization revenue 22 billion liras (\$12.2 billion) this year after the payments for projects long slated for sale finally reach the exchequer, he said.



# Iraqi Panel Promotes 'Biden Plan' For Federal Iraq

By: Mushreq Abbas for Al-Monitor Iraq

An Iraqi parliamentary committee, in a recent visit to Washington, has reiterated its demands to divide Iraq into three regions in a bid to solve the current problems plaguing the country. These demands have been made several times in the past, and they consist of creating three major regions that enjoy demographic and political unity — Shiite in the south, Sunni in the west and center, and Kurdish in the north.

In both popular and media memory, this idea has been associated with the name of US Vice President Joe Biden, as he was the one to suggest it when he was a senator in 2007. At the time, the idea was opposed by the Baker-Hamilton Commission, which was set up by former US President George W. Bush to study the situation in Iraq after the outbreak of civil war in 2006.

This association, however, seems largely misleading, and it has been used to either defend the idea by giving it objective and international dimensions, or to demonize it by saying that the goal of the US war on Iraq in 2003 was to divide the country, in the framework of an ongoing conspiracy theory.

The idea of regions was raised in different ways prior to the US occupation of Iraq. It was adopted by the Kurds decades ago, and translated into the autonomy project of the Kurdish areas, which was announced by the authorities in the mid-1970s. The idea was then put on the agenda of the Salahuddin Conference for the Iraqi opposition forces in 1992, and then discussed in the conference of the same forces in London in 2002.

After 2003, the issue of regions was raised in a clearer way. In exchange for making the Iraqi Kurdistan region a reality, prominent Shiite forces headed by the Supreme Islamic Council openly adopted the Shiite regional project under the name of "the region of the center and the south." In contrast, the Sunni regional project was explicitly raised for the first time by former governor of Anbar Faisal al-Qaoud in 2003. He gave his life defending this idea.

Meanwhile, discussions about the project were ongoing in Iraq before Biden reintroduced it in 2007, and they did not stop afterward. But there have been changes in the views of these communities over the past 10 years. Shiites found it absurd to cling to this project at a time during which they fully controlled the central government. Thus, supporters of the Shiite region challenged this project and defended the idea of a strong central state. Meanwhile, Sunnis who had attacked the project gradually adopted and defended it. For their part, Kurds continued to cling to it and deem it the solution for Iraq and a safeguard against the emergence of an authoritarian central authority.



US Vice President Joe Biden talks with soldiers at Camp Victory on the outskirts of Baghdad, July 4, 2009. (photo by REUTERS/Khalid Mohammed)

Apart from the historical basis of forming federal regions in Iraq, the visit made by the Iraqi parliamentary delegation to the US was an occasion to relaunch the project as a solution to the political crisis plaguing Iraq. Head of the parliamentary legal committee, Khalid Shwani, confirmed in a statement that "a delegation of the committee met during its visit to the US at the State Department with the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs and the people in charge of the Iraq dossier at the ministry in order to discuss views on the future of relations between the two countries within the framework of the strategic agreement, as well as the political crisis in the country."

Shwani pointed out that "the committee believes that the establishment of three federations in Iraq will be a guarantee for the construction of a unified federal state as per the project of US Vice President Joe Biden."

"The delegation of the committee and US officials emphasized the need to address the problems in accordance with the constitution in order to ensure the participation of all in the decision-making process and complete the building of the federal state institution," he added.

Remarkably, the statement also attempted to link the project to establish three regions to Biden, and ignored all the aforementioned history. Yet, that is not the core issue, which is that solutions are totally absent in Iraq, except for a federal system based on national and sectarian factors.

The assumption that the three federations will succeed in resolving the Iraqi crisis seems to be a prejudice. These are the same assumptions that have confounded the situation in Iraq since 2003, and prevented a stable identity of the state from being established.

Assuming that sectarian or national homogeneity in each region could dissolve the regional, tribal, political and economic conflicts that are expected to erupt between and within the cities seems to be general and uncertain, just as

Sunni and Shiite overlapping — in the cities of Basra in the far south, Mosul in the far north and the cities of Diyala, Salahuddin, Babil, Wasit and Karbala — is also uncertain.

In addition, easing the political struggle over power in Baghdad through [the establishment of] regions will not prevent other kinds of conflict over the borders of these regions from erupting, particularly with the significant border conflict between Iraqi cities, not to mention the problems concerning the distribution and management of wealth.

With all this, the essence of the federal concept is still a significant point of contention in Iraq, where those opposing it believe that the Kurdistan region of Iraq's complex and specific situation does not realistically represent a federation and is closer to a confederation.

All these assumptions lead to an objective question: Have the Iraqis exhausted all alternative solutions, most notably the implementation of a real decentralized system that gives a specific status to the Kurdistan region and broad powers to the other administrative units (the provinces)?

Of course, the answer is, "No." The law, which clarifies the relationship between the central government in Baghdad and provincial authorities, was not serious in guaranteeing a decentralized system, and did not give the provinces the powers that they are entitled to have. Yet, it has contributed to consolidating the central authority's powers, and allowed the political, security and economic turmoil in Iraq today to be produced.

The key to Iraq lies in turning the provinces into administrative units with wide powers that may be similar to the federal powers, in the fields of internal security, investment, construction, services, education, religious and sectarian specificity in exchange for annulling many central service ministries and bureaucratic systems inherited from the former socialist regime.

Empowering the provinces cannot take place without a fair distribution of wealth, ensuring that foreign policy, the military and national security are in the hands of the central authority, and passing a series of laws, most notably the establishment of the Federation Council, as provided in the Iraqi constitution. This Council would be parallel to the Iraqi Parliament and control the ties between the provinces, the regions and authority in Baghdad.

Iraq did not go through a phase of a decentralized system to prescribe its failure and move toward its partition into three regions. Security failures, economic regression and the spread of corruption probably reside in not taking openly, legally and clearly the option of a decentralized state, and the non-emergence of political parties and leaders who seek to be strongly committed to a comprehensive centralized system. ■

Mushreq Abbas is a contributing writer for Al-Monitor's Iraq Pulse. An author and journalist who has worked in the media for 15 years, he holds a degree in political science from Baghdad University.

# Syria oil industry buckling under rebel gains

Associated Press

**B**EIRUT — Syria's vital oil industry is breaking down as rebels capture many of the country's oil fields, with wells aflame and looters scooping up crude, depriving the government of much needed cash and fuel for its war machine against the uprising.

Exports have ground practically to a standstill, and the regime of President Bashar Assad has been forced to import refined fuel supplies to keep up with demand amid shortages and rising prices. In a sign of the increasing desperation, the oil minister met last week with Chinese and Russian officials to discuss exploring for gas and oil in the Mediterranean off Syria's coast.

Before the uprising against Assad's regime began in early 2011, the oil sector was a pillar of Syria's economy, with the country producing about 380,000 barrels a day and exports — mostly to Europe — bringing in more than \$3 billion in 2010. Oil revenues provided around a quarter of the funds for the government budget.

But production now is likely about half that, estimates Syrian economist Samir Seifan, given the rebels' gains. The government has not released recent production figures.

Since late 2012, rebels have been seizing fields in the eastern province of Deir el-Zour, one of two main centers of oil production. Most recently, they captured the Jbeysa oil field, one of the country's largest, after three days of fighting in February.

At the same time, overburdened government troops have had to withdraw from parts of the other main oil center — the northeastern Kurdish-majority region of Hassakeh, where they have handed control of the oil fields to the pro-government militia of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party, or PYD. Production from some of those fields still goes to the Syrian government, but the fields are more vulnerable to theft and smuggling.

Syrian activists, including Rami Abdul-Rahman who heads the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, say it is not clear how much of the fields are controlled by the rebels. Still activists and state media state say most of Syria's fields are no longer under direct government control. In November, rebels made one of the biggest gains when they briefly captured the large al-Omar field in Deir el-Zour only to lose it to government troops days later. They still control many other fields, the Observatory says.

So far, the rebels have largely been unable to benefit from the oil fields, particularly since the country's two refineries in the central city of Homs and the coastal city of Baniyas are in the hands of Assad's troops. Regime warplanes' control of the air makes it difficult for rebels to exploit the fields, as do the divisions among rival rebel factions.

"A number of challenges exist. In view of their lack of cohesion, the various strands of the armed opposition are unlikely to be able to mobilize in a unitary fashion to produce and export," said Anthony Skinner, Middle East-North Africa chief at the British risk analysis firm Maplecroft.

"Rebels also clearly lack the engineers and qualified workers to ensure uninterrupted production from the oil fields," Skinner added. "Even if they were to do so, the regime would seek to bomb identifiable vehicle tankers to prevent the armed

opposition from earning revenue to buy heavy weaponry."

But looting is rife. A Syrian activist in the province of Hassakeh said some people in the area are using primitive ways to refine oil. Thieves put crude into tankers, then set fires around it until the fuel begins to turn to vapor that passes through a metal hose. The hose is cooled with water to condense the vapor, and gasoline, kerosene or diesel is produced, said the activist, who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of government reprisals.

"It is a very dangerous process that has injured many people," he said.

An amateur video posted online showed crowds of people at a field in Deir el-Zour gathered at a pool of crude, filling buckets or pumping it into tanker trucks to take to makeshift refineries. The video appeared genuine and corresponded to other AP reporting on the events depicted.

On Sunday, the state news agency accused rebels of setting fire to three oil wells in Deir el-Zour. It said the fire caused a daily loss of 4,670 barrels of oil and 52 cubic meters of natural gas. It accused "terrorists," the government's term for rebels, of setting the fires after fighting among themselves about how to divide the oil. Oil Minister Suleiman Abbas told the government Al-Thawra daily that an estimated 750,000 barrels of oil have been lost from fires and other damage.

The loss of oil revenues has been a further blow to government coffers, depriving it of a major source of hard currency at a time when it is straining at the cost of the war. Syria's currency, the lira, has plummeted more than 80 percent in comparison to the dollar.

The U.S. and European Union banned Syrian oil exports in 2011, depriving Syria of its main European customers. Since then, exports have come practically to a halt as the falling production is put to domestic needs. Attacks on oil pipelines and infrastructure have been causing shortages for Syrians throughout the uprising. People wait for hours in lines to fill their vehicles' gas tanks, and hours of electricity cuts every day are more common because it is more difficult to supply power stations with fuel.

A cooking gas canister that went for around \$5 before the crisis started now sells five times that price, while the price of a liter of gasoline (around a quarter of a gallon) has double to the equivalent of \$2.

"Since the early months of the revolution oil pipelines came under attack in a strike against the regime's economic power," said Abdul-Rahman of the Observatory. "Such attacks harmed the regime financially as well as the Syrian economy and citizens in general."

Last week, the oil minister, Abbas, broached with the ambassadors of China and Russia the possibility of exploring for oil and gas off Syria's Mediterranean coast, the state news agency SANA reported. Israel is already developing recent discoveries of massive offshore deposits, with gas set to begin flowing in the coming days, and Lebanon has also spoken of trying to develop offshore fields.

Russia and China are Assad's strongest international backers and have used their veto power at the U.N. Security Council to prevent the international community from imposing international sanctions against Syria.

But Seifan, the Syrian economist, said it's unlikely international companies, even Russian and Chinese ones, will want to commit huge investments to any exploration now "because they don't know what the fate of the regime will be after few months."

"Businesswise there isn't a company that is willing to invest in Syria these days," said Seifan, who currently lives in Iraq. ○

## Question kurde, question constitutionnelle... rude semaine en perspective pour le parlement en Turquie.



PAR JEAN MARCOU

Finale-**F**inalement, le parlement va être saisi dès cette semaine du «processus de paix», lancé récemment pour essayer de résoudre la question kurde, en Turquie. Le 8 avril, le vice-premier ministre, Beşir Atalay, exposera devant l'assemblée cette initiative qui vise à mettre un terme à 30 ans de conflit larvé dans le sud-est du pays. Les quatre partis représentés au sein de la Grande Assemblée Nationale pourront ensuite s'exprimer, et seront peut-être conviés à élire une commission parlementaire destinée à surveiller et à évaluer le processus en cours.

La semaine dernière, alors qu'il rejetait encore l'hypothèse d'une saisine du parlement, le gouvernement avait pourtant constitué dans la précipitation un comité de 63 sages. Réunie le 4 avril par le premier ministre en personne, cette entité composée de représentants variés de la société civile (journalistes comme Etyen Mahçupyan ; artistes comme Orhan Gencebay (l'acteur et joueur de Sas des films turcs des années 1970) ; rude semaine universitaires comme Murat Belge ou Beril Dedeoğlu ; entrepreneurs comme Arzuhan Doğan Yalçındağ...) avait été présentée comme un rouage essentiel à la conduite du règlement de la question kurde. Elle semble néanmoins n'avoir pas totalement convaincu, au moment même où le problème du retrait des combattants du PKK hors du territoire turc, qui est la première étape annoncée, était sur la sellette, et où deux députés du BDP, après avoir rencontré une nouvelle fois Abdullah Öcalan sur l'île d'İmralı, convoiaient de nouveau une lettre au commandement militaire du PKK, dans les montagnes de Qandil.

En réalité, en annonçant à plusieurs reprises, depuis une dizaine de jours, que les combattants du PKK devraient sortir désarmés de Turquie, le premier ministre a provoqué l'inquiétude de la partie kurde qui s'est mise à réclamer un renforcement corrélatif des garanties. L'implication du parlement dans le processus devrait donc permettre de faire droit à cette demande. Elle mettra aussi au pied du mur les deux principaux partis d'opposition (CHP et MHP). En effet, ces derniers ont jusqu'à présent marqué leur désaccord, voire leur hostilité au «processus de paix». Toutefois, si le rejet des nationalistes du MHP semble sans appel, l'attitude des kémalistes du CHP pourrait en revanche évoluer. Car ce parti est divisé. Sa branche modérée incite les kémalistes à entrer dans la commission parlementaire de surveillance et d'évaluation qui pourrait être mise en place, tandis que ses tendances nationalistes, qui restent influentes, s'y opposent fermement. Mais pour qu'une évolution se produise chez les kémalistes, il faudra probable-



ment que Recep Tayyip Erdoğan fasse un geste en direction de Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu. En tout état de cause, il est probable que les débats seront houleux dans l'hémicycle. Vendredi dernier, un député du MHP Duran Bulut, a d'ailleurs déjà fait monter la tension, en s'en prenant violemment à la nomination de l'un des membres du Comité des sages, le journaliste d'origine arménienne, Etyen Mahçupyan.

**A**u cours de la semaine à venir, le règlement de la question kurde ne sera probablement pas le seul sujet historique inscrit à l'ordre du jour de la Grande Assemblée Nationale. La question constitutionnelle risque aussi de se rappeler à son bon souvenir, la commission de conciliation qui travaille en son sein n'ayant pas, comme on pouvait s'y attendre, rude semaine terminé l'élaboration de la nouvelle charte fondamentale. Dès lors, les projets constitutionnels propres à chaque parti ont refait surface, celui de l'AKP polarisant toute les attentions. Le parti au pouvoir souhaite en effet faire disparaître de la Constitution les formules kémalistes, comme la référence au «nationalisme d'Atatürk» ou l'évocation du fondateur de la République décrit comme «un chef immortel et un héros sans rival». L'AKP chercherait aussi à supprimer l'intangibilité des 3 premiers articles de la Constitution de 1982, décrivant les principes fondamentaux de la Turquie. En revanche, il conserverait la définition actuelle de la République, décrite comme «laïque, démocratique, sociale, et basée sur le respect de l'Etat de droit et des droits de l'homme.» À ces questions de principe, s'ajoute celle du désir du parti gouvernemental d'instaurer un régime présidentiel. Et c'est là que où le «processus de paix» croise sans doute le débat constitutionnel. Car Recep Tayyip Erdoğan pourrait retirer d'un succès dans le règlement de la question kurde, un prestige lui permettant à la fois de faire accepter une présidentialisation du régime, et d'accéder à la présidence renforcée qui serait alors instaurée.

Alors qu'il semble avoir évité les chausse-trappes de la première partie du «processus de paix», Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a d'ailleurs lancé un défi à ses rivaux de l'opposition, en affirmant que ces derniers s'opposaient à l'instauration d'un régime présidentiel, parce qu'ils n'étaient pas des leaders suffisamment charismatiques pour espérer se faire élire à la magistrature suprême. Ces derniers jours, en outre, le premier ministre n'a cessé de mettre en valeur les effets économiques bénéfiques qu'aurait la fin de la guérilla kurde dans le sud-est. De toute évidence le «grand pacificateur», qui est déjà en campagne, ne perd pas de vue ses ambitions de «grand leader».

□□□



Un combattant du Front al-Nusra, à Alep le 24 décembre. PHOTO AHMED JADALLAH, REUTERS

# Syrie : Al-Qaeda en Irak adoube le Front al-Nusra

**MOYEN-ORIENT** Le leader du groupe terroriste a revendiqué la suzeraineté sur son clone anti-Assad.

Les liens entre le Front al-Nusra, un groupe jihadiste actif en Syrie, et Al-Qaeda en Irak étaient connus. Ils sont désormais officiels. «*Il est temps de proclamer [...] au monde entier que le Front al-Nusra est en réalité une branche de l'Etat islamique d'Irak*», a déclaré Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, le chef d'Al-Qaeda en Irak, dans un communiqué diffusé sur des sites jihadistes. «*Nous avons préparé des plans et des politiques de travail. Nous avons donné de l'argent et un soutien humain*», a-t-il ajouté.

Classé comme organisation terroriste par les Etats-Unis en décembre, le Front al-Nusra était apparu en janvier 2012. Il s'était immédiatement démarqué des autres groupes rebelles et de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), largement composée de déserteurs, en commettant des

attentats-suicides dans les principales villes du pays, dont Damas. Ses membres sont également jugés plus aguerris et mieux disciplinés. Certains, parfois étrangers, ont déjà lutté en Irak ou

en Afghanistan contre l'armée américaine. Mais leurs relations avec les rebelles de l'ASL sont le plus souvent mitigées. Les accrochages entre les deux groupes restent courants. Il n'est pas

rare non plus que le Front al-Nusra et l'ASL revendiquent chacun de leur côté le succès d'une opération.

Ces dissensions s'expliquent en partie par l'objectif du Front al-Nusra : instaurer un Etat islamique là où l'ASL se contente de vouloir chasser du pouvoir Bachar al-Assad. Surtout, la présence de jihadistes au sein de la rébellion accrédite la thèse du gouvernement syrien qui catalogue les opposants de «*terroristes*» depuis le début du soulèvement, en mars 2011.

L'ironie est que le régime a longtemps soutenu Al-Qaeda en Irak. Lors de l'invasion américaine, il a laissé le mouvement installer des camps à la frontière irakienne, qui servaient au transit des jihadistes étrangers venus attaquer des cibles américaines à Bagdad. Au sein du gouvernement syrien, la gestion des liens avec Al-Qaeda en Irak était assurée par Assef Chawkat, directeur des services de renseignements et beau-frère de Bachar al-Assad, selon des télégrammes dévoilés par WikiLeaks. Dans l'un d'eux, écrit en 2008, le général américain David Petraeus prédit que les combattants d'Al-Qaeda en Irak se retourneront un jour où l'autre contre le régime. C'est désormais officiel.

LUC MATHIEU

## Le Monde

Vendredi 12 avril 2013

### Syrie

## Les djihadistes d'Al-Nosra déclinent le parrainage d'Al-Qaida en Irak

DAMAS. Le Front Al-Nosra, un groupe djihadiste en première ligne dans le combat contre le régime syrien, s'est démarqué, mercredi 10 avril, de l'annonce de parrainage faite la veille par la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaida. Tout en prêtant allégeance à «*cheikh Ayman Al-Zawahiri*», le numéro un de la nébuleuse terroriste, Abou Mohammed Al-Joulani, chef d'Al-Nosra, a jugé prématuré les déclarations d'Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi, le leader de l'Etat islamique en Irak. Celui-ci avait créé la surprise, mardi, en affirmant que les deux groupes seraient désormais fédérés sous l'appellation d'«*Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant*».

«*Le Front Al-Nosra restera fidèle à son image*, a répliqué Abou Mohamed Al-Joulani. *Nous ne voulions pas précipiter les choses avec l'annonce d'un Etat islamique car dans les régions libérées, se réalisent déjà la charia, la résolution des conflits, l'aspiration à la sécurité entre musulmans. Le fait d'annoncer cela n'était pas nécessaire.*» - (AFP) ■

# Le réveil des sunnites, « parias » de l'Irak

Dix ans après l'invasion américaine, les grands perdants de la guerre se révoltent contre la suprématie chiite



## Reportage

**Fallouja, Ramadi (province d'Anbar, Irak)**  
Envoyé spécial

C'est ici qu'avait commencé, par une simple manifestation il y a dix ans, l'insurrection qui transforma l'invasion de l'Irak en un cauchemar américain. Et c'est ici aussi, à Fallouja, qu'a débuté, il y a un peu plus de cent jours, l'intifada des sunnites d'Irak.

Le 21 décembre 2012, 120 gardes du corps du ministre sunnite des finances, Rafa Al-Issaoui, sont arrêtés à Bagdad. Ce dernier échappe de peu à la rafle et se réfugie dans son fief de Fallouja, à 80 kilomètres à l'ouest de Bagdad. C'est là qu'il s'était fait connaître en dirigeant l'hôpital pendant la terrible année 2004, durant laquelle la ville passa sous le contrôle de la rébellion et d'Al-Qaïda en Irak avant d'être reconquise par l'armée américaine, qui dut s'y reprendre à deux fois, laissant Fallouja à moitié détruite.

### Dix ans de tourmentes politiques et de violences

**20 mars 2003** Début de l'intervention militaire américano-britannique en Irak.

**9 avril** Chute du régime irakien.

**1<sup>er</sup> mai** George W. Bush déclare la « fin des combats ».

**28 juin 2004** Transfert du pouvoir au gouvernement irakien.

**15 décembre 2005** Victoire de l'alliance chiite aux législatives.

**Mai 2006** Le chiite Nouri Al-Maliki forme un gouvernement.

**30 juin 2008** Retrait des soldats américains des villes irakiennes.

**21 décembre 2012** Début des manifestations sunnites.

La ville, et la province d'Anbar, tire encore fierté de sa résistance acharnée à l'occupation américaine. Mais aujourd'hui, c'est un autre combat qui mobilise les sunnites : celui qui les oppose au premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, incarnation d'un pouvoir qu'ils accusent d'être confisqué par les chiites et inféodé à l'Iran. Excédés d'être qualifiés de suppôts de Saddam Hussein ou d'Al-Qaïda et d'être traités en parias, les sunnites sont les grands perdants du nouvel Irak.

Dès l'affaire Issaoui connue, des manifestations ont rapidement embrasé le pays sunnite. Elles se répètent tous les vendredis, sur le modèle des révolutions arabes. Dans la province d'Anbar, épicentre de la contestation, les manifestants ont installé des camps de tentes. L'autoroute qui relie Bagdad à la frontière jordanienne est coupée à hauteur de Ramadi. Spacieuses, les tentes s'étendent sur un bon kilomètre. On en compte une centaine, une par tribu. Le vendredi, plusieurs centaines de milliers de personnes s'y retrouvent à l'heure de la prière. Ces rassemblements et les campements sont devenus le théâtre d'une fierté retrouvée. A Fallouja, on y pratique même des cérémonies de mariage et de circoncision. L'estrade est couverte de slogans : « Le silence international nous tue », « L'Amérique a offert l'Irak à l'Iran et est partie », « 70 000 sunnites sont détenus dans les prisons du gouvernement sectaire », etc.

« Notre mouvement est pacifique, malgré les provocations du

gouvernement », insiste Mejhem Al-Alouani, un responsable du comité de coordination du « mouvement populaire » à Ramadi. Après un affrontement qui a fait huit morts à Fallouja le 25 janvier, l'armée s'est retirée hors des villes sunnites d'Anbar. La province fait l'objet d'un véritable bouclage, particulièrement les vendredis. Pour la première fois depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein, une portion du territoire irakien est interdite à la presse étrangère.

« Nous ne voulons plus être traités en citoyens de seconde zone, résume M. Alouani. Nos fils sont interdits de recrutement dans la justice, la police fédérale et l'armée. Nos hommes et même nos femmes sont arrêtés sur simple dénonciation anonyme, en vertu de la loi antiterroriste. Nos hommes politiques sont écartés au prétexte de fausses accusations. Nouri Al-Maliki [le premier ministre chiite] se comporte en dictateur : ce n'est qu'un traître installé par les Américains et à la solde de l'Iran. Notre patience a des limites. Si les chiites sont la majorité, pourquoi refusent-ils un recensement ? » La Syrie et sa révolution ne sont pas loin, galvanisant les uns, terrorisant les autres.

Malgré la volonté affichée de rallier les opposants chiites au premier ministre, le discours ouvertement sectaire du « mouvement populaire » effraie la communauté chiite. D'autant que des groupes, minoritaires mais bien présents dans les manifestations, sortent des portraits de Saddam Hussein ou le drapeau noir d'Al-Qaïda. Nouri Al-Maliki, pour sa part, n'a eu de cesse de brandir l'épouvantail de l'extrémiste sunnite et de dénoncer le soutien de la Turquie et du Qatar, qui se voient comme les parrains des sunnites d'Irak.

Depuis l'affaire Issaoui, la plupart des ministres sunnites – appartenant à la liste Irakiya – se sont retirés du gouvernement, à l'exception de deux d'entre eux, dont Saleh Al-Mutlaq, un ancien ministre de Saddam Hussein rallié à M. Maliki. M. Mutlaq est venu à Ramadi au début du mois de jan-

vier pour tenter une médiation avec les manifestants. Accusé de trahison, il a failli se faire lyncher.

## Des groupes de manifestants brandissent des portraits de Saddam Hussein ou le drapeau noir d'Al-Qaïda

Le premier ministre a pris prétexte de cette agitation pour suspendre les élections provinciales, prévues le 20 avril, dans les provinces d'Anbar et de Ninive (région de Mossoul), où ses alliés sunnites sont promis à l'échec. L'opposition hurle, depuis, à la manœuvre.

A l'inverse de M. Mutlaq, Rafa Al-Issaoui, l'ex-ministre des finances, est devenu la coqueluche des manifestants et de sa communauté. Craignant une arrestation, il s'est installé chez un cheikh tribal de Ramadi, Ahmed Abou Richa, dont le frère, assassiné, avait fondé les milices sunnites Sahwa (« le réveil ») ayant permis de remporter la guerre contre Al-Qaïda à partir de 2008. « Ce qui m'est arrivé ne suffit pas à expliquer ce mouvement, déclare-t-il au Monde dans un salon de réception richement décoré. C'est une accumulation d'injustice, d'oppression et de marginalisation. Les sunnites sont systématiquement les boucs émissaires. En 2005, on leur avait reproché d'avoir boycotté les premières élections et le référendum sur la Constitution. Maintenant qu'ils participent, on veut les empêcher. »

Poussé par la rue, il a formé un nouveau parti, Mouttahidoun (« Unis »), avec d'autres figures sunnites : Ahmed Abou Richa, son hôte, Oussama Al-Noujaifi, le président du Parlement, les députés Ahmed Al-Alouani, Selim Al-Joubouri, Salman Al-Joumaili... La moitié d'entre eux est accusée d'incitation à la violence sectaire. « Maliki utilise la justice comme une arme politique, dénonce le médecin de Fallouja. Il veut se défaire de ce gouvernement d'entente nationale au

profit d'une majorité à sa botte. Cela s'appelle une dictature. Notre pays n'est pas mûr pour une démocratie à l'occidentale. Il faut que tout le monde soit représenté.» Pour lui, M. Maliki est la seule source des problèmes : il se dit prêt à accepter n'importe quel premier ministre chiite issu du parti de M. Maliki, Al-Daawa.

Un début de détente semble se dessiner avec l'annonce, lundi 8 avril, d'une réforme de la loi de débaasification : le nombre de responsables de l'ancien régime interdits de fonction publique devrait être révisé à la baisse et des pensions de retraite payées aux anciens fedayins de Saddam Hussein. Pour Rafa Al-Issaoui, si le gouvernement ne donne pas satisfaction aux manifestants et n'organise pas vite des élections locales, le « mouvement populaire » pourrait déboucher sur une demande fédérale des sunnites d'Irak : « Si nous ne pouvons pas vivre avec les autres, autant se séparer. »

D'autres, plus pessimistes, évoquent une radicalisation du mouvement, voire des actes de violence. A Fallouja, le cheikh Khaled Hamoud, que les manifestants présentent comme leur *marja* (« source d'imitation ») – un mot initialement propre aux seuls chiïtes –, a interdit l'entrée du camp aux hommes politiques quels qu'ils soient, même à Rafa Al-Issaoui, l'enfant du pays : « Ils sont tous corrompus ? Tout ce qu'ils veulent, c'est se partager l'argent et les postes. Nous voulons la chute du gouvernement et l'annulation de la Constitution écrite par les Américains. C'est tout. » Mardi, le cheikh a prévu une grande manifestation à Fallouja pour commémorer le dixième anniversaire de la chute de Bagdad, ce qu'il appelle « le début de la décadence de l'Irak ». ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD



Des manifestants sunnites brandissent le drapeau de la révolution syrienne (au premier plan, à gauche), lors d'un rassemblement contre le gouvernement, le 15 mars à Fallouja. AP

## Un système politique construit sur une base institutionnelle instable

### Analyse

Bagdad  
Envoyé spécial

A défaut d'avoir créé en Irak une démocratie prospère et apaisée, les Etats-Unis y ont inventé le moteur à explosion institutionnel, une machine infernale perpétuellement en crise et dont les soubresauts se traduisent par des vagues d'attentats tellement routinières que plus personne ne prend la peine de chercher à savoir qui les commet ni pourquoi. Le mois de mars a été l'un

des plus sanglants, avec plus de 300 morts, depuis le retrait américain de décembre 2011. Et la courbe de la violence en Irak, en déclin net et régulier depuis 2008, repart légèrement à la hausse depuis un an. C'est signe que les choses vont mal.

En plus d'une vision communautaire de l'Irak divisé entre sunnites, chiïtes et Kurdes – avec une nette préférence pour les chiïtes et les Kurdes –, l'occupation américaine a débouché sur la mise en place d'un système politique reposant sur trois piliers : le fédéralisme, le parlementarisme et le parta-

ge du pouvoir, tel que prévu dans l'accord d'Erbil à l'automne 2010, qui a ouvert la voie à la reconduction du premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, au pouvoir depuis 2006. Dix ans après l'invasion, rien ne fonctionne comme prévu.

Le fédéralisme, destiné à donner aux Kurdes leur liberté, a été ensuite refusé aux sunnites et aux chiïtes qui en ont fait la demande. M. Maliki s'y oppose au nom de l'unité nationale et de sa vision centralisatrice du pouvoir. La seconde Chambre, censée représenter les régions, n'a jamais vu le jour. Et le pays est constamment tiraillé

entre centre et périphérie, au point que les Kurdes menacent aujourd'hui de se séparer de l'Irak si M. Maliki rogne leurs prérogatives.

### Culture de l'homme fort

Le parlementarisme ne s'est pas implanté dans un pays où la culture de l'homme fort continue de prévaloir. Enfin, l'accord d'Erbil a obligé à gouverner ensemble des forces politiques qui se détestent et ne cherchent qu'à s'éliminer les unes les autres. Il n'a jamais été appliqué.

A ce jeu-là, Nouri Al-Maliki s'est révélé le plus fort. Il a concentré

entre ses mains l'essentiel de l'appareil de sécurité : le ministère de la défense, celui de l'intérieur et le Conseil national de sécurité, tout comme le portefeuille de la justice, lui sont acquis. Par la force ou par l'appât du gain, il a su diviser ses adversaires sunnites de la liste Irakiya, pourtant arrivés devant sa propre formation, la liste de l'Etat de droit. Et il s'est imposé comme le dirigeant politique incontesté de sa propre communauté, les chiïtes. Enfin, il a réussi le tour de force d'être soutenu à la fois par les Etats-Unis et par l'Iran.

Mais le départ américain, fin 2011, a déséquilibré le jeu politique irakien, ouvrant la voie à une féroce lutte pour le pouvoir. Dans le même temps, l'Iran, menacé par les troubles en Syrie, a exigé de M. Maliki un soutien plus affirmé au régime de Damas et une mise sous tutelle des sunnites d'Irak, afin d'éviter tout effet domino de la révolution syrienne.

Désormais brouillé avec les Kurdes et les sunnites, Nouri Al-Maliki est plus puissant mais aussi plus isolé que jamais. Les élections nationales de 2014, si elles se tiennent, s'annoncent explosives. ■

C. A.

# Turkey's Kurdish Initiative In Regional Context

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's ambition to be "peacemaker" on the Kurdish issue has to be linked to Turkish policies in Iraq and Syria, writes Cengiz Candar.



Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan makes his address during a meeting with the "wise people" commission in Istanbul, April 4, 2013. (photo by REUTERS/Metin Pala/Pool)

By: Cengiz Candar for Al-Monitor

One of the most striking successes of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government in Turkey has to be its masterful management of the most exciting agenda item of the country which the public refers to as the "peace process" instead of the "solution process."

As with many other issues, here too, the great communicator is Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan himself. In an appeal to the news media — that sounded more like an instruction — Erdogan wanted the steps he is taking to be seen as a "solution process." Now he is working on being perceived as the leader who is taking his country step-by-step toward much desired peace. As perception becomes a reality, it will undoubtedly be added to Erdogan's accomplishments.

At the moment, Erdogan on stage and Abdullah Ocalan off stage from his prison island are taking Turkey toward peace with seemingly choreographed moves. Questioning this captivating dream is not allowed, even if prompted by intellectual curiosity, because it might spoil the dream of peace. Erdogan, the ultimate arbiter, announced 63 names of people who will make up the "Commission of Wise People," which will take on the initiative to enlighten the public on the peace process through meetings, symposiums, panels, etc., in seven different Turkish regions. The group includes some well-known journalists, prominent leaders of nongovernmental organizations, celebrities such as movie stars and popular singers, and several academic experts.

On April 4, Erdogan gathered the entire commission for dinner at the Dolmabahçe Palace where he has a prime ministry office. He praised them extensively, described the "peace process" once again and gave them a mandate of two months that would be concluded with the submission of reports from each of the seven "wise people" sub-committees. This was a

major public relations move by Erdogan. He managed to mobilize a broad spectrum of intellectuals around his efforts thanks to the "magic" of promising "peace" between Turkey and the Kurds.

During this meeting behind closed doors, Erdogan revealed the results of a poll he had requested and trusts. He related the percentage of support for the "peace process" in the different regions of the country. In Turkey's heavily Kurdish populated regions of the southeast and east, the support for the process appears to be 87% and 71%, respectively. In the strong conservative and nationalist Central Anatolia region support is said to be 57%. From figures of Central Anatolia it is understood that the ruling party has captured some Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) strongholds and dented its popular base. Those who approve and do not approve are equal at 43% in the Black Sea region, while 47% is in favor and 41% is against the process in the Mediterranean region.

Because of the inclusion of Istanbul, the Marmara region supports the "peace process" with 59%. In the country's least conservative Aegean region in the west, where anti-Kurdish sentiments and opposition to Erdogan's rule is the strongest, 49% of the people appear to be against the "peace process." In the Aegean region, support for the process is a little more than 40%.

The "wise people" activity is a public relations move for the prime minister to change the ratios to become more in favor of the "peace process." But it was this skillful public relations move that made "peace" and "process" synonymous. Let alone objecting to it, even posing a question as a tactical move risks the danger of being labeled as anti-peace, as noted earlier.

That may explain why the Syrian and Iraqi dimensions of the "process," which was first named the "Imrali process," subsequently under Erdogan's influence became the "solution process" and is now increasingly referred

to as the "peace process," have moved to the back burner and little is said and written about them.

But the influence of developments in Syria on the timing of the "process" is beyond doubt. Starting in July 2012, from the town of Afrin right next to the Turkish border of Hatay, nearly all the Kurdish towns along the border, including the largest Kurdish population center of Qamishli, came under control of the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is branded as the Syrian extension of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Turkey was hoping to control the developments in the Kurdish regions of Syria through the influence of President Massoud Barzani of the Iraqi Kurdish regional government with whom good relations were developed. Erdogan and Barzani were acting jointly against Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's exclusively Shiite stances and his Iranian-influenced pro-Assad regime.

July 2012, however, demonstrated to all, including Ankara, the limits of Barzani's influence on Syrian Kurds.

Similarly, the need to cripple the regional Iran-Syria axis required the removal of the PKK element from that equation. Turkey had no real leverage to dissuade the PKK leaders at their Kandil Mountain headquarters adjacent to Iran. Only Ocalan had the power, influence and vision to exercise such a role. He was brought back from oblivion and let to play a role from Imrali Island that can only be compared to Nelson Mandela's role, prior to his release from Robben Island in 1990.

The PKK's escalation of armed struggle had coincided with the declaration of a cease-fire between Iran and the Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), the Iranian Kurdish wing of the PKK, in August 2011. PJAK fighters are now waiting in their trenches in the Kandil Mountains. Both the PJAK of Iran and the PYD of Syria are under the PKK's rule with its supreme leader Abdullah Ocalan.

Therefore, the question to be asked is whether what is perceived as "peace" in Turkey is actually an armistice between Turkey and the PKK that will have the PJAK initiate action against Tehran and the PYD against Damascus, or whether Erdogan will not be satisfied until the full decommissioning of the PKK which would substantially signify the "ultimate peace."

Currently, these are thorny questions being discussed in Turkey. "Peace without substance" is the order of the day.

Yet, the regional dimension of the Turco-Kurdish "peace" needs to be discussed — and it will be done so in my next piece. ■

*Cengiz Candar is a contributing writer for Al-Monitor's Turkey Pulse. A journalist since 1976, he is the author of seven books in the Turkish language, mainly on Middle East issues, including the best-seller Mesopotamia Express: A Journey in History.*



Written by : *Ranj Alaaldin*

# Now is Not the Time for an Independent Kurdistan

## Asharq Al-Awsat Debate

**K**urdish-Arab tensions have increased in recent weeks as a result of political differences between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the federal government in Baghdad. Disputes over oil and gas resources and the 2013 budget have undermined stability in Iraq and exacerbated the security situation in the country. More broadly, regional upheavals, including the conflict in Syria, threaten to upset the power-balance in the region, as shown by Turkey's support for the anti-Assad rebels, shifting Ankara's previous alliances with Iran and indeed Damascus.

At the heart of these regional changes are the Kurds of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey, who have become important players necessary to ensure the changing dynamics in the region are sustained and stable.

But whilst turmoil in Iraq (which includes the Anbar protests and Sunni demands for federalism) as well as the regional changes taking place might undermine national unity and undermine the stability of Iraq, an independent Kurdistan is still not a viable outcome. Kurdish autonomy in recent years has increased, thanks to its oil wealth and effective management of Kurdistan's oil and gas resources. Kurdistan is now considered the oil exploration capital of the world.

Geostrategically, it has and will continue to play an important role in the Syria conflict, where the KRG has assisted Syrian Kurds and could soon be playing a role in developing an autonomous Syrian Kurdistan. As a result of the Syrian conflict, Turkey too has had to modify its policies toward its Kurdish population, who number more than 14 million. Domestic politics, along with Prime Minister Erdoğan's ambitions to become president and exercise effective power, require Kurdish support.

The Kurds, therefore, have lots to gain. But, at the same time, they may have a lot more to lose.

Fundamentally, an independent Kurdistan is not a likely possibility in the near or distant future because it lacks sufficient resources and allies.

Firstly, Kurdistan remains economically dependent on Arab Iraq, which contributes more than USD 11 billion every year to the Kurdish economy. The importance of this contribution is signaled by the fact that, without it, Kurdistan would implode. If Kurdistan were able to survive without this contribution we would be seeing a far tougher position from the KRG on existing disputes with Baghdad. In addition to not being able to pay local wages, expand its economy, and sustain development projects crucial for the survival of the region, without the contribution from Arab Iraq Kurdistan could find its politics coming under intensive strain, as the local population will demand greater economic development

and protection.

If Kirkuk and other disputed territories are taken out of the equation, then the amount of oil Iraqi Kurdistan could export may never match up to the 17 percent of the budget that they are currently getting.

The question, of course, is whether Kurdistan could depend on its allies, allies like Turkey and the US for example. But whilst changes in Ankara might be encouraging it would be foolish to assume that Ankara will continue its friendly relations with the Kurds. History has already shown that the Kurds have seldom had a reliable ally, as with countless US betrayals. Turkey, on the other hand, has become a partner of convenience, not one for the long-term. It remains an unreliable partner. As the recent Turkish rapprochement with Israel shows, as well as Turkey's decision to move against (former allies) Syria and Iranian interests, Ankara creates and changes its allies on the basis of its own geostrategic interests—the KRG would easily be expendable. At the same time, Ankara continues to support Kurdish rivals in Iraq, including the country's ultra-nationalist Sunni politicians like Osama and Atheel Nujayfi.

Turkey will support Kurdish objectives in Iraq but it is not ready for Kurdish independence. It will not support any Kurdish independence in Iraq because this will encourage unrest and Kurdish separatism in Turkey. Turkish-KRG relations have improved and the KRG will be an important energy supplier. But as a regional power and important member of the international community, Turkey is unlikely to become dependent entirely on Kurdish energy. Despite its tensions with Baghdad and despite the improvement in relations with the KRG, Turkey is still yet to support the incorporation of Kirkuk into Kurdistan.

The argument will be made that, in time, the KRG will develop the necessary economic conditions and infrastructure to build an independent state. Further, it might also be argued that the KRG and Turkish relationship will grow to the extent that the latter will become increasingly reliant on Kurdish oil and gas. But whilst there may be time, the unpredictability of the Middle East means that alliances with former enemies can be compromised and undermined. Regional dynamics will continue to be dominated by Iran and its allies in the region like the federal government in Baghdad.

Furthermore, Kurdistan will not emerge independent without Kirkuk, both because of its necessity and the demand among the Kurdish population. Arab Iraq will not accept the loss of Kirkuk without a war, and is likely to be backed by Iran in this respect. The US, meanwhile, will continue to favor its Arab allies and the Arab world ahead of the Kurds. The Arab world too would fear the formation of new independent states, as a result of the sectarian unrest that exists within their own territories.

In short, Kurdistan has more to gain as a part of Iraq, unless the above restrictions can be resolved, which is unlikely in the near or distant future. Being part of Iraq allows it to develop and expand Kurdish wealth and influence, with the benefit of both Kurdish resources as well as resources from Arab Iraq.

Strategically, this will remain the better option that allows Kurdistan to gradually improve its position domestically and in the region so that it becomes a crucial regional player in the next 30 years. Perhaps then an independent Kurdistan might be possible.

□□□



# Ankara's Kurdish Peace Talks Reverberate Among Syrian Kurds

by MUTLU CIVIROGLU  
rudaw.net

WASHINGTON DC – Turkey's historic peace talks with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is expected to have a positive impact on its tense relations with the Kurds in neighboring Syria, who accuse Ankara of helping their Arab rivals.

The Kurds have a hand in the uprising against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, now beginning its third year, but they have not been part of the larger opposition fighting under the banner of the Free Syrian Army (FSA).

Syria's powerful Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), widely seen as the Syrian arm of the PKK, has had tense relations with the larger Kurdish Supreme Council (KSC) in Syria. The PYD's armed Popular Protection Units (YPG), which are in de facto control of Syria's northern Kurdish regions, have been fighting accusations that they are in cahoots with the Damascus regime. They also have been denounced for extortion and harassment against refugees trying to cross into the safety of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Extremist Islamic groups, linked with the FSA and trying to gain greater control over Syria's Kurdish north, admit to military and other support from Ankara in rounds of intense fighting with the YPG, especially in the city of Ras al-Ain.

PYD leader Salih Muslim said last week that Syrian Kurds support Ankara's peace talks with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. Last month Ocalan, who has been kept in virtual isolation on Turkey's Imrali island since capture in 1999, called on his fighters to disarm.

Hereafter, Muslim said, Syria's Arab opposition will be able to act without Turkey's bidding, and coordinate their anti-regime war with the Kurds.

Muslim told Rudaw, in a telephone interview, that the PYD is willing to go so far as to open negotiations with Ankara, to discuss the plight of Syrian Kurds.

The leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, Abdulhakim Bashar, said that his



*Kurds in the city of Qamishli wave the Kurdish flag as they rally against the Syrian government. Photo: AFP*

group was behind the peace process. "We support the efforts to resolve the Kurdish issue in Turkey, without violence, through political dialogue," he told Rudaw.

According to Gonul Tol, director of the Turkish Research Center at the Middle East Institute in the United States, Ankara should talk to the PYD about its possible participation in toppling the Assad regime.

"Turkey has not agreed to talk with PYD, claiming that PYD has ties with PKK. In the current situation, if Turkey can talk with Ocalan, why wouldn't (Turkish) Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu talk with PYD leader Salih Muslim? That way, current checks and balances may change against the regime," she suggested.

One question that is frequently asked in Washington – which has backed Ankara's talks with Ocalan – relates to the possible impact recent developments in Turkey will have on the uprising against the Assad regime. The concern relates to the kind of impact Ocalan will have on Syrian Kurds, and the role they will play in the uprising, which has claimed an estimated 70,000 lives.

Washington-based Syrian-Kurdish journalist, Jihad Salih, believes that the indirect talks between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Ocalan have a direct link to developments in Syria.

"The emergence of the PYD as a sole political and military

force in Syrian Kurdistan, and Turkey's concerns over its security across the border, forced Erdogan to initiate a dialogue with Mr. Ocalan," Salih says.

He claims that since the failure of an effort by Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and Kurdistan Regional President Massoud Barzani to control Syrian Kurds, Turkey realized that it must take things into its own hands, and wants to reach the PYD through Ocalan.

Salih strongly believes that the future of Syrian Kurds is closely related to the peace process in Turkey. "The peace process is very positive, but Turkey has to constitutionally recognize the Kurdish rights," he says.

Sirwan Kajjo, another Washington-based Syrian-Kurdish journalist, reaffirms that the peace talks in Turkey will have direct consequences on Syrian Kurds

If the process succeeds, Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), "will gain significantly," Kajjo says. "Having Syrian Kurds unopposed to Turkish plans in Syria would provide Ankara additional push for its ultimate objectives in Syria and the broader region," according to Kajjo.

But he adds that, if the process fails, Turkey might be poised to be able to handle extreme reactions from Syrian Kurds. "Kurds on the other side of the border show their support for this peace plan, and they wish this process to prevail. However, they would certainly be unhappy

if their brethren get betrayed yet another time. Nothing could be predicted then," he warns.

Thomas McGee, a researcher on the Kurds of Syria at the University of Exeter, agrees that recent developments in Turkey's relationship with its own Kurds are largely motivated by Ankara's concerns regarding PYD's increasing influence and consolidation of power in the Kurdish regions of Syria.

"When faced with Kurdish Protection Units (YPG) dominating control across the border, it appears that negotiating with the PKK now appears as the least bad option for Turkey," McGee says.

Speaking of recent conversation with Kurds in Syria about the peace process, McGee confirms that many Kurds in Syria are supportive of the process. But he cannot help add that not many are very optimistic that this process will end positively.

"Kurds in Syria suspect that the Imrali Process could have been engineered by Turkey in order to introduce question marks and confusion to the momentum of PYD's development," the British researcher adds.

Moreover, there is strong expectation that Ankara will cut its support of Al Qaida-influenced radical groups, and instead will develop good relations with Syrian Kurdish groups, especially with the PYD.

Ankara is also expected to embrace all of its own opposition groups. One needs to wait and see how the Turkey-Israel-USA-EU front, which was defined during the recent trips to the region by US President Barack Obama and the Secretary of State John Kerry, will play against the Russia-Iran-Assad Regime front.

It is a very important development that Kurds in Turkey, Iraq and Syria, are in the Western front, as a whole, for the first time.

It is very likely that the Kurds will have an active role in their own region in the near future. To use that position to their advantage depends on their ability to strengthen their unity, and in building alliances.

Many Kurdish politicians openly state that a Turkey that can gain the support of its own Kurds, as well as those in Iraq and Syria, will be an important power, not only in the region, but the world. ●

# Mistrust mars deal between Syria rebels and Kurdish fighters

By Marie Roudani  
Agence France Presse

**ALEPPO, Syria:** In the majority-Kurdish Sheikh Maqsoud district of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo, Arab rebels and Kurd fighters say they are fighting together against the regime of President Bashar Assad.

But on the ground, the reality is rather more complex.

Standing at the entrance to Sheikh Maqsoud, rebel commander Abu Ahmad wears an orange, green and red scarf – the colors of the Kurdish flag.

Nearby, two flags fly together: that of the Kurds, alongside the green, black and white standard of the Syrian revolt.

“I wear the colors of my Kurdish brothers, even if I am an Arab,” says Abu Ahmad, proudly.

He says Kurdish militia loyal to the Democratic Union Party (PYD) – Syria’s branch of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) – have “given us ammunition, and their fighters are on the front lines of the battle against the regime.”

Kurds comprise 10 percent of Syria’s total population, with most living in the north of the embattled country.

Since the outbreak of the anti-Assad revolt more than two years ago, most Kurds have tried to ensure that their areas remained violence-free.

Last summer, Assad’s forces withdrew from majority Kurdish areas, and the YPG Kurdish militia became responsible for security there.

Although many Kurds feel hostile to a regime that has oppressed them for decades, they have also tried to keep the rebels out of the areas they control in order to avoid sparking a confrontation with the army.



*Rebel fighters run for cover in the majority-Kurdish Sheikh Maqsoud district in Aleppo Thursday.*

When Islamists launched a bid to take over the city of Ras al-Ain in the north, fire-fights pitted Arab rebels against the Kurds.

But in Sheikh Maqsoud, where rebels say “Aleppo’s biggest battle” is being waged, it appears that past grudges between rebels and Kurds have been set aside, and that the Kurdish militia has joined forces with the insurgents.

Thanks to the Kurds’ help, “we have blocked the army’s supply and reinforcements route near Al-Kindi hospital and the central prison” in northern Aleppo, says Abu Abdullah, who commands a mainstream rebel Free Syrian Army battalion in Syria’s second city.

“The regime can only use its planes now to bring supplies to its troops.”

But the army has bombarded the district since insurgents took up positions there. On Saturday, an air raid killed 15 people, among them nine children. In revenge, Kurdish fighters attacked an army checkpoint, killing five soldiers.

“There’s no difference between us. Together, we fight the same enemy: the regime,” says Abu Juan, a Kurdish militiaman. Another Kurdish fighter says, “It’s a matter of conscience. We are fighting oppression by the regime.”

But under the surface, feelings of mutual suspicion run deep.

Dozens of men wearing the Kurdish YPG militia uniform – distinct for its yellow star symbol on a red background – stand at a checkpoint.

They are visibly more disciplined and organized than the FSA in Aleppo, most of whose checkpoints are manned by young, shabbily dressed fighters.

A YPG commander says the Kurds’ priority is self-defense. “We are here to protect our people and residents of Sheikh Maqsoud, where the PYD has been present for years,” he says.

“Some FSA rebels are respectable, but others are here just to steal. They break into company premises and loot stuff,” adds the Kurdish commander.

Because of this, the fighters are well spread out in Sheikh Maqsoud. Arab rebels keep a lookout in residential areas of the district, while the YPG is responsible for the industrial part.

The FSA, meanwhile, fears that Kurdish residents will provide the loyalist army with sensitive information.

“We used to allow a lot of civilians to enter the neighborhood. But the bombing intensified, and now we are more careful,” says Abu Abdullah.

Because of the violence, Sheikh Maqsoud is becoming a ghost town.

At the district’s northern edges, civilians are leaving en masse, packing belongings including mattresses, carpets and electrical appliances onto pickup trucks. “We’re fleeing the bombing,” calls out one man, as the pickup he is in drives off. □

## State-funded dictionary in Turkish-Kurdish

ANKARA - Anatolia News Agency

The Turkish Language Institute (TDK) has come to an end of the preparation phase of a Kurdish dictionary.

A commission consisting of academics whose mother tongues are Kurdish has completed the Turkish-Kurdish chapter of the dictionary. The dictionary is in the Kurmanji dialect, the dialect spoken most widely by Kurds in Turkey, and was prepared for elementary



schools’ elective Kurdish classes. There are nearly 10,000 words in the dictionary and it is planned to enter into use in the

2013-2104 academic year, TDK head Mustafa S. Kaçalin said.

Kaçalin also said that a version for adults would be also prepared if demanded. Nezir Gümüş, Ahmet Korkut and Ziver İlhan, all native Kurdish-speaking graduate students from the Kurdish Language and Culture Department of Mardin Artuklu University’s Living Languages Institute began working on the project in 2012.

# The Arab Spring started in Iraq

Saddam Hussein's fall paved the way for a new generation to imagine an end to the Arab world's authoritarian system.

**Kanan Makiya**

**CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS** On April 9, 2003, Baghdad fell to an American-led coalition. The removal of Saddam Hussein and the toppling of a whole succession of other Arab dictators in 2011 were closely connected — a fact that has been overlooked largely because of the hostility that the Iraq war engendered.

Few of the brave young men and women behind the Arab Spring have been willing to publicly admit the possibility of a link between their revolutions and the end of Mr. Hussein's bloody reign 10 years ago. These activists have for the most part vigorously denied that their own demands for freedom and democracy, which were organic and homegrown, had anything to do with a war they saw as illegitimate and imperialistic.

To see the connection between the overthrow of Mr. Hussein in 2003 and the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in 2011, one must go back to 1990, when Iraq's army marched into Kuwait. The first Gulf war — in which an American-led coalition ousted Iraq's occupying army — enjoyed the support of most Arab governments, but not of their populations. Mr. Hussein's invasion of Kuwait threatened the order that had kept authoritarian regimes in power for decades and Arab leaders were willing to fight to restore it.

Citizens tend to rally around their leaders when faced with external attacks. But Iraqis didn't. Millions of Iraqis rose up against Mr. Hussein following the 1991 war, and did what was then unthinkable: they called upon the foreign forces that had been bombing them to help rid them of their own dictator.

Mr. Hussein's brutal response to the 1991 uprising killed tens of thousands of Iraqis. For the first time, the rhetoric used by Mr. Hussein's so-called secular nationalist regime turned explicitly sectarian, a forerunner of what we see in Syria today. "No more Shias after today," was the slogan painted on the tanks that rolled over Najaf and fired at Shiite protesters. The Western and Arab armies that had come to liberate Kuwait simply stood by and watched as Shites and Kurds who rose up were massacred. The overthrow of Mr. Hussein was deemed to be beyond the war's mandate.

And so ordinary Iraqis had to die in droves as the Arab state system was restored by force of Western arms. Those Iraqi deaths were a dress rehearsal for what is going on in other parts of the Middle East today.



MOISES SAMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Egyptians celebrating the news of Hosni Mubarak's resignation in Cairo on Feb. 11, 2011.

The first Gulf war achieved America's goals, but the people of Iraq paid the price for that success. They were left with international sanctions for another 12 years under a brutal and bitter dictator itching for vengeance against those who had dared to rise up against him, including Kurds in the north and Shiites in the south. By the time of the American invasion in 2003, the Iraqi middle class had been decimated, state institutions had been gutted and mistrust and hostility toward America abounded.

Both the George W. Bush administration and the Iraqi expatriate opposition to Mr. Hussein — myself included — grossly underestimated those costs in the run-up to the 2003 war. The Iraqi

state, we failed to realize, had become a house of cards.

None of these errors of judgment were necessarily an argument against going to war if you believed, as I do, that overthrowing Mr. Hussein was in the best interests of the Iraqi people. The calculus looks different today if one's starting point is American national interest. I could not in good conscience tell an American family grieving for a son killed in Iraq that the war

**Many people warn of the dangers of American hubris. But what the U.S. does or does not do isn't all that matters.**

matters. The blame for the catastrophe

of post-2003 Iraq must be placed on the new Iraqi political elite. The Shiite political class, put in power by the United States, preached a politics of victimhood and leveraged the state to enrich itself. These leaders falsely identified all Sunni Iraqis with Baathists, forgetting how heavily all Iraqis, including some Shiites, were implicated in the criminality of Mr. Hussein's regime.

Although I always feared, and warned in 1993, that the emergence of sectarian strife was a risk after Mr. Hussein's fall, my greatest misjudgment was in hoping that Iraq's new leaders would act for the collective Iraqi good.

For all its bungling, the Bush administration's invasion of Iraq exposed a fundamental truth of modern Arab politics. Washington's longstanding support for autocracy and dictatorship in the Middle East, a core principle of American foreign policy for decades, had helped stoke a deep-seated political malaise in the region that produced both Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda. By 2003, American support for Arab autocrats was no longer politically sustainable.

The system of beliefs Mr. Hussein represented had ossified and lost the ability to inspire anyone long before 2003. And yet he was still there, in power, the great survivor of so many terrible wars and revolutions. Before the American invasion, it was impossible for Iraqis to see beyond him.

There was hardly any war to speak of

in 2003. Mr. Hussein's whole terrible edifice just came crashing down under its own weight. The army dismantled itself, before L. Paul Bremer, the American proconsul, even issued his infamous and unnecessary order to purge Baath Party members from the military.

Toppling Mr. Hussein put the system of which he was such an integral part under newfound scrutiny. If the 1991 war was about the restoration of the Arab state system, the 2003 war called into question that system's very legitimacy. That's why support from Arab monarchies was not forthcoming in 2003, when a new, more equitable order was on the agenda in Iraq.

After 2003, the edifice of the Arab state system began to crack elsewhere. In 2005, thousands of Lebanese marched in the streets to boot out the occupying Syrian Army; Palestinians tasted their first real elections; American officials twisted the arm of Hosni Mubarak to allow Egyptians a slightly less rigged election in 2006; and a new kind of critical writing began to spread online and in fiction.

The Arab political psyche began to change as well. The legitimating ideas of post-1967 Arab politics — pan-Arabism, armed struggle, anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism — ideas that undergirded the regimes in both Iraq and

Syria, were rubbing up against the realities of life under Mr. Hussein.

**The blame for the catastrophe of post-2003 Iraq must be placed on the new Iraqi political elite.**

No Arab Spring protester, however much he or she might identify with the plight of the Palestinians or decry the cruel policies of Israeli occupation in

the West Bank (as I do), would think today to attribute all the ills of Arab politics to empty abstractions like "imperialism" and "Zionism." They understand in their bones that those phrases were tools of a language designed to prop up nasty regimes and distract people like them from the struggle for a better life.

Generations of Arabs have paid with

their lives and their futures because of a set of illusions that had nothing to do with Israel; these illusions come from deep within the world that we Arabs have constructed for ourselves, a world built upon denial, bombast and imagined past glories, ideas that have since

been exposed as bankrupt and dangerous to the future of the young Arab men and women who set out in 2011, against all odds, to build a new order.

In the place of these illusions, the young revolutionaries made the struggle against their own dictatorships their political priority, just as their Iraqi counterparts had done in vain 20 years earlier after the first gulf war.

Ideas are not constrained by frontiers or borders. Young people in the Arab world are not constrained by the prejudices of old men, by my generation's acquiescence to and compromises with dictatorships. And so in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Bahrain and Syria, a new movement that is still in the making has demanded a political order that derives its legitimacy from genuine citizenship.

It envisions new forms of community not based on a suffocating nationalist embrace supposedly designed to hold in check the avaricious intentions of America and Israel. All the Tunisian fruit vendor Mohamed Bouazizi was asking for in December 2010 was dignity and respect. That is how the Arab Spring began, and the toppling of the first Arab dictator, Saddam Hussein, paved the way for young Arabs to imagine it.

The Arab Spring is now turning into an Arab winter. The old rules that governed Arab politics have been turned completely upside down. Here, too, Iraq offers lessons.

Mr. Hussein used sectarianism and nationalism as tools against his internal enemies when he was weak. Today's Iraqi Shiite parties are doing worse:

they are legitimizing their rule on a sectarian basis. The idea of Iraq as a multi-ethnic country is being abandoned, and the same dynamic is at work in Syria.

The support that several key Arab monarchies are providing to Syrian resistance forces fighting against President Bashar al-Assad is further undermining the legitimacy of the whole Arab state system. The war will go on until Mr. Assad is gone and perhaps the state we know as Syria is, too. The only success story seems to be the Kurds — the great losers of the post-World War I order — who have built a thriving semi-autonomous region in northern Iraq that might eventually require independence to sustain its success.

Our species, at least in its modern garb, needs states, even imperfect ones. States are still the cornerstones of our security as individuals, and provide at least the possibility of a civilized way of life.

Traditionally conservative Arab monarchies are now doing the unthinkable and risking total state collapse in Syria. They are opposing Mr. Assad's Arab nationalist regime in an attempt to dictate the kind of country that will emerge from the chaos and to ensure some form of influence over the new Syria. That is the only way to salvage something of the old Arab order that they feel shifting under their feet.

And against these kinds of forces, unfortunately, the young revolutionaries of the Arab Spring are helpless.

*KANAN MAKIYA is a professor of Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies at Brandeis University and the author of "Republic of Fear: The Politics of Modern Iraq" and "Cruelty and Silence: War, Tyranny, Uprising, and the Arab World."*

**The New York Times** APRIL 10, 2013

## Genel Energy Makes Oil Find in Kurdistan

By STANLEY REED

LONDON — Genel Energy, the oil exploration company headed by Tony Hayward, the former chief executive of BP, announced Wednesday that it had made a significant oil find in Kurdistan.

Genel said its first well at Chia Surkh was producing almost 12,000 barrels of oil and 15 million cubic feet, or 435,000 cubic meters, of natural gas per day. "The reservoir is delivering at very high rates," Mr. Hayward, the chief executive, said in an interview.

He said that before the company started drilling, third-party estimates indica-

ted that there could be about 300 million barrels of oil in the field. If so, that would be a major addition to Genel's proven and probable reserves of about 445 million barrels.

Genel holds 60 percent of the license area, which is in the extreme south of the Kurdish region of Iraq. The company's stock price closed 6.4 percent higher in London on Wednesday.

Genel is the largest producer in Kurdistan, an autonomous part of Iraq that has struck exploration deals with Chevron and Exxon Mobil in recent years.

Despite the recent find, Genel is still unable to easily export its oil because of disagreements between Kurdistan and Iraq. The company's production, which averaged about 45,000 barrels per day last year, could be substantially higher if export pipeline routes were available.

"Legitimate concern remains over the outlook in Kurdistan and we remain cau-

tious pending a tangible framework defining availability of export markets and payments," analysts at Liberum Capital, a brokerage house in London, wrote in a research note.

Kurdistan is working to construct export pipelines to Turkey. In the meantime, Genel is trucking as much as 25,000 barrels per day to Turkey for export.

The company is also talking to Turkish utilities and other potential customers for gas, Mr. Hayward said.

It is also trying to diversify its portfolio through exploration in Somaliland, Malta, Morocco and Ivory Coast.

Mr. Hayward noted that George Reynolds, who made the oil discovery in Persia that led to the creation of BP's predecessor company, drilled in the area of the new find in 1903. That company, Anglo-Persian Oil, revisited the site several times without finding large amounts of oil. □

# Al-Qaïda étend son territoire et unit ses forces en Irak et en Syrie

**Bagdad**  
Envoyé spécial

Dans le monde de la finance, cela s'appelle une OPA, ou plutôt une fusion-acquisition. Le chef de l'Etat islamique en Irak, la branche irakienne d'Al-Qaïda, a annoncé, mardi 9 avril dans un message audio, la fusion de son groupe avec le Jabhat Al-Nosra (Front du soutien), principale organisation djihadiste armée en Syrie. Le nouvel ensemble s'intitulera Al-Qaïda en Irak et au Levant. Cette annonce intervient deux jours après l'appel lancé par Ayman Al-Zawahiri, le successeur d'Oussama Ben Laden à la tête de la « maison mère » qaïdiste, à l'instauration d'un Etat islamique en Syrie après la chute du régime de Bachar Al-Assad, en proie depuis plus de deux ans à une insurrection à majorité sunnite.

Dans son allocution, Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi, le chef de la branche irakienne, confirme la version selon laquelle le Front Al-Nosra a été fondé par des transfuges venus d'Irak, où ils avaient combattu l'occupation américaine de 2003 à 2011, notamment avec la bénédiction du régime syrien qui encourageait, à l'époque, le passage de djihadistes vers l'Irak. Mais aujourd'hui, le boomerang est revenu en Syrie. En un peu plus d'un an, le Front Al-Nosra, qui s'est fait connaître par des attentats-suicides, est devenu la principale force armée au sein de la rébellion contre le régime Assad. Toutefois, le mouvement, qui accueille plusieurs centaines d'étrangers venus de tout le monde arabe et musulman, est à large dominante syrienne. Il contrôle des portions entières du territoire, dont plusieurs quartiers d'Alep, la deuxième ville du pays, théâtre de combats acharnés depuis juillet 2012. Le communiqué audio confirme également qu'Abou Mohammed Al-Joulani, dont les origines restent obscures, est le chef d'Al-Nosra.

Même si les deux mouvements n'en forment désormais plus qu'un, les observateurs ont noté des différences réelles dans leur approche tactique. Contrairement à l'Etat islamique en Irak, Le Front Al-Nosra prend garde à ne pas cibler systématiquement les civils. Il a évité, pour l'instant, d'imposer un ordre islamique trop strict dans



Principaux attentats revendiqués par le Front Al-Nosra  
Bases militaires tombées aux mains des djihadistes

les zones passées sous son contrôle et conclut même des accords ponctuels avec la rébellion kurde, comme à Ras Al-Aïn, et plus récemment à Alep. Nul ne sait si ces différences sont le fruit d'une réflexion sur les excès passés d'Al-Qaïda en Irak ou si elles sont dues à la priorité accordée pour l'instant au combat contre le régime syrien.

L'annonce de cette fusion est une mauvaise nouvelle pour la rébellion syrienne. Le Front Al-Nosra a en effet été classé comme terroriste par le département d'Etat américain. Et Paris a annoncé mardi vouloir discuter avec ses partenaires européens et au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU d'un éventuel classement du mouvement comme « organisation terroriste ». La

perspective de voir les pays occidentaux livrer des armes aux rebelles syriens s'éloigne encore un peu plus. Les Etats-Unis n'y ont jamais été prêts. Et la France, qui avait déjà des difficultés à convaincre ses partenaires européens de lever l'embargo, hésite à son tour.

Le régime de Damas, qui vient de lancer une contre-offensive meurtrière, notamment à Alep, et qui a refusé, lundi, l'envoi d'une mission d'enquête de l'ONU sur l'usage d'armes chimiques, ne

peut que se réjouir. En revanche, ce développement fragilise un peu plus l'Irak, où les tensions confessionnelles et politiques entre chiites et sunnites menacent déjà l'unité du pays. Les provinces sunnites, excédées par l'hégémonie chiite

incarnée par le premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, sont entrées en rébellion depuis décembre 2012.

## Frontière poreuse

Parallèlement, l'Iran a accentué sa pression depuis janvier sur le gouvernement irakien afin qu'il aide le régime de Bachar Al-Assad, dominé par la minorité alaouite, une branche dissidente du chiisme. Récemment, les Etats-Unis ont sommé le gouvernement Maliki de ne plus laisser passer les avions iraniens chargés d'armes à destination de la Syrie. Enfin, les attentats commis par l'Etat islamique en Irak, essentiellement contre des quartiers et lieux de culte chiites, sont en net regain : l'organisation a aussi visé, le 18 mars, le ministère de la justice, symbole de l'oppression des sunnites, lors d'une attaque coordonnée telle qu'on en avait plus vu à Bagdad depuis 2010, faisant 30 morts.

Plus grave encore, le 4 mars, 42 soldats syriens ont été tués dans

une embuscade tendue entre Rabta et la frontière syrienne, dans une région reculée du désert d'Anbar. Ces militaires, repoussés par les rebelles syriens près du poste-frontière d'Abou Kamal, s'étaient réfugiés en Irak. Les autorités les y ont accueillis, les transportant à Bagdad avant de les ramener en Syrie par un chemin détourné. Une trentaine d'hommes d'Al-Qaïda, bien renseignés, ont attaqué le convoi au lance-roquettes RPG et à l'arme automatique, après l'avoir immobilisé grâce à des explosifs.

Cette affaire est la preuve que les services de sécurité irakiens sont infiltrés par des sympathisants de l'Etat islamique en Irak. Une source d'inquiétude supplémentaire alors que la frontière syro-irakienne est très poreuse : hommes et armes la franchissent dans les deux sens, aidés par des solidarités tribales très vivaces.

La province d'Anbar, entrée en rébellion contre Bagdad et désormais galvanisée par la révolution syrienne, pourrait rapidement redevenir le terrain de prédilection d'Al-Qaïda, comme ce fut le cas de 2004 à 2008. Mais cette fois-ci, il n'y a plus d'armée américaine pour y répondre. ■

**CHRISTOPHE AYAD**



Des combattants islamistes du Front Al-Nosra escortent un de leurs prisonniers dans la province de Rakka, au nord-est de Damas, dont ils ont pris le contrôle début mars. REUTERS



12 avril 2013

# LES KURDES, UN PEUPLE, QUATRE TERRITOIRES, QUATRE HISTOIRES

PAR ANNE BERNAS

L'arrêt de la lutte armée annoncé par le leader kurde Abdullah Öcalan, le 21 mars dernier, remet sur le devant de la scène la question kurde, et pas seulement en Turquie. Sujet brûlant de l'histoire, le peuple kurde, entre 20 et 40 millions de personnes, vit sur quatre Etats : la Turquie, l'Irak, l'Iran et la Syrie. Quatre territoires et pas d'Etat pour un peuple présent tout autour du monde. Et quatre situations bien différentes.

Le « Kurdistan » est un territoire sans frontières. Les Kurdes, dispersés entre la Turquie, l'Irak, l'Iran et la Syrie, se démènent tant bien que mal avec leur Etat respectif depuis des décennies, mais une radicalisation existe depuis 1975 en Irak, 1979 en Iran, 1984 en Turquie et 2011 en Syrie.

La fin des années 1970 et 1980 au Proche-Orient, marquées par la guerre civile au Liban et la guerre entre l'Iran et l'Irak, ont de nombreuses analogies avec les temps présents ; la région étant aujourd'hui encore rattrapée par des violences, en Syrie, en Turquie, etc. Pourtant, les années 1970 et 1980 ont été marquées par une marginalisation des Kurdes qui avaient été des acteurs armés à part entière dans des conflits comme celui entre l'Iran et l'Irak. La « fin du peuple kurde » aurait alors pu arriver, car seule la diaspora de l'époque vivait et faisait vivre l'identité kurde.

## LES KURDES, UNE ENTITÉ QUI COMPTE DANS LA RÉGION

Mais le peuple kurde est encore là. Plus que jamais même. Il est aujourd'hui une entité qui compte dans la région. Suite à la Guerre du Golfe de 1990, les Kurdes irakiens établissent une zone autonome au nord de l'Irak. Ils soutiennent en 2003, l'intervention américaine en Irak.

Adoptée par référendum en 2005, la Constitution irakienne reconnaît une très large autonomie au Kurdistan. Après une vingtaine d'années d'existence, il est le symbole d'une



société extrêmement dynamique et moderne au sein d'un Proche-Orient dévasté par les conflits.

La région autonome, fédérale, du Kurdistan irakien, est un espoir pour les autres Kurdes de la zone. Alors que seulement 17 % du budget national est donné au Kurdistan, la région est en modernité perpétuelle : 17 universités ont ouvert en dix ans, les hôpitaux, les autoroutes et les aéroports fleurissent. Aujourd'hui, même si la corruption existe et que le système administratif est suranné, le Kurdistan irakien est l'une des seules régions où la sécurité est réelle. Au point que la zone est devenue, dans le chaos régional, un lieu d'asile pour des réfugiés chrétiens et que de plus en plus d'Arabes y passent leurs vacances...

Déstabilisé par la guerre en Syrie et en lutte permanente avec l'Etat fédéral de plus en plus autoritaire, le Kurdistan irakien reste un modèle pour tous les peuples kurdes. Il a un impact sur les Kurdes dans l'ensemble de la région. Depuis juillet 2012, à la faveur de la rébellion, les Kurdes de Syrie font l'expérience de l'autonomie dans un espace plus ou moins pacifié. L'espace kurde syrien, défendu par une petite armée (de 20 000 à 40 000 soldats selon les sources), n'est plus un mythe.

Mais le chemin pour en arriver là a été long et semé d'embûches. Les Assad se sont attelés durant des décennies à morceler le territoire kurde de Syrie en créant une « ceinture arabe » autour des trois régions que sont Hassakeh, Kobane et Efrin.

En Syrie, jusqu'en 2004 où a eu lieu le soulèvement de Qamishli stimulé par le conflit en Irak, le peuple kurde (3 millions de personnes sur une population totale de 22 millions) n'a jamais fait appel à la lutte armée pour revendiquer ses droits, droits culturels, droits territoriaux et surtout le droit de se voir restituer la nationalité syrienne. Une loi sur le recensement en 1962 déchoit plus de 300 000 kurdes de leur nationalité. Alors que dans les autres pays de la région les autorités tentent d'assimiler les Kurdes, en Syrie, ils sont purement et simplement apatrides (470 000 apatrides aujourd'hui en Syrie).

En 2004, la répression contre les Kurdes s'est amplifiée. Un embargo économique a été mis en place par le régime de Damas pour étouffer la zone kurde. Bachar el-Assad a mis en place une loi interdisant les ventes immobilières dans la région. Le peuple kurde et le Kurdistan syriens paraissent avoir vécu ce que subit aujourd'hui l'ensemble du peuple syrien sous le joug du régime de Damas.

Les enjeux, après deux années de révolution,



Les Kurdes de Syrie à l'épreuve de la rébellion. Les enjeux, après deux années de révolution, sont énormes pour les Kurdes de Syrie. RFI/Jérôme Bastion

sont énormes pour les Kurdes de Syrie. « L'Armée syrienne libre n'est pas appréciée par les Kurdes qui regrettent que le mouvement de révolte n'ait pas conservé son aspect pacifique », déplore Sève Aydin Izouli, avocate au Barreau de Paris et militante de la cause kurde, qui récuse les accusations de certains membres de l'opposition syrienne envers les Kurdes, soupçonnés à tort de soutenir le régime Assad. Les Kurdes ne veulent plus du régime barbare des Assad mais refusent la création d'une République arabe syrienne comme l'a évoqué l'opposition ».

Lors de la Déclaration de Damas en 2005, les Kurdes étaient associés au mouvement de revendication pour la création d'une République syrienne, et non arabe. Et si Assad n'a pas réprimé les Kurdes au début de la révolution comme ce fut le cas à Deraa, « c'est parce qu'il ne voulait pas mettre le feu aux poudres dans la région », affirme l'avocate.

Le conflit syrien ne manque donc pas d'inquiéter les Kurdes. L'opposition syrienne les fait douter quant à leur avenir. Et Sève Aydin Izouli de regretter que « les Kurdes, les chrétiens, sont absents de la Coalition ».

## L'OPPRESSION DES KURDES D'IRAN

En Iran, comme en Syrie, la contestation militaire est absente mais le divorce entre Téhéran et les Kurdes est total et la radicalisation inédite. La répression n'en est que plus féroce. Le pays est une mosaïque de peuples et de cultures, Perses, Azaris, Kurdes, Balouchs, Arabes, etc., vivant ensemble sur un territoire gigantesque.

Le Kurdistan iranien s'étend sur 125 000 kilomètres carrés d'un territoire de plus 1,6 ➤

➤ million de kilomètres carrés, 16 % des 77,8 millions d'Iraniens sont des Kurdes. Pourtant, depuis le XXe siècle, l'Iran est une nation monolithique où le persan est devenu l'identité ethnique la plus favorisée. Alors que 60 % des Iraniens ne sont pas Persans...

Pourtant, la révolution de 1979 a représenté un réel espoir de reconnaissance pour les Kurdes, mais aujourd'hui, selon Khosrow Abdollahi Mandolkani, du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan d'Iran, le peuple kurde est le peuple le plus opprimé d'Iran. Les droits élémentaires, civils et politiques, sont violés par la politique répressive du régime. La discrimination confessionnelle est également omniprésente.

À la demande d'octroi d'une autonomie, Téhéran, après six mois de tergiversations et de pseudonégociations, répond par la répression militaire. Le 19 août 1979, une fatwa a proclamé « le jihad contre les Kurdes ». La chasse aux Kurdes est en marche depuis lors. Les assassinats politiques, perpétrés en Iran comme à l'étranger, se multiplient. En 2013, les régions kurdes d'Iran sont parmi les



La frontière entre l'Iran et le Kurdistan irakien. (Photo : AFP)

régions les plus sous-développées du pays et affichent un triste record de chômage à 50 %. Le fléau de la toxicomanie qui s'accroît chez les jeunes dans le tout le pays -mais que les

autorités ne tentent pas de freiner au Kurdistan- en rajoute à la misère ambiante.

Depuis 2005 et l'arrivée au pouvoir de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et surtout après les contestations de 2009, les violences contre les Kurdes se sont accrues. « Un mois avant les célébrations de Norouz, explique Khosrow Abdollahi Mandolkani, plus de 60 personnes ont été arrêtées dans les provinces kurdes d'Iran ».

Les Kurdes d'Iran réclament une reconnaissance, un système fédéral. Mais leur voix reste étouffée.

#### VERS LA FIN DE LA CRISE EN TURQUIE ?

C'est en Turquie que la question kurde est la plus médiatisée. La minorité kurde en Turquie représente 20 % de la population. Mais à la création de la République turque, l'identité kurde est oubliée.

promet un investissement économique dans la région et offre aux Kurdes la possibilité de s'organiser politiquement. Il mène par ailleurs des opérations offensives contre un parti armé, le PKK, le parti fondé par le leader de la rébellion Abdullah Öcalan, et cela jusque dans son sanctuaire irakien.

L'organisation multiplie les actions armées, jusqu'en Europe. Selon les chiffres officiels, 45 000 personnes ont été tuées depuis le début du conflit.

Depuis 2009, ayant pour modèle le Kurdistan irakien, l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK) met tout en œuvre pour parvenir à l'autonomie et à l'autodétermination. Mais l'Etat turc refuse de négocier.

Le 21 mars dernier, le chef rebelle kurde emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan a appelé les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan à déposer les armes. « La phase de lutte armée laisse la place à une phase de politique démocratique. Commence un processus essentiellement politique, social et



Durant la décennie 1990, le gouvernement turc reconnaît bien malgré lui l'identité kurde, Des centaines de milliers de personnes étaient rassemblées à Diyarbakir, dans sud-est de la Turquie, pour écouter l'annonce du chef du PKK, le 21 mars 2013.REUTERS/Umit Bektaş

économique. Se développe une conception fondée sur l'égalité, les droits et les libertés », a déclaré dans une lettre le leader du PKK.

#### UNE « KURDISTANISATION DES SOCIÉTÉS »

Un peuple sur quatre Etats, quatre problématiques distinctes, mais une unique question régionale, car chaque dimension interne a un impact externe. Plus de quarante années de revendications pour aboutir aujourd'hui à une « Kurdistanisation des sociétés », selon la formule d'Hamit Bozarslan, directeur d'études à l'EHESS : en 2013, la société kurde est jeune, plus de 50 % de la population a moins de 25 ans.

Avec le temps, la contestation ne s'est pas essouffée, bien au contraire puisque les jeunes poursuivent la lutte pour la reconnaissance du peuple kurde et de ses spécificités. C'est même une radicalisation qui émerge. La civilisation kurde ne cesse de s'intensifier, au sein des territoires kurdes comme à l'étranger. La culture kurde, son cinéma, sa littérature, sa musique, est plus que jamais vivante dans le monde.

« La revendication de constitution d'un espace kurde est ainsi intergénérationnelle. Lorsqu'un mouvement apparaît dans l'un des quatre territoires kurdes, un mouvement se crée à l'échelle régionale », poursuit le chercheur.

Le Kurdistan d'Irak, bien qu'il soit toujours sous la menace d'un conflit avec Bagdad, est aujourd'hui un modèle pour les peuples Kurdes de la région. De l'avenir du régime iranien et de sa sortie de l'autoritarisme dépendra celui du peuple kurde dans cet Etat. Téhéran affronte une crise structurelle, tant sur le plan interne que régional, et la solution militaire semble exclue. En Syrie, l'après-Assad sera décisif pour les Kurdes syriens. En Turquie, les négociations entre le PKK et l'Etat permettront-elles de parvenir à une cohabitation pacifique ? La question reste entière. □

### Le massacre de Halabja, la pire attaque au gaz perpétrée contre des civils

Le 16 mars 2013, la ville de Halabja a commémoré le 25e anniversaire du bombardement au gaz ordonné par Saddam Hussein. 5 000 personnes y ont trouvé la mort, dont les trois quarts étaient des femmes et des enfants. En 1988, les peshmergas, combattants kurdes, s'emparent de la ville engloutie dans les montagnes du Kurdistan irakien.

La guerre avec l'Iran touche à sa fin. L'armée irakienne ne tarde pas à riposter et à chasser les combattants de la ville où ne restent plus que des femmes et des enfants. Le 16 mars, durant plus de cinq heures des avions de combat irakiens déversent un mélange de gaz moutarde et des neurotoxiques Tabun, Sarin et VX.

Ali Hassan al-Majid, dit Ali le chimique, cousin de Saddam Hussein, est condamné à mort pour avoir commandité le massacre de la ville. Il est pendu le 25 janvier 2010. Sans avoir jamais exprimé ni le moindre remord ni le plus petit regret.

A. B.



## Iraqi Kurdistan sells first crude, defies Baghdad

April 5, 2013 - By Jessica Donati and Peg Mackey - (Reuters)

**LONDON, The first cargo of Iraqi Kurdistan's crude oil has been sold on the international market, industry sources said, as the autonomous northern region ramps up trade the central government views as illegal.**

The crude pumped from Genel Energy's Taq Taq oilfield was trucked over Iraq's northern border with Turkey and sold via tender for loading in April.

One trader said the cargo sold was 30,000 tonnes, which at Friday's market prices was worth around \$22 million.

"I said we may have interest for this 30,000 tonne cargo and they (Powertrans) said we already sold it," said the prospective buyer.

S.E.T. Select Energy GmbH, an energy firm based in Hamburg, Germany, won the tender issued by intermediary Powertrans, according to two industry sources.

Select Energy did not immediately respond to email and telephone requests for comment.

The direct trade of crude and condensate by truck through Turkey has been rising steadily and now stands at close to 50,000 barrels per day (bpd). Exports of Taq Taq crude by truck are now more than 25,000 bpd, industry sources said.

A senior Iraqi official said last month the growing trade between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Turkey threatens to split Iraq in two.

Oil lies at the heart of a long-running feud between the central government and Kurdistan. Baghdad says it alone has the authority to control exports and sign contracts, while the Kurds say their right to do so is enshrined in Iraq's federal constitution.

Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul Kareem Luaibi said in January the ministry of oil intended to sue Anglo-Turkish Genel Energy and other companies for the export of crude from Iraqi Kurdistan.

Genel Energy GENL.L expects to export oil by pipeline from its fields in Iraqi Kurdistan by 2014, regardless of a political impasse between Baghdad and the semi-autonomous region.

A number of major oil firms with interests in the south have opted not to participate in tenders offering Kurdish crude and condensate to avoid angering Baghdad.

That said, buyers of Kurdish condensate have so far faced few repercussions, with one notable exception - trading house Trafigura, which was banned from Iraq in December.

In any event, demand by smaller players and oil majors that do not have interests in southern Iraq is sufficient to absorb the growing volume on offer. ●



08 April 2013

## Kurdish Crude Hits the International Market

By Jen Alic  
Oilprice.com

**The Baghdad-Erbil oil standoff will escalate as the Iraqi Kurds sell their first crude oil on the international market and as Austria's OMV launches production at one of its wells and South Korea's state-run oil company reveals another significant discovery.**

Turkey's Genel Energy has successfully sold the first crude oil from its Taq Taq field in Northern Iraq, trucking 30,000 tons across the border to Turkey and selling it via tender for loading in April. It's worth around \$22 million and the tender went to Germany-based S.E.T. Select Energy GmbH.

This is the first time that Northern Iraq's crude has been sold on the international market without the Iraqi central government's involvement. While operators in Kurdistan have been trucking crude into Turkey (or smuggling, as Baghdad insists) for a while, this has been in a barter deal, not for sale on the international market.

The Kurds export crude to Turkey in return for refined oil derivatives like gasoline, intended for local consumption in Northern Iraq—not for the international market.

Now they're making money on their

crude—another step towards greater autonomy or independence.

This is a particularly dangerous precedent for Baghdad, whose oil ministry is lashing out verbally, promising to halt the "smuggling".

Right now, the Iraqi Kurds are trucking about 50,000 bpd of crude and condensate to Turkey, with exports from Taq Taq accounting for about half of that.

Traders would like to keep a low profile on this right now, fearing repercussions from Baghdad. So far, one trading house has been affected. In December, the Iraqi authorities banned Trafigura trading house from Iraq for double-dealing with the Kurds. But as long as a trader has no business with the Iraqi central government, there's really nothing Baghdad can do.

If you dig a little deeper, the politics gets more interesting. Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Hussein al-Shahristani is one of the most actively outspoken voices against Iraqi Kurdistan's oil moves. He's also one of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's strongest allies. It is Shahristani who is vowing to halt the Kurds' "smuggling operations". The Kurds are hoping to get rid of him and to do that they are quietly promising Maliki they will support him with a vote of confidence if he sidelines Shahristani from the Oil Ministry.

But there is one more truly effective way that Baghdad can fight back: to make a play for disputed Kirkuk, the most prized oil field in Iraq. This is what the Kurds worry about most.

Earlier this year, Baghdad announced it was reviewing offers from foreign oil companies (including BP) to develop a massive Kirkuk oilfield, claimed both by Baghdad and Erbil. This is the focal point for the showdown between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), and it will all come down to who controls this disputed territory's oil riches.

In the meantime, the Iraqi Kurds will continue to up the ante here. Genel expects to start exporting by pipeline directly to Turkey by 2014, regardless of whether it has Baghdad's blessing, which it won't. Erbil is eyeing 3 million barrels of crude oil exports per day after the pipeline completion.

In the meantime, new production is coming on line and new discoveries are adding to the mix. Genel and Austria's OMV AG said last week that an extended well test started production from the Bina Bawi-3 well in Iraqi Kurdistan on 20 March, showing an initial capacity of 5,000 boe/d. Genel owns a 44% stake, while OMV holds a 36% stake and the KRG holds 20%.

South Korea's state-owned oil company KNOC and its partner Swiss Oryx have also announced a new discovery in Northern Iraq. KNOC claims a "significant" new discovery in the Hawler field, with 10,000 bpd capacity during initial testing. ●





## Dans le nord syrien, les villages kurdes submergés par les déplacés

AFRINE (Syrie), 10 avril 2013 (AFP)

**"JE N'AURAIS JAMAIS cru que cela nous arriverait": comme Nesrine, chaque jour des milliers de déplacés arrivent à Afrine, à 60 km au nord d'Alep, fuyant les combats qui ont récemment gagné les quartiers kurdes de la capitale économique syrienne.**

"Nous vivions bien puis brusquement nous avons dû fuir avec les seuls habits que nous portions", poursuit cette femme de 25 ans, qui se retrouve désormais dans une salle de classe avec son mari, son fils et ses beaux-parents et subsiste grâce à l'aide alimentaire fournie par le Conseil suprême kurde, qui chapeaute tous les partis kurdes.

Ces Kurdes syriens ont pris naturellement le chemin d'Afrine car "c'est le seul endroit sûr et c'est chez nous", affirme un chef de famille rencontré dans une des 17 écoles d'Afrine transformées en camp improvisé. Les autres hommes approuvent.

Ils viennent tous de Cheikh Maqoud, un quartier du nord d'Alep, qui jouissait jusqu'à la semaine dernière du même calme que les villages kurdes, seule région du nord syrien où aucun tir ni explosion ne résonne, où aucun immeuble n'a été éventré par un bombardement aérien.

Depuis le début de la révolte il y a deux ans, les Kurdes (15% de la population) ont tenté de garder leurs régions à l'abri des violences, interdisant aux rebelles comme aux soldats d'y pénétrer.

A l'été 2012, l'armée régulière s'en est retirée sans combat et les Comités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), bras armé du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), y assurent la sécurité. Le PYD est considéré comme la branche syrienne du PKK turc.

"Nous sommes pour la révolution contre le régime baasiste qui a spolié nos

droits, mais nous avons adopté une tactique défensive, jamais offensive, nous ne faisons que riposter. Ce fut le cas à Cheikh Maqoud", explique un cadre du parti à Afrine.

A Alep, les Kurdes représentent 20% de la population. Dans ce quartier, rebelles et kurdes combattent ensemble les forces du régime de Bachar al-Assad qui ripostent en mobilisant notamment l'aviation. Samedi 15 personnes, dont neuf enfants, ont été tuées dans un raid aérien.

Les blessés sont transférés vers un hôpital de campagne d'Afrine. Sur les lits, des enfants, des femmes, des civils et quelques combattants du YPG, comme cet homme de 28 ans blessé à la jambe par des éclats d'obus.

"J'ai été transporté à l'hôpital il y a une semaine, je ne sais même pas si mes enfants sont encore à Alep, s'ils sont encore vivants", dit-il.

"Au premier jour des combats, 100.000 déplacés sont arrivés. Dix jours après, ils étaient 250.000", affirme Seenan Mohammad, co-présidente du Conseil populaire du Kurdistan occidental (CPKO), émanation du PYD.

"Comme d'autres déplacés étaient arrivés avant, des régions de Homs (centre) ou même de Deraa (sud), la population d'Afrine et des villages alentour a plus que doublé passant de 600.000 à 1,5 million d'habitants", ajoute cette femme également membre du Conseil suprême kurde, qui chapeaute une dizaine de partis kurdes de Syrie.

"Avant, Afrine était une petite ville calme, maintenant on se croirait à Paris, avec tous ces embouteillages", glisse un homme.

"Aucune organisation internationale n'a envoyé d'aides pour les déplacés kurdes, pour le moment tous les habitants participent aux frais et nous donnent de quoi nourrir les déplacés, mais qu'en sera-t-il dans un mois?", lance une volontaire du Comité humanitaire du Conseil suprême.

Car pour certains déplacés, l'installation à Afrine pourrait durer. "Hier, les voisins nous ont appelé pour nous apprendre que notre maison à Cheikh Maqoud avait brûlé", raconte ainsi une femme, qui partage avec ses proches une demi-douzaine de matelas et de couvertures à même le sol. ○

MEDIAPART

13 avril 2013

## Iran: au moins 56 kurdes exécutés en un an

Par Maxime-Azadi

**L**e régime iranien a exécuté au moins 56 kurdes au cours de l'année 2012, sur 77 qui ont été condamnés à la peine de mort. Près de 30 prisonniers politiques kurdes attendent en outre dans les couloirs de la mort.

L'Iran se classe au deuxième rang des cinq pays où la peine de mort est le plus appliquée, après la Chine, et devant l'Irak, l'Arabie saoudite et les Etats-Unis, selon le rapport sur la peine de mort en 2012 d'Amnesty International.

Les autorités iraniennes ont reconnu l'exécution de 314 personnes en 2012, mais l'Amnesty International et les organisations de la société civile iranienne affirment que ce chiffre est bien en-deçà de la réalité.

PRES DE 600 EXECUTIONS EN 2012

Dans un rapport publié le 4 avril, L'Ensemble contre la peine de mort (ECPM), une organisation francophone, et Iran Human Rights (IHR) s'alarment sur la situation de la peine de mort en Iran. Au moins 580 personnes ont été exécutées l'année dernière, selon ces deux ONG. "Depuis la dernière élection présidentielle, le nombre des exécutions publiques est en constante augmentation. Avec 60 cas recensés, elles ont été en 2012 plus de six fois plus élevées qu'en 2009. Notre rapport met également en exergue l'augmentation des exécutions secrètes (286 exécutions non officielles en 2012) pratiquées dans au moins quinze

prisons iraniennes et met un accent spécifique sur l'application de la peine de mort pour des membres de minorités en Iran."

Les condamnations pour des délits liés à la drogue représentent encore la majorité des exécutions (76 %), souligne le rapport.

Le site d'information Kurdpa affirme de son côté que les tribunaux iraniens ont condamné au moins 77 kurdes, dont neuf prisonniers politiques, à la peine de mort, au cours de la même année. Parmi eux, 56 ont été exécutés pour des délits de droit commun.

27 PRISONNIERS POLITIQUES KURDES MENACES D'EXECUTIONS

Dix prisonniers politiques kurdes ont été exécutés depuis 2007 par le régime iranien. Selon un décompte du site d'information ActuKurde, au moins 27 autres seraient toujours dans le quartier des condamnés à mort en raison de leur appartenance présumée à des organisations kurdes interdites et de leurs activités pour le compte de ces groupes.

Il s'agit de, Sherko Maarifi, Hebibollah Latifi, Sami Hosseini, Jamal Mohammadi, Rostem Arkiya, Mostefa Salimi, Anwar Rostemi, Iredj Mohammadi, Mohammad Amin Agochi, Ahmad Poladkhani, Hassan Talai, Aziz Mohamadi Zadeh, Habibollah Golperipour, Abdoulah Sirouri, Rachid Agkendi, Loqman Moradi, Zanyar Moradi, Bakhtiyar Mimari, Sirwan Nijwari, Ibrahim Isapour, Hosheng Rezaï, Simko Khurshidi, Saman Nessimi, Mansour Arwend, Sirwan Najad, Habib Achrafi, Ali Achrafi. ○

# TURKEY'S TRIUMPHS

BY KARL VICK / JERUSALEM

**I**N THE MIDDLE EAST, where nations often compete furiously to claim the mantle of the injured party, *sorry* truly is the hardest word. So Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's U.S.-brokered March 22 apology to his Turkish counterpart, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was as unusual as it was revealing about the reordered priorities of America's two most valued allies in the region—and about the Obama Administration's need for its friends to get along at a time of deepening instability in the region. As arranged in advance, Netanyahu read out an official apology over the phone for the nine lives lost on the Turkish vessel *Mavi Marmara* in May 2010, when Israeli commandos boarded the aid ship that was en route to break Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu's words restored an alliance of the two most stable democracies in the Middle East and the superpower that needs them on the same side—and handed Erdogan a huge boost in prestige.

The apology crowned what was already a historic week for Turkish diplomacy. Just a day earlier, Erdogan had won an arguably more important and far-reaching concession from another antagonist. Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed leader of the militant PKK, or Kurdistan Workers' Party, ordered his fighters out of Turkey and declared that the Kurdish quest for equal rights—a conflict that has claimed more than 40,000 lives over three decades—would henceforth be a purely political struggle.

The twin victories not only enhance Erdogan's standing as a regional power player but also carry substantial consequences for a rapidly changing Middle East. The implications range from the immediate (coordinated Turkish-Israeli responses to the chaos in Syria) to the intermediate (more cooperation in the effort to deny Iran a nuclear weapon). In the longer term, a Turkish peace deal with the Kurdish rebels will nurture the nationalist aspirations of Kurds elsewhere. Turkey is home to about half of the world's 30 million Kurds, the world's most populous landless people; the rest are spread mainly over four other nations: Iran, Iraq, Syria and Armenia. Historically, the Kurds

have mostly inclined toward allying with Western powers; a peaceful resolution of the PKK's war with Turkey would be a step toward bolstering pro-Western support in the Middle East.

For President Obama, who spoke briefly with Erdogan after the Israeli Prime Minister, the payoff from Netanyahu's gesture is the end to an impasse that needlessly complicated his own problems in the Middle East. Israel, Turkey and the U.S. share overlapping national interests in so many areas that it made no sense that two of the three were not on speaking terms as several of those areas burst into flames, including a messy revolution in Egypt, a bloody uprising in Syria and Iran's inching ever closer to nuclear capability. "I can think of a thousand reasons why Turkey and Israel should be friends. I cannot find one reason why they shouldn't be friends," Israeli President Shimon Peres pointed out in an interview

with CNN Turk on March 24, 48 hours after the Netanyahu-Erdogan call.

The two countries had already been working the back channels when Obama, upon arriving in Israel on March 20, began pressing Netanyahu to make the apology Erdogan had made a condition for any open thaw. "In a single stroke, [the U.S.] rehabilitated the Turkey-Israel relationship, which was traditionally the region's only axis of stability," says Soli Ozel, a professor of international relations at Istanbul's Kadir Has University.

The first priority for both Israel and Turkey is Syria, the country falling apart between them. Writing on his Facebook page on March 24, Netanyahu said Syria was "a prime consideration" in making his apology. "Syria is crumbling, and its massive stockpiles of advanced weapons are starting to fall into the hands of various elements," he wrote. "What we fear most is that terrorist groups will get their hands on chemical weapons."

Both countries favor the removal of Syrian President Bashar Assad. And both are working closely with Washington—Turkey to support the Syrian rebels and Israel to monitor Assad's chemical and biological weapons. Their rapprochement will reduce the potential for mishaps and, at minimum, give an already paranoid regime something new to worry about.

If it was only a matter of time before the two old allies made up in the face of a mutual threat, the new harmony between the PKK and Turkey was not quite so inevitable. For decades, the two sides have ground away at each other with a dogged violence that has marred Turkey's otherwise remarkable transformation into a major diplomatic and economic player in the region. The Turkish government and military have long been accused of abuses by human-rights groups, while the PKK is considered a terrorist organization by the U.S. and the E.U.

Ocalan, the man now trying to make peace with Erdogan's government from his island prison in the Sea of Marmara, began the Kurdish rebellion in 1984, taking up arms against a state that had long suppressed the Kurdish ethnic and cultural identity. When the Western powers redrew the map of the region after World War I, they broke promises to the Kurds



**'In a single stroke, [the U.S.] rehabilitated the Turkey-Israel relationship, which was traditionally the region's only axis of stability.'**

—SOLI OZEL, INTERNATIONAL-RELATIONS EXPERT, KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY

*Kurds in the PKK stronghold of Qandil in northern Iraq celebrate the festival of Nowruz and the announcement of the cease-fire. The flags represent the PKK, Iraqi Kurdistan and a PKK-affiliated political party.*  
 Photograph by Hawre Muhamed



**And now, for his third act** Erdoğan, waving to deputies in the Turkish parliament, has made no secret of his desire to broker peace between the rival factions in Palestine

that they would have their own homeland in the mountains where Iraq, Iran, Syria, Turkey and Armenia meet. Instead, the ethnic group ended up unhappily divided among those countries. In Turkey the Kurdish language was banned. Parents filing birth certificates encountered clerks who erased Kurdish names and assigned Turkish ones. The injustices fueled the rise of the PKK.

The militants found refuge in northern Iraq, where fellow Kurds had enjoyed autonomy from the regime of Saddam Hussein after 1991. Young Kurds continued to join the rebels. "My son went, but no one should have to go to these mountains anymore. Mothers should no longer cry," says Sadik Demir, 50, whose son Hamdi was 16 when he joined the PKK. Hamdi died last October at the age of 20 during a battle with the Turkish military. "Enough, no more," says the father, his voice quaking as it rises.

Like the rapprochement with Israel,

the breakthrough in months-long secret negotiations with Ocalan was the product of mutual interests. Both Erdoğan and Kurdish nationalists can operate more freely now that Erdoğan has succeeded in removing the Turkish military from politics; the generals enforced a strict secular and ethnic line. A new constitution could accommodate Kurdish aspirations within Turkish borders, as polls indicate Kurds now prefer.

There's also the matter of Erdoğan's career ambitions. His Justice and Development Party is seeking to empower the office of the President—currently a mostly ceremonial position—as part of a new constitution being drafted to replace the military-inspired existing document. It is widely expected that Erdoğan will stand for the presidency in 2014, a year before his current term as Prime Minister ends. But his party lacks the two-thirds parliamentary supermajority to pass the charter, and none of its secular rivals are disposed to help. That leaves the Kurds, whose main political bloc, the Peace and Democracy Party (or BDP), lionizes Ocalan. "We can support [Erdoğan's] presidency," Ocalan told BDP lawmakers who visited him on

Imrali Island on Feb. 23, according to a leaked transcript.

The question now is whether the pact can survive resistance from Turks who oppose Erdoğan and Kurdish aspirations. "The number of people who support a democratic solution is on the rise," says Bekir Agirdir, head of Konda Research and Consultancy, which supplies politicians with confidential monthly opinion polls. "But the number of people opposed is also increasing. There is more polarization." Ocalan also will have to placate skeptics within the PKK. But if the two leaders can make the peace stick, Turkey could offer an example to other nations in the region where the democratic urge has become snarled in identity politics, often violently. Erdoğan says he wants to go to Gaza in April, possibly to broker a real reconciliation between the warring Palestinian factions of Hamas and Fatah. That has long seemed a fool's errand, but after the improbable week he's had, who can blame Erdoğan for imagining what's possible? —WITH REPORTING BY JAY NEWTON-SMALL/WASHINGTON, PELIN TURGUT/ISTANBUL AND PIOTR ZALEWSKI/HAKKARI

ZAMAN FRANCE 12 avril 2013

## Moody's : la paix avec les Kurdes, bon point pour la Turquie

Par Reuters

L'agence de notation Moody's a estimé jeudi que le processus de paix entre le gouvernement turc et la rébellion kurde constituait un point positif pour sa note de crédit.

Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a déclaré un cessez-le-feu le mois dernier en réponse à un appel lancé de sa prison par son président, Abdullah Öcalan. (voir )

Moody's note la Turquie Ba1 avec perspective positive. La note Ba1 fait partie des notes de la catégorie spéculative, juste au-des-

sous de la catégorie "investissement".

"Le conflit dans le sud-est du pays est depuis longtemps un facteur d'incertitude politique qui limite la qualité du crédit de la Turquie", relève l'agence de notation américaine dans sa publication sur les perspectives de crédit, CreditOutlook.

Le cessez-le-feu et la création d'une commission parlementaire sont pour l'heure les indications les plus fortes d'une montée en puissance des négociations de paix, dit Moody's.

Moody's avait dit en janvier que la Turquie devait améliorer sa résistance aux aléas extérieurs en réduisant son déficit des paiements courants ou en augmentant ses réserves de changes avant de pouvoir envisager une note en catégorie investissement.

Une autre grande agence de notation, Fitch, note la Turquie en catégorie investissement depuis novembre. Il faudrait qu'une des deux autres grandes agences, Moody's ou Standard & Poor's, fasse de même pour que de nombreux fonds d'investissement puissent statutairement investir dans le pays. ■

REUTERS

## Syrian air raid on Kurdish village kills 11 civilians

AMMAN April 14, 2013 -(Reuters)

ELEVEN CIVILIANS were killed when a Syrian warplane bombed a Kurdish village in the oil-producing province of Hasaka in northeastern Syria on Sunday, Kurdish activists said.

The raid, which killed mostly women and children, is the biggest loss of Kurdish life from loyalist attacks since the start of the two-year uprising against President Bashar al-Assad, they said.

The circumstances of the attack on the impoverished village of Haddad, 60 km (40 miles) northeast of the city of Qamishli, are not clear, but it appears that a rebel force specialising in raiding oil wells had deployed on a hill near the village, the Kurdish sources said.

A statement by the Kurdish National Council said the attack was a "serious escalation by the regime" following a series of raids on rural areas near Qamishli, where fighting between rebel brigades and President Bashar al-Assad's military has intensified in the last week.

The Kurdish National Council is an umbrella grouping of the main Kurdish parties in Syria, excluding the Syrian branch of the militant Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which effectively has allied with Assad.

With his forces overstretched, Assad has sought to keep Hasaka from joining the revolt by handing the PKK control over parts of the province.

Distrust between Syria's Sunni Arab majority and the country's Kurds, who are also Sunni, have been deepening during the two-year, Arab Sunni led uprising against Assad, with Arab figures in the opposition suspicious that the Kurds may carve out an autonomous



province in the east, and Kurdish politicians accusing the opposition of disregarding Kurdish rights and seeking to secure the oil-producing northeast, which accounts for a large proportion of Syria's oil production.

Oil output stood before the revolt at a modest 300,000 barrels per day.

In January this year the PKK fought hardline Islamist rebel fighters in the Syrian town of Ras al-Ain on the border with Turkey. But the situation eased after the intervention of senior opposition figures. The rebels however have resumed attacks on army positions in areas of the Qamishli countryside in recent weeks.

In 2004 Assad put down an uprising by Syria's Kurds, who comprise an estimated 10 percent of the population. But the community, wary of the rise of militant Islamists in the revolt, have not joined the armed movement against Assad.

Assad's newfound support for the PKK, after years of persecuting the group, has also caused fissures in the Kurdish community. ○

The Washington Post April 14, 2013

## In Iraq, an Kurdish renaissance



By Jackson Diehl,  
Deputy Editorial Page  
Editor

By now it's obvious that "spring" is the wrong description of the political turmoil and civil war that have followed the Arab revolutions of 2011. But for one nation in the Middle East, it's beginning to look like freedom and prosperity just might be blooming. "People are beginning to talk about the Kurdish Spring, not the Arab Spring," says a grinning Fuad Hussein, a senior official in the government of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Hussein and a delegation from the Kurdistan Region Government, which controls a strip of northern Iraq slightly larger than Maryland, were in Washington last week to talk about where their country stands a decade after the U.S. invasion. From Irbil, Kurdistan's capital, the war looks like an extraordi-

nary success.

Kurdistan is a democracy, though an imperfect one; the territory is peaceful and the economy is booming at the rate of 11 percent a year. Foreign investors are pouring through gleaming new airports to invest, especially in Kurdish-controlled oil fields. Exxon, Chevron, Gazprom and Total are among the multinationals to sign deals with the regional government. A new pipeline from Kurdistan to Turkey could allow exports to soar to 1 million barrels a day within a couple of years.

There was one university for the region's 5.2 million people a decade ago; now there are 30. "Our people," says Hussein, the chief of staff to President Massoud Barzani, "did quite good."

The bigger story is that Kurds, a non-Arab nation of some 30 million deprived of a state and divided among Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria, are on the verge of

transcending their long, benighted history as the region's perpetual victims and pawns. Twenty-five years ago, Kurds were being slaughtered with chemical weapons by Saddam Hussein and persecuted by Turkey, where nearly half live. A vicious guerrilla war raged between Kurdish insurgents and the Turkish army.

Now Turkey is emerging as the Kurds' closest ally and the potential enabler of a string of adjacent, self-governing Kurdish communities stretching from Syria to the Iraq-Iran border. Having built close ties with the Iraqi Kurdistan government, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is now negotiating a peace deal with the insurgent Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK) — a pact that could mean new language and cultural rights, as well as elected local governments, for the Kurdish-populated areas of southeastern Turkey.

Meanwhile, Barzani and the Iraqi



► Kurds have been trying to foster a Kurdish self-government for northern Syria, where some 2.5 million Kurds live. Syrian government forces withdrew from the area last year, giving the Kurds the chance to set up their own administration. Until recently, the principal Syrian Kurdish party, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), was supporting the PKK's fight against Turkey and leaning toward the regime of Bashar al-Assad. Now, thanks to the nascent peace deal, it may be switching sides: Earlier this month its fighters joined with Syrian rebels to drive government forces out of a Kurdish-populated district of Aleppo.

Middle Eastern geo-politics, which for so long worked against the Kurds, is now working for them. The sectarian fragmentation of Syria and Iraq has created new space for a nation that is mostly Sunni Muslim, but moderate and sec-

ular. Suddenly the Kurds are being courted by all sides. Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki this month sent a delegation to Irbil to propose that the Kurds return the parliament deputies and ministers they withdrew from the national government last year. Barzani's government declined but agreed to send a delegation to Baghdad for negotiations.

As Hussein portrays it, the talks may be a last chance to avert a breakup of Iraq into separate Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish areas — a split he blames on Maliki's attempt to concentrate Shiite power. "Either we are going to have a real partnership, or we are going to go back to our own people," he said, adding that the result could be a referendum on Kurdistan's future.

It would make sense for the United

States to join Turkey in backing this Kurdish renaissance; the Kurds are a moderate and pro-Western force in an increasingly volatile region. Yet the Obama administration has consistently been at odds with the Iraqi Kurdish government. It has lobbied Turkey not to allow the new oil pipeline that would give Kurdistan economic independence from Baghdad, and, in the Kurds' view, repeatedly backed Maliki's attempts to impose his authority on the region.

"The administration sees us not as a stabilizing force, but as an irritant, as an alien presence in the region that complicates matters, another Israel," one of the visiting Kurds told me. That, like so much of the administration's policy in the Middle East these days, is wrong-headed. □

**Bloomberg**

April 15, 2013

## Iraq's Unity Hinges on Flexibility Over Kurd Oil, Hawrami Says

By Bruce Stanley

**I**RAQ'S KURDISH region could export 250,000 barrels of oil a day this year and is "on track" with discoveries to ship 1 million barrels a day by 2015 and 2 million by 2019, its natural resources minister said.

The semi-autonomous Kurds aren't seeking independence from the rest of the country, Ashti Hawrami said in a statement posted today on the Kurdistan Regional Government's website. Even so, Iraq's political cohesion depends on the Kurds' ability to produce and sell oil on their own terms, he said.

"We wish to remain part of a democratic and federal Iraq, but given the country's troubled history of authoritarian rule, we believe a decentralized oil policy and the sharing of power and wealth is essential to Iraq's unity," Hawrami said.

Iraqi Kurds are sparring with the central government in Baghdad over the sharing of revenue from crude sales, investments in Kurdish oil fields by foreign companies such as Exxon Mobil Corp., and territorial claims. Hawrami's comments came amid increasing speculation that the KRG may be preparing to build its own pipeline network to export oil and natural gas to neighboring Turkey, as a step toward economic self-sufficiency and, possibly, political independence.

The Kurds halted exports through the government-operated pipeline in December, due to a payments dispute, and have been trucking crude into Turkey instead. Turkey, which relies on energy imports, told Iraq's government that it's ready to build pipelines to transport oil from the landlocked Kurdish enclave once the Baghdad-run network reaches full capacity, Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz told reporters April 10 in Ankara.

### Kurds 'Entitled'

"The KRG is entitled to and can make the oil and gas exports happen and prefers to do this with Baghdad," Hawrami said. "But sadly, those in charge there refuse to honor agreements."



Turkey is bound by a 15-year accord with Iraq's central government on all oil-related business and any separate Turkish agreement with the KRG would "endanger" Turkey's interests in Iraq, Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul Kareem al-Luaibi said in an April 1 interview. Differences over the conflict in Syria have strained relations between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Iraqi counterpart Nouri al-Maliki.

Iraq has the world's fifth-largest crude reserves, according to data from BP Plc (BP/), and it revised its estimate upward last week by almost 5 percent to 150 billion barrels. The nation's Kurdish region holds an additional 45 billion barrels, according to the KRG. Iraq produced 3.2 million barrels a day in March, data compiled by Bloomberg show.

### Northern Exports

The country exported 2.43 million barrels a day last month, according to the International Energy Agency. Of Iraq's total shipments, 330,000 barrels a day flowed from the northern oil hub of Kirkuk and into Turkey through the pipeline controlled by the central government, the IEA said in its monthly report published on April 11.

"By 2019, over 3 million barrels a day of oil could flow through Iraq's northern energy corridor to Turkey and the international market," Hawrami said. "Export infrastructure must be built, but this requires tackling bottlenecks through additional feeder and export pipelines."

Genel Energy Plc (GENL), the largest producer in Iraq's Kurdish region, announced a discovery on April 10 at the Chia Surkh site. The first of five wells at the field flowed 11,950 barrels of oil a day and 15 million cubic feet of gas, the company said in a statement. Chia Surkh may hold more than 300 million barrels of oil equivalent, former BP Plc Chief Executive Officer Tony Hayward, who runs Genel, said in a phone interview. ■

## Les Kurdes du PKK veulent des garanties pour quitter la Turquie

**I**STANBUL (Reuters) - Le processus de paix entre la Turquie et les séparatistes kurdes du PKK se heurte déjà à un premier obstacle, le gouvernement d'Ankara refusant de garantir légalement aux rebelles qu'ils ne seront pas attaqués pendant leur retrait du pays.

Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a proclamé un cessez-le-feu le mois dernier en réponse à l'appel de son dirigeant historique emprisonné, Abdullah Öcalan.

L'étape suivante du processus de paix devrait être le départ des combattants kurdes vers leurs camps du nord de l'Irak, mais ceux-ci veulent obtenir au préalable l'assurance écrite qu'ils ne seront pas bombardés par l'armée turque.

"Les combattants ne peuvent pas se retirer sans élaboration d'une base légale et sans mesures (concrètes), parce qu'ils ont subi d'importantes attaques lors de précédents retraits", a déclaré un commandant du PKK, Cemil Bayik, dans un entretien diffusé tard lundi soir par la chaîne kurde Nuce TV.

Des centaines de militants du PKK ont été tués en 1999 dans des affrontements avec l'armée turque, alors qu'ils cherchaient à quitter l'est de la Turquie après

l'arrestation d'Abdullah Öcalan.

Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan s'est engagé verbalement à ce que de telles attaques ne se reproduisent pas, mais il s'est opposé à toute législation sur ce sujet. Il a en revanche appelé les Kurdes à déposer les armes avant de franchir la frontière afin d'éviter tout malentendu.

"Peu importe où ceux qui partent abandonnent leurs armes, ou même s'ils les enterrent. Ils doivent les déposer et s'en aller. Dans le cas contraire, la situation sera propice aux provocations", a-t-il déclaré vendredi à la télévision.

### CONVAINCRE LES KURDES

Le PKK campe depuis sur ses exigences.

"Le retrait tel que l'entend Erdogan n'est pas au programme de notre mouvement", ont prévenu ce week-end les commandants séparatistes kurdes basés dans le nord de l'Irak.

"Il est essentiel pour le développement sain et pérenne du processus (de paix) que des initiatives concrètes et pratiques soient prises pour convaincre nos troupes", ont-ils ajouté dans un communiqué commun.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan a pris un risque politique en rendant publiques les négocia-

tions avec Abdullah Öcalan, auxquelles une majorité de Turcs étaient jusqu'à présent opposés. Il s'est en revanche montré peu explicite sur les réformes qu'il pourrait mettre en oeuvre pour convaincre les Kurdes de déposer les armes.

Les partis politiques kurdes négocient notamment un renforcement des droits de leur minorité et la mise en place d'un gouvernement local aux pouvoirs renforcés dans le sud-est de la Turquie.

Une délégation du Parti pour la paix et de la démocratie (BDP, pro-kurde) devrait par ailleurs évoquer la question de la garantie légale réclamée par le PKK lors d'un prochain entretien avec Abdullah Öcalan.

Selon une source au ministère de la Justice turc, elle devrait rendre visite le week-end prochain au dirigeant séparatiste dans sa prison de l'île d'Imrali, au sud d'Istanbul.

Abdullah Öcalan, dont les partisans fêteront l'anniversaire jeudi à Ömerli, son village natal dans le sud-est de la Turquie, pourrait à l'issue de cet entretien ordonner le début du retrait des combattants du PKK. □

## Les rebelles kurdes réticents à désarmer avant leur retrait

par Alexandra Hudson et Gareth Jones

**B**ERLIN (Reuters) - Il sera difficile pour les combattants kurdes de désarmer avant de quitter la Turquie dans le cadre du processus de paix, pour des raisons touchant à leur sécurité, explique un haut responsable kurde.

Le gouvernement turc de Recep Tayyip Erdogan souhaite un retrait sans armes vers l'Irak des rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le cadre du règlement d'un conflit qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

Mais les rebelles craignent d'être attaqués. Lors d'un précédent retrait amorcé en 1999, plusieurs centaines d'entre eux ont été tués dans des affrontements avec les forces de sécurité.

"Le Premier ministre Erdogan dit qu'il faut désarmer, mais même lui sait que c'est impossible. Il dit : 'Laissez les armes dans une grotte ou enterrez-les, faites ce que vous voulez'; mais qui va réglementer cela ?", a déclaré à Reuters Selahattin Demirtas, co-président du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP, pro-kurde), lors d'un passage à Berlin.

La question du désarmement est la pierre d'achoppement du processus de paix. Le PKK, qui a déclaré un cessez-le-feu le mois dernier sur ordre de son chef kurde emprisonné Abdullah Öcalan, a fait savoir qu'il ne se retirerait pas dans les conditions exigées par Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

La prochaine étape dans le processus de paix est le retrait du territoire turc de 2.000 à 2.500 combattants kurdes vers des

bases situées dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

Malgré les difficultés, Selahattin Demirtas, qui faisait partie de la délégation autorisée à rendre visite à Abdullah Öcalan en février, estime que l'espoir de paix demeure.

Seuls le leader kurde et quelques responsables turcs sont au fait des détails du plan de paix. Les contacts se font par lettre.

RETRAIT TERMINE A L'AUTOMNE ?

Selahattin Demirtas précise que deux élus du BDP ont reçu une nouvelle lettre d'Abdullah Öcalan dimanche, lettre qui est actuellement entre les mains des responsables du ministère de la Justice.

Cette lettre, qui détaille le retrait, va être transmise aux chefs du PKK dans ➔

➔ le nord de l'Irak, qui répondront ensuite à Öcalan et au gouvernement turc.

Abdullah Öcalan pourrait ensuite faire une annonce dans les dix jours suivants, estime Selahattin Demirtas. Dans ce cas, estime-t-il, le retrait devrait être pratiquement effectué à l'automne.

Le plan de paix, résume Selahattin Demirtas, comporte trois étapes : retrait, modifications de la législation et négociations politiques pour une "normalisation".

"La deuxième étape est cruciale pour

un règlement. A ce stade, le gouvernement devra prendre un certain nombre de mesures pour la démocratie en Turquie et le droit des Kurdes. En particulier, les articles de la Constitution qui nient (l'existence) des Kurdes doivent être modifiés", souligne-t-il.

Le BDP a quatre demandes-clés, explique son co-président. La Constitution ne doit pas définir tous les citoyens comme "turcs", comme c'est le cas actuellement, elle doit leur accorder le droit à

l'éducation dans leur langue maternelle, reconnaître la diversité turque et prévoir le droit à une certaine forme d'autonomie.

"Il faut des mesures pour libérer les prisonniers politiques et les maires qui sont incarcérés", dit-il.

Plusieurs milliers de militants kurdes, dont des dizaines d'élus, sont sous les verrous en Turquie, accusés d'avoir soutenu le PKK.



17 avril 2013

## "Les Kurdes de Syrie jouent un jeu trouble"

**Alors qu'ils tentaient de se tenir à l'écart du conflit, allant parfois jusqu'à s'allier avec le régime pour préserver leurs régions des violences, les Kurdes de Syrie semblent s'être alliés avec les rebelles par endroits.**

Par Amara MAKHOUL-YATIM

**D**ébut avril encore, le quartier de Cheikh Maqsoûd, au nord d'Alep, jouissait du même calme que les villages kurdes du nord-est, seule région du nord de la Syrie où aucun tir ni explosion ne résonne, où aucun immeuble n'a été éventré par un bombardement aérien. Mais depuis une quinzaine de jours et au terme d'âpres combats, la rébellion a réussi à y prendre pied. La réaction du régime de Bachar al-Assad ne s'est pas fait attendre : depuis le 8 avril, un déluge de bombe s'abat sur Cheikh Maqsoûd que la quasi-totalité de ses habitants a déserté.

"Depuis le début, le but des Kurdes est de préserver leurs zones des violences", explique Fabrice Balanche, chercheur spécialiste de la Syrie, directeur du Groupe de recherches pour la Méditerranée et le Moyen-Orient (GREMMO). "Certains ont négocié avec le régime en promettant leur soutien contre la garantie que ce dernier ne bombarderait pas leurs quartiers", poursuit-il.

### "Jeu trouble"

Dans certains endroits d'Alep, les Kurdes n'avaient ainsi pas hésité à prêter main forte aux forces de Bachar al-Assad pour contrer l'avancée des rebelles. C'était le cas à Cheikh Maqsoûd. Essentiellement habité par des Kurdes, le quartier qui surplombe Alep jouit d'une position stratégique. À l'été 2012, l'armée régulière s'en était même retirée, lais-

sant aux milices kurdes du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD) le soin d'y assurer la sécurité. Le PYD est considéré comme la branche syrienne du PKK turc. Mais la prise du quartier par les rebelles début avril semble attester d'un retournement de situation. Car selon des sources rebelles et kurdes, les milices du PYD auraient combattu aux côtés de la rébellion cette fois.

"Il y a en effet un jeu trouble de la part des Kurdes en ce moment en Syrie", observe Fabrice Balanche. "En ce moment, il semble que les Kurdes opèrent un retournement car ils croient que l'opposition va peut-être l'emporter. Ils tentent donc de lui donner des gages de bonne volonté", analyse le chercheur qui insiste sur le fait que "les Kurdes ont toujours eu leur propre agenda". Il explique que la majorité d'entre eux, qui vit dans le nord à la frontière avec la Turquie, souhaite en effet constituer un réduit kurde.

Fabrice Balanche met toutefois en garde contre le risque de tirer des conclusions hâtives. "Les Kurdes de Syrie ne parlent pas tous d'une même voix selon leur situation géographique et sont de surcroît très divisés", explique-t-il. Ainsi, si dans le nord la majorité veut l'indépendance, certains ont néanmoins rejoint la rébellion et contestent la mainmise du PYD sur leurs zones. "Ces tensions internes peuvent expliquer le tournant que constitue la prise de Cheikh Maqsoûd", ajoute Fabrice Balanche. Quant à ceux qui vivent à Damas depuis plusieurs générations, ils se revendiquent d'une double identité arabo-kurde, et nombre d'entre eux ont rejoint l'opposition.

Au vu de la fragmentation de la communauté kurde, on ne peut exclure enfin les problèmes localisés. "Il y a parfois des histoires de clans, raconte encore le chercheur. Un jour, l'armée syrienne a bombardé un immeuble où vivait des Kurdes. Et on m'a raconté que cette famille en question était en conflit avec des shabihah [milices du régime, NDLR], le régime a fait cela pour soutenir ses hommes de

main".

### Rupture entre le régime et la minorité kurde ?

Majoritaire dans le nord-est du pays, la minorité kurde est également présente dans les grandes villes et représente environ 15% de la population du pays. À Alep, ils sont 20%. Depuis le début de la révolte il y a deux ans, ils ont tenté de garder leurs régions à l'abri des violences, interdisant aux rebelles d'y pénétrer pour éviter les bombardements de l'armée. Ainsi, à Ras el-Aïn, à l'extrémité nord-est du pays, de violents combats avaient opposé fin 2012, trois mois durant, rebelles et Kurdes quand des insurgés islamistes avaient voulu s'emparer de la ville. Une trêve avait finalement été signée en février 2013 grâce à la médiation de l'opposant Michel Kilo.

Et depuis le début du conflit, le régime a de son côté cherché à s'assurer du soutien des minorités dont les Kurdes, donnant à ces derniers certains gages. Mais l'entente semble désormais résolue, du moins par endroits. "Nous sommes pour la révolution, contre le régime baasiste qui a spolié nos droits, mais nous avons adopté une tactique défensive, jamais offensive, nous ne faisons que riposter. Ce fut le cas à Cheikh Maqsoûd", explique à l'AFP un cadre du PYD à Afrine, ville à majorité kurde située au nord d'Alep.

Un autre événement récent semble en effet confirmer cela : dimanche 14 avril, un raid aérien meurtrier a été mené sur la localité kurde de Haddad, dans le nord-est du pays. Quinze personnes ont été tuées, en majorité des femmes et des enfants. Le régime syrien a mené la semaine dernière une série d'opérations militaires contre des zones rurales des environs de Kamichli, où les combats entre insurgés et soldats sont intensifiés, mais l'attaque contre Haddad est la plus meurtrière menée par l'armée syrienne contre des Kurdes depuis le début du soulèvement en mars 2011.

Selon des sources kurdes citées par Reuters, il semblerait qu'un groupe d'insurgés spécialisés dans l'attaque de puits de pétrole s'était déployé sur une colline des environs du village. Cela pourrait expliquer le bombardement, mais il semble que l'entente tacite entre régime et Kurdes soit enterrée. Le Conseil national kurde a en effet qualifié l'attaque de "grave escalade de la part du régime". ●

# Raid meurtrier contre un village kurde en Syrie

Le Monde.fr avec AFP

L'aviation a mené dimanche un raid sanglant contre un village kurde du nord-est de la Syrie tuant au moins 16 personnes. Trois enfants sont morts, selon l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). "Il y a dans ce village (de la province de Hassaké) une position rebelle, pourtant ce n'est pas elle qui a été visée mais des maisons habitées par des civils", précise l'organisation, dont les informations reposent sur un vaste réseau de militants et de sources médicales civiles et militaires.

Le calme régnait jusqu'à présent dans les régions à majorité kurde dont les dirigeants ont conclu un compromis avec le régime et les rebelles. Mais ces dernières semaines, des combattants kurdes ont rejoint les rebelles syriens à Alep provoquant une réaction brutale de l'armée.

## AVION ALLEMAND ATTENDU

Dans cette ville, partagé entre rebelles et loyalistes, le correspondant de la télévision officielle Chadi Héloüé et deux cameramen "ont été blessés dans un attentat à la voiture piégée". Plus au nord, l'armée a brisé un siège de six mois de deux camps dans la province d'Idleb. Au moins 21 rebelles ont été tués dans cette attaque contre le village de Babulin, précise l'Observatoire.

Au même moment, un autre avion a largué ses bombes sur Qaboun, un quartier rebelle du nord-est de Damas, tuant neuf enfants, selon l'OSDH. Toutes ces violences, selon un bilan provisoire, ont causé dimanche la mort de 44 civils et neuf rebelles. Deux personnes ont été tuées et quatre autres blessées dans l'est du Liban par des obus tirés à partir du territoire syrien, a indiqué un communiqué



L'aviation a mené dimanche un raid sanglant contre un village kurde du nord-est de la Syrie tuant au moins 16 personnes.

de l'armée à Beyrouth.

Par ailleurs, selon le quotidien allemand Süddeutsche Zeitung, l'Allemagne va envoyer lundi un avion militaire spécialement aménagé pour chercher en Jordanie plus de 30 Syriens grièvement blessés qui seront soignés dans plusieurs hôpitaux allemands.

## DESTRUCTION D'UNE MOSQUÉE À DERAÄ

Dans la ville de Deraa, dans le sud du pays, partisans de Bachar Al-Assad et rebelles se sont mutuellement accusés d'avoir détruit le minaret carré en pierres noires de la mosquée Omari, une construction remontant aux premières heures de l'islam. Cette mosquée, située dans le centre de Deraa, fut le point de départ à la mi-mars 2011 de manifestations géantes en réaction aux tortures infligées par les services de sécurité à des enfants qui avaient écrit sur un mur un slogan contre Assad.

Mais l'agence officielle Sana, citant un "responsable" anonyme à Deraa, a accusé le Front al-Nosra d'avoir "fait sauter" la mosquée en arguant que "les terroristes avaient obtenu des fatwa (décrets religieux) les autorisant à viser les lieux de culte si cela s'avérait nécessaire".

L'acte d'allégeance publique de ce mouvement rebelle au chef d'Al-Qaïda Ayman al-Zawahiri jette toujours le trouble chez les opposants. "Nous nous opposons fermement à toute action ou déclaration qui va à l'encontre de la volonté du peuple syrien et des objectifs de la révolution. Ces initiatives servent seulement le régime d'Assad et portent atteinte aux progrès de la révolution", a indiqué le plus important regroupement d'opposants au régime de Damas. ■

## Irak: deux ministres kurdes provisoirement remplacés

BAGDAD, 23 avr 2013 (AFP)

LE PREMIER MINISTRE irakien, Nouri al-Maliki, a nommé deux personnes pour remplacer provisoirement les ministres des Affaires étrangères et du Commerce, deux Kurdes, a indiqué mardi un haut responsable du gouvernement.

Les ministres kurdes boycottent les réunions du gouvernement depuis début mars en raison de désaccords sur le budget fédéral.

Le vice-Premier ministre Hussein Chahristani doit remplacer provisoirement le chef de la diplomatie Hoshiyar Zebari, alors que le ministre de la Justice Hassan al-Shammari a été chargé en plus du ministère du Commerce remplaçant Khayrullah Hassan Babaker, a dit le responsable sous couvert de l'anonymat.

La région autonome du Kurdistan et le gouvernement fédéral à Bagdad sont en désaccord notamment au sujet de territoires disputés et de contrats pétroliers, signés par les autorités du Kurdistan sans l'accord de Bagdad. ○



# Rebel Kurds sticking to their guns

ZARGALI, IRAQ

Leader remains defiant after Turkey demands he disarm his forces

BY TIM ARANGO

In a safe house made of cinder blocks and surrounded by grazing goats and sheep, nestled high in the remote mountains of northern Iraq, a Kurdish fighter who has waged a guerrilla war against Turkey for nearly three decades remains defiant in the face of peace.

"Our forces believe they can achieve results through war," said the fighter, Murat Karayilan, who commands the thousands of fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or the P.K.K.

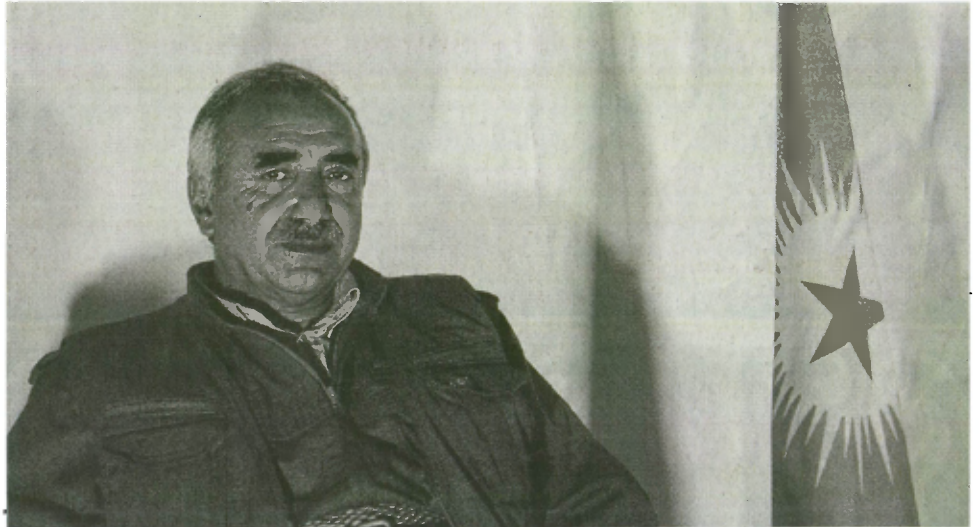
For all the costs of the long war, Mr. Karayilan, his fighters and millions of Kurds believe it has helped them achieve something they never would have without armed struggle: a recognition of Kurdish identity and more democratic rights.

Now, as the P.K.K. negotiates peace with Turkey to end one of the Middle East's most intractable conflicts, it is clinging to its guns despite demands by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, that it lay them down as a condition of talks. That defiance suggests that the peace process, despite the hope it has engendered on both sides, could be longer and more arduous than at first anticipated.

"Our guerrillas cannot give up their arms," Mr. Karayilan said in an interview in the safe house, which had a freezer full of ice cream, and satellite television, despite its remote location. "It is the last issue, something to discuss as a last issue to this process."

The shape of a peace deal is being negotiated in the Turkish capital, Ankara, and in the island prison cell of Abdullah Ocalan, the P.K.K. leader and philosopher-king of Turkey's Kurdish resistance. But it has fallen to Mr. Karayilan to manage the peace process from his mountain redoubt in a lawless nook of Iraq, where the only authority is that wielded by gun-toting Kurdish rebels who operate checkpoints and live in caves at remote outposts.

The skies above the mountains have gone quiet, for now. The bombing runs by Turkish planes, their pick of targets aided by imagery provided by U.S. drones, have ceased in order to allow the talks to proceed.



Murat Karayilan, who commands the thousands of fighters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., in a safe house in Iraq this month.

Since a cease-fire was announced in March by Mr. Ocalan, pausing a war that has claimed nearly 40,000 lives since it began in 1984, Mr. Karayilan has been holding meetings and conferences with his followers to convince them of the merits of a deal that many of them are reluctant to accept for one overriding reason.

The rank and file, he said, "do not believe and trust the approach of Turkey."

Mr. Erdogan, whose efforts at peace could establish his legacy as a peacemaker and propel him to the presidency next year, has demanded that the thousands of fighters scattered around Turkey lay down their weapons before withdrawing to havens in the mountains.

"We don't care where those withdrawing leave their weapons or even whether they bury them," Mr. Erdogan said in a recent television interview. "They must put them down and go. Because otherwise this situation is very open to provocation."

Mr. Erdogan has also resisted new legislation, demanded by Mr. Karayilan's party, to ensure the safety of retreating rebels. Instead, he has created a so-called committee of wise men, including Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals and leaders, to promote the peace talks.

Mr. Karayilan criticized Mr. Erdogan's tactics, saying: "It needs a serious approach. Erdogan does not approach it seriously; he doesn't understand the deep history. Everyone has to know that our guerrilla forces



have continued our struggle successfully to this day."

But Mr. Karayilan's defiant words are tempered by his desire for peace. The latest cease-fire is the ninth announced by the P.K.K., which was designated a terrorist organization by the United States and Europe in 1993. Years ago the party gave up its ambition to create a separate Kurdish state, and it now says it will exchange peace for the expansion of Kurdish rights enshrined in a new constitution and the release of thousands of political prisoners from Turkish prisons.

"We want to solve our problems through peace and dialogue," Mr. Karayilan said. "That is what we believe."

But, he said, "if they do not accept Kurds as equal citizens, this problem cannot be solved."

With his bushy mustache and easy smile, Mr. Karayilan, who became com-

mander of the P.K.K. after Mr. Ocalan was arrested in 1999, has an avuncular manner that belies his designation by the U.S. government as a terrorist leader and kingpin (a label the Treasury Department applied to him in 2009 after determining that his organization had raised money by smuggling drugs to Europe).

He sat in a back room of the safe house, with a yellow banner of Mr. Ocalan fastened to the wall. The air was sticky, and guerrillas carrying rifles served him tea.

If the war ends, he said, he hopes to return to Turkey to play a political role in advancing Kurdish rights. "After we put violence aside, then a democratic society has to be formed," Mr. Karayilan said.

If the war does not end, though, he is ready to fight again.

"If this does not happen, there will be a great war," he said.



P.K.K. fighters guarding Mr. Karayilan's safe house. He says the rank and file "do not believe and trust the approach of Turkey."

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune** THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 2013

# Syrian faction pledges Qaeda allegiance

BEIRUT

## But Islamist rebels call reports of a merger with Iraqi branch premature

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The leader of the most formidable rebel group in Syria pledged allegiance on Wednesday to Al Qaeda but distanced himself from a claim that his Islamic extremist faction had merged with the terrorist network's Iraqi branch.

Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia said Tuesday that it had joined forces with Al Nusra Front — the most effective force among the disparate rebel factions fighting to topple President Bashar al-Assad. It said they had formed a new alliance called the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

Talk of an alliance raised fears in Iraq, where intelligence officials said recently that increased cooperation was already evident in a number of deadly attacks. And in Syria, a stronger Nusra Front would only further complicate the battlefield where Western powers have

been trying to funnel weapons, training and aid toward more secular rebel groups and army defectors.

But the leader of Al Nusra Front, Abu Muhammad al-Golani, cast doubt on the merger. In a statement posted on mili-

tant Web sites, he said he was not consulted ahead of time and only heard about the union through the media.

He did not, however, deny the two groups had merged, and remained vague on the point, only saying that the announcement was premature. He said his group would continue to call itself Al Nusra Front.

"The banner of the Front will remain unchanged despite our pride in the banner of the State and those who carried it and sacrificed and shed their blood for it," he said in a reference to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia.

The message appeared to be, at least in part, an effort by Al Nusra Front to reassure Syrians that the group remained dedicated to the uprising to oust Mr. Assad and was not beholden to non-Syrian interests despite its pledge of fealty to the leader of Al Qaeda, Ayman al-Zawahiri.

"What you saw from the Front of its defense of your religion, honors, and blood, and its good qualities with you

and the fighting groups, will remain as you experienced it," Mr. Golani said in remarks addressed to the Syrian people. "The announcement of the pledge of allegiance will not change anything."

Earlier this week, Mr. Zawahiri urged Islamic fighters in Syria to unite in their efforts to oust Mr. Assad. That may have provided at least part of the impetus for the announced merger with Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, formally known as the Islamic State in Iraq.

The Syrian government seized upon the announced merger to back its assertions that it is not facing a true popular movement for change but rather a foreign-backed terrorist plot.

The state news agency, SANA, said Wednesday that the union "proves that this opposition was never anything other than a tool used by the West and by terrorists to destroy the Syrian people."

It added that the merger "puts the credibility of the United Nations and the Security Council and independent countries in front of a real test in which they must choose between their bias for terrorism represented by Al Qaeda ... or acknowledge the Syrian people and government's right to combat terrorism."

The United States designated Al Nusra Front a terrorist organization in December, and said at the time that the group had Qaeda ties. The Syrian group's oath of allegiance to Al Qaeda was unlikely to prompt a shift in international support for the broader Syrian opposition.

The United States and its allies are already working to try to counter the rising influence of Al Nusra Front and other Islamic extremists in the civil war by increasing their support for rebel factions deemed to be more moderate.

On Wednesday, Secretary of State John Kerry met with Syrian opposition leaders in London to discuss ways to step up aid to rebels.

So far, the United States and its allies have helped create the opposition umbrella group, the Syrian National Coalition, in the hope that it will serve as the united face of those trying to oust Mr. Assad.

The United States and other countries also have stepped up covert support for rebels on the ground by helping to coordinate shipments of new weapons and training rebels in Jordan, officials say. Those receiving training are mainly secular Sunni Muslim tribesmen from central and southern Syria who once served in the army and the police forces.



# Iraq attacks kill 55 less than a week before vote

April 15, 2013 - By ADAM SCHRECK, Associated Press

**BAGHDAD — Insurgents in Iraq deployed a series of car bombs as part of highly coordinated attacks that cut across a wide swath of the country Monday, killing at least 55 on the deadliest day in nearly a month.**

The assault bore the hallmarks of a resurgent al-Qaida in Iraq and appeared aimed at sowing fear days before the first elections since U.S. troops withdrew. There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but coordinated attacks are a favorite tactic of al-Qaida's Iraq branch.

Iraqi officials believe the insurgent group is growing stronger and increasingly coordinating with allies fighting to topple Syrian President Bashar Assad across the border. They say rising lawlessness on the Syria-Iraq frontier and cross-border cooperation with a Syrian group, the Nusra Front, has improved the militants' supply of weapons and foreign fighters.

The intensifying violence, some of it related to the provincial elections scheduled for Saturday, is worrying for Iraqi officials and Baghdad-based diplomats alike. At least 14 candidates have been killed in recent weeks, including one slain in an apparent ambush Sunday.

"Of course we are concerned about the violence in the country that has been increasing in the last weeks," United Nations envoy Martin Kobler told The Associated Press. He condemned the bloodshed and urged Iraqi officials to push ahead with the elections.

"They should be free and fair, and every voter should go to the polls free of intimidation and fear," he said.

Iraqi Army Maj. Gen. Hassan al-Baydhani, the No. 2 official at Baghdad's military command, said authorities managed to defuse three car bombs in Baghdad before they could go off.

He described the violence as an attempt to derail the elections and intimidate voters.

"The terrorists want to grab headlines as we approach election day," he said.

Monday's attacks — most of them car bombings — were unusually broad in scope. Among the places where attacks erupted were the Sunni-dominated western Anbar province and Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, the ethnically contested oil-rich city of Kirkuk and towns in the predominantly Shiite south.

The deadliest attacks hit Baghdad, where multiple car bombs and other explosions killed 25 people.

In one attack, a parked car bomb exploded at a bus station in the eastern suburbs of Kamaliya, killing four and wounding 13. Qassim Saad, a teacher in a nearby school, said his pupils began screaming as the explosion shattered windows.

He described a chaotic scene where security forces opened fire into the air upon arrival to disperse onlookers as overturned vegetable carts sat stained with blood amid wrecked storefronts.

Saad blamed politicians and security forces for lapses that led to the attacks, saying that elected officials "are doing nothing to help the people and are only looking out for their benefits."

Two more car bombs exploded in a rare attack in a parking lot near the heavily guarded entrances to Baghdad International Airport. Three people were killed, including a bodyguard of a Shiite lawmaker whose convoy was passing by. The lawmaker escaped unharmed.

"This attack and other attacks that took place today were part of the continuous efforts by al-Qaida terrorists to shake the security and political situation ahead of the upcoming elections," said Diaa al-Asadi, a political ally of the lawmaker who was traveling in the convoy.

Around sunset, a parked car bomb exploded near car dealerships in the

eastern Habibiya neighborhood, killing ten. Other blasts struck the



\* Civilians gather at the scene of a car bomb attack in the east Baghdad neighborhood of Kamaliya, Iraq, Monday, April 15, 2013. Photo: Khalid Mohammed

capital's Kamila, Karrada, Shurta, Baladiyat and Umm al-Maalif neighborhoods.

In and around the ethnically-mixed northern city of Kirkuk, three parked car bombs went off downtown simultaneously — one in an Arab district, one in a Kurdish one, and one in a Turkomen district— killing four. Three other car bombs exploded outside the city, killing another five.

Kirkuk, about 290 kilometers (180 miles) from Baghdad, is home to a mix of ethnic groups with competing claims to the oil-rich region.

The day's mayhem began around 6:30 a.m. in the former insurgent stronghold of Fallujah when a suicide bomber drove an explosives-packed car into a police checkpoint, killing two policemen and wounding six others.

Later in the day, two bodyguards assigned to a spokesman for anti-government protests that have raged for months were killed when a bomb attached to their car exploded on the highway between Ramadi and Fallujah. A similar bomb stuck to another car in the area killed two others.

Another 15 people were killed and dozens were wounded in attacks in Baqouba, Buhriz, Khalis, Mosul, Mussayab, Nasiriyah, Rutba, Tarmiyah and Tikrit.

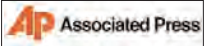
Local police officials provided details of the attacks, and hospital officials confirmed the casualty tolls. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to release details to reporters.

Although violence in Iraq has fallen from its peak in 2006 and 2007, bombings and other attacks remain common.

The blasts struck a day after a series of attacks left 10 people dead, including a Sunni candidate running in the upcoming provincial elections.

The vote on Saturday will be the country's first since U.S. troops withdrew in December 2011. The election, for local-level officials, will be a test of the strength of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's political bloc as well as the ability of security forces to keep the country safe.

Monday's violence marked Iraq's deadliest day since March 19, the eve of the 10th anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion, when a wave of bombings killed 65 across the country. ●



# 9 killed in car bombings northern Iraq

BAGHDAD / April 15, 2013 / SINAN SALAHEDDIN / (AP)

**Officials say a string of six car bombs in a northern Iraqi city has killed nine people and wounded 79.**

Two police officers say the bombs, all parked cars, went off simultaneously Monday morning in and around Kirkuk, home to a mix of ethnic groups with competing claims.

Three bombs exploded downtown — one in an Arab district, one in a Kurdish one, and one in a Turkomen district. The rest went off outside. A detailed casualty breakdown wasn't available.

Bombings are common in Iraq, most blamed on al-Qaida militants. But six at once is an unusually large number and multiple ethnic groups are rarely targeted simultaneously.

The police officers spoke anonymously as they were not authorized to



release information. Senior health official Sidiq Omar Rasool confirmed the casualty figures. ●



April 18, 2013

## Syrian Kurds fear increasing attacks from Assad forces

By Alexandra Hudson | Reuters

**B**ERLIN - Bombings of Kurdish areas in Syria suggest that Syrian Kurds, long detached from the revolt against President Bashar al-Assad, are increasingly being targeted by his forces after they struck deals with rebels fighting to topple him, a Kurdish leader said.

Saleh Muslim, head of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), said a recent wave of Syrian army attacks may have been prompted by non-aggression pacts reached between Kurds and some moderate factions in the rebel forces.

Another possible reason, he told Reuters in an interview, was that Assad feared Turkey - which has harbored Syrian rebels and called on him to quit - could also aid Syrian Kurds after entering peace talks with its own restive Kurdish minority.

"Maybe the (Syrian) government was bothered about these agreements. We also had such agreements with some small groups in Aleppo, and so because of that they bombed our areas," Muslim told Reuters in an interview in Berlin.

"Maybe will think we are getting some help from Turkey, but this is not true."

Eleven civilians were killed when a Syrian warplane bombed a Kurdish village in the oil-producing province of Hasaka in northeastern Syria on Sunday, Kurdish activists said. It was the biggest loss of Kurdish life from government attacks since the start of the two-year-old uprising against Assad.

A Kurdish district of the northern city of Aleppo, Sheikh Maqsoud, has also been battered by air strikes that have killed 47 civilians over the last 15 days, Muslim said.



*Saleh Muslim, head of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), is seen during a Reuters interview in Berlin April 18, 2013. REUTERS*

"From the beginning we decided not to be a part of this blind fighting going ahead between Damascus and others ... Our policy has been self defense, the right to protect ourselves, protect our Kurdish areas."

### KURDISH-ARAB TENSIONS

Mistrust between Syria's Sunni Muslim Arab majority and its Kurds, who comprise an estimated 9-10 percent of the population and are also largely Sunni, deepened as the Sunni-led uprising gathered steam. In the process, Kurds asserted control in parts of the northeast where their community predominates.

Arab figures in the opposition are suspicious that the Kurds may set up an autonomous province spanning those areas.

For their part, Syrian Kurdish politicians accuse the Arab anti-Assad opposi-

tion of ignoring Kurdish rights and seeking to dominate the oil-producing northeast, which accounts for a large proportion of Syria's crude production.

"The Kurdish provinces are rich provinces; everyone is trying to get these areas under their control. Maybe not just Assad's forces, maybe also others in future," Muslim said.

In February a ceasefire was signed between Syrian rebels and a Kurdish militia, the Popular Protection Units (YPG), who had been clashing for months in a town near the Turkish border.

Muslim said YPG forces were training in the Kurdish-controlled areas of Derik, Kobani and Afrin. They had more than 10,000 fighters, he said, and could call on most of the Kurdish population for support. Kurds had started fighting back against government forces after being attacked, he added.

Asked if the Kurds could yet join forces with the Sunni Arab-led Free Syrian Army, Muslim said this could happen only if the FSA committed to a democratic, secular Syria. But, he said, the FSA includes radical Islamic Salafists and jihadists and only a fraction of it is native Syrian.

Syria's conflict started with mainly peaceful demonstrations but descended into a civil war in which the United Nations says at least 70,000 people have been killed. Islamist militants have emerged as the most potent of the anti-Assad insurgents.

Asked about PYD aims, Muslim said Syrian Kurds hoped to achieve democratic self determination. "It is not like classical autonomy, we don't want to draw any borders, also because we have half a million Kurds living in (the capital) Damascus."

An end to the violence could be achieved with a political resolution, he said, but he feared the Arab League had chosen the route of prolonged armed conflict in Syria.

# Des preuves de l'utilisation d'armes chimiques en Syrie transmises à l'ONU

Des diplomates du Conseil de sécurité détiennent des éléments « solides » accusant Damas

**New York (Nations unies)**  
Correspondante

Des armes chimiques ont été utilisées au moins une fois en Syrie. Ce sont des diplomates du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU qui l'affirment. « Nous avons des preuves solides » de l'utilisation d'obus chimiques « de façon sporadique », a assuré jeudi 11 avril l'un d'entre eux devant des journalistes. Des preuves « très

**L'opposition syrienne se démarque d'Al-Nosra**

**Embarrassée par l'annonce, mercredi 10 avril, de l'adhésion du Front Al-Nosra à la nébuleuse Al-Qaida, l'opposition syrienne a tenté de se démarquer, jeudi, de ce groupe djihadiste, à la pointe du combat contre le régime de Damas. Moaz Al-Khatib, le chef de la Coalition nationale syrienne, le principal plateforme anti-Assad, a ainsi déclaré que « la pensée d'Al-Qaida ne nous sied pas et les révolutionnaires en Syrie doivent prendre une position claire sur ce sujet ».**

convaincantes » ont été communiquées au secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban Ki-moon, souligne un autre. Le même jour à Londres, les ministres des Affaires étrangères des pays du G8 réunis en sommet, rappelaient que « tout recours à des armes chimiques exigerait une réponse internationale sérieuse ».

Depuis plusieurs mois, plusieurs pays occidentaux, au premier rang desquels les Etats-Unis, ont qualifié l'usage d'armes chimiques dans le conflit de franchissement d'une « ligne rouge », susceptible de justifier le déclenchement d'une intervention armée internationale en Syrie.

Selon les Occidentaux, au moins un obus chimique a bien été utilisé à la mi-mars dans le village de Khan Aassal, aux environs d'Alep. Le tir a blessé plusieurs soldats syriens, mais son origine reste à déterminer. S'agissait-il d'un tir raté de l'armée régulière ou d'un tir provenant du camp rebelle ? Rien ne permet encore de trancher. Britanniques et Français disent en revanche disposer d'informations selon lesquelles les forces syriennes ont bien utilisé des

armes chimiques face aux rebelles, notamment dans le quartier d'Al-Bayyada, à Homs, le 23 décembre 2012. Ce jour-là, une arme chimique, dont la nature n'a pas encore été établie, aurait provoqué plusieurs morts et des dizaines de cas d'empoisonnement.

**Obstruction de Damas**

À la demande de Damas, persuadé que l'attaque de Khan Aassal a été perpétrée par des rebelles, Ban Ki-moon avait annoncé le 21 mars l'ouverture d'une enquête onusienne sur cet incident. La France et le Royaume-Uni avaient alors demandé que cette mission se penche aussi sur d'autres cas de possibles utilisation d'armes chimiques, imputés au régime, près d'Alep, de Damas et à Homs.

Trois semaines plus tard, l'équipe des Nations Unies, constituée de 15 experts « neutres » – originaires de pays nordiques, latino-américains ou asiatiques mais d'aucun des cinq pays membres permanents du conseil de sécurité –, attend toujours à Chypre que Damas l'autorise à se déployer en Syrie.

Mais depuis que Ban Ki-moon demande un accès « sans entraves » et exige que « toutes les allégations » soient vérifiées, les autorités syriennes ne veulent plus entendre parler de cette mission. « Il est regrettable que le gouvernement syrien ait rejeté mon offre de mener une enquête » sur place, a déclaré Ban Ki-moon, jeudi, après sa rencontre à Washington avec le président américain Barack Obama.

Dans une lettre datée du 6 avril, le ministre des affaires étrangères syrien, Walid Al-Moualem, expliquait que l'équipe onusienne devait entamer sa mission à Alep et qu'elle serait autorisée à se rendre ensuite à Homs si toutefois son travail se révélait « honnête » et « impartial ». « Mieux vaut pas d'enquête du tout qu'une enquête limitée à Alep », réplique un diplomate occidental, convaincu que celle-ci peut être menée de l'extérieur de la Syrie, en recueillant les témoignages de victimes présumées de bombardements à l'arme chimique ayant fui le pays. ■

ALEXANDRA GENESTE



17 avril 2013

## Le pétrole du Kurdistan irakien exporté en direct via la Turquie

Le Kurdistan irakien sera prêt à exporter directement son pétrole brut dans quelques mois, une fois la construction d'un nouvel oléoduc achevée, apprend-on de sources du secteur. Ce nouveau circuit devrait permettre au Kurdistan d'accroître ses exportations de façon importante, au risque de déplaire au gouvernement central irakien qui considère les exportations du Nord comme illégales et craint

le développement d'un commerce direct entre le Kurdistan et la Turquie n'entraîne une partition du pays. Le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan aura achevé le pipeline, conçu à l'origine pour transporter du gaz, au troisième trimestre. Il reliera le gisement de Tak Tak de la société Genel Energy au pipeline Irak-Turquie déjà en service. L'oléoduc, en

cours de construction par une société turque, a une capacité de transport de 300.000 barils par jour. Le pétrole de Tak Tak entrera dans l'oléoduc Kirkouk-Ceyhan à la station de pompage de Fichkhabour près de la frontière turque d'où il sera directement acheminé vers le port turc de Ceyhan et vers les marchés internationaux. La Turquie a donné son feu vert au projet.

Jusqu'ici, le brut du Kurdistan

était transporté vers le marché mondial via un pipeline contrôlé par Bagdad, mais les exportations par ce canal se sont tariées l'an dernier après un différend sur les paiements. Le gouvernement fédéral de Bagdad affirme avoir seul le droit de contrôler les exportations et de signer des contrats, tandis que les Kurdes soutiennent que le droit de faire la même chose leur est garanti par la constitution fédérale irakienne. ●

Avec Reuters

# Bagdad, dix ans après



Bagdad, dans le centre-ville : l'avenue Al-Jumhuriya (« la République »), à gauche en mai 2003, à droite en mars 2013. PHOTOS : BRUNO STEVENS/COSMOS

## REPORTAGE

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

Bagdad, envoyé spécial

**E**n ce temps-là, on n'arrivait que par la route : une douzaine d'heures entre Amman et Bagdad, en comptant le suspicieux contrôle des douaniers irakiens. Je suis arrivé en Irak, le 25 mars 2003, au milieu d'une tempête de sable et une semaine après le début de la guerre. La tempête était tellement forte qu'on ne voyait pas plus loin que le capot de la voiture. Elle dura trois jours et, comme le brouillard de la guerre était assez épais et que les médias sont d'ataviques impatients, l'on crut à un « enlèvement » de l'armée américaine.

Moins d'une semaine plus tard, aux alentours du 1<sup>er</sup> avril 2003, les premiers tanks américains faisaient leur apparition aux abords de l'aéroport de Bagdad. Il n'avait plus accueilli de vol international depuis la guerre du Golfe de 1991. Il a fallu attendre la chute de Saddam Hussein et la levée des sanctions pour qu'il reprenne du service. Aujourd'hui, plus besoin de prendre la route pour se rendre à Bagdad. On atterrit directement. Le plus étonnant, pour le visiteur en 2013, c'est que rien ou presque n'a changé depuis les années 1980 : même moquette verte, même décoration tubulaire au plafond, tout est daté, fané.

Même l'accueil des douaniers est aussi rogne que sous l'ancien régime. Question de souveraineté et de crédibilité. Depuis le départ du dernier soldat américain, en décembre 2011, il est de plus en plus diffi-

le de venir en Irak, qu'on soit journaliste, homme d'affaires ou surtout mercenaire pour une société de sécurité privée. Dix ans d'occupation et d'abus ont rendu les Irakiens assez désabusés sur les bienfaits que pourraient leur apporter les étrangers.

Les Américains sont donc partis, mais ils ont laissé leurs uniformes, leurs camps militaires et un pays encore en reconstruction. La longue avenue qui mène de l'aéroport au centre-ville a été la plus meurtrière du monde, au pic de l'insurrection, entre 2004 et 2008 : aujourd'hui encore, les passagers sont obligés de passer par une dizaine de fouilles, ce qui les oblige à arriver cinq à six heures avant leur vol. Mais c'est un autre type de record qu'a battu plus récemment cette artère d'une vingtaine de kilomètres : celui des pots-de-vin versés par la mairie de Bagdad pour le chantier de rénovation et d'embellissement mené par des entreprises turques. La politique est la continuation de la guerre par d'autres moyens ; en Irak, elle est la poursuite du pillage par des moyens pacifiques.

Revenir à Bagdad dix ans après la guerre, c'est faire de l'archéologie, retrouver le passé enfoui sous les différentes strates de guerre. Par où commencer ? La place Al-Firdos bien sûr. Cette enceinte circulaire, située au pied des deux hôtels, Méridien-Palestine et Sheraton-Ishtar, où le régime baasiste avait parqué les journalistes étrangers pendant la guerre, accueillait la plus grande statue de Saddam Hussein. Les hôtels ont été rénovés à l'identique pour le sommet de la Ligue arabe de mars 2012, qui marqua le grand retour diplomatique de l'Irak : l'on y voit toujours la trace laissée par un abus de tank américain qui tua deux journalistes le 8 avril 2003. C'est là que nous assistions tous les jours, con-

nés ou amusés, aux conférences de presse surréalistes de Mohamed Saïd Al-Sahhaf, le ministre de l'information, qui énumérait les victoires aussi éclatantes que fantomatiques des forces baasistes contre le « gang d'animaux du désert » en train d'envahir l'Irak. En dehors des soliloques de Sahhaf, il était plus compliqué de se déplacer librement en ville pour tenter de savoir ce qui s'y passait et recueillir l'opinion des Irakiens hors de la surveillance des gardes-chiourmes baasistes.

C'est en faisant tomber, à l'aide d'un filin en acier, la grande statue de Saddam Hussein sous les yeux médusés, incrédu-

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les, surexcités ou enthousiastes de quelques centaines d'Irakiens, que l'armée américaine a officiellement pris possession de Bagdad, le 9 avril 2003 en fin d'après-midi. La guerre prenait fin, une autre allait commencer.

C'est aussi sur cette place que j'ai rencontré Thaer, ce même 9 avril au matin. Il n'était ni chauffeur, ni traducteur, ni employé du ministère de l'information. Mais, à cause de la guerre, il avait dû fermer sa boutique de pièces détachées auto-

mobiles et était venu traîner dans le coin en se disant qu'il y aurait peut-être du travail. Tous les fonctionnaires chargés habituellement de nous encadrer s'étaient volatilisés, comme les dirigeants du régime, ainsi que Saddam Hussein.

Thaer avait une voiture et pas d'a priori. Ensemble, nous avons passé la journée du 9 avril à parcourir Bagdad, slalomant entre les colonnes américaines et les fedayins de Saddam en déroute. Ensemble, nous sommes allés pour la première fois à Saddam City, cette immense banlieue chiite déshéritée. Le quartier, réputé hostile au régime baasiste, était interdit d'accès. A peine le régime tombé, il fut rebaptisé Medinet Al-Sadr, du nom d'un célèbre dignitaire religieux chiite connu pour avoir été tué par Saddam Hussein.

Le quartier est resté aussi pauvre ou presque. La voirie est absente, les ordures brûlent à ciel ouvert. Seules les enseignes, rutilantes, des magasins – nettement mieux fournis – ont changé. Les chiites sont au pouvoir désormais mais ceux de Medinet Al-Sadr sont restés d'irréductibles rebelles. Le quartier est entièrement sous la coupe du parti et des milices de Moqtada Al-Sadr, qui y perpétuent le culte du martyr et de la persécution. Le cheikh Ibrahim Al-Jabri, principal représentant du mouvement, reçoit à la mosquée Al-Mohsen : « Rien n'a changé depuis 2003, sauf la liberté de pratiquer notre religion et de prêcher. Pour le reste, nous sommes sous la coupe d'un régime soumis aux Etats-Unis, nos jeunes n'ont pas de travail, les politiciens ne pensent qu'à s'enrichir. »

Ensemble, avec Thaer, nous étions entrés dans les prisons du régime, à la recherche des disparus. La rage de leurs proches était telle qu'ils s'étaient attaqués aux parois d'un tunnel routier, convaincus qu'elles abritaient des cellules secrètes. Les nouvelles autorités ont réinvesti sans état d'âme les anciens locaux des Moukhabarat (services secrets), quand ils n'avaient pas été détruits par les bombardements américains. Le nouvel Irak est un étrange mélange d'institutions démocratiques et de pratiques autocratiques. « J'ai découvert par hasard en 2011 que la zone verte abritait une prison secrète [ironiquement baptisée Charaf, l'honneur], m'explique le président de la commission des droits de l'homme du Parlement, Selim Joubouri. Depuis, Charaf a fermé. Et d'autres Charaf ont ouvert ailleurs.

Avec Thaer toujours, nous avons assisté pendant dix jours au grand pillage de Bagdad. D'abord les villas des dignitaires du régime, celle de Tarek Aziz en particulier, aujourd'hui récupérée par un haut dignitaire du Conseil islamique d'Irak, une formation chiite. Puis les ministères, les casernes, le musée, qui n'a toujours pas rouvert dix ans plus tard, puis les banques, puis tout ce qui pouvait être arraché, emporté. Le reste était saccagé, incendié. Bagdad ne s'en est pas encore complètement remise. Certains ministères n'ont été rénovés que récemment... avant d'être visés par des attentats, deux fois pour



**Si les infrastructures et la voirie sont toujours en chantier, la consommation, elle, a progressé.**

celui des finances. D'autres bâtiments ont été laissés en l'état, encore troués de balles et d'obus. C'est peut-être pour cette raison qu'aucune infrastructure majeure n'a été construite à Bagdad ces dix dernières années, aussi incroyable que cela puisse paraître. On parle d'un métro aérien, dont Alstom doit faire les études. Mais c'est en province, dans le Sud chiite et le Nord kurde surtout, qu'on construit à tour de bras : un aéroport dans la ville sainte de Nadjaf, un grand stade dans le port pétrolier de Bassora, des centres commerciaux à profusion à Erbil. Bagdad, qui écrasait le reste de l'Irak jusqu'en 2003, est devenue le parent pauvre du nouvel Irak. Même les monuments érigés par Saddam sont restés debout, hormis sa statue : de toute façon, il n'y en pas d'autres.

La mise à sac de la capitale irakienne a été la première d'une longue série d'erreurs commises par les Américains : ils sont apparus comme faibles et négligents. Les Irakiens, eux, sont persuadés que cette destruction par procuration était intentionnelle. Mais des chantiers commencent à émerger, en dehors des trottoirs en éternelle réfection. Au moins sept grands centres commerciaux sont en construction, surtout dans les quartiers de Jadrieh et de Mansour. Rien n'est fait pour restaurer l'ancien. Le passé déprime cette société pourtant fondamentalement nostalgique. L'avenir, le rêve, c'est Dubai. Consommer et c'est tout. La liberté, elle, n'a apporté que le chaos et la division.

Partout, chacun affiche ses couleurs, son identité, comme pour marquer son territoire. Les drapeaux à la gloire d'Husseïn et d'Ali, les deux principaux imams chiites, ont envahi tout l'espace public.

Les policiers, majoritairement chiites, les placent sur leurs guérites et aux checkpoints, même en plein quartier sunnite. En retour, les sunnites se sont mis à célébrer le mouled Al-Nabi, l'anniversaire du Prophète, en déployant des fanions vert et

jaune frappés du croissant. Mille petits signes sont là pour affirmer son appartenance ou provoquer l'autre. Il n'y a pas eu de « nettoyage confessionnel », mais les quartiers sont devenus plus homogènes : Kerrada, naguère chrétien, est chiite, Jadrieh est aux Kurdes, Mansour aux sunnites. Il n'est pas interdit d'y habiter quand on est d'une autre confession, mais l'on s'y sent isolé, vulnérable. Certains quartiers mixtes le sont restés. Chaque force politique a élu domicile dans une partie de la ville, érigeant de véritables petites forteresses militaires.

Dans les notes que j'ai retrouvées remontant au 9 avril 2003, Thaer disait : « Je suis chiite mais je me sens plus proche de mon voisin sunnite ou chrétien que d'un chiite du Sud ou de Medinet Saddam. Maintenant que nous avons la liberté, j'ai peur que ce soit la guerre de tous contre tous pour le pouvoir. » Nous avons passé un mois à arpenter l'Irak.

Quand j'ai cessé de retourner en Irak à partir de 2004, j'ai perdu la trace de Thaer. Le téléphone mobile n'existait pas encore, Internet débutait à peine. Je n'avais plus de lui qu'une adresse sans savoir s'il était seulement vivant ou s'il faisait partie des quelque 120 000 victimes civiles de cette décennie de feu, de sang et de larmes.

Comment le retrouver ? En relisant mes notes, je découvre une adresse : quartier Al-Ghadir, rue 79, maison 41. C'est un quartier de la classe moyenne ; chiites, sunnites, chrétiens s'y mélangent. Des fonctionnaires, des commerçants, des cadres intermédiaires... la classe moyenne. Celle que l'embargo a commencé de détruire entre 1991 et 2003. Une rigole coule au milieu de la rue, une femme en pyjama bleu, une croix en or au cou, asperge la rue au tuyau d'arrosage. « Si je ne nettoie pas, personne ne le fait, surtout pas la mairie. C'est le règne des voyous et des drogués. Ils squattent les maisons abandonnées et jettent leurs canettes dans la rue. » Sur les

vingt familles chrétiennes de la rue, il n'en reste que cinq. « Je ne me sens plus chez moi. Les nouveaux, ils viennent de province, d'ailleurs. » Comme sa voisine chiïte d'en face dont elle est devenue l'amie.

Que retiennent-elles de ces dix dernières années ? « Tout va de plus en plus mal », se plaint la chrétienne. « C'est dur, mais les choses s'améliorent », répond la chiïte. En dix ans, la guerre a fait deux fois irruption dans la rue. Un obus tiré à l'aveuglette – par les Américains, dit la chiïte ; par les milices chiïtes, dit la chrétienne – qui a atterri sur un toit et un attentat particulièrement vicieux. Abou Jamal, un sunnite, avait été kidnappé : relâché par ses ravisseurs contre une rançon, il a été renvoyé chez lui dans une voiture qui a explosé au moment où il est entré dans son garage. C'était en 2006, au pire des affrontements interconfessionnels. Mais les deux femmes le jurent : rien ne divisera les Irakiens, chiïtes, sunnites, Kurdes. Thær n'habite plus au 41, il a déménagé en 2008, croit savoir la chrétienne. Elle part à la recherche de son numéro de téléphone. J'attends à l'ombre d'un petit arbre. Quelques 4 x 4 garés dans la rue témoignent que la guerre n'a pas été une catastrophe pour tout le monde.

A deux rues de là habitait une avocate, Lahib Noman. Elle était devenue célèbre en intentant un procès à Saddam Hussein pour le meurtre d'un de ses gardes du corps. Arrêtée par les Moukhabarat, elle avait été violée et torturée au point de devenir à moitié folle. Après la chute du régime, je l'avais retrouvée errant dans la rue, déguenillée et proférant des propos incohérents. Les murs de sa petite maison étaient recouverts de signes kabbalistiques et de slogans contre Saddam et son fils Oudaï. Elle est morte en 2005, révèle un voisin : « Une ONG étrangère l'avait soignée, elle allait mieux. Puis les étrangers ne sont plus venus à cause des attentats et des enlèvements. Elle a replongé. Des miliciens chiïtes

ont voulu lui acheter de force sa maison. Elle refusait. Un matin, on l'a retrouvée le crâne défoncé à coups de pierre. » C'est l'Eglise chaldéenne qui a hérité de sa maison.

Je récupère finalement le numéro de portable de Thær. Nous nous retrouvons trois heures plus tard. Il a vendu sa boutique de pièces détachées et gagne sa vie comme taxi. « J'ai acheté une voiture bon marché. C'est une Saipa iranienne : robuste mais il ne faut pas dépasser 140, les pièces se détachent. » Il rit avec amertume. Ses traits se sont creusés. Il a 54 ans, la même moustache et des cheveux teints. Depuis

ver un emploi de fonctionnaire. Alors, tout va bien. Mais si un autre ministre arrive, on risque sa place. Chacun est classé en fonction de sa religion. Je suis chiïte, mais je n'ai rien gagné dans cette guerre. Elle n'a enrichi qu'un petit nombre, les politiciens qui vivent à l'abri des hauts murs de béton qui encerclent la zone verte. Qu'est-ce qu'ils connaissent de l'Irak, ceux-là ? Les gens ont changé, ils n'ont plus de morale, plus de respect. » Thær, comme la plupart des vieux Bagdadis, se sent envahi : par les Américains, les Iraniens, les banlieusards, les provinciaux, les exilés pleins de rancune...

Son travail de taxi est un cauchemar quotidien : à cause des innombrables checkpoints dressés pour faire pièce aux attentats, il passe des heures dans les embouteillages. Les Bagdadis ont connu tout ce qu'il est possible d'imaginer en matière d'attentats. Le vélo piégé, l'âne kamikaze, le camion poubelle bélier, les explosions simultanées ou successives, etc. Il y a eu jusqu'à trente explosions en une journée. Thær en est réchappé de peu : « C'était en 2007, la bombe a explosé à l'emplacement que je venais de quitter moins d'une minute auparavant. » Le nombre de barrages filtrants s'est considérablement allégé ces trois dernières années, ainsi que les murs antibombes qui défiguraient la ville. Mais la « zone verte », qui la coupe en deux, n'est pas près de disparaître. Les policiers continuent d'utiliser des détecteurs d'explosifs dont on sait parfaitement qu'ils sont inopérants : le contrat, qui se montait à 85 millions de dollars, était l'une des plus belles arnaques du siècle. Les barrages servent autant à protéger qu'à contrôler les quartiers jugés hostiles, comme les zones sunnites de Mansour, Adhamiya ou Daoudi.

Thær n'a pas les relations nécessaires pour décrocher un travail dans la fonction publique, synonyme de sécurité et de bon salaire, maintenant que le pétrole coule de nouveau à flots : un professeur d'université gagne 3 000 dollars, un policier 1 000. Mais la vie est devenue chère : les Irakiens sont nostalgiques de l'Etat-providence et centralisateur. « La liberté, résume Thær, à quoi elle me sert si je ne peux rien changer à ma vie ? La liberté, c'est un moyen, pas un but en soi. Nous avons la liberté, mais pas de vraie démocratie. Alors, à quoi bon ? » Les Irakiens ont découvert Internet, le téléphone portable et les chaînes par satellite, mais c'est comme si le chaos du monde avait fait irruption dans leur vie privée. Ils vivaient sur un île-prison, ils sont désormais au milieu d'un champ de bataille, obligés de s'adapter aux règles floues d'un libéralisme sauvage et sans pitié pour les plus faibles.

Le 9 avril 2013, le gouvernement irakien n'a organisé aucune cérémonie pour commémorer la chute de Bagdad. Le pays est bien trop occupé avec ses problèmes du moment. Quant à Thær, chaque fois qu'il emprunte la place Al-Firdos, il se demande si tout cela n'est pas un mauvais rêve. ■

**Chaque force politique  
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militaires**

qu'il a divorcé en 2008, il n'a plus goût à la vie. Ses deux filles, Zahra et Zeinab, parties en Syrie avec leur mère, lui manquent.

La guerre ? « La vie est bien plus dure aujourd'hui qu'avant. Oui, on n'avait pas de liberté mais, pour le reste, nous avions une vie décente. On travaillait, on mangeait à sa faim, on pouvait sortir à n'importe quelle heure et laisser sa maison ouverte sans craindre d'être agressé par des bandits. Maintenant, tout est compliqué. L'électricité ne marche que douze heures par jour. Il faut faire de la politique pour trou-



Les policiers, chiïtes en majorité, placardent aux checkpoints des portraits des imams Hussein et Ali.





# Special Report: IN PARIS KURD KILLINGS, A SUSPECT AND A MYSTERY

PARIS/MUNICH | April 16, 2013 - (Reuters)

By Nicholas Vinocur and Alexandra Hudson

**THE THREE KURDISH** activists living in Paris were about to embark on a trip when they disappeared, their phones ringing endlessly as colleagues tried to locate them. The next morning, January 10, a friend opened the locked door of their office in the city center and found a scene of horror.

Lying face-up on the floor of a large waiting room in the Kurdish Information Centre was the body of Leyla Saylemez, 25. Blood had trickled from her nose and mouth. A few paces behind her, partly hidden by a coffee table, were the tangled bodies of two comrades: Fidan Dogan, 32, a prominent spokeswoman for Kurdish issues in France, and Sakine Cansiz, 55, a founding member of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has fought a bloody 30-year struggle for Kurdish autonomy from Turkey.

All three women had all been shot at close range, investigators later said. They bore frozen, stunned expressions, the friend who discovered the bodies told Reuters, which has uncovered new details about a case that may affect the peace process between Turkey and the PKK.

The friend declined to be named, but Murat Polat, an activist who also arrived at the scene, said: "We were horrified, everyone was in shock. There was a lot of fear. People thought they might be targeted too."

The murders quickly became a rallying point for Europe's ethnic Kurds, who number more than a million. The PKK is outlawed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. But for many Kurds, the group is a symbol of a stateless people, and Cansiz a hero.

In the hours after news of the murders emerged, thousands of people gathered near the Kurdish Information Centre on Rue Lafayette chanting, "We are all PKK," as riot police stood by.

Visible on news footage of the gathering is Omer Guney, a Turkish immigrant to France who had joined the activists' scene months before. Clean-shaven and wearing a hefty winter coat, he stood near the door to the apartment building that houses the center as France's Interior Minister Manuel Valls described the murders as an "execution."

Guney had driven Cansiz to the office on the morning of the killings. By January 21, the 30-year-old was the prime suspect in the case, after closed-circuit television footage showed he had also been at the premises later on the day of the murders.

Many Kurds suspect the killer or killers, whoever they were, were part of a Turkish plot to infiltrate the PKK and assassinate the activists. The PKK's leader, Abdullah Ocalan, who is incarcerated on a Turkish island, recently agreed to a historic ceasefire with the Turkish state.

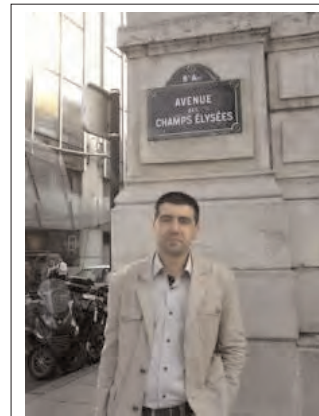
Mehmet Ulker, head of an umbrella organization of Kurdish groups in France, said he believes the murders were meant to intimidate the Kurds as talks over a possible ceasefire began. Muzaffer Ayata, 57, a founding member of the PKK who has lived in Germany since 2002, told Reuters there were signs shadowy elements within the Turkish state "committed this assassination to sabotage the peace process."

Turkey has denied such allegations, suggesting instead that the murders were related to internal disputes in the PKK. It blames the PKK for the deaths of more than 40,000 people, mostly Kurdish, who have died since the militant group took up arms against the state in 1984.

Guney is being held in a Paris jail under formal investigation for "murder related to a terrorist enterprise" and "criminal conspiracy." He denies he killed the women. His lawyer told Reuters that a medical condition made him incapable of committing such an elaborate crime. He had been treated for a tumor in his brain, his lawyer said, though activists who knew



Portraits of Kurdish activists, from L-R, Fidan Dogan, Sakine Cansiz and Leyla Saylemez are seen pinned on a member of the Kurdish community's coat as they gather next to the entrance of the Information Centre of Kurdistan in Paris, where the women were found shot dead in this January 10, 2013 file photo.



An undated photograph taken from a social media website and provided to Reuters April 12, 2013 by the Firat News Agency shows Omer Guney posing on a street in Paris. Credit: REUTERS/Firat News Agency/Handout

Guney say he showed no obvious impairment.

Many questions remain. If Guney was involved, was he set up? Were the three women killed by just one person? What was the motive?

"The investigators are walking on eggshells," said Guney's lawyer. "The diplomatic context is very sensitive; they are not taking any chances."

A Reuters examination has found fresh information about Guney's past and how he came to mix with the PKK despite it being unclear whether he had any Kurdish roots. A man who many in the Kurdish community call a maverick emerges as a complex character, a gun enthusiast with health problems who has had at least one brush with European police.

## "ALWAYS ARMED"

Guney was born in the Turkish city of Sarkisla in the region of Sivas as the only son, along with four daughters, of a Turkish family. According to Guney's state-appointed lawyer, Anne-Sophie Laguens, his family immigrated to France in the mid-1990s and installed themselves in the outer Paris suburb of Garges-les-Gonesse.

Neighbors confirmed that in 2005, Guney's parents opened a kebab restaurant in the nearby suburb of St. Denis. A nearby barber said he knew Guney's father and described his family as "nice people who never spoke about politics."

Little is known about Guney's early life in France except that he received a high school-level diploma as a mechanic from a French lycee. ➔

⇒ Laguens said that at some point Guney moved to a town on the outskirts of Munich, Germany, to live with his wife, a Turkish woman he had met in France and married in 2003.

There, Guney held a job for several years at a medium-sized firm called Kinshofer, which makes cranes and forklifts.

A colleague who worked with Guney between 2009 and 2011 described him as a "fairly neutral guy" who always appeared well-dressed in suits or jeans and suit jackets, and had a keen interest in weapons. Guney owned an air pistol that he took with him to work and had the image of a Kalashnikov rifle as the background screen of his telephone, the colleague said.

"Once an Albanian told me to be careful, 'Guney is someone who is always armed'," he said.

At Kinshofer, staffed by many Turks from Guney's home region of Sivas, some Turkish workers harassed Kurdish employees, the colleague said. Guney did not join in; instead, he took an interest in Kurdish issues, telling the colleague that he had a Kurdish grandmother. It was not possible to verify that claim.

The work colleague said Guney expressed an interest in meeting other Kurds. "He always said to me, 'tell me who you are meeting, who are your contacts, take me with you, you can trust me ... I have good friends who will make sure nothing happens!'"

At one stage Guney said he had a tumor in his head and took several months off work. When he returned, he told the colleague that he was fine, but that his marriage was deteriorating.

"He told me, 'I have nobody'," the colleague said.

In 2011, Guney divorced his wife and began to make frequent trips to France, his lawyer said. During one of these trips he joined a Kurdish association in Villiers-le-Bel, a town not far from his parents' home. The director of the association, the Kurdish Cultural House, recalled signing Guney's membership application form but found him unremarkable.

"Our group is open to anyone of any background, including Turks, so there was no reason for me to be suspicious of Guney," said Mehmet Subasi. "At that level of the organization, there is no screening."

Local activists said it was not unusual for left-wing Turks to join their movement, which may offer a haven to those feeling marginalized in European society.

Guney began to spend more time at the association, offering to help with errands. He gave different versions of his background to different members, telling one that his father was Kurdish and another that he merely assumed a Kurdish identity to obtain political asylum in France, two activists who knew Guney said.

Ulker, the head of the Kurdish umbrella group in France, said that Guney's story seemed to change depending on the background of the person he was addressing. "When he spoke to an Alevi, he would say 'I am an Alevi, too,'" Ulker said, referring to a Muslim sect in Turkey. "When he spoke to a Sunni, he would say 'I am also a Sunni (Muslim)'. And when someone exposed him he would say, 'Ah, I was only joking.'"

In August 2012, Guney returned to his home in Germany and said he had to move out of his rented room immediately, according to his former landlady. Neighbors friendly with Guney's parents said this move coincided with the death of his grandmother.

According to his lawyer, Guney traveled to Ankara, Turkey's capital, several times in 2012, flying on low-cost airlines.

Meral Danis Bestas, a leader of the Kurdish BDP Party in Turkey who traveled to Paris and spoke to investigators, said on Friday that it was "very strange" no information about why Guney traveled to Ankara was forthcoming from French police. A French judicial source said investigators were still verifying the trips and were exchanging information with Turkey.

Guney's lawyer told Reuters: "The trips were to find a perfect wife."

#### MENTAL HEALTH

After returning to Paris, Guney moved back in with his parents and briefly worked as a maintenance officer at the Charles de Gaulle airport. The stint was cut short when Guney suffered a seizure on the job and was

taken for treatment at the Saint-Anne Hospital in Paris, a specialist center for neurology and psychiatry, his lawyer said.

She said Guney was diagnosed with a brain tumor which caused frequent bouts of amnesia and provoked seizures. An uncle of Guney's from Sivas interviewed on Turkey's CNN affiliate said that he was "unable to remember what he ate an hour ago." After his release from hospital, Guney received 700 to 800 euros per month in French disability payments.

"He suffers from very serious neurological difficulties," Laguens said.

During this period of unemployment in early 2012, activists said, Guney started to appear at the Kurdish Cultural Centre in central Paris. The large facility houses several Kurdish associations, and is a short walk from the Kurdish Information Centre, which is known as an office for PKK activists. Nobody recalls having met Guney before he turned up.

"We realized later that nobody really knew him. He hung around the Centre, he smiled, he talked to people in Turkish, but nobody knew his family or friends," said Polat, the activist who attended the scene of the murders soon after they were discovered.

In photographs from an outing with activists in March 2012, Guney is seen on the first floor of the Eiffel Tower hoisting a banner hailing Ocalan, the jailed leader of the PKK.

Berivan Akyol, a translator for the Kurdish community, said that despite his neurological problems Guney was capable of showing up on time for appointments, was able to drive and never complained of headaches or lost his balance.

Thanks to his fluent French, Guney was often called upon to translate for Kurdish women who wanted to communicate with their doctors, activists said. He also occasionally worked as a driver.

Last December, Guney accompanied a group of Kurdish activists on a trip to the Netherlands for a rally in the southwestern town of Ellemeet attended by PKK officials in Europe. The rally was broken up by 150 Dutch police, who arrested 55 people. Among them were Guney and Saylemez, the 25-year-old activist later shot in Paris (whose name in some reports has been spelled Soylemez). Guney was released the same day without charge.

That month, Guney moved into a flat in a high-rise building in the Paris suburb of La Courneuve, with a Turk of Kurdish origin whom he had met at the Villiers-le-Bel association. In an interview with Firat, a news agency linked to the PKK, the flatmate said that Guney owned five mobile phones which he refused to lend, and had shown him a gun. The flatmate, who was taken in for questioning by police along with Guney on January 17, did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Subasi of the Kurdish association in Villiers-le-Bel said that after the murders he had questioned the flatmate, who had told him the gun shown to him by Guney had looked real. Guney's lawyer said the gun was merely an air pistol and explained his interest in weapons as a cultural proclivity of Turkish men.

#### THE VICTIMS

On January 8, the day before the murders, Sakine Cansiz went to renew her French residency visa in Paris, said Akyol, the Kurdish translator. To Cansiz's outrage, police refused to issue the visa that day, saying it was not ready, according to Akyol, who spoke to Cansiz about the process. The police declined to comment.

"I told her, 'Calm down, this is France, there is no point in getting excited'," Akyol said. "She could not hide her militant side, that was part of her personality."

Cansiz's temperament formed part of her legend among PKK supporters and Kurdish activists. Known by her code name "Sara" in the PKK, she had joined Ocalan's movement as a student in the early 1970s before becoming a fighter. The PKK originally sought an independent Kurdish state, but has moderated its demands to seeking political autonomy and cultural rights.

Arrested by Turkish forces in the early 1980s, Cansiz spent a decade in the infamous Diyarbakir prison in eastern Turkey, where she said she was tortured. The experience forged a mindset based on unwavering personal discipline, said Ulker and other Kurdish activists.

Turkish sources said Cansiz had her differences with

⇒

⇒ the organization's elite. She had fled to Europe in the 1990s and followed a nomadic lifestyle, travelling between Paris, Brussels and Cologne, Germany, cities with large Kurdish exile populations.

Though Kurdish activists said she had come to deal mainly with women's issues in the PKK, Cansiz almost certainly retained a wider political role.

According to a 2007 diplomatic cable revealed by WikiLeaks, U.S. officials saw her as a key figure in the flow of funds sent from Europe to PKK leaders in Iraq - a role that has prompted speculation the killings' motivation may have been robbery, not politics. Ayata, the founding member of the PKK who lives in Germany, said Cansiz had nothing to do with financing the group.

On January 9 Cansiz was planning to travel to Cologne and then on to attend conferences in Qandil, a district in the mountainous borderlands of northern Iraq where the PKK operates permanent bases, said a PKK official. Some Kurds believe Cansiz opposed the ceasefire talks. Ulker disagrees.

"There are disagreements in the PKK, like any organization, but Cansiz was not a renegade," he said. "The reason for this killing, whoever was behind it, was to intimidate and provoke the Kurds as the (ceasefire) talks began, to cow them into weakness."

Saylemez, who was killed alongside Cansiz, was an area manager in the PKK youth organization, and had planned to accompany her better-known comrade to Germany. "She was due to come to Germany the day she died," her sister Yasmin told Reuters. "We never expected something like this could happen in Europe. Never."

The other woman at the center was Dogan, who acted as an informal spokeswoman for Kurdish issues in France. The role had led her to meet journalists and officials, including President Francois Hollande.

The three were bright, fit and experienced. At 55, the combat-trained Cansiz continued to rise early each morning to go on an hour-long run or exercise in her room, according to Akyol.

Could one man with a mental impairment shoot all three with clinical accuracy?

#### 10 BULLETS

Prosecutor Francois Mollins said the main piece of evidence linking Guney to the killings is closed-circuit TV footage showing him entering the Kurdish Information Centre building with Cansiz around 9 a.m. on January 9. Guney told interrogators he left the building for good at 11.30 a.m.

But cameras across the street recorded him entering with a shoulder bag shortly after noon and emerging, alone, at 12:56 p.m. Guney later said he could no longer recall exactly what time he had left the building but he maintained the women were alive when he did, according to his lawyer.

Forensic specialists found no signs of a struggle inside the office. There were four empty glasses in the kitchen sink, Ulker and other Kurdish sources assisting the police said. It appeared the three victims knew their killer and had been caught by surprise, police sources said.

Dogan had her coat on as though she had been about to leave the office, a converted apartment, said Polat, the Kurdish activist who attended the scene, and Cansiz was bleeding from several head wounds. She and Saylemez both had blackened, swollen eyes, said Ulker, who saw the corpses at the morgue. Aside from the bodies on the floor and a packed suitcase lying open next to the coffee table, the room was neat and undisturbed.

Autopsies showed the women were killed by bullets fired into their heads at close range, three each for Dogan and Saylemez, and four for Cansiz. Ballistics experts found two brands of 7.65mm caliber bullets at the site. Molins said the bullets had "most likely" been fired from a single gun. The attack "looked like the work of a professional," a judicial source told France's TF1 television.

Traces of gunpowder were found on a bag in Guney's car. Guney cannot explain the traces because the reason for them being there "is too uncertain," said his lawyer. Partial DNA traces recovered on a bullet casing from the murder scene were inconclusive and no gun has been recovered, the prosecutor said.

Some Kurdish activists at the Information Centre suggest others might

have gained access to the building via an entrance leading into its hallway from an adjacent grocery store, which was closed and shuttered that day.

In the aftermath of the shootings, Guney stayed in and around Paris. As well as being caught on CCTV in the crowd outside the center, he also attended a rally in memory of the victims on the outskirts of Paris a few days later.

Activists asked Guney to help police with their investigation because he had been Cansiz's driver on the day of the women's murder, said Polat. Guney went to police for an initial round of questioning on January 16 and was asked to return the following day.

Anti-terrorism investigators questioned Guney and his flatmate for about 96 hours, the maximum period allowed in terrorism cases in France. The flatmate was released while Guney stayed in custody. On January 21 a prosecutor told journalists that Guney was "probably the author or one of the authors of these acts".

#### MISSING MOTIVE

Under French law Guney could remain in jail for up to a year, with possible extension to a maximum of four years, subject to review by judges overseeing the case.

French judicial sources declined to comment on their theories for a possible motive. Though police sources at first touted several suggestions, ranging from a love spat gone wrong to internal PKK score-settling to a temporary bout of insanity, they have since stayed silent.

Guney has claimed to be the victim of a Franco-Turkish plot, according to Ulker's conversations with police, and told police that surveillance footage had been tampered with to remove images of other men, according to Ulker. Guney's lawyer denied he mentioned a plot during questioning.

French and Kurdish media reported that Guney told police he was a member of the PKK, potentially fuelling suspicions that the killings were related to tensions within the organization. But the PKK leadership denies Guney was a member, and Guney's lawyer said that he did not claim to be a fully fledged member of the organization.

PKK sources prefer to point the finger at Turkey. They said warnings by Turkish government officials days after the shootings that PKK officials were unsafe hinted at state involvement in the murders. Roj Welat, a senior PKK fighter based in northern Iraq, described the killings as a "political massacre" and "an international conspiracy."

Turkish officials reject such allegations.

After decades of conflict, the decision by Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan to talk openly with PKK leader Ocalan is fraught with political risk. Erdogan has to carry with him a skeptical conservative establishment; Ocalan has to keep the obedience of fighters in the remote mountains of Qandil, some harboring doubts about the process.

The Paris shootings had an almost immediate political impact. After news of the deaths, Ocalan suspended talks with Turkey for five or six weeks and demanded that the killer be identified, according to Ulker who has talked with people in the Kurdish BDP party who visited Ocalan.

In late March Turkey and the PKK finally signed a ceasefire agreement. At the same time a wider peace process continues and the deaths of the three activists remain a sensitive issue.

Yesterday, Selahattin Demirtas, a co-leader of the Kurdish BDP party, told Reuters: "It was a deliberate murder and assassination. As long as it remains unsolved, as to who was behind this, then the peace process is in danger. That is why it is important to find out who was behind the murders." ○

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(Additional reporting by Daren Butler and Ayla Jean Yackley in Istanbul, and Chine Labbe and Nicolas Bertin in Paris; Editing By Richard Woods and Simon Robinson)

# The dangerous price of ignoring Syria

Obama must engage on Syria and reverse America's retreat from the troubled region.

**Vali Nasr**

President Obama has doggedly resisted American involvement in Syria. The killing of over 70,000 people and the plight of over a million refugees have elicited sympathy from the White House but not much more. That is because Syria challenges a central aim of Obama's foreign policy: shrinking the U.S. footprint in the Middle East and downplaying the region's importance to global politics. Doing more on Syria would reverse the U.S. retreat from the region.

Since the beginning of Obama's first term, the administration's stance as events unfolded in the Middle East has been wholly reactive. This "lean back and wait" approach has squandered precious opportunity to influence the course of events in the Middle East. There has been no strategy for capitalizing on the opportunity that the Arab Spring presented, or for containing its fallout — the Syrian crisis being the worst case to date. The president rewarded Burmese generals with a six-hour visit for their willingness to em-

brace reform, but he has not visited a single Arab country that went through the Arab Spring.

Obama sees Syria as a tragic humanitarian crisis without obvious strategic implications for the United States. "How do I weigh tens of thousands who've been killed in Syria versus the tens of thousands who are currently being killed in the Congo?" he asked in a *New Republic* interview in January. When the president visited the region last month he chose to focus on the Arab-Israeli peace process rather than Syria. The peace process is now at the top of Secretary of State John Kerry's agenda.

The plight of Palestinians is a perennial concern, but it is in Syria that the future of the region hangs in the balance. Choosing the peace process over Syria underscores not the administration's interest in the Middle East but its determination to look past it.

Washington has wasted precious time in using diplomatic, economic and military levers to influence the course of events in Syria. That neglect has allowed the conflagration to rage at great human cost, radicalizing the opposition and putting at risk U.S. allies across the region.

America cannot and should not decide

the fate of the Middle East, but it should be clear about its stakes there, and not shy away from efforts to at least nudge events in more favorable directions as this critical region faces momentous choices. A "lean back and wait" posture toward unfolding events is dangerous.

The paroxysm of violence in Syria is expected to kill tens of thousands more and produce as many as three million refugees by the year's end. That is a humanitarian tragedy to be sure, but one with immediate strategic consequences. American insouciance in the face of that devastation is fomenting anti-Americanism. The waves of refugees will constitute an unstable

**Washington's neglect has allowed the conflagration to rage at great human cost, putting America's allies at risk.**

population that will be a breeding ground for extremism and in turn destabilize the countries where they take refuge. Syria's neighbors are not equipped to deal with a humanitarian disaster on this scale.

The longer the devastation goes on the more difficult it will be to put Syria back together, and failing to do so will leave a dangerous morass in the heart of the Middle East, a failed state at war with itself where extremism and instability will fester and all manner of terrorists and Al Qaeda affiliates will find ample space, resources and recruits to menace the region and world.

Worse yet, the conflict in Syria could spill over its borders. Syria has become ground zero in a broader conflict that pits Shiites against Sunnis and shapes the larger regional competition for power between Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia. Syria's paroxysms if allowed to drag on could potentially spread far and wide and even change the map of the region. America may think it does not have any interests in Syria, but it has interests everywhere the Syrian conflict touches.

Lebanon and Iraq are each deeply divided along sectarian lines, and both countries teeter on a knife's edge as tensions rise between their ascendant Shiite populations who fear a setback if Bashar al-Assad falls, and the minority

Sunnis in their own countries who support Syria's Sunni-led opposition. Sectarian tensions stretch from Lebanon and Iraq through the Gulf countries of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain and on to Pakistan where sectarian violence has exploded into the open.

It is time America takes the lead in organizing international assistance to refugees. America should not hide behind the Russian veto. It should pursue a concerted diplomatic strategy in support of arming the rebels and imposing a no-flight zone over Syria. That would not only hamper Assad's ability to fight, it would allow refugees to remain within Syria's borders, thus reducing pressure



DIMITAR DJILKOFF/AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE

on neighboring countries.

It is time the U.S. took over from Qatar and Saudi Arabia in organizing the Syrian opposition into a credible political force — failure to do that accounts for the chaos that has paralyzed the group. There are powerful economic sanctions that the U.S. could use to cripple the Assad regime.

Finally, America should build ties with the Free Syrian Army with the goal of denying extremist groups the ability to dominate the armed resis-

tance and gaining influence with groups that will dominate Syria's future. It was failing to build those ties in Afghanistan that allowed the resistance groups who opposed the Soviet Union to disintegrate into the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

The Syrian crisis has become a Gordian knot that cannot be easily disentangled. As daunting as the crisis looks, there is a cost to inaction — in human suffering, regional instability and damage to America's global standing. And as the Syrian crisis escalates, America

and the world will only rediscover their stakes in the Middle East. If Obama truly wants to pivot away from the Middle East then he has to help end the bloodletting in Syria.

**VALI NASR**, dean of the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, is the author of the forthcoming book *"The Dispensable Nation: American Foreign Policy in Retreat."*

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune**

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17, 2013

# Syria's forgotten front

As the civil war in Syria rages on, the risk that Israel will be drawn into the fray is rising.

**David Pollock**

**WASHINGTON** As the civil war in Syria rages on, the risk that Israel will be drawn into the fray is rising.

Just last Friday, shells fired from Syria again hit the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, and Israel fired back. It's not the first time tensions in the area have flared.

On Jan. 30, Israel staged an airstrike on a weapons convoy in Syria, reportedly destined for Hezbollah in Lebanon. On March 6, jihadist rebels kidnapped 21 Filipino peacekeepers in the Golan Heights. The risk that Israeli retaliation for cross-border fire could spiral into a major skirmish, or even a larger Israeli intervention to set up a buffer zone in Syria, is real. To prevent it, the United States should broker a tacit agreement between Israel and moderate elements of the Syrian opposition.

Israel and the Syrian opposition don't have much in common, but they do share some important mutual enemies, namely Hezbollah and Iran, both of which are fighting furiously to save Bashar al-Assad's government.

This convergence of interests provides an opening for America to quietly strike a deal between Israel and the leadership of the Syrian opposition: Israel should agree to refrain from arming proxies inside Syria to protect its border; and the Syrian opposition should work to keep extremist groups like Hezbollah and Jabhat al-Nusra and other affiliates of Al Qaeda far away from the Israeli frontier. This would demonstrate the Syrian opposition's bona fides to potential Western supporters and dissuade Israel from intervening or arming allies in Syria.

The Assad regime's army, increasingly pressed for manpower on other fronts, recently withdrew many troops from the Israeli border, leaving the field open to extremist groups like Jabhat al-Nusra.

The recent high-profile visit by Israel's defense minister, Moshe Yaalon, to the front line in the Golan Heights led to rumors in Syria that Israel was planning to create and support a proxy army among the Syrian Druse population. Although these rumors are probably exaggerated, there is little doubt that Israel is trying to step up its contacts across this border.

But if Israel tries to establish proxy forces in a buffer zone along the border, it would almost certainly backfire. Such a move would invite Hezbollah, its allies and other extremists to join the conflict. That would be very much like what happened in Lebanon, with disastrous long-term consequences, beginning in the late 1970s when Israel invaded southern Lebanon and set up the South Lebanon Army to protect its border before staging a second, larger invasion in 1982. The result was the creation of Hezbollah, with Iranian support, to "liberate" south Lebanon — a threat that remains today.

Over the past 18 months, my colleagues and I have traveled extensively in the region and conducted interviews with hundreds of armed and unarmed Syrian opposition leaders and activists. Three surveys we conducted for the firm Pechter Polls revealed intense animosity toward both Iran and Hezbollah. This disdain means that the Syrian opposition will most likely want to keep Hezbollah forces far from any rebel-held territory, something that would please Israel.

In addition to Israel's agreement not to deploy proxies in Syria, American and international Jewish charities could agree to step up the humanitarian assistance that they are already providing to Syrian civilians on a small scale. These efforts are generally being carried out quietly, for fear that too much publicity might provoke a public relations backlash.

Besides food and shelter, there is one medical donation that would have a huge symbolic impact: atropine, an an-

tidote against the chemical weapons that many believe Assad is starting to use against his own population. This kind of aid would definitively refute the false but widely held conspiracy theory among Syrians that Israel, and its legendary lobby, still secretly support the Assad regime. It would chip away at Syrians' entrenched mistrust of Israel.

Finally, the United States could also restrict the aerial intelligence that it misguidedly still provides to the Syrian government under a 1974 agreement — information that could be used by Assad to target rebel soldiers.

Any arrangement that distances the opposition from the jihadis, avoids Israeli intervention on Syrian soil and focuses all efforts squarely against Assad should appeal to Syrian opposition leaders. It would also accomplish multiple goals without any direct American intervention: stabilizing an increasingly precarious front line; preventing further regional conflict; helping alleviate a humanitarian crisis; and setting the stage for a better post-Assad future.

The key is to do it quickly, before the situation on another one of Syria's borders spirals even more dangerously downward.

**DAVID POLLOCK** is a senior fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

# Turkey Said to Sign Oil Deal With Kurds, Defying Baghdad

BY ERCAN ERSOY & CHRIS V. NICHOLSON

**Iraq's Kurdish region has signed a landmark agreement with Turkey to supply it directly with oil and gas, two people familiar with the matter said.**

The accord was signed last month when Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan met Iraqi Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani in Ankara, said the people, who asked not to be identified because the plans are private. Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz, contacted via his press office, declined to comment, as did an Iraqi Kurdish official. The Oil Ministry in Baghdad didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

The Kurdish government will sell oil and gas directly to Turkey in a deal that so far has bypassed the Iraqi government in Baghdad, which has warned the Kurds not to sign separate energy accords. Turkey may also take the Kurdish government's stake in concessions operated by Exxon Mobil Corp. on the enclave's border with the rest of Iraq, one of the people said.

"Large-scale oil exports would change the economic position of Kurdistan," said Robin Mills, head of consulting at Dubai-based Manaar Energy Consulting and Project Management. "If this deal goes through, it's an aggressive move by Turkey that really means busting relations with Baghdad."

Iraq's deputy prime minister, Hussain al-Shahristani, said yesterday his government has told Turkey that it doesn't allow oil agreements without central government approval, and that Turkey must respect Iraqi sovereignty.

## Genel Windfall

The accords also spell a windfall for oil and gas companies such as Genel Energy Plc (GENL), the largest producer in the Kurdish region. Genel Chief Executive Officer Tony Hayward said last week that he expected a new pipeline transporting oil from the Kurdish region to Turkey to be finished by midyear.

Patrick d'Ancona, a spokesman for Genel, declined to comment on the agreement.

The Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq signed a produc-



tion-sharing agreement with Exxon Mobil in 2011. It covered six blocks, the region's oil minister Ashti Hawrami said in November that year, including Qara Hansher in the disputed region where the Kurdish enclave borders the rest of Iraq.

The Kurdish area could export 250,000 barrels of oil a day this year and that may increase to 1 million barrels by 2015 and 2 million by 2019, Hawrami said this month. "We believe a decentralized oil policy and the sharing of power and wealth is essential to Iraq's unity," he said.

## Oil Nationalism

A deal with Turkey would make the Kurds less dependent on the Iraqi budget. That's long been a point of contention between Baghdad and Erbil, the northern capital and base for a semi-autonomous Kurdish administration since after the 1991 Gulf War.

"Oil is linked to nationalism," said Aziz Sardar, a visiting lecturer in Middle Eastern studies at University College Cork in Ireland. "Barzani is using it to secure his position and mobilize people, who see it as a way to independence."

For Turkey, the accord offers access to cheaper energy that would reduce its import bill and current-account deficit, the \$800 billion economy's key weakness.

The deficit ballooned to about 10 percent of economic output in 2011, exceeding \$77 billion and ranking as the world's second-biggest after the U.S. Last year Turkey imported \$59 billion of energy, Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan said in January.

In recent years Turkey has reversed its earlier hostility to autonomy for Iraqi Kurds and moved toward an alliance. It had previously cited concerns that self-rule in northern Iraq would encourage Turkey's own Kurdish minority to demand similar rights.

The government this year has opened peace talks with Kurdish militants who have been fighting in southeast Turkey for almost three decades. ●



## Kurdish oil pipeline planned for Turkey

ANKARA, Turkey, April 17 2013 (UPI)

**Converting a natural gas pipeline to an oil pipeline will allow for additional exports from the Kurdish region of Iraq, Genel Energy chief Tony Hayward said.**

Genel Energy, an Anglo-Turkish company, said last week that it reached a test rate of 11,950 barrels of oil per day from its first of five exploration wells in the Chia Surkh discovery area in the semi-autonomous Kurdish region of Iraq.

Hayward, the Genel chief executive officer, told Bloomberg News that infrastructure is needed to complete a small section of a line that would convert an existing natural gas pipeline to an oil pipeline.

"They'll have that infrastructure by the middle of the year," he said.

Genel received permission Jan. 7 from the Kurdistan Regional Government to ship crude oil from the Taq Taq field by truck to Turkey. Export restrictions had been in place as a sign of growing frustration with the central Iraqi government over oil laws in the country.

Turkish Energy Minister Taner Yildiz said last week that he was ready to move ahead with pipeline construction after meeting with Kurdish leaders in Ankara in March.

Political disputes between the semiautonomous Kurdish government and the central Iraqi government over oil laws are seen as impediments to Iraq's oil potential. ○

# A la télévision syrienne, Bachar Al-Assad affiche sa sérénité et stigmatise l'Occident

Le président syrien accuse les pays occidentaux de faire le jeu d'Al-Qaïda en soutenant la rébellion

Dans une interview télévisée très soignée, diffusée mercredi 17 avril par la chaîne pro-régime Al-Ikhbariya, à l'occasion de la fête nationale syrienne, le président Bachar Al-Assad s'est livré à son exercice médiatique préféré : stigmatiser le soutien des puissances occidentales à ses opposants, qui équivaut selon lui à financer Al-Qaïda et projeter l'image d'un leader serein, confiant dans sa capacité à restaurer l'autorité de son régime, après deux ans d'insurrection armée.

Filmé dans un bureau de la présidence baigné de couleurs chaudes, avec le drapeau syrien et des rayonnages de livres en arrière-plan, le maître de Damas a fait le parallèle entre les « héros de l'indépendance » d'hier, acquise en 1946, après vingt-cinq années de domination française et l'armée syrienne d'aujourd'hui, confiée à des « groupes terroristes » manipulés

selon lui de l'étranger. « Nous n'avons pas d'autres options que la victoire, car si nous ne sommes pas victorieux, ce sera la fin de la Syrie, et je ne pense pas qu'un seul citoyen syrien accepte cette option », a déclaré Bachar Al-Assad, sur fond de boiseries mordorées.

« On a beaucoup sous-estimé le régime syrien », réagit Peter Harling, analyste à l'International Crisis Group. Le simple professionnalisme de cette vidéo montre que le régime s'est installé dans le conflit, qu'il s'y est adapté. Il faut sortir du récit qui présente le régime comme une entité toujours plus aux abois. »

Parfaitement à l'aise face à deux journalistes acquis à ses vues, le chef d'Etat syrien a loué l'aide humanitaire distribuée par les autorités et affirmé que les Occidentaux jouaient avec le feu en appuyant l'opposition, composée en partie de groupes djihadistes.

« L'Occident a déjà payé très cher le fait d'avoir aidé à ses débuts Al-Qaïda. Aujourd'hui il fait la même chose en Syrie, en Libye et dans d'autres endroits et il le paiera cher au cœur de l'Europe et des Etats-Unis. »

Cette allusion voilée aux déboires américains en Afghanistan –

« Nous n'avons pas d'autres options que la victoire, sinon ce sera la fin de la Syrie »

Bachar Al-Assad

pays où le djihad antisoviétique, initialement financé par Washington, a contribué à l'essor d'Al-Qaïda – est un classique de la rhétorique de Bachar Al-Assad. Mais depuis que le front Al-Nosra, un mouvement djihadiste à la pointe

du combat contre le régime syrien, a officialisé, mi-avril, ses liens avec la nébuleuse terroriste, cette mise en garde résonne avec une acuité nouvelle.

Le président syrien a d'autant plus de raisons d'être satisfait que ces derniers jours, ses troupes ont regagné un peu de terrain face aux insurgés. Celles-ci ont notamment desserré le siège de la base de Wadi Deif, un site d'une importance stratégique, sur la route entre Damas et Alep. En mars, l'armée régulière avait aussi repris le quartier de Baba Amr, à Homs, un bastion de la rébellion, que le régime avait investi, à l'hiver 2012, avant que les insurgés ne s'y réintroduisent.

« C'est une erreur de considérer que le régime renonce à des parties de territoires », analyse Peter Harling. Il n'abandonne rien. Il vit dans l'idée qu'une normalisation est toujours possible. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

INTERNATIONAL Herald Tribune TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2013

## Turkish pianist sentenced for Twitter posts on Islam

ISTANBUL

BY SEBNEM ARSU

A court here handed down a suspended 10-month prison term on Monday for Fazil Say, an internationally acclaimed Turkish pianist and composer convicted of insulting Islam and offending Muslims in postings on Twitter.

Mr. Say, 43, who has performed with major orchestras in cities including Berlin, New York and Tokyo, said in earlier hearings that the accusations against him went "against universal human rights and laws." The sentence was suspended for five years, meaning that Mr. Say will not be sent to prison unless he is convicted of another offense within that period.

In recent years, many intellectuals, writers and artists have been prosecuted for statements about Islam and Turkish identity, both of which the pro-Islamic government seeks to shield from criticism. Social media outlets like Face-

book and Twitter, however, have rarely figured in previous trials, although Turks are active users of the sites.

The messages cited in the indictment were Mr. Say's personal remarks referring to a poem by the 11th-century Persian poet Omar Khayyam, which poked fun at an Islamic vision of the afterlife.

The poem was sent to Mr. Say from another user before he forwarded it.

In another personal Twitter post, he joked about the rapid call to prayer at a nearby mosque, questioning whether the muezzin who makes the call was running late for a drink.

Mr. Say, who denied the charges, is known for his critical stance against the government's social and cultural policies. He has said publicly that he is an atheist — a rare statement in a country where the bulk of the population of 74 million identify themselves as Muslims.

Many intellectuals and writers, including the Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk, have faced similar charges in recent years, prompting heavy interna-

tional criticism of Turkey's record on freedom of speech and human rights.

Mr. Pamuk was fined \$3,700 for saying in a Swiss newspaper that Turks "have killed 30,000 Kurds and 1 million Armenians," in reference to the 1915 mass killings of Armenians by the Ottoman Army — a deeply contentious issue in Turkey.

In other continuing trials, dozens of writers and intellectuals and a large number of journalists face a wide range of terrorism-related charges, hampering Turkey's continuing efforts to join the European Union, which sets high judicial standards for prospective members.

Hundreds of Mr. Say's fans and supporters have attended the three hearings in six months to protest his prosecution.

He has continued to perform nationally and internationally, and, when the sentence was handed down, he was in Germany for a concert in the southern city of Reutlingen.

In a written statement, Mr. Say said he was concerned about the implications of the court's judgment for freedom of expression in his country, since he had been sentenced "although I've committed no crime."

# Le Hezbollah turc repasse à l'action dans les universités

Par Laure Marchand

**Des affrontements entre étudiants islamistes et kurdes ont gagné ces derniers jours plusieurs campus à travers le pays.**

**I**stanbul - La violence politique sur les campus turcs a fait une réapparition brutale à l'université Dicle, à Diyarbakir, la grande ville kurde dans l'Est. Des étudiants islamistes affiliés au Hezbollah turc - un mouvement radical sunnite distinct de son homonyme libanais - se sont violemment opposés à des étudiants sympathisants de la guérilla du PKK la semaine dernière. Des tracts annonçant des activités pour célébrer la naissance de Mahomet semblent à l'origine des trois jours de heurts qui ont conduit à la fermeture de l'université.

Trois jeunes Kurdes au moins ont été poignardés au cours des affrontements. Des gaz lacrymogènes ont été lancés par la police depuis des hélicoptères pour disperser un rassemblement d'étudiants qui voulaient empêcher la tenue de la conférence sur le Prophète. Les tensions ont gagné d'autres universités du pays. Des clashes



*Après avoir éclaté entre étudiants sur le campus de l'université Dicle, à Diyarbakir, les affrontements se sont poursuivis avec les forces de l'ordre dans un champ voisin. Crédits photo : MEHMET ENGIN/AFP*

entre groupes islamistes et kurdes ont été signalés dans des facultés à Ankara, Istanbul, Samsun...

«La querelle entre les Kurdes islamistes et les Kurdes laïcs s'est déclenchée bien plus tôt que prévu», s'inquiète Kurtulus Tayiz dans un éditorial du quotidien Taraf, en référence aux négociations actuellement menées par le gouvernement turc pour obtenir le désarmement des rebelles. Le Hezbollah, mouvement majoritairement kurde qui prône l'établissement d'un État islamique, est officiellement

classé comme une organisation terroriste par Ankara. Mais il est accusé d'avoir été utilisé par l'État turc dans la «sale guerre» conduite contre le PKK dans les années 1990 et d'avoir tué des centaines de civils kurdes. À son actif, le Hezbollah compte, entre autres, des attentats contre des débits de vente d'alcool ou l'assassinat du préfet de police de Diyarbakir en 2001. De la clandestinité à la représentation légale

Les agressions à renfort de barres de fer et de couteaux à l'université de Diyarbakir sont révélatrices du regain

d'activités de cette mouvance et de sa présence plus marquée sur la scène politique. En 2011, les principaux leaders du Hezbollah ont bénéficié d'une loi plafonnant la durée maximum de détention sans procès à dix ans et sont sortis de prison. La majorité en a profité pour disparaître dans la nature. Depuis, le Hezbollah est passé de la clandestinité à la représentation légale. Fondé fin 2012, le Huda-Par, qui peut se traduire par «Dans les pas de Dieu», est le dernier-né des partis politiques turcs. Les assaillants de l'université de Dicle en sont membres. Si elle ne prône plus la violence armée, la formation reste une émanation du Hezbollah.

Une nébuleuse d'associations islamistes soupçonnées d'avoir des liens avec ce groupe fondamentaliste mène régulièrement des actions dans l'espace public. En janvier, par exemple, des militants de l'ONG Özgür-Der, très active dans le Sud-Est kurde, ont manifesté devant le consulat français à Istanbul contre l'intervention au Mali. Avec leurs confrères de l'IHH, organisateurs de la flottille humanitaire qui a tenté de forcer le blocus de Gaza en 2010, ils ont déroulé une large banderole qui réclamait que «la France colonialiste (...) dégage» du Mali.

## Irak: les forces kurdes déployées près d'une ville disputée

KIRKOUK (Irak), 27 avr 2013 (AFP)

**LES FORCES de sécurité kurdes se sont déployées près de la ville disputée de Kirkouk dans le nord de l'Irak, apparemment pour combattre des insurgés alors qu'une vague de violences a fait plus de 200 morts depuis mardi à travers le pays, a indiqué samedi un haut responsable.**

"Après concertation avec le gouverneur de Kirkouk, il a été décidé que les peshmerga parent aux manquements sécuritaires en règle générale, et en particulier autour de la ville de Kirkouk", a déclaré dans un communiqué Jabbar Yawar, secrétaire général du ministère des peshmerga dans la région autonome du Kurdistan.

"Les services de renseignement des peshmerga disposent d'informations selon lesquelles des groupes terroristes planifient de lancer des attaques dans la région", a dit M. Yawar, ajoutant que l'objectif de son ministère est de "préserver

la vie des citoyens".

L'armée irakienne a toutefois attribué ce mouvement à des "manoeuvres politiques".

"Après les derniers mouvements des forces des peshmerga, l'armée a été mise en état d'alerte", a dit un officier supérieur à l'AFP. Selon lui, les mouvements des peshmerga sont une manoeuvre politique et ne sont pas destinés à combler un vide sécuritaire".

De son côté, un haut responsable militaire irakien a qualifié ce déploiement de "développement dangereux".

"C'est un développement dangereux. Ils (Les Kurdes) veulent atteindre les puits de pétrole" de cette province multiethnique riche en pétrole, a déclaré à l'AFP le général Ali Ghaidan.

Kirkouk et la province et sa capitale éponyme sont une véritable mosaïque ethnique et confessionnelle, où vivent Kurdes, Arabes, et Turkmènes, sunnites et chiites. Elle constitue l'essentiel du territoire que les Kurdes veulent inclure dans la région autonome du Kurdistan, au grand dam du gouvernement fédéral à Bagdad. ○



# Au front syrien, les combattantes kurdes font figure d'exception

**A**LEP (Syrie) -(AFP) - Les cheveux découverts, elle lance des ordres à des combattants kurdes à la mine patibulaire qui la dépassent de plusieurs têtes: la commandante Engizek détonne au milieu des rangs quasi-exclusivement masculins de la rébellion syrienne.

Cette petite femme frêle dirige des dizaines de combattants kurdes dans le quartier de Cheikh Maqsoud aux mains des rebelles dans le nord d'Alep, la capitale économique syrienne entrée dans la guerre il y a neuf mois.

"Les femmes peuvent tirer au fusil automatique, à la kalachnikov et même dans un char, aussi bien que les hommes", dit Engizek, 28 ans, vêtue d'un pantalon et d'une veste beige, les cheveux strictement attachés.

"Les femmes sont partie intégrante de notre révolution", affirme-t-elle à l'AFP dans une rue déserte de Cheikh Maqsoud au milieu de bâtiments détruits par des explosions ou criblés d'impacts de balles, alors que résonnent les tirs des snipers.

La brigade d'Engizek compte 20% de femmes et dépend des comités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), bras armé du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD), branche syrienne du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, rebelles kurdes en Turquie).

A Cheikh Maqsoud, les comités se sont récemment alliés aux rebelles dans leur combat contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad.

Contrairement aux Arabes, les femmes kurdes ont une longue tradition de combat. Les combattantes du PKK ont connu une notoriété mondiale dans les années 1990, notamment en menant des opérations suicide.

Engizek, qui n'a qu'un seul patro-



nyme, affirme que les combattants du YPG, hommes et femmes, suivent le même entraînement strict, montent ensemble au front et se partagent également les corvées domestiques.

Pour Moumtaz, 18 ans, rejoindre la rébellion il y a un an a été une "expérience libératrice".

Seule combattante parmi ses quatre frères et soeurs, elle dit s'être transformée en une nuit. La petite étudiante est devenue une guerrière quand elle a rejoint un camp d'entraînement du YPG dans sa ville d'Afrine, bastion kurde au nord d'Alep.

"Prendre les armes a été une décision personnelle", dit cette jeune fille, le front ceint d'un bandana.

Derrière elle, ses camarades, femmes et hommes, fument, discutent et mangent un morceau ensemble. S'ils se retrouvent au front et lors des pauses, ils vivent séparément et toute relation est formellement interdite.

Mais la présence de ces combattantes dans la société conservatrice syrienne suscite l'étonnement et sou-

vent même le rejet.

"Ce ne sont pas des femmes, ce sont des hommes. Une vraie femme est plus féminine", lance ainsi un combattant rebelle qui se dit opposé à la présence de femmes au front car cela peut "distraindre les combattants".

Dans son école, soutenue par Liwa al-Tawhid, une des plus importantes brigades d'Alep au sein de laquelle combat son mari, Nour al-Haq partage le même avis.

"Les femmes n'ont aucune raison de prendre les armes, il y a tellement d'hommes qui le font", dit-elle.

Les Syriennes, quelles que soient leur ethnie ou leur classe sociale, ont participé à la révolution à leur manière: elles manifestent ou apportent nourriture et munitions aux combattants.

Engizek et ses compagnons d'armes balayaient ces arguments: "arriérés".

"Ce pays ne sera libre qu'une fois que les femmes le seront", affirme Lokman Abousalem, combattant de 41 ans, qui affirme que ses camarades n'ont aucune objection à être dirigés par une femme.

Pour Engizek, l'ascension de groupes islamistes radicaux peut être une menace pour le droit des femmes. Elle craint notamment le Front jihadiste Al-Nosra qui a récemment fait allégeance à Al-Qaïda.

"Nous ne voulons pas collaborer avec ceux qui n'acceptent pas les droits des femmes", dit-elle.

"En tant que mouvement, nous ne pouvons pas accepter cela. En tant que femme, je ne peux pas accepter cela". ■



*Contrairement aux Arabes, les femmes kurdes ont une longue tradition de combat. Les combattantes du PKK ont connu une notoriété mondiale dans les années 1990, notamment en menant des opérations suicide.*

# All benefit from Turkish-Kurdish amity

By Moritz Pieper,  
Octavius Pinkard  
The Daily Star

Ten years from now, what will be said of Turkey's reconciliation with its Kurdish population? How will Turkey's resolution of a seemingly intractable conflict affect regional security, and will it provide a model for others to follow? The answers hold serious implications not only for Turkey, but also for Turkey's neighbors – Syria, Iran and Iraq. The “Kurdish question” has long been one of Turkey's most pressing political concerns. In post-Kemalist Turkey, societal assimilation of Kurds was not a vision shared by Turkish rulers, who belied that multiculturalism and nation building could not coexist. Ever since the founding of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in the late 1970s, Turkey has been plagued by terrorist activities, while the Kurds have been subject to statist discrimination. It is therefore not surprising that when PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan recently called on the party to lay down its arms, he raised hopes in the region and beyond that Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation was a distinct possibility.

The relationship between Ankara and the Kurds has had a marked effect on domestic politics in Turkey. In 2011, the tension between the two complicated the involvement of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in the drafting of the new Turkish constitution. The

secret talks that have taken place between the Turkish authorities and Ocalan have changed these dynamics, and have demonstrated a renewed readiness by the Turkish government to peacefully resolve this long-standing conflict. And in response to Ocalan's call for a truce, the PKK did indeed declare a cease-fire with Turkey last month. Ankara is now expecting the withdrawal of Kurdish militants from Turkish soil to PKK bases in Northern Iraq.

It remains unknown what the PKK is being offered in return for its consent to lay down arms, and it is not always clear who controls certain factions among the fighters. What is clear, however, is that the so-called Imrali process – the talks between Turkish intelligence agents and Ocalan – has initiated a constructive dialogue, the outcome of which could be peace between the Turkish state and the Kurds.

To be sure, there are a number of factors that will have an impact on the extent to which such a scenario proves viable, or is merely wishful thinking. One such factor is the extent to which equal rights and freedoms for the Kurds will be embedded in the new Turkish constitution. The last constitution dates back to 1982, when the country was ruled by a military junta. It has been criticized for its explicit emphasis on Turkish ethnicity as a precondition for full citizenship, with all ensuing rights. Especially with a view to Turkish-European Union accession talks, a more liberal constitution could have

important legitimizing effects, facilitating both Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation and the advancement of democracy.

Another significant factor is one over which Turkey has only partial control. It relates to the “Kurdish question” on a much more intricate level – the regional power dynamics between Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. The Kurds, occasionally and derisively labeled “Mountain Turks” in Anatolia, have been integrated in Syria and Iran to a far greater extent than in Turkey. The existence of the Western Iranian province of “Kurdistan” is a case in point. Linguistically as well as ethnically, Kurds have always been closer to the Persians than to the Turks. This proximity naturally extended into the political realm, and has had an impact on Turkish-Iranian relations. The repeated suspicion of Iranian support for the PKK has long been an annoyance to Ankara.

In Syria, the PKK has had a powerful partner in President Bashar Assad, but the relationship has shown signs of strain in recent weeks as the PKK and Turkish government have grown closer. Damascus is steadily losing control of the Kurdish-dominated northern region of the country. Qamishli, sitting along the Turkish border, and one of the largest cities in the region, has now fallen to the opposition.

Regime attacks on rebel positions in the north have now become increasingly fierce. At least 70 people were killed in the last two weeks as a result of repeated bombings of Kurdish districts by Assad's forces. This has further complicated the regime's relationship with the Democratic Union Party, which is affiliated with the PKK, and with Syria's Kurds in general. Such atrocities,

paired with uncertainties about how the Kurds might fare if the Syrian regime falls, will likely lead to international calls for an institutionalized framework for protecting Kurdish areas.

What might make Ankara nervous in this context is the prospect of a semiautonomous Kurdish regional government emerging in northern Syria after the collapse of the Assad regime. Such a Kurdish regional government is already in place in northern Iraq, and Turkey could find itself surrounded by centers of Kurdish power. For geopolitical reasons, a peace process between Turkey and the PKK is thus clearly in Turkey's interest.

Kurdish separatist sentiments in Turkey would only be strengthened by the presence of neighboring autonomous regions. For Ankara, avoiding this can only be achieved by political concessions in the form of constitutional equality between Kurds and Turks. The extent to which Turkey manages this process will not only determine the durability of peace between itself and the Kurds, it will also be an important step in Turkey's democratization. The regional implications cannot be overstated. ○

*Moritz Pieper and Octavius Pinkard, Brussels-based specialists in foreign policy analysis and Middle Eastern politics, are doctoral researchers at the University of Kent. They wrote this commentary for THE DAILY STAR.*

## Northern Iraq

# Peace, harmony and oil

Despite assertions to the contrary, Iraq's Kurds are inching towards outright independence

ERBIL AND SULAYMANIYAH



**BIBLE** scholars say the Garden of Eden was in southern Iraq, perhaps where the rivers Tigris and Euphrates meet. But when Iraqis think of earthly paradise they tend to look north, towards Kurdistan. It is easy to see why. Over Nowruz, the spring holiday celebrated last month, picnickers flocked to the autonomous region's flower-speckled meadows and valleys carved by streams flowing down from snow-capped mountains.

Nature is not Iraqi Kurdistan's only draw. The relative order, security and wealth enjoyed by the 5m residents of Iraq's three Kurdish provinces are the envy of the remaining 25m who live in the battered bulk of Iraq, and of others too. Since 2011 some 130,000 Syrian refugees, nearly all of them ethnic Kurds, have been welcomed in as brothers; the UN says that number could reach 350,000 by the year's end. From the east come Iranian Kurds eager to work on the building sites that bristle across a territory the size of Switzerland. From the north come plane-loads of Turkish businessmen seeking profit from a land so rich in oil that its sweet, cloying smell hangs everywhere. Iraq is now Turkey's second export market after Germany, with 70% of that trade directed to the Kurdish part; 4,000 trucks cross the border daily.

It was not always like this. Surveying a dusty vista of tents at Domiz, a camp

housing more than 50,000 destitute Syrians outside the booming city of Dohuk, an Iraqi Kurd shrugs and says, "Twenty years ago this was us." He is referring to the aftermath of the Anfal, a campaign in the late 1980s by Iraq's then-leader Saddam Hussein to crush a Kurdish uprising. It left at least 100,000 dead, destroyed 4,000 villages and created 1m refugees.

The imposition of a UN haven allowed Kurdish fighters, the peshmerga, to claw back control in 1991, but the landlocked autonomous region remained surrounded by suspicious powers. Iran, Syria and Turkey all feared that Kurdish nationalism would infect their own minorities. There was trouble within, too. Politics amplified a linguistic divide between Iraqi Kurdistan's east and west, sparking a fratricidal war from 1994 to 1997.

Tensions from that time linger, along with complaints of greed and nepotism in the two ruling parties that dominate the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Iraqi Kurds also yearn to see their de facto independence formalised. To Kurdish eyes this would mean keeping control of land that technically lies outside the three provinces recognised throughout Iraq as Kurdish, and in particular the multi-ethnic but historically Kurdish-tinted city of Kirkuk.

Yet most Kurds accept that patience has



paid off, so far. Iraq's American protectors have kept other foreign powers at bay. The KRG receives 17% of the Iraqi federal budget, now a hefty sum thanks to Iraq's growing oil exports (though the Kurds' share comes after a 30% deduction for "sovereign" Iraqi expenses).

Since the American-led invasion in 2003 Iraqi Kurds have rebuilt villages, raised GDP per person tenfold, maintained law and order and turned the peshmerga into a formidable army. Daily blackouts may plague Baghdad, but the KRG exports surplus power to adjacent Iraqi towns. Divided at home, the Kurds have united to deal successfully with the federal government, securing good terms in the 2005 constitution and high office in the capital.

### Oily borders

Kurdish officials will not speak of independence yet. But several factors point towards a reckoning. One of these is the dismal state of the rest of Iraq. Battered by al-Qaeda bombings and worried by the likely fall of Syria's pro-Shia government, a growing number of Iraqi Shias whisper that they should let the Kurds go, better to control what remains.

Meanwhile Nuri al-Maliki, Iraq's increasingly dictatorial prime minister, has grown more confrontational towards the Kurds. In December he sent troops to Kirkuk, prompting the KRG to mobilise

■■■ the peshmerga. In March, over Kurdish objections, the federal parliament passed a \$118-billion budget that allotted just \$650m to pay what the KRG claims is a \$3.5 billion debt it owes foreign oil companies. The angry Kurds withdrew their federal ministers and MPs. They now have no official representation in Baghdad; Jalal Talabani, Iraq's Kurdish president, whose easy-going charm has often soothed troubles, has been ill in Germany since December.

Whatever the current desires of politicians, oil finds may redraw Iraq's borders. The Kurds say Iraq's constitution frees autonomous regions to develop new fields, and have attracted big foreign firms with production-sharing deals that let them book reserves as assets. Baghdad says these are illegal; oil is the property of the people and all revenues must go to the central state. It is annoyed, too, that some of the 50-odd deals signed by the KRG fall in disputed territory.

So long as most of Iraq's oil output came from the south, and so long as it controlled export pipelines, Baghdad held the upper hand. But Kurdistan turns out to have a lot of oil. Proven reserves are now put at 45 billion barrels, a third or less of Iraq's total, but still nearly double America's. Kurdish production capacity is rising fast. It should reach 1m barrels a day by 2015 and possibly 2m by 2020, says an executive at Genel, a British-Turkish firm that is Kurdistan's biggest operator.

Squabbles with Baghdad have led to repeated shutdowns of the main pipeline to Turkey, but growing volumes go by tanker truck, solidifying a budding Kurdish-Turkish alliance that would have shocked both peoples only a few years ago. The KRG expects a pipeline to Turkey to be complete by September. Turkey, meanwhile, is keen to diversify away from reliance on Iran and Russia. It helps, too, that many of Turkey's energy firms are

politically close to the ruling Justice and Development (AK) party, which has, not coincidentally, lately made headway in securing peace with Turkey's own Kurds. Officials in Ankara, the Turkish capital, hint that a deal is in the works, covering exploration, production and transport of both oil and natural gas.

This prospect alarms the government in Baghdad, and not only because Mr Maliki tends to see Turkey through sectarian lenses as a meddling Sunni behemoth. If Kurdistan secures independent oil wealth, other parts of Iraq could follow. This is a fear shared, oddly enough, by Iraq's two biggest allies, Iran and the United States. The Americans have repeatedly moved to curb Kurdish ambitions while encouraging Baghdad to accommodate them. But the prize for both Kurds and Turks is starting to look too big for Iraq's future to be settled with yet fuzzier compromises.

TODAYS ZAMAN

21 April 2013

## The timing of Turkey's Kurdish strategy

Turkey is on the verge of a paradigm change in its relations with the Kurdish minority.



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If the current peace process creates a genuine peace, the country will have solved its most intractable problem since the creation of the republic in 1923. The irony is that Ankara is dealing with the Kurdish question at a time when the Kurdish movement in Turkey and in the Middle East is at a historic height. It is very likely that in the wake of the dissolution of the Bashar al-Assad regime, a semi-autonomous Kurdish regional government will be formed in northern Syria. With the presence of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) 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.

Turkey realized that the Arab Spring at its core is a movement for democratic self-determination and that such sweeping change in the region was bound to have a major impact on Kurdish demands for self-determination. After all, the emergence of an independent greater Kurdistan is the dream of millions of nationalist Kurds.

It is important to remember that imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan's call for a truce came after months of negotiations with Turkish authorities. The timing of such negotiations can be partly explained by Turkish pragmatism. Today, there are approximately 30 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 million -- live in Turkey. The Palestinians may be the most often proclaimed nation without a state, but the Kurds, who outnumber the Palestinians by five-to-one, are the most populous such nation in the Middle East. It is therefore not surprising that Ankara is alarmed about prospects of Kurdish nationalism and a "greater Kurdistan" emerging in the region.

The only hope to stem this growing tide in Turkey is to co-opt the Kurds into the framework of federalism and autonomy. Nothing less than serious steps towards democratization, multiculturalism and federalism will win over the Kurdish tide. Until recently, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was trying to limit concessions to Turkey's Kurds, while strengthening ties with Iraqi Kurds. Having fostered close economic ties with northern Iraq, Turkey is now siding with Iraqi Kurds in their assertion of regional oil and gas deposits.

In the meantime, it became simply impossible for Turkey to have a regional Kurdish strategy while suppressing Kurdish rights at home. Now Ankara has to change course with the peace process with the PKK. It will have to offer a much better deal to its own Kurds. In return, it will hope to bring Iraq and Syria's Kurds into Turkey's zone of economic, political and strategic influence. Turkey has made significant progress in a number of crucial areas over the last 10 years. On the economic front, the country more than doubled its income per capita and tripled the gross domestic product (GDP), reaching the rank of the 16th largest economy in the world. In the last 10 years, Turkey has also witnessed a crucial transformation in foreign policy. Partly as a product of its economic success, it is now a much more self-confident, active and ambitious regional superpower. On the domestic politics front, changes have been equally momentous. A silent revolution took place in civil-military relations. The system of military tutelage has been replaced by the strong presence of a civilian political party that has an unprecedented level of popularity and legitimacy in the eyes of close to 50 percent of voters. No political party in the modern history of the country has managed to win three elections in a row by increasing its share of the vote each time. Despite this picture of overall success in economic, foreign policy and political terms, until recently there was one area where Turkey had clearly failed to change the paradigm: the Kurdish problem. Now, this is on the verge of changing thanks to Ankara's high-risks and high-rewards gamble. ■

# Have Syria's Kurds had a change of heart?

**In recent weeks, once dormant player awakens from slumber; may provide Syria's rebels with boost to break deadlock with the Assad regime.**

By DANIEL NISMAN

**'Deal** with your friends as if they will become your enemies tomorrow, and deal with your enemies as if they will become your friends tomorrow." It's a proverb passed along through Kurdish generations – and a telling context to the Kurdish strategy in today's conflict in Syria. In recent weeks, this once dormant player has awoken from its slumber, and may just provide Syria's desperate rebels with a much needed boost to break their deadlock with the Assad regime.

Reports indicate that YPG militiamen and Syrian rebels have agreed to share control of the strategic Sheikh Maqsoud District of northern Aleppo, cutting off regime supply routes to a hospital, prison and other key positions. Rebel fighters entered the district largely unopposed on March 31. On April 6, the Syrian military bombarded Kurdish neighborhoods in northern Aleppo, killing 15 people in a likely response to this new arrangement.

The following day, Kurdish militiamen attacked a Syrian military checkpoint in the city, killing five troops.

Further east, Syrian military units attacked a checkpoint manned by Kurdish militiamen in the northeastern city of Qamishli on April 4. Hours later, militiamen from the Kurdish People's Defense Units (YPG) attacked two Syrian military positions on the outskirts of Qamishli. The attacks resulted in a number of deaths on both sides and marked the first such incident to occur in the predominantly Kurdish Hasakah Province since the Syrian military withdrew from the region's urban



*A FREE Syrian Army fighter listening to fighting in a northern Syrian Kurdish town. Photo: Reuters*

centers in the summer of 2012.

ETHNIC KURDS comprise approximately 10 percent of Syria's population, dwelling in the country's northeastern and northern provinces. Apart from several sporadic clashes with extremist rebels, Kurdish factions have largely refrained from taking sides since the outset of the conflict.

Increasing violence between Kurdish militias and the Syrian military indicates a notable shift in the policy of the Syrian Kurdish leadership's policy of neutrality.

The rebel capture of Aleppo's Sheikh Maqsoud area on March 31 was coordinated and facilitated by local Kurdish militias, effectively ending that district's neutral status in battle for control of the city. Subsequent aerial bombardments of the district indicate that the Syrian military now views Kurdish militias in the region as a hostile entity.

The Syrian Kurdish leadership has likely been influenced by cease-fire developments taking place between its PKK counterparts and the Turkish government. Since October 2012, the Turkish government has conducted negotiations for a draw-down of PKK fighters from Turkey with Abdullah Ocalan, a currently imprisoned, through highly influential Kurdish leader. During the Nevruz holiday in

late March 2013, the PKK agreed to a cease-fire with the Turkish military and an Ocalan-approved timetable for withdrawal. In early April 2013, Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union (PYD) leader Salih Muslim stated that his constituents support cease-fire efforts being conducted between the Turkish government and Kurdish PKK separatists.

Subsequent statements of support by Syrian Kurdish leaders for the talks have been followed by increasing coordination of Kurdish militias with Syrian rebels, including the March 31 withdrawal from Aleppo's Sheikh Maqsoud.

Despite the current shift of support to the rebels, Syrian Kurds still prioritize the protection and independence of their communities above nationalist-revolutionary aspirations of the country's Arab Sunnis. Any agreement with the Syrian opposition is thus likely to remain fragile and subject to change.

In the near term, the stance of the Syrian Kurdish leadership regarding cooperation with the rebels is likely to be heavily influenced by Turkish policies. Reports indicate that the Syrian Kurdish leadership expects Turkey to begin negotiating directly with PYD in a similar manner to the PKK. Until recently, Turkey had refused any contact with the PYD over fears of setting a prece-

dent for recognition of an autonomous Kurdish entity in Syria.

In addition, the PYD reportedly expects Turkey to reduce its support for extremist Syrian rebels, including those who have clashed with the group in the past. Furthermore, any breakdown of the draw-down process with the PKK would likely hinder Kurdish-rebel cooperation in Syria, and an increase in hostility from the PYD toward the Turkish government. Lastly, attacks by jihadist Syrian rebel elements against Kurdish communities could also bring an end to cooperation mixed cities and regions in northern Syria, threatening to derail the rebel effort to end the standoff in Aleppo.

In the long term, the maintaining of Kurdish-rebel coordination could result in considerable setbacks for the Syrian military, particularly impacting efforts to maintain control over outlying areas. Continued bombardments by the Syrian military against Kurdish populations are likely to result in an increase of reprisal attacks against Syrian military troops stationed in the area, who are already impacted by a breakdown in resupply routes. In Aleppo, Kurdish-rebel cooperation would further pressure regime forces, by enabling additional staging grounds for rebel offensives against the remaining southwest districts held by the Syrian military.

As far back as the First World War, the Kurdish people have been cast as the historic losers of conflict in the Middle East.

In a region which is no stranger to ironic twists, it should come as no surprise that this long-persecuted ethnic group has emerged as a kingmaker in a battle which will undoubtedly shape the face of the region for years to come.

□ □ □

## Syria: Qamishli's Kurds Fight Two Enemies at Once

By: Youssef Sheikho  
<http://english.al-akhbar.com>

**In northeastern Syria, Kurdish militias battle with both regime and opposition forces outside the Kurdish city of Qamishli.**

Recently, a government air raid killed 16 civilians, including three children, in the village of Hadad just south of Qamishli. According to local witnesses, the attacks were directed against Free Syrian Army (FSA) fighters based near the Kurdish villages.

A PYD militia source told Al-Akhbar that the regime is refusing to pull out of Qamishli. The deaths came a day after regime forces bombarded nine villages south of Qamishli as armed opposition groups attacked the 154th Brigade stationed on the edge of the city.

The Kurdish political parties that control the area – the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the Kurdish National Democratic Union (PYD) – had warned both the regime and opposition to stay away from Qamishli so as to spare it the kind of fighting that has engulfed many parts of the country.

But while the KNC, which was founded in 2011 in Erbil under the auspices of Masoud Barzani, took a more vocal stand, the PYD, which is aligned with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), was more circumspect in its response, reflecting its leader's recent statement that the



*Kurdish female militias from Kurdish National Democratic Union (PYD) in Syrian Kurdistan (Western Kurdistan)*

party must choose one of its two enemies to fight.

The PYD would like to avoid a confrontation with the regime as it could very well end in the destruction of Kurdish areas and the displacement of its inhabitants. This was the case in Aleppo where 150,000 Kurds were forced to flee during the fighting.

This does not mean that the PYD has not fought ferocious battles with the regime. A PYD militia source told Al-Akhbar that the regime is refusing to pull out of Qamishli. Some attribute this to the recently declared negotiations between the PKK and the Turkish government, and the turn of events in Aleppo.

Al-Akhbar also learned that PYD fighters allowed the opposition to reach the

154th Brigade checkpoint after receiving orders to facilitate their attack on regime forces.

Syria's Kurds are divided in their opinion of the PYD. One group appreciates their presence as a defense from attacks by the armed opposition, like those in Ras al-Ayn at the end of 2012. Others reject the party's tendency to impose its politics and ideology on the areas it controls.

The regime kills the people and the opposition kills the people. This is the cesspool of war." A Kurdish source in Qamishli argues that the PYD "does not work for anyone and is not in the service of anyone but the Kurds and their interests." In this situation, he said, "the only innocent party is the people. The regime kills the people and the opposition kills the people. This is the cesspool of war."

He concludes by saying "we are willing to be partners with whoever recognizes us and our rights."

Today, there are growing Kurdish concerns of a major confrontation between the PYD forces and the opposition, which has threatened to attack both government and Kurdish military positions in Qamishli.

Kurdish sources say that the "regime will be leaving the Kurdish areas sooner or later, therefore, our fight is with the new occupiers."

Many in the area are convinced that a major attack by the opposition is not long in coming. This could lead to an outbreak of further violence in the area, dissolving the agreement signed by the two sides after their last major confrontation around Ras al-Ayn. □

**The Japan Times** April 23, 2013

## Kurdish militia decides to align with Syria rebels

Truce with Assad began to crumble after key town was attacked

AFP-JIJI

**A**LEPPO, SYRIA – Wriggling through crater-size holes in deserted, bullet-pocked buildings, once-dormant Kurdish militia fighters in the city of Aleppo are providing Syrian rebels a much-needed boost to push back regime forces. Since the uprising against President Bashar Assad's regime started more than two years ago, Syria's Kurds, who make up 15 percent of the population, have lar-

gely refrained from taking sides, keeping both regime and rebel forces out of their neighborhoods.

But in a momentous development that could potentially change the course of the civil war, the Kurds joined forces with Syrian rebels last month, helping them overrun the strategic Sheikh Maksud neighborhood on a hilltop north of Aleppo.

Sheikh Maksud is currently in the

midst of some of the heaviest fighting since the uprising began, with incessant sniper fire and aerial bombardment in the wake of the newfound alliance forcing thousands of Kurdish residents to flee the district.

"We have the same goal as the rebel fighters," said Engizek, a commander of the People's Protection Committees (YPG), the armed wing of Syria's main Kurdish Democratic Union Party

(PYD).

"It is to seek the ouster of Assad," Engizek, who goes by a single name, said in Sheikh Maksud during a lull in fighting interspersed with sporadic bursts of sniper fire but declining to comment on the shift in the Kurdish policy of neutrality.

Aleppo, Syria's largest city, has been mired in a bloody stalemate as the fighting involving fragmented rebel forces moves slowly from street to street, neighborhood to neighborhood, with neither side making major tactical headway.

But militiamen of PYD — considered to be the Syrian offshoot of Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) — may ➔

➔ just provide increasingly desperate rebels a boost to break the deadlock.

“The ‘Kurds of Aleppo and north’ have preferred to remain neutral when they can, but (they) understand that they must live with Arabs and have no hope of ever gaining an independent state or autonomy,” said Joshua Landis, director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the University of Oklahoma.

They “can make a difference” by joining forces with the Free Syrian Army, Landis said.

Since entering Sheikh Maksud, PYD militiamen, which also included female fighters, have managed to cut off regime supply routes to key positions, including a local hospital.

But Kurdish rebels, some as young as 14, who have set up sniper nests in dank, desolate buildings once crowded with civilians, say the regime forces have proved to be stubbornly resistant.

The fighting in Sheikh Maksud has morphed into an urban guerrilla war playing out in slow motion and



*Turning the table: Kurdish fighters belonging to the People's Protection Committees sit in a house in the majority Kurdish Sheikh Maksud district of the northern Syrian city of Aleppo on Sunday. | AFP-JJJI*

dominated by snipers.

Fighters stealthily climb through mouse holes punched in walls — in order to avoid streets on the target of regime snipers — and pick their way through shattered furniture and possessions left behind by residents who fled after Assad's forces threatened to bomb the district.

Some Kurdish fighters who were interviewed said the decision to realign with Syrian rebels came after weeks of deliberation within the group's top leadership.

Assad's troops pulled out of majority Kurdish areas in northern Syria last summer, granting the Kurds a partial autonomy apparently in exchange for their remaining neu-

tral in the war.

But the Kurdish combatants interviewed said the uneasy truce with Assad began deteriorating as Sheikh Maksud often came under fire amid raging battles with the rebels.

The alliance came just days after Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan, currently imprisoned in Istanbul, declared a truce with Ankara — a move that could potentially end the long-running Kurdish insurgency in Turkey.

Observers say that the position of the Syrian Kurdish leadership is likely to be heavily swayed by the way the unprecedented Turkish ceasefire progresses, but the Syrian agreement is already showing signs of strain.

“Some Free Syrian Army (FSA) rebels are seriously fighting for freedom, some are not,” Engizek said.

“There is no organization, hardly any unity within the FSA. It's a total mess,” she said. ♦

**TheNational**

APRIL 25, 2013

## Kurdish singer's identity debate politicises Arab Idol

Yasmine Al-Kuttab / Reuters  
www.thenational.ae

**ARBIL, IRAQ** // A singer from Iraq's Kurdistan region has made it through to the semi-finals of Arab Idol, igniting heated debates over Iraqi identity and politicising the popular TV show.

A panel of judges praised 24-year-old Parwaz Hussein and she was voted through to the next round of Arab Idol, in which aspiring popstars from across the Mena region compete for a recording contract.

Many Kurds have rallied behind Parwaz, who wore a pendant in the shape of "greater Kurdistan" - the term used to describe the territory Kurds claim as their rightful homeland, which covers swathes of Syria, Turkey, Iran and Iraq.

"If before you were a singer, now you bear a great patriotic responsibility," one Facebook user called Kurdistani Kurdan wrote on Parwaz's page.

Numbering more than 25 million, the non-Arab Kurds are often described as the world's largest ethnic group without a state and regard national borders as an historical injustice that has led to



their systematic oppression.

In Iraq, Kurds were the target of chemical attacks under deposed strongman Saddam Hussein, but now enjoy a large measure of self-rule in the north of the country, where they run their own administration and armed forces.

Kurdish autonomy is enshrined in Iraq's federal constitution, drawn up after the US-led invasion of 2003. The document recognises Kurdish as Iraq's second official language.

But relations between the northern enclave and the central government in Baghdad have been strained by disputes over land and oil rights that have worsened since US troops left in December 2011.

At her first audition, Ms Parwaz, who speaks broken Arabic, was accompanied by a translator so she could communicate with the judges. She has sung in both Arabic and Kurdish.

Unlike two other Arab Iraqi contestants who were described as being from Iraq, Ms Parwaz's origin was referred to as "Iraqi Kurdistan". On Saturday night's show, one of the judges took issue with the distinction.

"I am against the country title that says Parwaz is from Kurdistan, because Kurdistan is an inseparable part of Iraq," said Ahlam, a popstar from the UAE. "I want your introduction to say that you are from Iraq and not Kurdistan."

The comment provoked an angry response among Kurds, who said it was evidence of Arab racism towards them.

"Tell Ahlam we are not Arabs," said Ako Aljaff on Parwaz's Facebook page. Others said that as a Kurd she should not have entered a competition called Arab Idol in the first place.

Ahlam later apologised on her Facebook page, but many Kurds said they would not accept the gesture unless it was broadcast on television. Some Arab nationalists took umbrage at that.

"If the Kurds didn't like what Ahlam said, let them go to India or Pakistan or the Soviet Union or Armenia or establish their state far away from us," said one Facebook user named Moteb Saud.

# Syrie: l'Occident étouffe l'aide aux rebelles

L'Amérique va doubler sa contribution aux insurgés.

Paris et Londres veulent assouplir l'embargo sur les armes.

JEAN-JACQUES MÉVEL  @jjmevel  
CORRESPONDANT À BRUXELLES

**PROCHE-ORIENT** Après des mois d'un surplace frustrant, l'Occident semble prêt à faire monter la pression politique et militaire sur Bachar el-Assad. Les États-Unis vont doubler leur aide à la révolte syrienne, tandis que l'Allemagne signale pour la première fois qu'elle pourrait consentir au desserrement de l'embargo sur les armes recherché par la France et par le Royaume-Uni.

Des deux côtés de l'Atlantique, la nouvelle dynamique est née ces derniers jours d'un constat désespérant : « Il y a un an, el-Assad croyait qu'il allait perdre, dit un ambassadeur au cœur de la discussion. Aujourd'hui, le régime croit à nouveau qu'il peut gagner. Bachar n'a aucune incitation à négocier sa sortie tant que cette illusion subsiste. Il faut la briser. »

Les premiers éléments se sont mis en place ce week-end, lors d'un rendez-vous des Amis de la Syrie à Istanbul, en Turquie. Il s'agit de « muscler » militairement l'opposition pour amener enfin le régime à composer. « Nous devons changer le calcul du président Assad », insiste le secrétaire d'État américain. John Kerry a confirmé

une aide supplémentaire de 123 millions de dollars aux rebelles. Depuis février, Washington fournit officiellement assistance médicale et rations alimentaires. Cette fois, il s'agira d'équipement militaire, bien que Barack Obama exclu la livraison d'armes de guerre. Le Pentagone pourrait fournir des vestes pare-éclats et des lunettes de vision nocturne.

La réponse américaine reste bien en deçà du minimum espéré par l'opposition anti-Assad et l'Armée syrienne libre. À Istanbul, elles ont réclamé des frappes aériennes sur les rampes de missiles et les dépôts d'armes chimiques du régime. Sur le modèle libyen, les rebelles souhaitent aussi voir instaurer des zones d'interdiction aérienne, afin de protéger l'espace saisi à l'ennemi.

Le second volet de la réponse est européen : depuis six semaines, Londres et Paris poussent à amender ou à lever l'embargo sur les livraisons d'armes imposé à l'ensemble du territoire syrien. L'interdit, propre à l'Union européenne (UE), n'empêche nullement l'armée du régime de s'approvisionner librement auprès de la Russie et de l'Iran. Il a aussi l'effet pervers de laisser les factions islamistes de la rébellion se renforcer et s'armer auprès de l'Arabie saoudite et du Qa-

tar, au risque de marginaliser l'opposition « modérée » soutenue par l'Occident. Si la résistance raisonnable « n'est pas soutenue et aidée, ce sont les extrémistes - parmi lesquels al-Nosra, filiale d'al-Qaïda - qui risquent de l'emporter demain », dit Laurent Fabius.

Jusqu'ici, une bonne moitié des capitales de l'UE menées par Vienne, La Haye et surtout Berlin s'opposent à toute livraison d'armement, jugeant qu'il y en avait déjà bien assez sur le terrain. Mais à la veille d'un conseil des affaires étrangères de l'UE, suivi mardi d'un rendez-vous des 28 ministres des pays membres de l'Otan, l'Allemagne infléchit sa position : « Si un ou deux pays de l'UE jugent qu'il n'y a pas de risque que les armes tombent en de mauvaises mains, alors nous devons respecter leur avis », a lâché le chef diplomate Guido Westerwelle, à son retour d'Istanbul. En clair, si Paris et Londres réussissent à rassurer leurs alliés, Berlin pourrait rapidement céder à la pression. ■



Le 16 avril, un rebelle syrien montre le haut d'une mosquée détruite à Alep; DIMITAR DILKOFF / AFP



# L'Union européenne prête à lever l'embargo sur les produits pétroliers syriens

La levée des sanctions vise à relancer l'activité économique dans les régions rebelles

Luxembourg  
Envoyé spécial

Les ministres des affaires étrangères européens, réunis lundi 22 avril à Luxembourg, devaient réviser leurs décisions concernant l'embargo sur les produits pétroliers syriens « afin d'aider la population civile ». Cette première adaptation des diverses sanctions européennes visant Damas concerne essentiellement des régions du nord et de l'est du pays, contrôlées par la rébellion et où se trouvent des installations pétrolières. Ils s'agit, selon les Vingt-Sept, de contribuer à restaurer les services de base et l'activité économique, ainsi que de favoriser la reconstruction.

L'embargo sur le pétrole, décidé en 2011, a eu des résultats tangibles : il a entraîné une chute des exportations syriennes, passées de

5,5 milliards d'euros en 2011 à 141 millions en 2012. Les mesures de rétorsion à l'encontre du régime de Bachar Al-Assad n'ont toutefois pas affecté outre mesure ses responsables et son armée. Sans doute parce que le régime est parvenu à les contourner en autorisant désormais des sociétés privées à agir sur ce marché : elles font appel à des agents maritimes grecs et italiens qui livrent de l'essence et du gasoil. Ces produits aboutissent à la société d'Etat Mahrukat, pourtant visée, elle, par les sanctions.

L'allègement de l'embargo pétrolier prendra du temps et sera complexe à concrétiser. Au cours de la réunion de lundi, les ministres européens devaient également débattre d'une éventuelle levée de l'embargo sur les armes à destination de la Syrie. Londres et Paris, en pointe sur le sujet, sont confrontés aux réticences de beau-

coup de leurs partenaires, accrochés à l'idée que seul un processus de transition politique peut être prôné. Pour Laurent Fabius et William Hague, ministres des affaires étrangères français et britannique, la livraison d'armes n'est pas tant « une option de rechange », mais bien « une condition » pour parvenir à une solution négociée.

## Hausse de l'aide américaine

Les Vingt-Sept devront se mettre d'accord avant la fin mai, le régime actuel de sanctions venant à échéance le 1<sup>er</sup> juin. Une majorité de pays s'inquiète toujours de voir les armes qui seraient livrées aux opposants aboutir entre les mains des groupes les plus radicaux, dont les islamistes d'Al-Nosra.

Londres et Paris objectent que plus on tardera à armer les modérés, plus la radicalisation gagnera du terrain. Après de longues hésitations, l'Allemagne a rallié cette thèse : le ministre des affaires étrangères allemand, Guido Westerwelle, a indiqué, dimanche 21 avril, que son pays était « prêt à considérer » une demande de levée de l'embargo sur les armes.

Washington a annoncé, le 20 avril, un doublement de son « assistance non létale » à la rébellion, lors d'une réunion du groupe des Amis de la Syrie, à Istanbul. L'aide américaine atteint désormais 250 millions de dollars et

## Nouveau carnage dans un faubourg de Damas

Les forces pro-Assad ont tué des dizaines de personnes, notamment des femmes et des enfants, dans un quartier de Damas, Jdeidet Al-Fadel, théâtre de combats pendant cinq jours, rapportaient des opposants, dimanche 21 avril. Le bilan de ce nouveau « massacre » oscille, selon les sources, entre 80 et 250 morts. Jdeidet Al-Fadel est un faubourg populaire de la périphérie sunnite de Damas, laquelle est l'un des principaux foyers de la rébellion contre le régime. Les meurtres se sont produits sur plusieurs jours, dans la foulée de la reconquête du quartier par l'armée.

pourrait encore quadrupler, a promis le secrétaire d'Etat, John Kerry. Les Etats-Unis refusent toujours la livraison d'armements lourds.

Un élément qui, ajouté à d'autres, a entraîné, dimanche, la démission, semble-t-il définitive, de Moaz Al-Khatib, le chef de la Coalition nationale syrienne, qui avait déjà annoncé son retrait à la fin mars, avant de faire machine arrière. Il a déploré « l'inaction » de la communauté internationale. ■

JEAN-PIERRE STROOBANTS



20 avril 2013

# Turquie : six ans de prison pour avoir envoyé un pull à son fils, rebelle kurde

Par AFP

Une femme âgée de 77 ans a été condamnée par la justice turque à six ans de prison pour avoir envoyé des vêtements et des photos à son fils, un rebelle kurde réfugié dans la montagne dans l'est de la Turquie, a rapporté samedi la presse turque.

La sentence a été récemment commuée en deux ans de résidence surveillée en raison de son âge avancé et la condamnée porte depuis trois mois un bracelet électronique, selon le journal Radikal.

Nazife Babayigit, une Kurde qui a émigré avec sa famille du sud-est anatolien, peuplé majoritairement de Kurdes, vers la ville de

Gebze, près d'Istanbul (nord-ouest), a été condamnée en début d'année pour « collusion avec une organisation terroriste », en l'occurrence le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit), et a purgé 12 jours de prison, a précisé le quotidien Hürriyet.

La condamnée aurait fait la connaissance en 2007 de deux jeunes affirmant connaître son fils qu'elle n'avait pas vu depuis des années. Elle leur a demandé de lui remettre un pullover qu'elle avait tricoté, d'autres vêtements ainsi qu'une photo d'elle, pour lui faire savoir qu'elle était toujours en vie.

Ces jeunes hommes ont été arrêtés par la police dans l'est de



la Turquie, poussant un procureur à inculper la femme âgée. De nombreux militants kurdes ont été emprisonnés en Turquie pour recel et aide aux rebelles kurdes mais une récente réforme de la loi anti-terroriste, très rigide en Turquie, a permis à

plusieurs dizaines d'entre eux de recouvrer la liberté.

Le gouvernement islamo-conservateur turc mène depuis la fin de l'an dernier un processus de dialogue avec le PKK pour un règlement du conflit kurde qui perdure depuis 1984. ♦



# Irak: assaut sanglant de l'armée contre des manifestants, 54 morts

Par Marwan IBRAHIM AFP

**V**ingt-cinq manifestants sunnites ont été tués lors d'un assaut de l'armée, provoquant la démission de deux ministres et une série d'attaques sanglantes en représailles à travers l'Irak.

Ces violences, les plus graves liées aux manifestations secouant les régions sunnites depuis décembre, ont fait 54 morts.

Les manifestants réclament la démission du Premier ministre chiite Nouri al-Maliki, accusé d'accaparer le pouvoir, et la fin de la "marginalisation" dont la communauté sunnite s'estime victime.

Treize personnes ont été tuées dans d'autres violences, portant à 67 le nombre de morts mardi.

Les forces anti-émeutes ont pris d'assaut avant l'aube une place de la localité de Houweijah, dans la province de Kirkouk (nord), après l'expiration d'un ultimatum adressé aux manifestants pour qu'ils livrent les assassins d'un soldat tué la semaine dernière, selon le ministère de l'Intérieur.

Vingt-cinq manifestants et deux militaires ont été tués dans cet assaut et 70 personnes blessées, selon l'armée.

"Nos forces n'ont pas ouvert le feu en premier. Elles ne l'ont fait que lorsque les manifestants ont tiré et nous avons riposté pour nous défendre", a affirmé à l'AFP un officier ayant requis l'anonymat.

D'après lui, l'opération visait "l'Armée des Naqchbandis", qui compte dans ses rangs d'anciens officiers de l'armée de Saddam Hussein et serait lié au numéro deux du régime en fuite, Izzat al-Douri.

Deux soldats ont été tués dans cette opération et sept ont été blessés.

Un porte-parole des manifestants, Abdel Malek Al-Joubouri, a cependant affirmé

à l'AFP que les forces anti-émeutes avaient "ouvert le feu sans discernement" sur les manifestants.

Selon lui, elles ont en outre "mis le feu aux tentes" dans lesquelles des centaines de manifestants campaient depuis plusieurs semaines.

Le ministère de l'Intérieur affirme pour sa part que les autorités avaient "demandé aux manifestants pacifiques non armés d'évacuer la place" avant l'assaut.

Cette opération a déclenché des attaques de représailles meurtrières.

"Lorsqu'ils ont appris qu'il y a eu des morts et des blessés sur la place du sit-in, les membres des tribus des villages de la région ont attaqué les postes de contrôle de l'armée", a affirmé le porte-parole des manifestants.

Treize hommes qui tentaient d'attaquer des positions de l'armée dans la province de Kirkouk ont ainsi été tués, selon des officiers.

Plus tard, des manifestants armés ont tué six soldats et en ont enlevé un septième près de Ramadi(ouest), a-t-on appris de source policière. Selon le lieutenant Ibrahim Faraj, ils ont incendié deux véhicules blindés.

Cinq soldats ont été tués ainsi qu'un assaillant à des barages de l'armée près de Souleimane Bek dans la province de Salaheddine, a déclaré Ahmed Aziz, du conseil local.

Deux policiers ont également été tués et trois blessés à Falloujah, à l'ouest de Bagdad, selon un officier de police et un médecin.

Dénonçant les violences, deux ministres ont démissionné, portant à quatre le nombre de ministres sunnites ayant quitté leur poste depuis mars.

"Le ministre de l'Education, Mohammed Ali Tamim, a démissionné de son poste après que l'armée a fait irruption dans un sit-in dans (la pro-



Les forces anti-émeutes ont pris d'assaut avant l'aube une place de la localité de Houweijah, dans la province de Kirkouk (nord), après l'expiration d'un ultimatum adressé aux manifestants pour qu'ils livrent les assassins d'un soldat tué la semaine dernière, selon le ministère de l'Intérieur. Photo Par Marwan Ibrahim -



vince de) Kirkouk", a affirmé un responsable au sein du cabinet du vice-Premier ministre Saleh al-Moutlak.

Le président du Parlement Osama al-Nujaifi a indiqué plus tard que le ministre des Sciences et des Technologies Abdel Karim al-Samarrai lui avait fait part de sa décision de démissionner.

Le chef du conseil de la province de Kirkouk, Hassan Trouhan, a appelé "l'ONU à intervenir car la situation est extrêmement grave et Kirkouk ne peut pas supporter de nouvelles crises". Située à 240 km au nord de Bagdad, la province de Kirkouk est une mosaïque ethnique et confessionnelle où

cohabitent Kurdes, Arabes et Turkmènes, sunnites et chiites.

Dans ce contexte tendu, 13 personnes ont été tuées dans des attaques menées contre des mosquées sunnites qui ont également fait des dizaines de blessés, selon des sources médicales et des services de sécurité.

Deux attaques au mortier ont visé la mosquée de Moqdadiyyah, au nord-est de Bagdad, faisant neuf morts et 25 blessés, a-t-on appris auprès d'un médecin et de la police. Un précédent bilan faisait état de six morts et 20 blessés.

En outre, quatre fidèles ont été tués mardi et 14 blessés dans l'explosion de deux bombes visant une mosquée sunnite à Bagdad, selon des sources des services de sécurité.

La minorité sunnite représente environ 24% de la population irakienne. ♦



# Le monde, vu du Kurdistan irakien

Par BERNARD GUETTA

**S**ur cette langue de terre, entre montagnes et vallées, la Syrie n'est plus qu'un long doigt planté dans l'Irak. L'herbe est verte, le soleil radieux et ces deux pays se mêlent ici, d'autant plus intimement que, des deux côtés d'une frontière tracée par les Empires français et britannique aux lendemains de la Première Guerre mondiale, vivent uniquement des Kurdes, unis par une même langue et un long drame, celui d'un peuple persécuté et sans Etat, dispersé entre Iran, Syrie, Irak et Turquie.

Chaque jour, quelque sept cents réfugiés kurdes de Syrie arrivent donc au Kurdistan irakien, affluent vers le camp de Domiz et y étendent un village de tentes, bientôt un bourg où l'histoire, les relations internationales, les incessants progrès et reculs de la civilisation et la capacité de survie de l'espèce humaine se lisent à livre ouvert.

Si vous pensez que l'ONU ne sert à rien, demandez-vous ce que feraient ces familles démunies de tout sans le Haut-Commissariat des Nations unies aux réfugiés (HCR), qui leur fournit tentes, rations alimentaires et soins médicaux. Ici comme ailleurs, la solidarité internationale est tragiquement insuffisante mais elle existe, institutionnalisée par ce Parlement du monde que sont les Nations unies.

Si vous pensez que l'Union européenne n'existe pas, regardez le panneau où s'affichent les drapeaux des pays qui financent ce camp, et vous n'y verrez ni la France, ni l'Allemagne, ni l'Italie, mais l'Union à la bannière bleue qui fournit plus de 50 % de l'aide humanitaire aux Syriens et qui, vue d'ici, existe bel et bien, même si elle n'est encore qu'un nain politique.

Si vous avez fini par croire que toutes les causes sont vaines et que rien ne vaut d'autre que cultiver son jardin, dites à un Kurde que vous êtes français et vous l'entendrez aussitôt déifier la «Mère des Kurdes», Danielle Mitterrand, qui incarne pour ce peuple le soutien que tant de défenseurs français des droits de l'homme lui ont apporté depuis plus de trente ans.

Face au regard perdu des gosses de Domiz, on a comme honte de venir de cette Europe qui ne sait plus ce que sont l'utopie créatrice, l'espoir, la volonté, les défis à relever, mais attention ! Pas de naïveté pour autant. Contrairement aux autres pays d'accueil des réfugiés syriens, le Kurdistan irakien les laisse sortir de leur camp et aller chercher du travail dans ses villes et villages. «Ils sont les parias que nous étions du temps de Saddam...», entend-on partout. Emouvant, mais la réalité est souvent moins belle. Devenu totalement autonome depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein, le Kurdistan irakien est en plein boom économique. Dès l'aube, les grues font sortir de terre de nouveaux bâtiments, les étals débordent de tout, les taxis sont pleins, les voitures neuves. La main-d'œuvre qualifiée manque et ces réfugiés syriens, assez formés pour avoir tenté la fuite, sont donc une aubaine que l'on exploite sans vergogne en les sous-payant honteusement.

La solidarité kurde est une chose. La loi de l'offre et de la demande en est une autre et, à Domiz, on ne sait plus si le rêve séculaire du Grand Kurdistan est en train de prendre forme ou de mourir au contraire. La frontière est abolie. Assad finira par tomber et il serait, désormais, improbable que l'Etat syrien reste assez fort pour s'opposer à une sécession kurde. Deux des Kurdistan sont, de fait, réunis. C'est un tournant

de l'épopée kurde. Toute la région pourrait en exploser. La crise syrienne devient, toujours plus vite, une crise régionale, mais les Kurdes syriens ne semblent guère pressés de se lancer, demain, dans une guerre d'indépendance et les Kurdes irakiens ne paraissent pas tellement insatisfaits d'avoir un pied en Irak et l'autre dehors.

Loin de Bagdad et de ses attentats, ils aimantent toutes les grandes entreprises qui se servent d'eux comme d'une plateforme d'envol pour le reste de l'Irak le jour où il sera pacifié. Parfaitement tranquilles au sein d'un Etat faible, ils s'enrichissent à vue d'œil en commerçant avec tout le monde, l'Iran asphyxié par les sanctions internationales et, bien sûr, la Turquie, petit dragon régional à la croissance vertigineuse. Partout présente au Kurdistan irakien, la Turquie ascendante se réconcilie avec ses propres Kurdes pour se projeter dans ces Etats éclatés que sont l'Irak et la Syrie et s'affirmer, ainsi, comme l'incontournable puissance économique du Proche-Orient.

Domiz est une caisse de résonance de ces grands jeux croisés et c'est aussi bien l'histoire du siècle passé, celle des Empires européens et des dictatures postcoloniales, qu'on y lit que l'histoire immédiate, incertaine, sanglante et précipitée. Avec ses voitures asiatiques, ses portables finlandais et ses frontières mouvantes, ce camp dit tout le changement du monde et on y enrage en pensant à l'aveugle stupidité avec laquelle l'Europe ferme ses portes à la Turquie, «pays locomotive» qui pourrait être l'avant-garde de l'Union dans un Proche-Orient remis en mouvement. ♦

# Clashes at Sunni Protest Site in Iraq Kill 33

By TIM ARANGO

**B**AGHDAD — Iraqi security forces stormed a Sunni protest encampment in a village near the northern city of Kirkuk on Tuesday, prompting clashes between government forces and gunmen that left dozens dead and wounded and sharply raised the stakes in Iraq's sectarian troubles.

As of midday, according to security officials in Kirkuk, at least 33 civilians were dead, and nearly 100 people wounded. The Ministry of Defense said that 20 people it described as gunmen were killed, and 75 others arrested. The ministry said three soldiers were killed and nine others wounded.

The fighting, in a town called Hawija, represented the deadliest turn yet in a Sunni-led protest movement against the Shiite-dominated central government led by Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki that began in December. The clashes sent shock waves through Sunni communities across the land.

In the seething Sunni populations of Anbar and Salahuddin Provinces, tribesmen were mobilizing Tuesday after the fighting, declaring jihad, or holy war, and vowing to take the fight to the government. Near Hawija, reports emerged that claimed some armed Sunni tribesman had taken control of government checkpoints.

"The peaceful demonstrations are over due to what happened today," said Saddoun al-Obaidi, a tribal leader in Hawija who was a leader of the protest movement. "Now we are going to carry weapons. We have all the weapons we need, and we are getting support from other provinces. This will not pass easily. Something bad will happen soon."

Elsewhere, the reaction from Iraq's Sunnis was swift. In Falluja, where clashes between the army and protesters in January killed at least seven protesters, thousands of citizens took to the streets demanding the international community stop what they described as the "massacres of the government." Protest leaders, tribal chiefs and local Muslim scholars were planning to meet Tuesday to consider a response.

In Baghdad, leaders of Iraqiya, a largely Sunni bloc of lawmakers, announced they were suspending participation in Parliament. In Mosul, in the north, which has hosted continuing protests, a spokes-



*Iraqi medics help an injured demonstrator after clashes between Iraqi soldiers and anti-government protesters in Kirkuk on Tuesday.*

man for the Sunni movement there, Salim al-Jabouri, said, "the demonstrators in Mosul left the sit-in area to take up arms in support of the demonstrators in Hawija and take revenge for them."

The raid by government forces followed days in which the army and the police had surrounded the protest camp, demanding that gunmen who had attacked a government checkpoint on Friday, killing one soldier and wounding three others, be turned over to the authorities. The government has claimed that the gunmen had sought refuge amid the gathering of protesters.

A statement released by the Ministry of Defense in Baghdad said that on Friday gunmen had "attacked a joint checkpoint of the police and army, that led to the death and injury of our fighters and they also took our weapons and then disappeared among the protesters."

On Tuesday morning, after the protesters refused to turn over the gunmen, soldiers and police officers stormed the protest camp, the ministry said. "The security forces did their duty to impose the law," the statement said. "They faced heavy weapons, and snipers, and the clashes resulted in the death of a number of our forces and the killing of a number of Baathists and Al Qaeda members that have been coordinating with the protesters."

The ministry said security forces had seized 40 Kalashnikov rifles and other automatic weapons, hand grenades and swords and knives.

As tensions rose in recent days, the United Nations released a statement Monday urging caution from both sides.

"I encourage the Iraqi security forces to exercise the utmost self-restraint in maintaining law and order and the demonstrators to continue to preserve the peaceful character of the demonstrations," Martin Kobler, the United Nations' representative in Iraq, said in the statement.

Iraq's government has sought to cast any expression of Sunni disenchantment as the work of terrorists, while protest leaders have portrayed their cause as a reaction to the perceived marginalization of the Sunni community.

Those dueling narratives played out in Iraq's media on Tuesday. In late morning, as some channels broadcast chaotic scenes of shouting protesters and bloodied bodies being carried away on gurneys, the state-owned Iraqiya network was showing a poetry festival in Basra, juxtaposed with a breaking news alert declaring that security forces had raided a gathering of Al Qaeda members and Baath Party sympathizers.

The violence came days after Iraq held local elections, which were largely peaceful and carried out under extraordinary security measures. The elections, though, had been postponed in two largely Sunni provinces, Anbar and Nineveh, and were never scheduled in Kirkuk, which is rich in oil and disputed by Arabs and Kurds.

Iraq's Shiite and Sunni Muslim communities fought a brutal civil war from 2005 to 2007, but while violence has declined, there has never been full reconciliation. The civil war in Syria, which pits a Sunni-led rebellion against a government dominated by Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, has exacerbated tensions here, with each sect taking sides. The fiercest fighting group in Syria, Jabhet al-Nusra, has been fostered by Al Qaeda in Iraq, while Iraq's government has lined up on the side of the Syrian regime, allowing its territory to be a transit corridor for the supply of weapons to the government of the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, mainly from Iran.

As the war in Syria grinds on, analysts and American officials are increasingly worried that the Syrian war could spill over into Iraq. Barham Salih, the former prime minister of Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region in the north, wrote on Twitter on Tuesday after the violence in Hawija that, "Iraq, Syria dynamics" could merge into one fight with "dire consequences."

*Yasir Ghazi and Duraid Adnan contributed reporting from Baghdad, and employees of the New York Times contributed reporting from Kirkuk, Mosul and Falluja, Iraq.*

# U.S. to double aid to Syrian rebels

ISTANBUL

**They would get supplies deemed nonlethal; Kerry urges others to give more**

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON AND SEBNEM ARSU

Secretary of State John Kerry announced on Sunday that the United States would double its aid to the Syrian opposition, providing \$123 million in fresh assistance.

Mr. Kerry made the announcement at a meeting with foreign ministers from 10 European and Middle Eastern nations that was convened in Istanbul to decide how to help the opposition in the Syrian civil war, which has killed more than 70,000 people.

A portion of the new U.S. aid, the State Department said, will help provide additional "nonlethal" supplies to the military wing of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolutionary and Opposition Forces, an umbrella organization formed in November to unite the rebel groups that have been trying for two years to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad.

U.S. officials did not specify the items to be sent, saying that they would be determined in consultation with the coalition. But the Obama administration has been considering providing military equipment like body armor and night-vision goggles.

"This conflict is now spilling across borders and is now threatening neighboring countries," Mr. Kerry said at a news conference he held with Moaz al-Khatib, the leader of the Syrian opposition coalition, and Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish foreign minister. "The president directed me to step up our efforts."

A major goal of the meeting was to buttress the role of moderates within the opposition forces and to isolate extremist groups like the Nusra Front, which the United States has asserted is affiliated with Al Qaeda. That entailed forcing a consensus among supporting nations about how military assistance should be channeled to the rebels. Toward that end, the foreign ministers decided that all future military assistance would be funneled "exclusively" through the Supreme Military Council, the military wing of the coalition. This procedure is intended to address the concern that some of the opposition's financial backers in Gulf states have been less particular than Western nations about the rebel factions they support.

Another goal was to secure a new commitment from the Syrian opposition coalition that it is prepared to enter into a negotiation over a political transition to a post-Assad Syria, if one can ever be organized, and that a post-Assad government would be a democracy in which the rights of minorities would be protected.

At the end of the meetings, the Syrian opposition coalition issued a declaration stating that it is "aiming at a political solution," rejected extremist ideology,

and said a post-Assad Syria would be pluralistic and based on the rule of law.

In a closed-door session, Gen. Salim Idris, the head of the opposition's command, gave a presentation to the foreign minister that was intended to show that he had a functioning chain of command and that military aid the Syrian opposition received would be used properly.

The new aid announced by Mr. Kerry would be in addition to the food rations and medical supplies that the United States pledged to provide to the military wing of the Syrian resistance at a conference in late February in Rome. That assistance has yet to be delivered but is scheduled to be provided by April 30, a State Department official said.

With the pledge of fresh aid, the total amount of nonlethal assistance from the United States to the coalition and civic groups in Syria is \$250 million. In the meeting in Istanbul, Mr. Kerry urged other nations to increase their assistance, with the objective of providing \$1 billion in international aid to the opposition.

Despite this, the assistance promised at the meeting fell well short of the military help the Syrian opposition has long sought. In a statement issued before the meeting, the coalition asked for several steps, including airstrikes to stop the Syrian government from firing Scud missiles, the establishment of a no-flight zone along Syria's northern and southern borders, and a U.N. resolution condemning the Syrian government for what the opposition claims is its use of chemical weapons.

**The Washington Post** APRIL 18, 2013

## Evening suicide bombing in cafe kills 26, wounds dozens in Baghdad

By Associated Press,

**B**AGHDAD — A suicide bomber detonated explosives at a Baghdad cafe crowded with young people late Thursday, killing at least 26 and wounding dozens ahead of provincial elections scheduled for the weekend.

The rare evening attack, which came at the start of the local weekend, brought to 30 the number of people killed across the country Thursday.

The cafe bomber struck about 9:30 p.m. Police said that two children and a woman who were passing by at the time of the blast were among the dead. More than 50 people were wounded.

The packed cafe is on the third floor of a building in the predominantly Sunni neighborhood of Amiriyah. Police said the cafe was packed with young people enjoying water pipes and playing pool.

Earlier in the day, a car bomb struck an army convoy in Mosul, 360 kilometers (225 miles) northwest of Baghdad, killing three soldiers and wounding five others. Hours later, one policeman was killed and three others were wounded when gunmen attacked a security checkpoint in western Baghdad, police said.

Hospital officials confirmed the casualties. All officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters.

Violence has been on the rise ahead of provincial elections to be held on Saturday. The vote is for local officials in several provinces across the country, including the capital, Baghdad. Authorities have been vowing to bolster security ahead of the elections.

Also on Thursday, Iraq's self-ruled Kurdish region announced that new parliamentary and presidential elections will

be held on Sept. 21.

A Kurdish government statement said that Masoud Barzani, the president of the Kurdish region, approved the date for the elections and called for a fair election.

Following the U.S.-led invasion that toppled Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, the Kurdish area was recognized as an autonomous region that is in many ways politically independent from Baghdad. Since then, the two main Kurdish parties — the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan — have joined forces to rule the oil-rich region.

Baghdad and the Kurds have been at loggerheads for years over several issues, including oil and control over disputed areas claimed by both sides. The vote for a new 111-seat National Assembly would be the third election in the three-province Kurdish region since 2005. ○

# Why Obama Won't Help

Voices for some kind of military intervention in Syria are growing louder in Washington, but the President worries it would do U.S. interests more harm than good

By Michael Crowley/Washington

WHEN BARACK OBAMA ordered U.S. air strikes over Libya just over two years ago, he said the threat to innocent life in that country's civil war had compelled him to act. "Some nations may be able to turn a blind eye to atrocities in other countries," the President said. "The [U.S.] is different ... I refused to wait for the images of slaughter and mass graves before taking action."

Two years later, the civil war in Syria has claimed some 70,000 lives. The atrocities, slaughter and mass graves have been visible for months. And if anything, the strategic dangers—spreading sectarian violence, stolen chemical weapons—are greater than they had been in Libya. Yet even as some of Washington's leading foreign policy figures, including ones within his own Administration, have urged Obama to take more action, he has firmly resisted. After four years of his presidency, observers still debate whether there is an Obama Doctrine. But in the case of Syria, the President's doctrine is simple: Stay out.

"The voices calling for intervention are certainly shaping the Washington debate," says Marc Lynch, a George Washington University professor of Middle East studies and an adviser to Obama's re-election campaign. "The main person putting the brakes on this is Obama."

Obama certainly hasn't turned a blind eye toward Syria. The U.S. has already delivered \$385 million in humanitarian aid for the country. The CIA is reportedly training rebel fighters in Turkey and is also helping steer arms and supplies delivered by Sunni Arab countries toward moderate rebel factions and away from those with radical Islamic views or ties to

al-Qaeda. The President has backed international diplomacy aimed at persuading Bashar Assad, Syria's dictator, to end the violence, give up power and make way for a relatively moderate government.

That approach is looking increasingly ineffective, however. Assad's brutality suggests he is determined to fight to the bitter end. And the influx of weapons from Arab countries has unleashed violence that might not be containable as Sunnis, Shi'ites and other sectarian groups fight for power and survival. As Lynch puts it, "The political track is dead."

That has intensified the debate about

what else America and its allies could do. For months, only reliable hawks like Republican Senator John McCain were calling on Obama to send arms to the rebels or order air strikes against Assad's forces. But recently such calls have come from more surprising quarters. Britain and France have pushed to end the E.U. embargo on arms shipments to the rebels. Democratic Senator Carl Levin of Michigan, a forceful critic of the Iraq war, has joined McCain in urging Obama to create a no-fly zone in northern Syria, possibly enforced with air strikes against Assad's aircraft and missile batteries. "No boots on the ground," says Levin, who has not heard from the White House. But a senior Administration official tells TIME the Levin-McCain plan is "no easy fix."

Most striking is the dissent from within Obama's own Administration. Last summer, then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then CIA Director David Petraeus presented the White House with a plan to vet, train and arm select Syrian rebels. Obama's Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Martin Dempsey and then Defense Secretary Leon Panetta later said they supported the idea. Obama rejected it.

And when John Kerry was a Senator last year, he spoke openly about possibly shipping arms to the rebels, and even conducting air strikes to enforce a no-fly zone. But since becoming Obama's Secretary of State in January, Kerry has spoken exclusively of diplomacy in public.

A White House aide says Obama is "constantly reviewing every possible option that could help end the violence and accelerate a political transition." But critics of Obama's approach warn that the inaction can be as costly as an ill-advised intervention. Some argue that arming some rebels might ensure American influence in the country's uncertain future. "A package of military assistance delivered to the appropriate rebel groups would still allow them to play a more effective role in the coming big battles" around major cities like Damascus and Aleppo that could determine Assad's fate, says Jeffrey Smith, a former military-intelligence analyst now at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. "Once the regime is gone, in whatever situation develops after that, we want to have at least some armed groups in Syria connected to us, to be people we can work with."

Although Obama has never publicly explained his thinking on Syria in detail, the main arguments against further U.S. action are clear. One is deep anxiety that U.S.-supplied weapons might wind up in the hands of designated terrorists like the al-Nusra Front, "an al-Qaeda franchise with direct connections to the al-Qaeda core in Pakistan," according to Bruce Reidel, a former CIA official now with the Brookings Institution. "I think the Administration is very worried that any arms that do go to the Syrian opposition are going to wind up in the hands of the al-Nusra Front, and it's very hard to prevent that from happening."

Likewise, the use of airpower is riskier than it may sound. Unlike Muammar Gaddafi's military, Assad's has an advanced Russian-made air-defense system, including planes, radar and surface-to-air missiles. American missions in the area would draw heavy resistance.

Even if Obama wanted to take those steps, his lawyers might tell him not to. Thanks to Chinese and Russian resistance, the U.N. has not authorized military action or arms supplies. Without Security Council approval, either step would violate international prohibitions against



**Lone gunman** A fighter for the Free Syrian Army prepares to fire a rocket-propelled grenade

Kenneth Pollack, a foreign policy expert at the Brookings Institution. “The President’s real agenda is a domestic political one. The last thing the American people want is a bunch of distractions in the Middle East.” Indeed, a March YouGov survey found that 45% of Americans opposed sending arms to the Syrian rebels, while 16% were in favor.

A wild card is Syria’s chemical-weapons stockpile, which likely includes the nerve agents sarin and VX. Obama has declared the regime’s use of those superlethal agents a “red line” that would provoke an unspecified U.S. response. It’s not clear how or even if Assad’s chemical arsenal could be located and secured, but the specter of loose nerve gas might be the one thing that could summon American ground forces to the Levant. For now, Washington is reportedly training trusted rebel fighters in Turkey and Jordan on how to secure chemical-weapons sites.

Of course, it didn’t take a red line for Obama to intervene in Libya—a fact not lost on Syrian rebels and opposition leaders. But in justifying his rationale for bombing Gaddafi’s forces in 2011, he framed his action narrowly, like a judge trying to avoid setting precedent. He emphasized the specific circumstances, which included U.N. backing and America’s “unique ability” to stop the slaughter of civilians.

In Syria, by contrast, Obama is unlikely to persuade Russia and China to support action at the U.N. anytime soon. Even if he did, discerning regime targets in Syria’s densely populated cities and villages would be much harder than blasting Gaddafi convoys on Libya’s desert highways.

“I think he interprets Syria to be a slippery slope to military involvement,” says Vali Nasr, a former Obama State Department official who disagrees with the current policy. Nasr adds that while many consider the Libya action to be a low-cost success, ending with Gaddafi’s demise, that may not be Obama’s view. The mission unexpectedly dragged on for weeks, and Gaddafi’s fall unleashed long-repressed Islamist forces in the region, including the militants who attacked a U.S. compound in Benghazi last September, killing four Americans. “We forget that Libya didn’t turn out well,” says Nasr. It seems that Obama remembers. ■

interfering in the internal affairs of other nations. For the same reason, most U.S. humanitarian aid winds up being distributed by the Assad regime, meaning virtually none reaches rebel areas.

Further complicating matters is Iran. Javier Solana, a former E.U. official who was among the West’s negotiators with Tehran until 2009, recently told a Washington audience that he believes Obama has avoided a Syria entanglement for fear of complicating his diplomacy with Tehran, which views Assad as an important ally and has sent him massive aid.

Ultimately, though, Obama simply doubts that the U.S. would really be able to control the chaos. “In a situation like Syria, I have to ask, Can we make a difference...?” he told the *New Republic* in January.

### No Distractions

OBAMA’S FIRST PRESIDENTIAL BID IN 2008 was shaped by his critique of the Iraq war, which he called a reckless use of American power. “He’s the man elected, not to get the U.S. involved in any more wars in the Middle East [but] to get us out of wars,” says

‘The voices calling for intervention are certainly shaping the Washington debate. The main person putting the brakes on this is Obama.’

—MARC LYNCH, PROFESSOR OF MIDDLE EAST STUDIES, GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

# U.S. suggests Syria used chemical arms

WASHINGTON

## White House seeks proof before making decision on a response

BY MARK LANDLER

The White House said on Thursday that American intelligence agencies now believed, with "varying degrees of confidence," that the Syrian government has used chemical weapons, but it said it needed conclusive proof before President Obama would take action.

The disclosure, made in letters to Congressional leaders, took the administration a step closer to acknowledging that President Bashar al-Assad had crossed a red line established by Mr. Obama last summer, when he said the United States would take unspecified action against Syria if there was evidence that chemical weapons had been used in the civil war.

It also immediately added to pressures on Mr. Obama from congressional advocates of more forceful action in Syria, some of whom have pushed to arm the rebels who have been fighting to drive Mr. Assad from power.

The White House emphasized that, "given the stakes involved," the United States still needed "credible and corroborated facts" before deciding on a course of action. The letter, signed by the president's director of legislative affairs, Miguel E. Rodriguez, said the United States was pressing for a "comprehensive United Nations investigation that can credibly evaluate the evidence and establish what happened."

Although the White House said it could not confirm the circumstances in which victims were exposed to chemical weapons, it said it believed that the chemical agent sarin had been used. "We do believe," the letter said, "that any use of chemical weapons in Syria would very likely have originated with the Assad regime."

Secretary of State John Kerry, emerging from a Congressional hearing, said that the United States believed that chemical weapons had been used in two instances, though he did not offer details.

Britain, in a letter last month requesting a United Nations investigation, cited three episodes in which it suspected that chemical weapons had been used: in a village west of Aleppo and on the outskirts of Damascus, both on March 19, and in Homs on Dec. 24. And on Tuesday, coinciding with a trip through the region by Defense Secretary Chuck

Hagel, an Israeli military intelligence official asserted that Syria had repeatedly used chemical weapons.

Mr. Hagel, wrapping up weeklong travels in the Middle East that included daily discussions of the Syria crisis, said he was prepared to "give advice on policy decisions" for Pentagon action, but he cautioned that much remained uncertain about the alleged use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime.

Asked if this assessment had proved that Syria had crossed a "red line" drawn by the president, he responded, "We need all the facts, we need all the information." He noted that uncertainties remained over "what was used, where it was used, who used it."

In a conference call with reporters, a senior administration official declined to say how many specific incidents of chemical use had been detected, or which might have touched off the latest concerns.

Speaking on grounds of anonymity, the official underscored that the administration wanted to build upon the intelligence estimates through more intensive scrutiny of the incidents in order to have "a strong, firm evidentiary basis" before consulting with allies about what steps to take.

But while the letter specifically raised questions about the "chain of custody"



POOL PHOTO BY JIM WATSON

Chuck Hagel said Thursday that the reports remained uncertain.

of Syrian chemical weapons — leaving open the possibility, at least, that some group other than government troops might have obtained and used them — the official made clear that Mr. Assad holds ultimate responsibility.

He said that U.S. officials were "very skeptical" that any other group could have gained custody of the weapons. And, he added, of Mr. Assad, "ultimately he is accountable for any use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime."

The official declined to delineate any steps the United States might take, separately or in conjunction with its allies, but said, "Suffice to say all options are on the table in terms of our response."

The disclosure brought a swift reaction on Capitol Hill, where Senator John McCain, Republican of Arizona, said, "I think it's pretty obvious that a red line has been crossed," and he referred to Mr. Obama's characterization last summer that Syria's use of such weapons would be a "game changer."

Mr. McCain called on the president to begin supplying weapons to the rebels, which he has so far refused to do; to enforce a no-fly zone over Syria; and to redouble pressure on Russia to abandon its support for the Assad regime.

Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee, the ranking Republican member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the intelligence assessment was "deeply troubling," and if correct, means that "President Obama's red line has certainly been crossed."

The administration's use of the phrase "varying degrees of certainty" suggested there might be differing levels of confidence among the multiple American intelligence agencies about the reliability of the evidence that chemical weapons were used.

Faced with mounting pressure to act against Syria, the United States has been waiting for the results of an exhaustive analysis by the United Nations of soil, hair and other material to determine whether chemical warfare agents have been used.

But that investigation has been hobbled because the United Nations inspectors have not been allowed into Syria. Also, the scope of that investigation does not extend to who used the weapons, focusing merely on whether chemical agents were used. The United States is also conducting its own assess-

ment, as are Israel and other countries.

Even if the United Nations investigation proves the use of chemicals, an official said, the White House must determine who used them and whether they were used deliberately or accidentally. He did not offer a timetable for that process.

"It is precisely because this is a red line that we have to establish with airtight certainty that this happened," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity so he could discuss internal deliberations. "The bar on the United States is higher than on anyone else, both because of our capabilities and because of our history in Iraq."

Mr. Hagel, speaking on Wednesday in Cairo, said, "Suspicions are one thing; evidence is another."

Some analysts say they worry that if the United States waits too long, it will embolden Mr. Assad, who has steadily escalated the lethality of the weapons used against the opposition. The government's use of chemical weapons in



isolated episodes, these experts said, would be a way to test international re-

**"We need all the facts, we need all the information."**

action before using them on a wider scale.

Last August, Mr. Obama threatened the Syrian government with unspecified American action if there was any

evidence that chemical weapons were being used or moved on a large scale. On Tuesday, Israel's top military intelligence analyst, Brig. Gen. Itai Brun, said at a security conference in Tel Aviv that the Syrian government had used chemical weapons, and he criticized the international community for not doing more in response.

"The president's red line appears to have been crossed," said Martin S. Indyk, a former American ambassador to

Israel. "The administration has to take some time to decide what to do about it."

"But if they end up leaving the impression that the president is not willing to enforce his red line," said Mr. Indyk, who is now at the Brookings Institution, "that will have consequences in the region, particularly when it comes to Iran's nuclear program, as well as for our ability to deter Assad's use of chemical weapons in Syria."

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune** FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2013

## Iraqi premier warns of civil war as clashes intensify

BAGHDAD

BY TIM ARANGO

In the face of an armed rebellion by disgruntled Sunni Muslims against his Shiite-led government, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki of Iraq on Thursday urged dialogue to calm tensions but vowed to continue military operations in a growing sectarian conflict that he warned could lead to a civil war like the one raging in Syria.

"Security forces must impose security in Iraq, which is affected by a region teeming with sectarianism," Mr. Maliki said in a speech broadcast to the nation on Thursday afternoon. "And now we are starting to see those problems come to us."

Mr. Maliki's remarks came as his security forces continued to battle armed Sunni tribesmen, some linked to an insurgent group led by former officials of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party, in a fight that began Tuesday morning when security forces raided a Sunni protest camp in the northern village of Hawija, near Kirkuk, that left at least 50 civilians dead and more than 100 wounded.

That led to a series of revenge attacks against security forces, and the fighting intensified Wednesday in the town of Sulaiman Bek, a village north of Baghdad that was surrounded by army vehicles after insurgents had taken over government buildings. The government used helicopter gunships to shoot at militants

hiding in the village, and was said to be preparing a broader assault on the town.

"What happened in Hawija, and what is happening today in Sulaiman Bek and other places, is a point in which we should stop and think because it might lead to sectarian strife," Mr. Maliki said. "Everyone would lose. Whether he is in the north, the south, east or west of Iraq, if the fire of sectarianism starts, everyone's fingers will be burned by it."



WISSMAL OKILI/REUTERS

A funeral held Thursday in Baghdad for an Iraqi soldier killed in recent clashes.

As fighting also raged in the northern city of Mosul, in Falluja and in villages surrounding Baquba, the capital of Diyala Province, there were signs that Mr. Maliki's military was fracturing along sectarian lines.

Sheik Abdul Malik al-Saadi, a leading Sunni cleric who wields enormous influence over Iraq's Sunni population, has urged members of Iraq's security forces to abandon their posts and join the opposition to the Shiite-led government, saying they should do so just as "their brothers did in Syria."

In linking the raging civil war in Syria to the growing unrest in Iraq, the declaration is one of the surest signs yet that the sectarian battles under way in both countries are regarded by Sunnis as two elements of a growing regional sectarian conflict. The civil war in Syria pits a Sunni-led rebellion against a government dominated by Alawites, an offshoot of Shiite Islam.

Sheik Saadi released his statement Wednesday night from Amman, where he lives. While he urged soldiers — he did not specify Sunnis only — to leave the military, he stopped short of endorsing an armed rebellion against the government by ordering deserting soldiers to leave their weapons behind. He told govern-

ment opponents to exercise restraint "as long as the armed forces are peaceful."

"But if they open fire, then burn the land beneath them and defend yourself with courage and strength," he said.

Sheik Saadi, who fled Saddam Hussein's repression and in recent years began to hold religious sway over Iraq's Sunnis, has taken on a growing role in directing Sunni protests in Iraq, which began in December and this week took a violent turn with the raid on Hawija.

Already, a few Sunni members of Iraq's Army are deserting, according to Najmaldin Karim, the governor of Kirkuk,

the province where Hawija is located. The desertions underscore how quickly the situation here is beginning to mimic the early stages of the civil war in Syria, when government forces turned their weapons on peaceful Sunni-led protests.

"The Sunnis certainly don't want to fight," said Mr. Karim, adding that some members of units based near Kirkuk had contacted local officials, saying they wanted to leave their posts. "They don't want to kill their own people."

On Thursday, the battles had killed nearly 50 people, most of them described by security officials as militants. At the same time, Western diplomats intensified efforts to persuade Mr. Maliki and his government to back away from a military solution. The government responded to those efforts with justifications for the violent response, partly out of fears that the situation would otherwise deteriorate into another Syria, according to one Western diplomat and an official close to Mr. Maliki, both of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Friday, the day when Sunni protests have traditionally been at their most zealous, loomed ominously, and many expected further clashes.

"The situation is very grim, and I think it will spread," Mr. Karim said.

*Duraïd Adnan and Yasir Ghazi contributed reporting from Baghdad, and employees of The New York Times from Nineveh, Anbar, Kirkuk and Diyala Provinces.*

# Le conflit syrien devenu négociable ?

**A** WASHINGTON, Paris et Londres, il n'est plus question de réclamer publiquement le départ de Bachar, même si on continue de l'espérer. C'est le reflet d'une inquiétude générale après deux ans de guerre civile. La position de l'équipe Obama a en effet évolué, selon les attachés militaires français en poste aux États-Unis. A preuve, les informations qu'ils ont récemment transmises à Paris sur une réunion, le 17 avril, des sénateurs US, membres de la Commission des forces armées, qui auditionnaient le général Martin Dempsey, chef d'état-major, et le nouveau patron du Pentagone, Chuck Hagel.

En réponse aux questions des sénateurs, le général a résumé ainsi la situation sur le front anti-Bachar : l'opposition est plus divisée que jamais, et la montée en puissance, ainsi qu'en efficacité militaire, des combattants djihadistes contribue à ce désordre. Un constat que partagent les services de renseignement américains, français et britanniques.

Quant au chef du Pentagone, ses confidences aux sénateurs ont été plus politiques. A en croire Chuck Hagel, il va falloir examiner d'autres options – sous-entendu, que l'option militaire –, car l'intention des États-Unis est d'éviter « un conflit prolongé » avec le régime syrien. Après les deux guerres d'Irak et d'Afghanistan, Obama n'a guère envie d'entamer une troisième. Alors, une négociation avec Bachar et les siens ? Per-

sonne n'envisage avec plaisir pareille éventualité, d'autant que l'Armée syrienne libre et les groupes djihadistes ne veulent pas en entendre parler.

A Paris, on ne s'étonne guère de cette discrète invitation à négocier lancée par la Maison-Blanche. A l'état-major des armées, un général admet d'ailleurs que le départ de Bachar est « incroyablement peu probable ». Et que, s'il devait y avoir une réaction militaire des Alliés, sous quelque forme qu'elle revête, « ce ne pourrait être qu'une option d'extrême recours » face à une soudaine menace. Par exemple, l'utilisation d'armes chimiques par l'armée loyaliste.

## Fuites de gaz

Le 18 avril, Londres et Paris ont remis un « mémorandum » au secrétaire général de l'ONU. Ce document affirme qu'à deux reprises, les 23 décembre 2012 et 19 mars dernier, « des évidences crédibles » (jargon de spécialistes...) permettent de croire à une attaque aux gaz de combat. Le gouvernement syrien et l'opposition s'accusent mutuellement d'avoir utilisé ces armes présumées interdites. Bachar a refusé que des experts de l'ONU viennent enquêter sur place, ce qui n'est pas à son avantage. Mais, selon un officier français de la Direction du renseignement militaire, il s'agissait peut-être d'une mauvaise manipulation par l'armée syrienne des munitions chimiques dont elle dispose.

L'avenir de cet arsenal, réparti dans une quarantaine de sites différents, « fout la trouille à toutes les armées occidentales », constate un diplomate. Avant d'ajouter : « Mieux vaudrait que des groupes terroristes ne s'en emparent pas, si le régime s'écroule. » Et les états-majors français évaluent à 20 000 hommes les effectifs nécessaires pour pénétrer en Syrie et mettre en sécurité, en cas de besoin, cette quincaillerie malodorante.

Là n'est pas le seul motif d'inquiétude des Américains et des Européens. Le débat sur la livraison d'armes modernes aux insurgés, et notamment de missiles antiaériens, est loin d'être tranché. Toujours par crainte d'en voir une partie tomber aux mains de groupes terroristes. Car, comme le déplore ingénument un diplomate, quelques heures après l'attentat, à Tripoli, contre l'ambassade de France, « il y a vraiment trop d'islamistes en Syrie, et peut-être aussi en Libye »...

Jérôme Canard

LE FIGARO mercredi 24 avril 2013

# Washington tergiverse face aux armes chimiques d'Assad

ISABELLE LASSERRE [ilasserre@lefigaro.fr](mailto:ilasserre@lefigaro.fr)

**MOYEN-ORIENT** Cette fois, c'est un responsable israélien appartenant aux services de renseignements militaires, le général Itai Brun, qui l'affirme. Le régime syrien a utilisé des armes chimiques contre ses opposants à plusieurs reprises au cours des derniers mois. Probablement du gaz sarin.

Cela n'est pas nouveau. À l'ONU, des diplomates ont confirmé au début du mois disposer de preuves « solides » et « très convaincantes » que des armes chimiques ont bien été employées en Syrie : à Alep, à Homs et peut-être à Damas. Alors que le régime de Bachar el-Assad a refusé aux enquêteurs des Nations unies d'accéder aux sites suspects, l'utilisation de telles armes a été confirmée à Paris et à Londres par des sources bien informées.

Mais en portant ses accusations à dé-

couvert, pendant une conférence internationale sur la sécurité à Tel-Aviv, le général Itai Brun a donné une couleur particulière aux soupçons contre Damas. La veille, en effet, le secrétaire américain à la Défense, Chuck Hagel, avait affirmé lors d'une visite en Israël que les agences de renseignements de son pays enquêtaient toujours sur le sujet. Depuis plusieurs semaines, les Américains semblent botter en touche. Hier encore, la Maison-Blanche a indiqué n'être « pas parvenue à la conclusion » de l'utilisation d'armes de cette nature par Damas.

C'est que Barack Obama, suivi par ses alliés britannique et français, a fait de l'utilisation ces armes chimiques par le régime syrien une « ligne rouge » qui, si elle était franchie, serait susceptible de provoquer une intervention militaire. Cette « ligne rouge », susceptible selon les responsables américains « de changer la donne », a visiblement sauté depuis

plusieurs semaines sans provoquer aucune réaction de Washington. Lassitude de la guerre après l'Irak et l'Afghanistan, peur des opposants islamistes, recentrage stratégique vers l'Asie : les raisons de ne pas intervenir en Syrie sont nombreuses, vues de Washington.

## Les promesses d'Obama

Cette passivité risque cependant d'avoir des conséquences sur d'autres dossiers. Dans la région, Barack Obama est lié par un autre engagement. Il a promis à son allié israélien qu'il empêcherait, par la force s'il le faut, une fois épuisés les moyens diplomatiques et la politique de sanctions, l'émergence de la bombe nucléaire iranienne. À plusieurs reprises, des responsables américains se sont rendus à Tel-Aviv pour dissuader Benyamin Nétanyahou de lancer des frappes préventives contre les installations iraniennes. Le premier ministre israélien, qui a toujours

douté de la fiabilité de Barack Obama, a accepté, avec fortes réticences, de décaler ses projets guerriers.

Mais si le président américain ne respecte pas sa promesse en Syrie, comment être sûr qu'il le fera en Iran, se demandent sans doute aujourd'hui les responsables israéliens, dont certains considèrent la perspective d'un Iran nucléaire comme

une menace existentielle.

L'inertie des Occidentaux en Syrie ne décrédibilise pas seulement la parole du monde libre auprès des rebelles syriens. Elle affaiblit le discours américain auprès de ses principaux alliés dans le monde. Israël bien sûr, qui pourrait à nouveau être tenté d'agir unilatéralement. Mais aussi tous les pays installés sous le para-

pluie américain, qu'il s'agisse de la Corée du Sud et du Japon lorsqu'ils sont menacés par Pyongyang. Ou des pays de l'ancienne Europe de l'Est, qui craignent toujours leur grand voisin russe. ■

LE FIGARO

mardi 23 avril 2013

# La carte turque de la diplomatie américaine



**E**n l'espace de la seule journée du dimanche 21 avril 2013, qu'il a passée à Istanbul, John Kerry aura pu faire progresser tous les grands dossiers de la diplomatie américaine au Moyen-Orient.

À la faveur d'une réunion des Amis de la Syrie, le groupe des puissances hostiles au régime Assad, le Secrétaire d'État a confirmé son attachement à une Syrie « unifiée » et « pacifiée ». L'usage du premier terme vise à exclure l'hypothèse d'un éclatement du pays en différents mini-États (kurde, druze, alaouite, sunnite, etc.) ; le second est un appel au maintien de la tolérance religieuse, dans un pays qui compte d'importantes minorités, chrétiennes ou non, aujourd'hui menacées par la montée du radicalisme sunnite d'origine wahhabite. L'Amérique va livrer pour 123 millions de dollars d'« équipements non létaux » à la rébellion, ce qui est une demi-mesure par rapport aux « frappes chirurgicales » réclamées par l'Armée syrienne libre du général Salem Idris.

Lors d'un entretien avec le président de l'Autorité palestinienne, John Kerry a promis que les États-Unis allaient accroître considérablement leur aide

économique à la Cisjordanie. En échange, il attend de Mahmoud Abbas qu'il assouplisse sa position, en acceptant de reprendre les pourparlers avec les Israéliens, même si ces derniers ne prononcent pas le gel de leurs colonisations de peuplement. Le chef de la diplomatie américaine veut à tout prix que reprenne un dialogue direct israélo-palestinien, afin de donner sa dernière chance à la solution des deux États. Il sait que, dans deux ans, ce sera trop tard : par lassitude, les Palestiniens demanderont leur intégration pure et simple comme citoyens du grand Israël, plutôt que de continuer à mal vivre dans des bantoustans.

Le conflit israélo-palestinien a été l'un des grands thèmes du long tête-à-tête qu'a eu John Kerry avec le premier ministre turc. Maintenant que Nétanyahou a présenté ses excuses au gouvernement d'Ankara pour l'incident du Mavi Marmara (9 citoyens turcs tués, en 2010, lors de l'arraisonnement, dans les eaux internationales, d'un navire civil turc s'appropriant à enfreindre le blocus israélien de Gaza), la Turquie est revenue au cœur du jeu diplomatique au Levant. Pourquoi Kerry a-t-il dit publiquement avoir demandé à Recep Tayyip Erdoğan de reporter son voyage à Gaza, prévu pour la fin du mois de mai 2013 ? Ce genre d'exigence ne se clame pas, sauf à vouloir embarrasser son interlocuteur. En fait, le but de Kerry était de calmer le Congrès des États-Unis, qui honnit le Hamas, mouvement de Frères musulmans contrôlant la bande de Gaza d'une main de fer. Erdoğan n'a plus d'autre choix que d'aller à Gaza, où il pourra tranquillement prêcher le pragmatisme aux islamistes du Hamas, leur recommandant de reconnaître le droit d'existence à l'État d'Israël.

Ce n'est pas par hasard qu'Erdoğan

sera reçu à Washington à la mi-mai par le président Obama. La Turquie est devenue le premier levier de la diplomatie orientale des Américains, qui admirent son goût du travail, sa prospérité, sa démocratie, son ordre, son néo-ottomanisme de bon aloi, qui ne s'écarte pas du cadre onusien. Pour l'Amérique, la Turquie est devenue un partenaire beaucoup plus précieux que l'Égypte. Pour la Turquie, l'Amérique reste le modèle à suivre, sur les plans universitaire, industriel, technologique.

Il est certain que les Turcs joueront un rôle crucial dans le dialogue direct que les Américains comptent ouvrir avec les Perses, juste après les élections présidentielles du 14 juin en Iran. Les Américains ont exigé des Européens qu'ils boycottent l'Iran, mais pas des Turcs. Ces derniers, bénéficiant d'un régime dérogatoire, continuent de s'approvisionner en gaz iranien, qu'ils paient en lingots d'or. L'administration Obama, qui ne veut pas entendre parler d'une troisième guerre « préventive » en Orient, estime qu'il est encore possible de trouver un « deal » honorable avec l'Iran.

Dans ce nouveau grand jeu, la France semble hélas marginalisée. En mai 2007, Ali Larijani, alors numéro trois du régime iranien, en charge du Nucléaire, de la Défense et des Affaires étrangères, avait, dans un entretien au *Figaro*, proposé que la France joue un rôle d'intermédiaire sincère entre Washington et Téhéran. Cette offre avait été torpillée par un petit clan de diplomates néoconservateurs sévissant au Quai d'Orsay et à l'Élysée. À Washington, cela fait longtemps que les néoconservateurs ont perdu toute influence dans un Département d'État qui s'appête à confier à la Turquie ce beau rôle d'« honest broker » en Orient...

# Risques de guerre civile en Irak

Deux journées de violences entre les sunnites et le pouvoir chiite ont causé plus de 100 morts

Peu à peu, l'Irak s'enfonce dans une crise politique et confessionnelle qui semble inexorablement ramener le pays aux pires heures de la guerre civile, entre 2006 et 2009, lorsque milices chiites et combattants d'Al-Qaïda commettaient quotidiennement des massacres.

Le pire n'est pas encore sûr, mais les incidents d'Houweïjah, mardi 23 avril, dans lesquels vingt-cinq manifestants sunnites et deux soldats sont morts, sont inquiétants à bien des égards. Cet assaut de l'armée, aux ordres du premier ministre chiite Nouri Al-Maliki, contre un sit-in de manifestants sunnites dans la province agitée de Kirkouk, a conduit à un enchaînement de violences qui a causé 110 morts en deux jours.

Ces violences sont les plus graves depuis le début de « l'intifada » sunnite en Irak, à la fin de décembre 2012. Ce mouvement de manifestations, déclenché à la suite de la tentative d'arrestation de Rafa Al-Issaoui, ministre des finances et figure montante de la scène politique sunnite, entendait dénoncer la politique d'oppression et de discrimination menée par M. Maliki à l'égard de ses adversaires politiques et confessionnels.

Le « mouvement populaire » exprimait également le malaise des sunnites, grands perdants dans l'Irak post-Saddam Hussein dessiné par l'administration Bush, qui avait choisi de s'appuyer sur les chiites et les Kurdes.

Mais l'aggravation de la crise politique et le refus du chef de gouvernement d'apporter une réponse globale aux frustrations exprimées par les manifestants ont contribué à pourrir et à radicaliser le mouvement. Peu à peu, les extrémistes, tenants d'Al-Qaïda ou de la secte religieuse des Naqshbandi, sont en train de prendre le dessus au sein du camp sunnite, l'entraînant dans une surenchère violente à l'issue incertaine.

Mardi, l'armée a tenté de disperser par la force un campement de manifestants à Houweïjah, au terme d'un ultimatum enjoignant les protestataires de livrer les coupables de l'assassinat d'un soldat la semaine précédente. L'intervention sanglante des militaires a suscité une vague sans précédent de représailles dans les provinces de Ninive (Mosoul), Salaheddine (Tikrit) et Anbar, principaux bas-



Capture d'image sur Facebook montrant des corps à l'hôpital d'Houweïjah, ville où des affrontements ont eu lieu le 23 avril et au cours desquels vingt-cinq manifestants sunnites et deux soldats sont morts. AP

tions de la présence sunnite en Irak. A Ramadi, notamment, la capitale de la province d'Anbar, six soldats ont été tués et un camion militaire incendié. Deux autres soldats, pris en otages, ont finalement été libérés sains et saufs mercredi. Non loin de là, à Falloujah, deux policiers ont été tués par balles.

## Des insurgés se sont emparés de la ville de Souleimane Pak, dans les territoires du Nord, que se disputent Arabes et Kurdes

Plus grave, des insurgés se sont emparés de la ville de Souleimane Pak, dans les territoires contestés du Nord, que se disputent Arabes et Kurdes. Pendant ce temps, des attaques de mosquées sunnites à Bagdad et dans sa banlieue font craindre le retour en scène de milices chiïtes, jusque-là en sommeil.

Au plan politique également, l'attaque d'Houweïjah a accentué la cassure entre chiïtes et sunnites. Deux nouveaux ministres sunnites ont démissionné du gouvernement Maliki, au sein duquel Saleh Al-Mutlak, un ancien responsable baasiste proche de Saddam Hus-

sein désormais rallié au nouveau pouvoir, est quasiment le seul représentant de cette communauté. « Au lieu de jouer le jeu du partage du pouvoir, Nouri Al-Maliki a cherché à radicaliser les sunnites pour souder derrière lui le camp chiïte, tétanisé par une possible reprise de la guerre civile », analyse sévèrement un diplomate. Une dérive d'autant plus inquiétante que les partis kurdes ont également suspendu leur participation au gouvernement.

Alors qu'en 2009-2010, Nouri Al-Maliki et Iyad Allaoui, tous deux chiïtes – le premier islamiste modéré et le second laïque –, se disputaient les suffrages sunnites, la scène politique irakienne épouse désormais presque parfaitement les lignes de fracture confessionnelles. M. Maliki est devenu un leader chiïte, soutenu par son encombrant voisin et allié iranien, tandis que M. Allaoui a disparu du paysage politique.

Quant aux hommes politiques sunnites, soit ils sont débauchés tour à tour par l'habile Nouri Al-Maliki, soit ils sont poussés à se radicaliser par une « rue sunnite » chauffée à blanc et menée par des oulémas, tels les cheikhs Abdelmalik Al-Saadi, réfugié à Amman, et Rafa Al-Rifai, installé à Souleimaniyé, au Kurdistan d'Irak. « Ce sont nos marjas [sources d'imitation],

nous déclarait récemment à Ramadi un manifestant du sit-in de protestation, reprenant un terme religieux propre aux chiïtes d'Irak.

A Fallouja, le cheikh Khaled Hammoud Al-Joumaili dirige la contestation et le campement de tentes installé à l'entrée de la ville. C'est un naqshbandi, une confrérie soufie originaire du sous-continent indien, défendant une vision salafiste et radicalement antipolitique.

« Avec les événements d'Houweïjah, on peut parler d'un tournant », analyse Myriam Benraad, chercheuse associée à Science Po Paris et à l'Iremam d'Aix-en-Provence. Pour elle, l'incident illustre surtout « la dérive autoritaire du premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki, engagé dans une fuite en avant militaire croissante à mesure que la situation sécuritaire échappé à son contrôle ».

En conflit ouvert avec le dirigeant kurde Massoud Barzani, détesté par l'opinion sunnite et décrié jusque dans les rangs chiïtes – notamment par les partisans de Moqtada Al-Sadr –, Nouri Al-Maliki est plus isolé mais aussi plus puissant que jamais. Soit il finit par démissionner, soit il se maintient à tout prix au pouvoir, entraînant son pays dans la guerre civile. ■

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

## Kurdish peace process to close the 'doors of a dark era': Turkish PM Erdoğan

ISTANBUL

The doors of a dark era will be closed at the end of the ongoing Kurdish resolution process and a brand new era will start, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said April 27 in his first remarks on the subject following the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party's (PKK) press conference announcing the starting date of the militant's withdrawal.

"What is approaching its end is not only 30 years of terrorism. It is a sequence of problems extending to much longer years," Erdoğan said at the Independent Industrialists' and Businessmen's Association's (MÜSİAD) 22nd General Assembly, echoing the confident tone of the statements made a day earlier by key government officials.

Speaking to an audience composed mainly by entrepreneurs and industrialists, Erdoğan called on businessmen's associations to invest to the eastern and southeastern regions and assist their development. "When the chimney's of the factories start to emit smoke, when employment rises, the resolution process will be permanent," he said praising the initiatives undertaken by MÜSİAD. He also called on other major business orga-



Erdoğan urged Turkish businessmen to invest to the eastern and southeastern regions. AA photo

nizations such as the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD), All Industrialist and Businessmen Association (TÜMSİAD), Confederation of Businessmen and Industrialists of Turkey (TUSKON) and Anatolian Lions Businessmen's Association (ASKON) to take due responsibility during the process.

Those not part of the solution will become part of the problem

The Turkish prime minister increased

his tone in his criticism of the opposition, urging all parties to show their support for the process. "Those who are not part of the solution will become part of the problem. We opened our door wide so that the opposition could be part of the process. Unfortunately [they] preferred to stay out of it, and even be against it," he said, accusing both the Republican People's Party (CHP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) of hoping the process would fail.

"None of the fears that the MHP leader [Devlet Bahçeli] tries to instill is real. The only thing he wants is the continuation of the martyrs so that he can continue to take advantage of it, because the CHP and MHP know that when terrorism ends, there will be nothing they can take advantage of."

Erdoğan also dismissed CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu's criticism that his party did not know about the details of the talks. "[Kılıçdaroğlu] does not see what everybody sees, does not understand what everybody understands," he said, adding with irony that the Wise Persons commissions, established to seek public support, could visit the CHP leader and explain the process. □

## New tensions in Kirkuk as Peshmerga deploy near disputed city

Kurdish official says move aims at combating militants but Iraq army bills move of peshmerga as 'political manoeuvre.'

Middle East Online

**KIRKUK (Iraq)** - Kurdish security forces deployed near the disputed northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, a Kurdish official said Saturday, a move allegedly aimed at combating militants in the area. In the past week, a wave of violence has killed more than 200 people, including 40 in Kirkuk.

"After consultations with the governor of Kirkuk, there has been a decision for Peshmerga (security) forces to fill the vacuums in general, and especially around the city of Kirkuk," Jabbar Yawar, secretary general of Iraqi Kurdistan's peshmerga ministry, said in a statement.

"The intelligence service of the peshmerga has information that terrorist groups have plans to launch terrorist attacks in these regions,"



Kurdish peshmerga soldiers stationed on the outskirts of Kirkuk in December. Kurdish security forces deployed near the disputed north Iraq city of Kirkuk, a top Kurdish official said Saturday, a move allegedly aimed at combating militants, as a wave of violence killed more than 200 people.

Yawar said. "Our only goal is to preserve the life of citizens."

But the Iraqi army ascribed different motives to the deployment.

"After the latest movements of the peshmerga forces, the army is on alert," a high-ranking army officer said. "The army sees the move of the peshmerga as a (political) manoeuvre and not to fill any vacuum."

Kirkuk province and its eponymous capital, home to Kurds, Arabs and Turkmen, fall within the territory the autonomous Kurdistan region wants to incorporate, despite strong objections from the federal government in Baghdad.

Diplomats and officials say the territorial dispute between Baghdad and Kurdistan -- a three-province region with its own government, security forces, borders and flag but which still receives a portion of the federal budget -- is a major threat to Iraq's long-term stability. ○

# Is Iraq on the Cusp of Partition?

**Iraqi army losing hold on north to Sunni and Kurdish forces as troops desert**

PATRICK COCKBURN

Soldiers are deserting a beleaguered Iraqi army as it struggles to keep its hold on the northern half of Iraq in the face of escalating hostility from Sunni Arabs and Kurds who dominate in the region.

Around the oil city of Kirkuk Kurdish troops have advanced south to take over military positions abandoned by the army, while in Baghdad senior Iraqi politicians say that for the first time there is talk of partitioning the country.

The current crisis was sparked on 23 April when the Iraqi army attacked a sit-in protest in the Sunni Arab town of Hawijah, killing at least 50 people and injuring 110. Outraged Sunni Arab protesters have since stepped up their demonstrations against the Shia-led government. Demonstrators are increasingly protected by armed men, some of whom are accused of dragging five military intelligence soldiers in civilian clothes from a car that came near a protest in Ramadi and killing them.

There are signs that the Iraqi army can no longer cope with a crisis in which it is confronting both Sunni Arabs and Kurds. Many soldiers prefer to desert the army rather than shoot at protesters said Najmaldin Karim, the Kurdish Governor of Kirkuk, where Hawijah is situated, in an interview with *The Independent*. Most deserters are Sunni, Mr Karim said, but he added that some are Shia who don't want to fight in strange places for something they don't believe in.

Mr Karim, formerly a doctor in the US, confirmed that Kurdish troops have moved to take over positions around Kirkuk left vacant by the Iraqi army, but vehemently denies that this is a land-grab by the Kurds seeking to take over the oilfields as Iraqi army commanders have alleged. Affirming that Kurdish forces have taken over places vacated by the Iraqi army, he explained that Iraqi military units are under orders to leave their outposts at night and concentrate in defensible positions.

"They [Iraqi army commanders] are playing on people's emotions and trying to detract from the fact that they attacked civilian demonstrators and kil-



The funeral of an Iraqi soldier killed in clashes following the storming of a Sunni Muslim protest camp by Iraqi forces

led scores of them at close range."

Mediators seeking to end the protest in Hawijah last week say they only needed another six hours to end the confrontation when the army attacked.

A confrontation between the Kurds and the central government in Baghdad last summer has led to poor relations between the two. Security cooperation has broken down and there has been a 30 per cent rise in terrorist attacks in Kirkuk as a result. Last week al-Qa'ida in Iraq was able to take over the town of Suleiman Bec in Kirkuk province and only left under a truce arrangement

"It is really ironic," says Mr Karim, "that at Hawijah the army attacks demonstrators including children and elderly. And then at Suleiman Bec al-Qa'ida killed the police chief. They captured and killed whoever was in the police station. The whole population of the town left. Terrorists controlled the town for 24 hours and then they were given safe passage to get out with their weapons and stolen cars."

Iraqi politicians are gloomy about the prospects for keeping the country together. Mowaffak al-Rubaie, the former Iraqi National Security Adviser, said in a phone interview yesterday that for the first time he was hearing leaders in Baghdad talk seriously of partitioning the country. He said "I believe Iraq is going through its most critical phase since the creation of the state in 1921." He said that for Iraq partition would not be a soft option but would be more like the bloodbath when India and Pakistan divided.

In the last four months Mr Maliki has done little to conciliate the Sunni

Arabs who have been conducting a peaceful campaign demanding civil and political rights. They want an end to job discrimination and a terror law under which suspects can be arrested tortured on the word of an unknown informant. The protests were conducted largely without violence until the unexpected break-up of the Hawijah sit-in. Sunni Arabs are now demanding that the army withdraw from their areas. A highly influential Sunni religious figure, seen as the inspirational leader of the protests, Abdul Malik al-Saadi, had previously counselled moderation, but last week issued a statement saying "if they open fire, then burn the land beneath them, and defend your selves with courage."

The government has been ambivalent in its attitude to the demonstrations, sometimes declaring their grievances to be just and at others demonising them as al-Qa'ida members. "I call upon the peaceful protesters to expel the criminals targeting military and police," Mr Maliki said in a statement posted on his official website. Yesterday ten satellite television companies, including al-Jazeera and al-Sharkiya, had their licenses withdrawn, while earlier the authorities announced a curfew in the whole of Sunni Anbar province in western Iraq. But the television channels have gone on operating and the army may not be in a position to enforce a curfew. ○



# Turkey warns opp against sabotaging Kurdish peace moves

ISTANBUL / April 27, 2013 / Reuters

**THE TURKISH government welcomed a planned withdrawal by Kurdish militants as significant progress towards ending three decades of conflict on Friday, and it warned its nationalist opponents not to sabotage the peace process.**

The main nationalist party, however, was quick to reiterate its opposition to any dealings with the militants.

Rebel field commander Murat Karayilan on Thursday ordered his fighters to begin leaving Turkey on May 8 for the mountains of northern Iraq, in a step to halt a war that has killed more than 40,000 and scarred the nation.

The pullout is a major step forward in a peace plan hammered out during months of negotiations between Turkey's MIT intelligence agency and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) chief Abdullah Ocalan, jailed on a prison island near Istanbul.

The onus is now on the government to enact reforms sought by Ocalan and his followers, a process that will require support for changes to the constitution in the face of nationalist anger at negotiations with a man they have long reviled.

"The point we have reached in the process is very important and we need to be sensitive for it to be completed successfully," Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said.

"It is necessary to determinedly avoid behaviour and actions which would sabotage the process," he said, criticising opposition parties including the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) for seeking to "besmirch" the government.

Nationalists have made no secret of their opposition to negotiating with the Kurdish militants. "The Turkish nation will under no conditions surrender to the PKK or consent to the PKK's treacherous demands," MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli said in a statement.

The withdrawal announcement has given a boost to Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan, who has taken a huge political risk in sanctioning negotiations with the PKK ahead of local and presidential elections next year.

Pushing through constitutional reform, which could also pave the way for Erdogan to take the helm of new presidential system next year, will be fiercely resisted in parliament by nationalist politicians.

Erdogan will need to manage public opinion carefully as the elections approach. But for now the mainstream media is backing a process

which proponents say could lift the economy, boost Turkey's international credibility and cement Erdogan's legacy.

"His courage ended terrorism," the front-page headline in the mainstream Haberturk newspaper said of Erdogan. "Game Over", said the Yeni Safak daily, which is close to the government. "Go and don't come back", Posta newspaper said of the militants.

Ocalan, who began peace talks with Turkish intelligence agents from prison six months ago, brought the violence to a halt with a ceasefire order at Kurdish new year celebrations on March 21.

From May, some 2,000 rebels are to move into Iraq in small groups, monitored on the Turkish side by the MIT and by the Kurdish regional government in Iraq.

Speaking in the PKK's stronghold in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq where thousands of its members are based, Karayilan indicated that Erdogan's demand that the fighters disarm before they leave Turkey had been quietly dropped.

Dressed in baggy olive green fatigues and flanked by other senior rebels, Karayilan said Ankara would first have to push through reforms guaranteeing Kurdish rights and release Ocalan before the PKK would consider disarmament.

Arinc brushed aside the apparent discrepancy over when disarmament would take place with little explanation:

"There is no confusion. If it is said armed elements will leave, there is no need to ask whether they are armed or not."

Since coming to power in 2002, Erdogan has extended rights to Kurds who make up 20 percent of Turkey's 76 million-strong population, breaking taboos deeply rooted in the conservative establishment, including allowing Kurdish television broadcasts and elective Kurdish language courses at state schools.

But the government faces deeper demands including changes to the constitutional definition of citizenship and strengthening regional government in the mainly Kurdish southeast.

Thousands of Kurdish politicians and activists have also been detained in recent years over alleged links to the PKK, designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union, and Ocalan is expecting their release.

Around 200 PKK-linked defendants have been released from custody pending trial in the last two months, the Zaman daily said on Friday, suggesting some progress on that front. ○



28 avril 2013

## Irak: 10 chaînes satellitaires suspendues pour "incitation à la violence"

BAGDAD (AFP)

L'Irak a suspendu dimanche les licences de 10 chaînes de télévision satellitaires, notamment Al-Jazeera (du Qatar), pour "incitation à la violence et au confessionnalisme", a-t-on appris auprès d'un responsable de l'Autorité des médias et des communications.

"Nous avons pris la décision de suspendre les licences de certaines chaînes satellitaires qui ont adopté une ligne incitant à la vio-



lence et au confessionnalisme", a déclaré le directeur en charge des médias, Moujahed Aboulheil, alors que l'Irak connaît depuis mardi des violences faisant craindre un retour au sanglant conflit confessionnel ayant suivi l'invasion américaine de 2003

L'Autorité "a dû, après une série d'avertissements, suspendre la licence de ces chaînes dans tout l'Irak", a-t-il ajouté.

Parmi les 10 télévisions suspendues ■■■

■■■ figurent les chaînes irakiennes Bagdad, Alsharqiya, et Al-Fallujah.

La suspension des licences "signifie la suspension de leur travail et leurs activités en Irak", a-t-il expliquant précisant que ces chaînes ne pourront plus "couvrir les événements en Irak ou circuler" dans le pays.

Cette décision survient alors que l'Irak est secoué par des violences déclenchés mardi par un assaut de policiers, près de Houweijah (nord), contre un camp de manifestants sunnites hostiles au Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, un chiite, qui a

provoqué des heurts sanglants. En riposte, des attaques ont été lancées contre l'armée et les violences ont fait en cinq jours plus de 215 morts et 300 blessés, selon des responsables.

Les tensions se sont accrues après que la puissante milice des Sahwa, fidèle au gouvernement Maliki, a menacé de faire la guerre aux rebelles comme aux pires années du conflit ayant suivi l'invasion américaine de l'Irak en 2003, faisant craindre une escalade incontrôlée des violences.

Parallèlement, les forces de sécurité du

Kurdistan autonome (nord) se sont déployées samedi près de Kirkouk, afin de faire face selon elles à d'éventuelles attaques contre cette ville multiethnique riche en pétrole et revendiquée par les Kurdes et le pouvoir central à Bagdad.

M. Maliki a lié samedi les violences confessionnelles au conflit en Syrie voisine. ♦



April / 28 / 2013

## Peace process first step to Greater Kurdistan: Turkish main opposition

Main opposition CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu slammed the ongoing peace process saying that it the first phase of a more comprehensive plan to establish a Greater Kurdistan on the Iraqi, Syrian and Turkish soil

ANKARA

The leader of the main opposition party, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, has claimed that the ongoing peace process in Turkey is in fact the first phase of a more comprehensive plan to establish a Greater Kurdistan on the territories of Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

"In the first phase of this plan, Turkey will enjoy Northern Iraq's oil and natural gas sources within certain limits. The AKP's [Justice and Development Party] mission in this phase is to become the surrogate mother of Greater Kurdistan. The Greater Kurdistan will be established not only on Syrian and Iraqi territories but also on Turkish territories," leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu said in an interview with the daily Hürriyet over the weekend.

The plan also envisages the establishment of an alliance between Israel in order to establish a Greater Kurdistan he said. Kılıçdaroğlu, who remained cold to the AKP's calls to join the efforts to resolve the terror problem and the Kurdish question added an external dimension of why his party will not stand with the ruling party in this bid.

### Öcalan's road map

"The process is being run in line with the road map drafted by Öcalan. The AKP is supporting the Democratic



*Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) says his party will not be involved in the 'bargaining' process between the government and the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. AA photo*

Union Party's (PYD) efforts to gain control in the northern Syria in order to divide Syria. Following PYD's control will be provided, northern parts of Iraq and Syria will be united and access to Mediterranean will also be possible," he claimed.

Kılıçdaroğlu vowed that his party would not become part of an ongoing alliance between the head of the government and the imprisoned terrorist leader but underlined that they were still working toward the people's expectations for ending terror and resolving the Kurdish issue.

"The AKP's strategy is to carry out this process with a unilateral and non-transparent approach and in cooperation with Abdullah Öcalan by excluding the Parliament. It's not possible

for the CHP to become a part of this negotiation between [Prime Minister Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan and Öcalan," Kılıçdaroğlu said.

For Kılıçdaroğlu, Erdoğan's strategy in forcing the CHP to take part in this process is to find a potential scapegoat on which he would put all the blame in case of the collapse of this process.

"According to us, the address of the resolution is the Parliament. For the AKP however, the address is Öcalan. While the AKP brought a non-returnable legitimacy to the PKK [Kurdistan Workers' Party], it also allowed Öcalan to become the official counterpart of Turkey," he said. Criticizing the government for not sharing information about negotiations and developments, Kılıçdaroğlu said this strategy of the AKP did not leave any room for the CHP to become a part of these talks.

The legality of this process has vital importance, according to the main opposition leader, who urged the government to pay attention not to violate the principles of the rule of law during the withdrawal of the PKK members. Underlining that the PKK should declare their intention to cease all forms of terrorist and violent acts against the Republic of Turkey and to surrender their weapons, he said, adding that this was the point the PKK leaders had avoided in their recent statements. □



# Kurdish Rebel Group to Withdraw From Turkey

Associated Press

By SEBNEM ARSU

**I**STANBUL — The Kurdistan Workers' Party, the main Kurdish rebel group in Turkey, said Thursday that it would withdraw all of its forces from the country by May 8 as part of a peace agreement to end a 30-year conflict with the Turkish state. Speaking at a rare news conference at the group's base in the Qandil mountains of neighboring Iraq, Murat Karayilan, the commander of the group, known as the P.K.K., called on the Turkish Army not to launch attacks during the rebels' gradual withdrawal into northern Iraq. Any such confrontation will end the P.K.K.'s cease-fire, he said.

Mr. Karayilan, in a statement read in Turkish and summarized in English, outlined the process by which the P.K.K. expected the government to meet its end of the bargain, by giving the Kurds further democratic rights under a new constitution and releasing Kurdish prisoners, including the P.K.K.'s highly influential primary founder, Abdullah Ocalan. However, he refused demands by the Turkish government that rebels disarm before leaving the country, and said his militants would carry weapons strictly for self-defense. He also suggested that foreign observers monitor the withdrawal for any misconduct on either side, reported NTV, a private TV network.

Many analysts agree that despite the P.K.K.'s announcement, the peace process is fragile and still at risk of disruption by opposing groups inside the P.K.K. and Turkish nationalist circles. In a recent interview, Mr. Karayilan himself was defiant, emphasizing his rebels' eagerness to fight. Three female Kurdish political activists were killed in Paris a few weeks after talks started in January, an attack many analysts said was aimed at intimidating the negotiating parties.

Over the decades, a military solution had eluded the government despite the military might of Turkey, with the second-largest army in the NATO alliance, and early this year, the ruling Justice and Development Party decided to cash in on its popularity to force a political resolution.



Karayilan (C) and several of his deputies held a press conference in northern Iraq on April 25 to officially declare the PKK's withdrawal from Turkey.

"It is highly hopeful that the will of the P.K.K., the will of the government and the will of the people join for the first time for a common cause, to end a 30-year-old conflict," Numan Kurtulmus, deputy chairman of the party, said on NTV.

"The first step has been made, so we hope the process would be finalized without any acts of provocation," he said.

Many analysts agree that the government's success in resolving the conflict will win the already popular prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, even greater acclaim, which could then allow him to replace Turkey's parliamentary system with a strong-president system of some kind.

After the government made Mr. Ocalan, the sole political authority of the P.K.K., a party to the talks, he communicated with his rebels from a fortresslike prison on an island in western Turkey in March, calling off the armed struggle.

His message was largely welcomed by Turkey's nearly 15 million Kurds, who were long denied their ethnic rights and had been subject to severe human rights violations. Turkey has improved Kurdish rights to some degree as part of a membership requirement for the European Union, which it is trying to join.

Although the government agreed to other changes in exchange for the P.K.K.'s cal-

ling off the struggle, it is unclear whether it can deliver on its promises. For major legislative changes like a new constitution, for example, the government needs the backing of the main opposition parties, none of which fully supports the peace process.

Staunchly nationalist lawmakers claim that talks will ultimately lead to the destruction of Turkey's territorial unity at a time when its Middle Eastern neighbors are engaged in sectarian and ethnic conflicts, as in Syria.

Kurds are spread over Iraq, Syria, Iran and Turkey, and Kurdish nationalists have long aspired to establish a new country called Kurdistan — an aspiration that the P.K.K., which is listed as a terror group by Turkey, the European Union and the United States, said it dropped in exchange for some form of autonomy and democratic rights within Turkey.

"The moment that weapons stop being used as a political tool, the Kurdish issue gets freed from the stigma of terror," Muhsin Kizilkaya, a Kurdish intellectual, said in a telephone interview.

"From now on, democratic and legislative demands of Kurds can no longer be rejected, as they were seen as a compromise to terror, so today is the real beginning of the Kurdish conflict in a political framework."

# Allaoui: « L'Irak est au bord de la guerre civile »

Ex-premier ministre, en 2004, après la libération de l'Irak par les États-Unis, Iyad Allaoui dénonce la « dérive sectaire » du régime.

PROPOS RECUEILLIS À BAGDAD PAR  
**GEORGES MALBRUNOT**  
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LE FIGARO. - Avec la recrudescence des violences confessionnelles, l'Irak va-t-elle replonger dans la guerre civile ?  
IYAD ALLAOUÏ. - Le risque d'un retour à la guerre civile existe, car la crise est explosive. Il faut donc agir vite et sur deux fronts. À chaud, le pouvoir doit punir ceux qui ont commis les crimes de ces derniers jours et engager un dialogue avec les manifestants pour répondre enfin à leurs exigences. Le premier ministre, Maliki, doit arrêter de faire diversion en créant des comités par-ci et des comités par-là. Il doit démanteler les instruments sécuritaires qu'il a créés hors de la Constitution comme le Commandement du Tigre. Notre Constitution stipule bien que ce n'est pas à l'armée de régler les conflits intérieurs. Nous ne voulons pas que ce qui s'est passé en 1991 lorsque Saddam Hussein a utilisé l'armée pour écraser les chiïtes et les Kurdes se reproduise. Puis il faut travailler sur le processus politique. Nous devons recréer de la confiance entre les acteurs politiques du pays. Mais cette confiance ne peut être rétablie que si on respecte la loi et si on re-



« Qui aurait pu imaginer que, dix ans après sa libération, l'Irak serait si fragmenté, sans stabilité », souligne l'ancien premier ministre irakien Iyad Allaoui. AMR DALSH/REUTERS

## Les violences ont provoqué la mort de près de 200 Irakiens en quatre jours

QUATRE personnes ont été tuées vendredi dans des attentats visant des mosquées sunnites de la région de Bagdad, au quatrième jour d'une vague de violences sanglantes en Irak liées aux manifestations contre le gouvernement. Au total, 195 personnes ont péri dans ces violences et plus de 300 ont été blessées depuis

mardi à travers le pays dans des heurts entre forces de sécurité d'une part et manifestants et hommes armés sunnites d'autre part. Vendredi, l'attaque la plus meurtrière a touché la mosquée al-Koubalsi dans le sud de la capitale, où quatre personnes ont péri et trente-six ont été blessées.

fonde un processus de partage du pouvoir basé sur la Constitution, une Constitution rectifiée, et de nouvelles élections, mais nous n'avons pas confiance dans ce gouvernement pour garantir la bonne tenue d'un nouveau scrutin.

**Vous appelez les sunnites à arrêter la violence ?**

Bien sûr que j'appelle les sunnites à arrêter les violences, mais dans le même temps je demande au gouvernement de stopper la répression, de respecter les sunnites, et surtout d'arrêter sa politique sectaire, qui frappe également les chrétiens, dont la moitié ont quitté le pays de-

**« Le manque de vision des Américains a créé un énorme vide dans lequel des puissances extérieures se sont engouffrées »**

IYAD ALLAOUÏ

puis dix ans. Le sectarisme est une face horrible de l'extrémisme. Aujourd'hui l'armée est fondée sur le sectarisme. C'est pourquoi beaucoup de soldats refusent de combattre. Quand la guerre civile éclata à

Beyrouth en 1975, l'armée éclata. Veut-on d'un nouveau Liban en Irak ? Pourtant, la plupart de nos tribus sont mixtes, de nombreux mariages unissent chiïtes et sunnites. Certes, il y a toujours eu des poches de sectarisme en Irak, mais ce fléau domine aujourd'hui l'économie, la politique et la vie sociale. Et Maliki ne peut pas être un soft Saddam, il ne peut pas être à la fois premier ministre, ministre de la Défense et de l'Intérieur, commandant en chef de l'armée, chef de son parti, al-Dawa : il accapare trop de pouvoirs. Ce n'est pas cela, la démocratie.

**Les sunnites réclament sa démission. Quelles sont leurs revendications ?**

Ils sont marginalisés, arrêtés, intimidés. 90 % des personnes visées par la loi antiterroriste sont des sunnites. Si vous êtes soupçonné de liens avec tel ou tel groupe terroriste, on vient chez vous, on vous arrête, vous êtes torturé jusqu'à ce que vous passiez aux aveux. Les sunnites ont l'impression qu'ils sont des citoyens de seconde zone. Et l'interférence de l'Iran a renforcé ce sectarisme. Malheureusement, les États-Unis ont laissé faire les Iraniens en Irak.

**Les régions sunnites vont-elles faire sécession si la crise continue ?**

Si le sectarisme et la répression se pour-

suivent, l'Irak éclatera, et cet éclatement se fera dans la violence, et l'instabilité affectera d'autres pays du Moyen-Orient. Elle risque également de vous affecter, vous, en France et en Europe.

**Un an et demi après leur retrait, quelle est l'influence des États-Unis aujourd'hui en Irak ?**

Elle diminue fortement. Les États-Unis n'ont plus la volonté d'agir. Je ne suis pas sûr qu'ils aient même la volonté de faire face à l'Iran.

**Quel bilan tirez-vous dix ans après la libération de l'Irak ?**

L'Irak va dans la mauvaise direction. Qui aurait pu imaginer que, dix ans après sa libération, l'Irak serait si fragmenté, sans stabilité, un pays où les services fonctionnent toujours très mal, où la corruption est très élevée, alors que l'Irak a toujours joué un rôle important au Moyen-Orient.

**Comprenez-vous la nostalgie de ceux qui regrettent la sécurité qui régnait sous Saddam Hussein ?**

Saddam nous a conduits là où nous sommes. Mais nous aurions dû tirer des leçons de la dictature. Malheureusement, quand l'occupation américaine a com-

mencé, nos objectifs étaient confus. De leur côté, les Américains n'avaient aucun plan, une fois la victoire acquise. L'Irak est devenu un train sans pilote, alors que l'Irak, avec sa richesse humaine et sa richesse pétrolière, aurait pu jouer un rôle stabilisateur. Malheureusement, le manque de vision des Américains, qui ont cassé l'État, a créé un énorme vide dans lequel des puissances extérieures se sont engouffrées. Cette faute, nous en payons les conséquences dix ans après, et nous continuerons de payer le prix de ces erreurs, si nous ne réglons pas une fois pour toutes les problèmes à leur racine. ■

## Le Monde

Samedi 27 avril 2013

# Les Etats-Unis confirment l'usage d'armes chimiques par Bachar Al-Assad

## La Maison Blanche craint de se voir entraînée dans une intervention en Syrie

Washington  
Correspondante

**A** lors que l'ancien président George W. Bush réaffirmait, jeudi 25 avril, à Dallas (Texas), sa conviction que les Etats-Unis doivent « s'efforcer d'étendre le règne de la liberté » dans le monde, lors de l'inauguration de sa bibliothèque présidentielle, en présence de Barack Obama et des anciens présidents encore en vie, la Maison Blanche a reconnu pour la première fois ce que ses partenaires essaient de lui faire admettre publiquement depuis des semaines : des armes chimiques ont été utilisées en Syrie, un facteur qui pourrait entraîner une intervention américaine dans le conflit.

La déclaration figure dans une lettre au sénateur McCain et à plusieurs de ses collègues, républicains mais aussi démocrates. Ceux-ci avaient demandé, la veille, des informations à la Maison Blanche sur les affirmations des services de renseignement israéliens, français et britanniques faisant état de l'utilisation d'armes chimiques par les forces de Bachar Al-Assad.

Lue par le secrétaire à la défense, Chuck Hagel, en visite à Abou Dhabi, la réponse de la Maison Blanche est d'une grande prudence : « La communauté américaine du renseignement, avec différents

degrés de certitude, est parvenue à la conclusion que le régime syrien a utilisé des armes chimiques à petite échelle, en Syrie, en particulier du gaz sarin », indique la lettre. Un haut responsable américain a justifié cette prudence par les erreurs des services de renseignement sur les armes de destruction massive de l'Irak en 2002-2003. « Compte tenu de nos antécédents dans la collecte du renseignement, y compris sur les armes de destruction massive, il est important d'établir les faits avec certitude », a-t-il dit.

La Maison Blanche a affirmé disposer d'informations basées sur des échantillons physiologiques – notamment les résultats de tests sanguins effectués sur des victimes –, mais ne pas pouvoir considérer ces prélèvements comme une preuve formelle de l'utilisation du gaz. Elle a refusé de confirmer l'existence d'un deuxième lieu, outre Alep, où des armes chimiques auraient été utilisées, comme l'avait révélé le secrétaire d'Etat John Kerry.

En août 2012, Barack Obama avait indiqué que le recours aux armes chimiques constituait une « ligne rouge » pour les Etats-Unis et que les conséquences seraient « énormes ». C'est précisément « parce nous prenons cette ligne rouge au sérieux » que la décision

doit être basée sur des faits confirmés, a ajouté le haut responsable. S'ils devaient l'être, alors « toutes les options sont sur la table ».

### Intensifier les pressions

Les sénateurs républicains – et quelques démocrates comme Diane Feinstein – ont estimé que la ligne rouge avait été franchie. Ils réclament l'instauration d'une zone de sécurité ou d'un corridor humanitaire du côté de la frontière nord, protégée par l'établissement d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne. Les « réalistes », hostiles à toute précipitation tant que l'intérêt national n'est pas en jeu, mettent en garde les va-t-en-guerre en rappelant que l'aviation syrienne est l'une des plus puissantes de la région. Ils posent la question de savoir quelle serait la base légale pour une intervention. Et quel sens aurait l'instauration d'un couloir humanitaire dans le nord du pays, alors que la population civile qui est menacée se trouve aussi dans le sud ?

L'administration Obama veut intensifier les pressions, notamment sur Moscou, pour obtenir que l'ONU puisse enquêter sur place. Le Pentagone a préparé des plans d'urgence et déployé une centaine de membres des forces spéciales en Jordanie. Barack Obama consulte beaucoup les alliés de la région. Après l'émir du Qatar, le roi Abdallah de Jordanie était attendu vendredi 26 avril à la Maison Blanche. Le 29 avril, John Kerry recevra ses homologues arabes. A l'ordre du jour, la Syrie mais aussi le processus de paix israélo-palestinien. ■

CORINE LESNES

# Iran Qui succédera à Ahmadinejad ?

CHRISTOPHE AYAD

**L**e 14 juin, près de 50 millions d'électeurs iraniens seront appelés à élire un nouveau président de la République. Seule certitude : il ne s'agira pas de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, arrivé au terme de son second mandat. Le scrutin est attendu avec nervosité et fatalisme par une partie de la population, après la répression qui a suivi le scrutin de juin 2009. Outrés par ce qu'ils percevaient comme une fraude éhontée ayant permis la réélection dès le premier tour de M. Ahmadinejad, des millions d'Iraniens avaient protesté dans la rue. Le Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, avait opposé une fin de non-recevoir aux manifestants, donnant le signal de la répression qui entraîna plusieurs centaines de morts et conduisit des milliers de personnes à la prison et à la torture durant l'été 2009. Si une répétition de ce scénario paraît exclue, l'élection de juin présente bien des incertitudes.

## Qu'est-ce qui a changé depuis 2009 ?

Le « mouvement vert », qui s'était formé à la faveur de l'élection de juin 2009 autour des deux principaux candidats réformateurs, Mir Hossein Moussavi et Mehdi Karoubi, a été réduit au silence. Les milliers d'arrestations de l'été 2009 ont découpé l'encadrement du mouvement, particulièrement populaire parmi les classes moyennes urbaines éduquées. Des milliers d'intellectuels, étudiants, avocats, journalistes, etc., ont été emprisonnés ou laissés en liberté après des condamnations à de lourdes peines. Beaucoup ont préféré la fuite et l'exil, se condamnant à une forme d'impuissance politique. Les deux principaux leaders du « mouvement vert » sont en résidence surveillée, ainsi que l'épouse de M. Moussavi, Zahra Rahnavard. Leur élargissement n'est pas à l'ordre du jour, même si leurs conditions d'isolement ont été légèrement assouplies.



## Mahmoud Ahmadinejad

Président sortant

Né en 1956, il aura été le premier président iranien laïque, sans compétence religieuse, à effectuer deux mandats. Il s'est engagé pour faire élire son ami et beau-père de son fils, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, la bête noire des religieux qui voient en lui un « déviant ». PHOTO AFP



## Ali Khamenei

Le Guide suprême

A 74 ans, il est loin d'avoir le prestige de l'ayatollah Khomeyni, auquel il a succédé en 1989. Il s'est senti trahi par M. Ahmadinejad, dont il a défendu la réélection en juin 2009 mais qui a tenté, en vain, de mettre la main sur le pétrole et les renseignements. PHOTO AFP

L'ensemble du courant réformateur, déjà très affaibli pendant les dernières années de la présidence de Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), a littéralement disparu de la scène politique iranienne. En revanche, le camp conservateur, théoriquement grand gagnant des huit années de présidence Ahmadinejad, s'est fissuré et fragmenté. Les appétits se sont aiguisés, la concurrence s'est avivée entre les fac-

**Le Guide a besoin de s'appuyer sur un président qui ne menace ni ne conteste son autorité**

tions, les différends se sont durcis. La crise de légitimité du régime consécutive aux manifestations de juin 2009 – durant lesquelles le Guide suprême a été conspué par la foule – a rejailli sur l'ensemble des responsables politiques. Ce handicap, aggravé par l'opposition traditionnelle entre les deux têtes de l'exécutif, le Guide et le président de la République – le premier tirant sa légitimité du divin, le second des urnes –, a conduit à une véritable guerre de légitimité entre Ali Khamenei et Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, que rien pourtant ne sépare fondamentalement.

## Quels sont les enjeux de l'élection ?

Le principal enjeu de la présidentielle est le rétablissement de l'autorité du Guide Ali Khamenei, écornée par les manifestations de juin 2009 et chahutée par les provocations de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad et de son bras droit – et candidat en puissance à sa succession –, Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, qui a plusieurs fois mis en cause la suprématie des religieux dans le système politi-

que. Le Guide a besoin de s'appuyer sur un président qui ne menace ni ne conteste son autorité. Seul un rétablissement de sa prééminence lui permettra d'aborder les deux dossiers les plus urgents et vitaux pour l'avenir du régime : la levée des sanctions économiques et le règlement de la question nucléaire. Les deux questions sont liées, et seul le Guide a le pouvoir et la légitimité pour décider d'aller jusqu'au bout du défi ou de passer un compromis historique, comme l'avait fait l'ayatollah Khomeyni lorsqu'il avait accepté d'ordonner un cessez-le-feu avec l'Irak en 1988 au terme de huit ans de guerre. Il avait alors décidé de « boire la coupe de poison » afin de préserver la République islamique...

Le règlement de la question nucléaire est d'autant plus urgent que les sanctions adoptées par les pays occidentaux sont en train de provoquer des pénuries, notamment dans le secteur hospitalier et industriel. L'inflation dépasse les 30 %, la monnaie nationale a perdu la moitié de sa valeur et les exportations de pétrole sont en baisse. L'Iran traverse une crise économique grave qui pourrait déboucher sur des troubles sociaux.

Mais, surtout, le régime va devoir choisir sa ligne de conduite sur le nucléaire. En mars, Barack Obama et Benyamin Nétanyahou ont estimé à un an le délai avant que l'Iran ne développe la bombe atomique. Le président américain et le premier ministre israélien s'accordent mutuellement le droit d'agir à leur guise le moment venu. Or, côté iranien, étant donné les paralysies traditionnelles du leadership en matière de prise de décisions, ce délai apparaît très court pour décider de la réaction à adopter.

Le déroulement des élections lui-même donnera une idée de la santé du régime et de sa capacité à concilier participation et stabilité. Les autorités, qui ont couplé les élections locales avec le scrutin présidentiel, comptent sur une participation importante (autour de 60 % et plus) afin de « retremper » leur légitimité. Mais une forte mobilisation est également un facteur d'incertitude.

## Comment se présente le scrutin de juin ?

Les leaders du camp réformateur ont d'ores et déjà déclaré forfait ou sont empêchés de se présenter. Ainsi, Mohammad Khatami, l'ex-président réformateur, a déclaré que les conditions n'étaient pas réunies pour « un changement ». Quant à Ali Akbar Hachemi Rafsandjani, qui avait effectué deux mandats entre 1989 et 1997, durant lesquels il avait œuvré à la libéralisation économique du pays, il a écarté toute idée de candidature, sa fille et son fils

ayant été emprisonnés ces derniers mois. La surprise pourrait venir d'Esfandiar Rahim Mashaie, qui mène ouvertement campagne et cherche à récupérer les électeurs en déshérence du « mouvement vert ». Mahmoud Ahmadinejad l'appuie ouvertement et semble décidé à mettre les moyens de l'Etat à sa disposition. Mais de fortes résistances se font jour au sein du système. M. Mashaie pourrait voir sa candidature refusée par le Conseil des gardiens, qui doit officialiser la liste des candidats le 14 mai. M. Ahmadinejad a menacé implicitement de faire des révélations gênantes si M. Mashaie venait à être écarté.

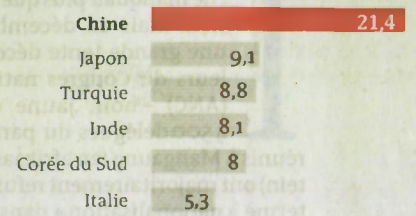
Deux semaines avant la déclaration formelle des candidatures, le paysage politique reste très éclaté. Le « comité 2+1 », qui représente les intérêts du Guide, regroupe Ali Akbar Velayati, Mohammad Ghalibaf et Gholam Ali Haddad-Adel : ces trois « poids lourds » ne sont pas parvenus pour le moment à s'entendre sur un accord de désistement. L'ancien commandant pasdaran (gardiens de la révolution), Mohsen Rezaei, incarne le poids de cette institution dans le régime et dans l'économie. Plusieurs dizaines de candidats de moindre envergure, des ultraconservateurs aux indépendants, se sont déclarés, rendant cette élection plus ouverte que prévu. ■

### Une économie fragilisée par les sanctions internationales

Exportations de pétrole iranien, en milliards de dollars



Principales destinations des exportations iraniennes, en % du total en 2011



**3<sup>e</sup>** plus grand exportateur de pétrole brut, l'Iran a vu ses exportations de pétrole chuter à **1,5 million** de barils/jour en 2012

alors que les Etats-Unis et l'Union européenne ont renforcé leurs sanctions.

Dans le même temps, les échanges iraniens avec l'Asie se sont accrus, la Chine en tête.

### Repères et dates

**Population** 77 millions.

**PIB par habitant** 5 730 dollars (4 400 euros) par an en 2011.

**Chômage** 15,5 % (estimation 2012).

**Inflation** 25,2 % (estimation 2012).

**1979** Révolution et instauration de la République islamique.

**1980-1988** Guerre Iran-Irak.

**1989** Mort de Khomeyni et désignation d'Ali Khamenei comme Guide suprême.

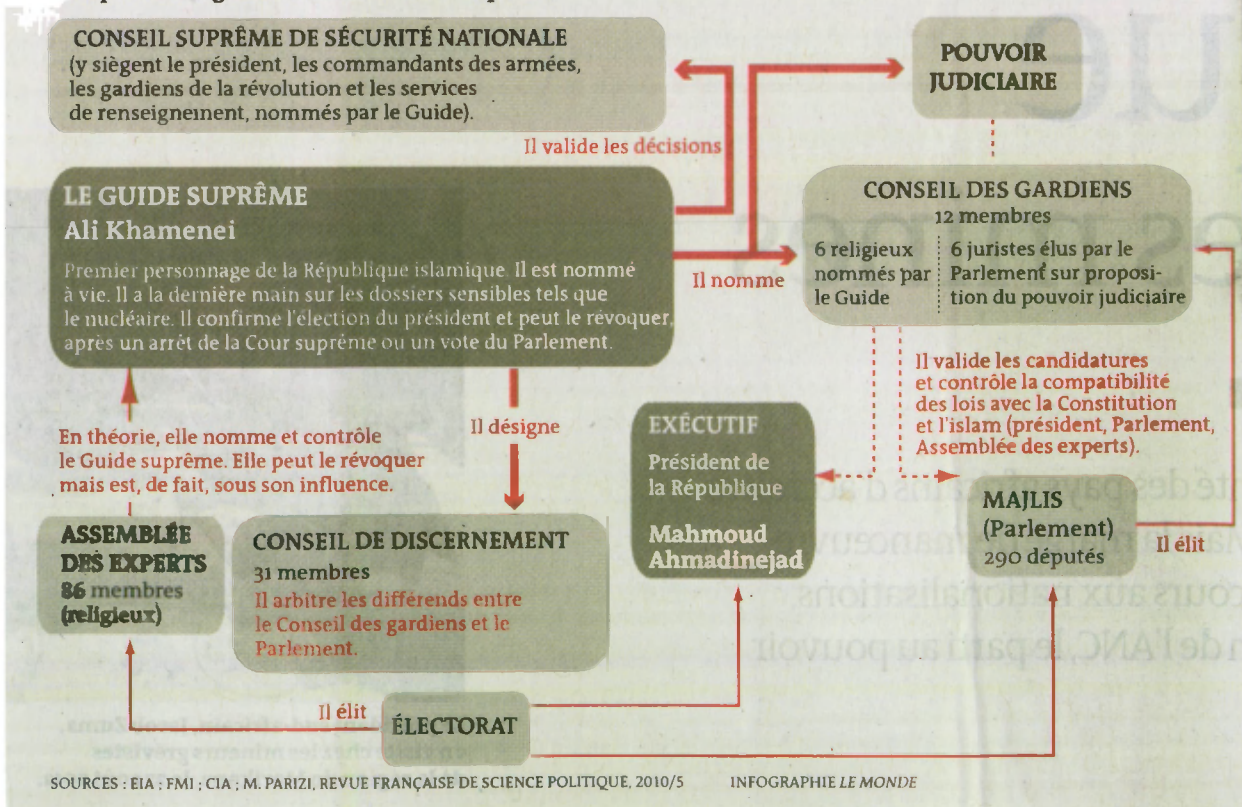
**1997** Election du président réformateur Mohammad Khatami.

**2005** Mahmoud Ahmadinejad est élu.

**2009** Vague inédite de protestations après la réélection contestée de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

**14 juin 2013** Election présidentielle.

### Un pouvoir organisé autour du Guide suprême



# Kurdish peace will make Turkey 'major power' in Middle East

**Thomas Seibert**

[www.thenational.ae](http://www.thenational.ae)

**I**STANBUL // A political solution to Turkey's conflict with Kurdish separatists would make the country a more active player in the Middle East, boost economic growth and change relations with Iraq and Syria, analysts said yesterday.

After months of talks between the Turkish state and the jailed rebel leader Abdullah Ocalan, his Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) said on Thursday it would start withdrawing its fighters from Turkey next month.

Analysts say Turkey has much to gain from ending the nearly 30-year conflict in which more than 40,000 people have been killed, although some have cautioned that the question of how to strengthen the rights of Turkey's 13 million Kurds, the main PKK demand in exchange for disarmament, is still unresolved.

But they said a solution would bolster Turkey's economy and strengthen its drive to become the leading power in the region.

"A democratic solution to the Kurdish conflict would add to Turkey's character as a model" for the rest of the region, said Veyssel Ayhan, director of the International Middle East Peace Research Center, a think tank in Ankara.

"If it works, Turkey will become a major power in the Middle East. If it doesn't work, it will have missed a big opportunity," he said.

"Turkey's ability to deal with the conflict peacefully may constitute an example" to other countries with minority problems, said Ilter Turan, a political scientist at Istanbul's Bilgi University.

A foreign diplomat in Ankara, speaking on condition of anonymity, pointed out that Ahmet Davutoglu, the foreign minister, regarded economic development and a peaceful environment at home as preconditions for a stronger Turkish role abroad.

"Turkey will not sit tight" in foreign policy matters, even though the country is facing presidential, parliamentary and local elections in the next



*The PKK's acting leader Murat Karayilan said on Thursday that the group's fighters would be withdrawn from Turkish territory in May as part of a plan to end a war that has dragged on for almost three decades. PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan has been negotiating with the Turkish government since last year.*

*Ibrahim Yakut / EPA / Anadolu*

two years, with the Kurdish question expected to be one of the main campaign issues, the diplomat said.

Peace in south-eastern Anatolia could also change Turkey's relations with its neighbours. Ankara's already strong political and economic ties with the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq are set to grow further, said Cenap Cakmak, a political scientist at Osmangazi University in Eskisehir in western Turkey.

"Northern Iraq will become the natural partner of Turkey, even more than today," he said. Without the fighting on the Turkish side of the border and the regular Turkish military strikes against PKK camps in the mountains of northern Iraq, trade and cooperation would boom even more, he added.

"There is a huge potential," Mr Cakmak said.

Turkey's exports to northern Iraq have helped to make Iraq the second-biggest export market for Turkey. A recent report by Istanbul's Bahcesehir University said Iraq would replace Germany at the top spot within three years.

But at the same time, Ankara's close

relations with the KRG have angered the central Iraqi government in Baghdad. Prof Turan, of Bilgi University, said further escalation was possible. In case of a military confrontation between Baghdad and the KRG, "Turkey will not hesitate to take the side of the KRG", he said.

Turkish-Kurdish reconciliation would also improve Ankara's relations with Kurds in Syria, Turkey's southern neighbour, Prof Turan said. Syria's Kurds, who make up about 10 per cent of Syria's population of 20 million, live mostly in regions close to the Turkish border.

In recent months, Ankara has accused Kurdish groups in Syria of siding with the PKK and with the government of Bashar Al Assad in its continuing conflict with opposition forces, which are supported by Ankara and others.

But a Kurdish peace deal at home would change Turkey's view on Kurds in Syria, Prof Turan said. Better relations with Syrian Kurds "would be a resource for Turkey in dealing with Damascus. And if there should be a new Syria, Turkey would have good relations with the Kurds there."●

# The Rise of English in Iraq's Kurdistan Region

rudaw.net  
By SOFIA BARBARANI

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** - English as a second language is on the rise in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan Region, where the population increasingly embraces the lingua franca.

In Erbil, the Kurdish enclave's capital, English has been leaving its mark through films, music and even media and literature. More often than not, restaurants are making use of English names, whilst road signs have English translations. Even the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan make use of English on their logos.

Whilst some like to attribute the increase in English-speaking Kurds to the supposed disdain for what is often viewed as the oppressor's language (Arabic) Chris Ludlow, Country Director for AMIDEAST, a US non-profit engaged in educational and training services, says Kurdish enthusiasm for learning English does not stem from a refusal to adopt Arabic as a second language, but from an understanding that English is a necessary stepping stone to career advancement.

The steady influx of foreign companies has made more people aware of the importance of building relationships with English-speaking countries. "In Kurdistan they've realized the need to develop communication skills with the outside world," explained Didar Shwani, administrative manager at the British International Institute (BII).

"Employment is one of the main reasons for learning English," says Didar. Kurds know that speaking English is a key employability skill, and

although many can communicate on a very basic level, they are not linguistically equipped to operate in a work environment.

According to Ludlow, the phenomenon of Diaspora Kurds returning to Kurdistan has also fueled the rise in the number of English-speaking Kurds within the Kurdistan Region. "They bring a native, or near-native level of English with them," he explained. Whilst young Western-educated Kurds are returning, many Kurds who grew up in Kurdistan are emigrating to other parts of the world. "The desire among graduates to study or work abroad has sparked an awareness of the need to be functional in English in academic and professional settings," Ludlow says. Much of Kurdistan's youth is getting the opportunity to study abroad due to largely government-subsidized scholarships; many of these institutions instruct in English, for this reason more Kurds want to learn the language, Ludlow adds.

English is also quietly imposing its presence in the region through English-taught schools. The past six years have seen a mushrooming of these institutions, and more parents have begun to appreciate the importance of a child's need for English.

Although most of these schools are off-limit to a lot of local children due to their high fees, some of them work with scholarship programs. The Ihsan Dogramaci Bilkent Erbil College, for example, provides scholarships for all of its students. "Most parents don't understand the international curriculum," remarked David Tigchelaar, the head of the school. However, he explained,



*The majority of the students at Bilkent College are Kurdish, and whilst the younger ones have a very basic understanding of English, the improvement is apparent by third grade. Photo courtesy of Bilkent College*

many are willing to pay the steep school fees because they realize that it is beneficial for their child to have a strong grasp of the English language.

The majority of the students at Bilkent College are Kurdish, and whilst the younger ones have a very basic understanding of English, the improvement is apparent by third grade. In one of the second grade classes, instructions were given in English and repeated in Kurdish by one of the pupils, as a means to ensure complete understanding of the task. The majority of third grade pupils revealed that they felt comfortable speaking in English, and many considered it their favorite language.

According to Tigchelaar, it is likely that many of the Kurdish students will take up positions in the region once they finish their education; this will entail a further expansion of the use of English in Kurdistan.

Like Bilkent College, Erbil's British International School also welcomes pupils with zero English proficiency. "We offer intensive English lessons before they are introduced to the classroom," explains founder and Head Teacher Freshta Raper. In the school's lively cafeteria, a group of ninth grade girls, all of them Kurds who had recently returned to the region, explained that a good knowledge of English was the best part of the school curriculum. "This is by far the best education system," according to one of the girls.

Freshta believes that the number of English-speaking Kurds will keep increasing, and that 90 percent of the population will soon consider English its second language. Ludlow reiterated this point by suggesting that, because English classes are being offered at elementary school, and because -- according to him -- the Kurdistan Regional Government wants to see English become the second language, English will be the norm among young people within the next few years. He says that would happen only with "better English training among local English teachers - i.e. Kurdish teachers in the classroom."

"English language acquisition will establish a generation of Kurds who are more global in their outlook; this generation has the potential to bring greater development and prosperity, as well as educational opportunities and advancement to Kurdistan," Ludlow concludes.

The rise in English is just one of the many changes which have taken Kurdistan by storm. Unlike the uncertainty of foreign investment, or the inevitable expiration of oil, English is a perdurable asset that can be handed down from generation to generation. The Kurds of Iraq are increasingly aware of this, and embracing the new language. ●

# Clashes in Iraq prompt worries of new civil war

BAGHDAD

## Baath Party veterans could replace Al Qaeda as leaders of insurgency

BY TIM ARANGO

In the final days before the United States withdrew its troops from Iraq, American intelligence officers worried that a future Sunni insurgency here might be led not by Al Qaeda but by an organization whose leaders are former

### NEWS ANALYSIS

high-level members of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party.

Now, after large numbers of Sunni tribesmen clashed with government forces last week, Iraqis of all sects are asking two questions: Is the country headed toward a new civil war? And, if so, will the group of former Baathists lead one side of it?

The group, the Men of the Army of the Naqshbandia Order, commonly known by the initials of its Arabic name, J.R.T.N., has emerged as a potential alternative to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia for Sunnis who have long felt deeply marginalized under the Shiite-led government in Iraq and who are taking up arms once again. Passions were ignited last week after a raid by security forces on a Sunni protest camp in the northern village of Hawija, a stronghold for the group, left dozens dead.

Biding its time, as Al Qaeda has continued to carry out car bombings and suicide attacks, the group has armed itself. It has enlisted recruits from the ranks of Mr. Hussein's Republican Guard units and devised a well-executed media campaign, with an online magazine, pamphlets and a social media presence, to hone its message that its members are the protectors of Sunni Arab nationalism and guardians against Iranian influence.

"They are playing the long game," said Michael Knights, an analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, who has researched the Naqshbandia group. "This is the next step in the long game. J.R.T.N. is very well positioned to exploit what's going on."

Iraq careers from one crisis to another — clashes between Sunni gunmen and government forces continued over the weekend — but diplomats and experts say events may have finally pushed the country to the brink of a new civil war. Martin Kobler, the U.N. representative in Iraq, recently warned that the country "could head towards the un-



During a funeral in Baghdad on Sunday, an Iraqi soldier held a photo of one of five comrades killed a day earlier near a Sunni protest camp.

**"The violence is going to inflame Iraqis to prepare for a revolution against the government."**

known." The International Crisis Group, a conflict-prevention organization, said Iraq "has begun a perilous, downward slide toward confrontation."

The fear that has gripped Iraq reflects the shifting nature of the recent violence. Random explosions have only a limited ability to challenge the authority of the state, partly because so many leaders, Sunnis and other citizens have disavowed such attacks. But what Iraqis are seeing now is entirely different: large numbers of Sunni men are picking up weapons, forming militia units and pledging to fight the government.

The likelihood of a civil war could hinge on two things: Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki's ability to defuse the crisis by offering meaningful concessions to Sunnis, in the form of judicial overhaul and the release of Sunni prisoners held without charges; and the ability of groups like the Naqshbandia organization to persuade Sunnis to embark on a campaign of armed resistance.

Following the raid in Hawija, which set off a wave of revenge attacks against Iraqi security forces, some Sunnis say they are ready to join armed groups like the Naqshbandia organization to fight a government that they regard as loyal to Iran and unwilling to accommodate a meaningful role for Sunnis in public life.

Sunnis, a minority in Iraq, lost the recent sectarian civil war here. But now their anger at the government has converged with a sense of empowerment wrought by the civil war in neighboring Syria, where Sunnis are fighting to topple the government, reviving their impulse for insurrection.

"What happened in Hawija is a trap that the government is falling into, to impose the same thing that is happening in Syria," said Ghazi al-Zaidi, 62, a Sunni living in Diyala Province. "The violence is going to inflame Iraqis to prepare for a revolution against the government, and bring more sympathy to those who are forming forces that will fight against the government."

In its statements in recent days, the Naqshbandia group, which is said to be led by Izzat Ibrahim al-Douri, Mr. Hussein's top adviser and the highest-ranking member of the former government to elude capture, has sounded emboldened. It has said that once-peaceful protesters have "joined our army and are fighting" under the group's banner and has vowed to march on Baghdad.

"The orders were issued to our groups and to our people to complete all preparation to march into our beloved capital, Baghdad, and we will strike relentlessly and with an iron fist on the heads of the traitors, agents and Safavid enemies of Arabism and Islam," the group said in a statement posted on its Web site. The term "Safavid" is used to refer to Iran, which was ruled by the Safavid Empire in the 16th, 17th and early 18th centuries, and is perceived by Sunnis to dominate



Iraq and its Shiite government.

The group has connections to Sufism, the mystical branch of Islam, but also to the Baath Party, and it portrays itself as a guardian of Arab nationalism. In 2011, Mr. Knights predicted that the group could lead "Iraq's next insurgency." He described the outfit as having learned from the mistakes of Al Qaeda by creating a "hybrid of Islamist themes and nationalist military expertise."

While it carried out attacks against Iraqi security forces and so-called collaborators with the central government, including the Sunni Awakening, the units of fighters who were paid to switch sides and fight alongside the United States against Al Qaeda, the group pointedly refrained from attacking civilians.

"J.R.T.N. has hardly ever been linked to a mass casualty attack," Mr. Knights said. But he added that the group had, on occasion, contracted with Al Qaeda to carry out car bombings.

Many of the attacks by the group have occurred in the tribal regions around Hawija, and analysts say its members have played a role in the protests in Sunni-dominated cities that began in December and were largely peaceful until last week. The episode that set off the confrontation in Hawija — an attack on an Iraqi Army checkpoint that left one soldier dead — is believed to have been carried out by gunmen with the Naqshbandia group, who then took refuge among protesters in the village.

The group draws its strength from northern Iraq, near Hawija, but also has support in other areas like Diyala and Salahuddin Provinces. It has made some inroads in Anbar Province, the historical center of Sunni resistance in Iraq, where on Friday, leaders called on the formation of tribal armies. Anbar is also a stronghold for Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia, and could be the scene of a struggle between the groups as they seek to exploit popular anger.

"If J.R.T.N. becomes the face of violent Sunni resistance, then the Anbar sheiks could go along with it," said Kenneth M. Pollack, an Iraq expert and an analyst at the Brookings Institution.

*Yasir Ghazi contributed reporting from Baghdad, and an employee of The New York Times from Diyala Province, Iraq.*

## Strong blast hits convoy of Syrian premier

BEIRUT

BY ANNE BARNARD  
AND ALAN COWELL

In the latest reported attack on a high-ranking Syrian official, Prime Minister Wael Nader al-Halqi survived what appeared to be an assassination attempt on Monday in an upscale neighborhood of the capital, Damascus, when a car bomb exploded near his convoy, according to state-run media and opposition reports. A bodyguard was reported killed.

The reports said the attack had taken place in Mezze, a central district where many senior officials live. The prime minister was reportedly unhurt, though state media said others had been injured. Video on state television showed a car reduced to a charred skeleton and, nearby, a bus with its windows shattered.

The assault fit a pattern of attempts to attack high officials. Less than two weeks ago, another official — Ali Balan, the government's chief coordinator of emergency aid distribution to civilians — was killed by gunmen with silencer-equipped weapons at a restaurant in the same heavily guarded neighborhood, close to buildings housing government and military institutions.

In July, an explosion at a security headquarters in the Syrian capital killed or wounded several key aides loyal to President Bashar al-Assad, who has been fighting a growing revolt that began with street protests in March 2011 and has escalated into a civil war with insurgents battling for positions across the land, including the outskirts of Damascus.

State television in Syria called the attack a "terrorist explosion" that was "an attempt to target the convoy of the prime minister." Terrorist is the word used by the authorities to depict their armed adversaries. The television said the prime minister was "well and not hurt at all," Reuters reported, but his condition could not immediately be independently confirmed.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which is based in Britain and draws information from a network of opposition sources inside Syria, said initial reports showed that a bodyguard had been killed.

Mr. Halqi has been part of an effort by Mr. Assad to wage an energized diplomatic campaign to persuade the United States that it is on the wrong side of the civil war. "We are partners in fighting terrorism," Mr. Halqi said of the United States in a recent interview.

## 5 car bombs kill 36 Iraqis in majority Shiite areas

BAGHDAD

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Five car bombs struck in predominantly Shiite cities and districts in central and southern Iraq on Monday, killing 36 people and wounding dozens in the latest wave of violence roiling the country, Iraqi officials said.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks, but coordinated bombings in civilian areas are a favorite strategy used by Al Qaeda in Iraq.

Since April 23 and including the latest deaths, at least 218 people have been killed in attacks and battles between gunmen and security forces that began with clashes at a Sunni protest camp in northern Iraq.

The deadliest attack on Monday was in the southern city of Amara, where two parked car bombs went off simultaneously in the early morning near a gathering of construction workers and a market, killing 18 people and wounding 42, the police said.

That attack was followed by another parked car bomb explosion near a restaurant in the city of Diwaniya, which killed 9 people and wounded 23.

Amara, about 320 kilometers, or 200 miles, southeast of Baghdad and Diwaniya, 130 kilometers south of the capital, are heavily Shiite and usually peaceful.

Hours later, yet another car bomb went off in the Shiite city of Karbala, killing 3 civilians and wounding 14, the police said.

In the otherwise predominantly Sunni town of Mahmoudiya, about 30 kilometers south of Baghdad, a car bomb ripped through a Shiite neighborhood killing 6 people and wounding 14, the police said.

Four medical officials confirmed the casualty figures. All officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the news media.

Sectarian violence has spiked since last week, when security forces tried to make arrests at a Sunni Muslim protest camp in the northern city of Hawija. The move set off a clash that killed 23 people, including 3 soldiers.

# Erbil Sends Forces to Outskirts Of Kirkuk, Enraging Baghdad

By: Abdel Hamid Zebari for Al-Monitor

Kurdish peshmerga forces were deployed to the outskirts of Kirkuk to fill the security vacuum there and to thwart a sectarian war, which some believe to be just around the corner. According to the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs, the move was coordinated with the governor of Kirkuk. Iraqi military forces, however, believe that the oil wells located in the area are the reason behind this move and consider it a breach of security agreements between Erbil and Baghdad.

In that regard, the Ministry of Peshmerga in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced that it was merely filling the gap left by the Iraqi army in the disputed area out of fear that armed groups might infiltrate the region. The ministry reiterated that its aim was to protect all citizens and groups, regardless of political or religious affiliation.

The Ministry of Peshmerga released a statement saying, "The Iraqi army has been abandoning the majority of its barracks and bases affiliated with Squad 5 in Diyala, Squad 4 in Salahuddin and Squad 12 in Kirkuk and Ninevah, especially at night, for fear of being attacked by armed groups."

The statement affirmed that "[this move] has led to a [security] vacuum in the areas surrounding the city and the affiliated townships, particularly in the outskirts of Kirkuk." It continued: "In order to protect the lives of citizens of all national, societal, religious and sectarian backgrounds, and following a deliberation with the governor of Kirkuk, the Kurdistan peshmerga forces will fill the [security] vacuum in general and the vacuum in the areas surrounding Kirkuk in particular."

The statement pointed out that the move "aims at fending off the infiltration of armed terrorist groups and protecting the lives of citizens and military forces from terrorist operations."

It also said, "The ministry's intelligence data shows that these groups intend to carry out massive terrorist attacks, particularly in the city of Kirkuk."

This is not the first time the Kurds have deployed their forces to these areas. A few months ago, when the federal government established the Tigris Operations Command in Kirkuk, Diyala and Salahuddin provinces, the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs sent military reinforcements and prevented them from reaching Kirkuk. The Tigris Operations forces remained in the town of Tuz Khormato, south of Kirkuk, and a political crisis flared up between the central government and that of the Kurdistan region.

Following the Kurdish move, Ali Ghaidan Majid, commander of the Iraqi army's ground forces, rushed to consider the deployment in Kirkuk to be a breach of the joint security agreement previously concluded between the Iraqi army and the Kurdish forces.

Ghaidan said the Kurdish moves are aimed at "oil fields and wells. This is a dangerous development."

In a statement to Al-Monitor, Falak al-Din Kakai, a Kurdish leader in the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by President Massoud Barzani, denied that the move was carried out unilaterally or underlay political aims to take over the region.

"We do not make unilateral moves; we coordinate with the other parties, whether in the federal government or the other Iraqi powers and political blocs. Our purpose is not to align with one party; we care deeply about preserving peace in the region, especially in the disputed regions. The mission of the peshmerga and the political leadership is solely peace. As Barzani affirmed recently, we support peace and we will become party to any treaty that conveys peace," he added.

Kakai said deploying peshmerga forces to these areas exemplifies the peaceful role that Kurds can perform. He said, "[We are sending these troops] in case battles expand beyond our control and that of the govern-



ment and other forces. However, we hope [these battles] remain contained."

He said: "Unfortunately, all signs point in the direction of an escalating war. It will turn into a civil war and as such, the situation will be beyond the control of everyone." He continued: "Who is able to contain the situation currently? We, as far as we are concerned, are preserving the security and safety of citizens of all backgrounds in the disputed areas. We are trying to avoid getting involved in any fighting."

The Iraqi Kurdistan Region sees these areas as falling within its administrative borders, yet they are not under its governance.

In Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, a roadmap was laid out to settle the dispute over these areas by sending the Arabs away and allowing the Kurds who were deported during the rule of former President Saddam Hussein to return. Afterward, a census and a referendum was to be conducted so residents could decide whether they wanted to remain under the auspices of the federal government or join the KRG. The implementation of Article 140, however, has been hindered by political and security crises.

Political analyst Mohammed Sherif, a former Iraqi MP for the Democratic Patriotic Alliance of Kurdistan, said: "The deployment of peshmerga forces to these areas comes with security connotations, which supersede political connotations because the Iraqi army has retreated from these delicate regions that are threatened with a sectarian war. Peshmerga forces are in charge of preserving the security of the region and halting the infiltration of terrorists. They have to fulfill this task."

Sherif said the tensions that exist along the border between the region and these areas – which are considered to be part of the Kurdistan region yet are in dispute – are affecting the security situation, upsetting citizens and impacting their business dealings and daily activities. If it was not for the military and security deployment, the situation would have been hazardous, he said.

He added, "The country is witnessing a dangerous situation. The Iraqi Constitution prohibits the army from suppressing citizens. Regardless of the aim of the demonstration that was staged in Hawija or in any other place that upsets the government, it was peaceful nonetheless and turning it into an armed protest was dangerous. This was caused by interference on the part of the army."

Iraqi army forces stormed a protest being held in a public square in Hawija in Kirkuk province, leaving protesters in neighboring provinces enraged. In return, the protesters attacked army and police forces and members of the Sahwa forces, which resulted in a number of dead and wounded on both sides.

Residents of Sunni-dominated areas – Anbar, Ninevah, Salahuddin, Diyala, parts of Kirkuk, and Baghdad – claim that they have been marginalized ever since the ousting of the former regime in 2003. They accused Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki of using counterterrorism and de-Baathification laws to unjustly target them. Maliki, on the other hand, reiterates that he is enforcing the law and following the constitution.

It is important to note that sectarian tensions in Iraq during 2006 and 2007 claimed the lives of thousands.

*Abdel Hamid Zebari is a contributing writer for Al-Monitor's Iraq Pulse. A reporter from Erbil who works in print journalism and radio, he has published several reports in local and world media, including Agence France-Press and Radio Free Iraq (Radio Free Europe).*

# Reza Pahlavi : « Nous préconisons la désobéissance civile »

Le fils du chah d'Iran vient de participer à la création, à Paris, d'une coalition de partis d'opposition

## Entretien

Le Conseil national iranien (CNI) a tenu son congrès fondateur samedi 27 et dimanche 28 avril, à Paris. En exil depuis 1979, Reza Pahlavi, 52 ans, fils du chah d'Iran, est l'un des membres fondateurs de cette nouvelle coalition d'opposition, qui compte 18 partis et organisations politiques, allant des monarchistes aux paniranistes en passant par les sociaux-libéraux et le « mouvement vert ».

### Quel est le programme du Conseil national iranien ?

Depuis la fraude électorale [à l'élection présidentielle] de 2009, qui a donné naissance au mouvement vert, il fallait mettre sur pied une instance pour qu'une nouvelle génération ne soit pas sacrifiée en vain et que les gens de l'intérieur sachent que leur lutte continue. Je me suis beaucoup entretenu avec des activistes et dissidents à l'intérieur de l'Iran, y compris des prisonniers politiques. Au terme d'un an et trois mois d'échanges, nous sommes arrivés à une charte en 16 points. Ce texte a été signé par 25 000 personnes. Notre demande première est la tenue d'élections libres. Et pour arriver à cela, nous sommes tous d'accord sur le fait qu'il faut renverser le régime.

### Qu'attendez-vous de l'élection

### présidentielle du 14 juin 2013 ?

On ne peut pas parler de véritables élections dans un régime qui filtre les candidatures, censure les médias, n'autorise pas la formation de partis politiques et emprisonne les opposants. Il ne faut pas oublier qu'en 2009, M. Moussavi et M. Karoubi, qui se sont retrouvés à la tête du mouvement vert, étaient des opposants loyaux, qui ne voulaient que réformer le régime de l'intérieur. Ils sont aujourd'hui en résidence surveillée. Les réformateurs ne croient plus dans la possibilité de changer le régime

**« Un Iran démocratique éliminera les tensions et menaces régionales, comme en Syrie »**

de l'intérieur. Même eux en sont arrivés à la conclusion qu'il faut boycotter totalement les élections, car elles légitiment le régime.

### Comment comptez-vous renverser le régime ?

Ce n'est pas dans la rue ou par les armes que nous gagnerons. Nous préconisons une campagne de désobéissance civile et non violente, accompagnée de grèves mas-

sives dans le secteur industriel, qui aboutiraient à une paralysie totale du pays. Aucun régime ne peut demander à quelqu'un qui reste chez soi de sortir travailler.

Par ailleurs, nous sommes pour la réconciliation nationale et l'amnistie. Il y a beaucoup de gens qui sont enlisés dans le système, qui n'y croient plus et veulent en sortir, notamment des gardiens de la révolution et des bassidjis. Nous sommes en contact avec certains d'entre eux. Ils doivent avoir la garantie qu'ils auront leur place dans l'Iran de demain.

### Qu'attendez-vous de la communauté internationale ?

Les responsables américains et européens veulent que ça bouge. Ils ont tiré les leçons des échecs des dernières tentatives de dialogue et sont mûrs pour une alternative. Mais plutôt que de se fixer sur la « ligne rouge » nucléaire et d'envisager une action militaire qui ne peut que retarder l'échéance, voire précipiter des alliances internationales et une mobilisation nationale en Iran, nous aimerions que les pays libres et démocratiques soutiennent notre campagne de désobéissance civile.

Si jamais il y a des grèves, on pourrait imaginer une caisse d'assurance permettant d'indemniser les pertes de salaire, par exemple. Les Occidentaux ont longtemps

insisté pour que le régime change de politique, il faut désormais qu'ils contribuent au changement de régime. Les sanctions seront soutenues par la population si elle comprend qu'elles s'accompagnent d'un soutien à la démocratie et aux droits de l'homme. Et un Iran démocratique éliminera instantanément les tensions et menaces régionales, comme en Syrie par exemple.

### L'opposition iranienne a longtemps été divisée entre marxistes et libéraux, fédéralistes et jacobins, religieux et laïques, monarchistes et républicains...

Il y a aujourd'hui un dialogue entre toutes les factions de l'opposition, le pluralisme et la tolérance progressent. La maturité politique a augmenté en Iran, surtout grâce à la jeunesse. Tout le monde est conscient que le pays est en danger. Quel rôle voulez-vous jouer à l'avenir ? Souhaitez-vous un retour de la monarchie ?

Aujourd'hui, je souhaite jouer un rôle rassembleur dans l'opposition. Quant aux institutions à venir, les Iraniens en décideront : s'ils veulent d'une monarchie constitutionnelle à l'espagnole, pourquoi pas, mais l'important c'est que l'Iran devienne une véritable démocratie. ■

**PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR  
CHRISTOPHE AYAD**

LE FIGARO

mardi 30 avril 2013

# Le gouvernement turc durcit sa guerre contre l'alcool

Le premier ministre islamo-conservateur veut promouvoir un breuvage à base de yaourt pour former « une génération saine ».

LAURE MARCHAND  
ISTANBUL

**TURQUIE** « Je prends un troisième raki, j'en profite tant qu'on a encore le droit d'en boire », raille Serdar, jeune entrepreneur, en laissant tomber un glaçon dans son verre. Dans la douceur de la nuit stambouliote, ses récriminations à l'encontre du premier ministre turc se font plus sonores à mesure que baisse le niveau de la bouteille d'alcool de raisin anisé partagée avec ses amis. Vendredi, dans un symposium consacré aux politiques publiques sur l'alcool, Re-

cep Tayyip Erdogan a décrété que la boisson des Turcs était l'ayran, un breuvage à base de yaourt, et s'est ému que la promotion de la bière ait accompagné la fondation de la République turque dans les années 1920. Le lendemain, il a réitéré lors d'un congrès d'hommes d'affaires musulmans : « Pour former une génération saine, mon grand-père m'a suggéré l'ayran comme boisson nationale. »

La croisade contre l'alcool du chef du gouvernement turc n'est pas nouvelle mais la question devient de plus en plus sensible : son interventionnisme est perçu comme une volonté d'imposer des va-

leurs islamiques à l'ensemble de la société. D'autant que sa diatribe visait « la consommation d'alcool comme mode de vie (qui) n'apporte aucun bénéfice à la société, au contraire, elle lui cause du tort ».

### 35 euros, la bouteille de raki

Les amateurs d'alcool ne sont pourtant pas si nombreux. 85 % des Turcs ne boivent pas selon les statistiques de l'institut national TurkStat. Et une étude du Centre de recherches économiques et sociales (Betam) de l'université de Bahçesehir montre que la consommation privée a diminué d'un tiers entre 2003 et 2008, une tendance in-

versement proportionnelle à la hausse des taxes, qui sont parmi les plus élevées dans le monde. Une bouteille de raki au restaurant se paie au moins 35 euros, une somme rapportée au coût de la vie.

L'accès à l'alcool devient plus difficile et les Turcs sont de plus en plus contraints de boire en catimini. Le nombre de points de vente diminue dans les villes conservatrices. Afyon, dans l'ouest du pays, avait même prohibé la consommation dans l'es-

pace public en 2012 mais un tribunal vient d'annuler l'interdiction.

L'orientation de Turkish Airlines, dont l'État est l'actionnaire principal, est révélatrice de cette stigmatisation croissante. Après s'être attiré une volée de critiques en début d'année pour avoir supprimé l'alcool vers huit destinations au Moyen-Orient, la compagnie aérienne a annoncé la semaine dernière son intention de mettre également les vols vers la Russie au jus

d'orange. Avant l'arrivée des islamo-conservateurs au pouvoir en 2003, refuser un verre lors d'une cérémonie pouvait coûter une promotion à un fonctionnaire. « Dans un dîner officiel, aujourd'hui, déplorait récemment un diplomate européen, je me sens obligé de boire pour soutenir les Turcs présents qui veulent faire de même. » ■

INTERNATIONAL  
**Herald Tribune**

TUESDAY, APRIL 30, 2013

## 2 U.S. allies stuck at arm's length



**Judy Dempsey**

### LETTER FROM EUROPE

**BERLIN** After President Barack Obama's visit to Jerusalem last month, there were high hopes in Washington and NATO for a turning point in relations between Israel and Turkey.

Mr. Obama had persuaded Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to apologize to Turkey for the episode aboard the Mavi Marmara in May 2010. The organizers of the aid ship had wanted to break Israel's naval blockade of the Gaza Strip. Israeli marines boarded the ship while still in international waters, killing nine people — eight Turks and an American of Turkish descent.

The United States hoped that the apology would end the freeze in Israeli-

**It is in the interests of Israel and Turkey to reach a new understanding.**

Turkish relations, especially since both share a border with Syria and a stake in the outcome of the civil war there. Both are also important U.S. allies.

To general disappointment in Washington and Brussels, Israel's gesture has produced few positive results from Turkey.

"This is a headache Washington wanted cleared away," said Hay Eytan Cohen Yanarocak, an expert on Turkey

with the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University. "Washington needs Israel and Turkey to cooperate, especially over security issues."

NATO also believed the apology would give new life to the Mediterranean Dialogue, the attempt by NATO during the mid-1990s to facilitate security and political cooperation between several North African and Middle Eastern countries, including Israel.

Despite reluctance by some Middle Eastern countries to sit at the same table with Israel, NATO managed to host two meetings among foreign ministers of the Mediterranean Dialogue countries. The last was in 2008, shortly before Israel launched its assault on the Hamas leadership in the Gaza Strip. Since then, Turkey, to the annoyance of the United States, has prevented NATO from forging closer ties with Israel.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the Turkish prime minister, quashed alliance plans to host a gathering of Mediterranean Dialogue foreign ministers last week in Brussels, where NATO foreign ministers were meeting.

"While the atmospherics are somewhat better, we haven't seen changes of substance," one NATO diplomat said, speaking on the condition of anonymity because she was not authorized to discuss the issue.

Turkey also said it would not re-establish full diplomatic relations with Israel until the issue of compensating the victims' families was settled and Israel lifted its blockade of the Gaza Strip.

"What we hear informally is that once the compensation issue is resolved, we can expect an improvement in the overall approach toward Israel," the NATO diplomat added.

But will it?

Analysts cannot see a return to the 1990s, when Israel and Turkey shared intelligence and cooperated on military matters and Israel could use Turkish airspace for training and reconnaissance.

"There is no going back to the 1990s," said Ozgur Unluhisarcikli, director of the Ankara office for the German Marshall Fund of the United States. "Too much has changed."

During the 1990s, because of the Oslo peace accords between Israel and the Palestinians, Israel could use its good relations with the European Union to

support Turkey's ambitions to open accession talks with the bloc.

Similarly, as a leading NATO member, Turkey was prepared to support the U.S.-led military alliance forging closer ties to Israel.

Circumstances have since changed markedly. Israel is less useful to Turkey in the European Union. The paralysis over resolving the Palestinian conflict and Israel's continuing settlement policy have hardened the bloc's attitude toward Israel.

Turkey is also less useful to Israel in NATO because of Mr. Erdogan's policies. Since his Justice and Development Party was elected in 2002, Mr. Erdogan has wanted Turkey to become a major regional player, competing with Egypt for regional pre-eminence.

To achieve this, Turkey, a non-Arab country, reached out to its Arab neighbors, especially the Palestinians. Previous Turkish governments, in contrast, had focused on building a strong relationship with Israel.

Yet regional experts say that even if there is no going back to the 1990s, it is in the interests of Israel and Turkey to reach a new understanding.

"The turmoil in the region surely means that Turkey needs relative stability on its borders and regional cooperation," said Ian Lesser, an expert on Turkey and director of the Brussels office of the German Marshall Fund. "That includes Israel."

Israel needs Turkey for secure borders that will keep weapons from reaching Hamas or the Shiite militant group Hezbollah in Lebanon. No wonder, then, that the United States and NATO will keep pushing both countries to improve their relations.

"A modus vivendi between Israel and Turkey will have to be found," said Mr. Cohen Yanarocak of Tel Aviv University. "But it will be no honeymoon. Those times are over."

*Judy Dempsey is editor in chief of Strategic Europe at Carnegie Europe. (www.carnegieeuropa.eu)*

# Iraq instability tested further with bombing wave

By ADAM SCHRECK, (AP)

**B**AGHDAD — A wave of car bomb blasts tore through Shiite areas south of Baghdad on Monday, killing at least 36 and deepening fears that Iraq is rapidly spiraling back out of control.

The attacks capped a week of turmoil that is posing the greatest test of Iraq's stability since U.S. troops left the country in late 2011. At least 218 people have been killed in attacks and battles between gunmen and security forces that began with clashes at a Sunni protest camp in northern Iraq last Tuesday.

The unrest follows four months of widespread protests among Iraq's Sunni minority, who feel they are discriminated against and are being marginalized by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's Shiite-led government.

Iraqi officials fear that Sunni feelings of disenfranchisement could be exploited by extremist groups such as al-Qaida and militant organizations such as the Naqshabandi Army, which is linked to Saddam Hussein's former regime.

In a possible sign of mounting worries over the deteriorating security situation, Iraqi authorities announced they plan to close the country's only border crossing with Jordan, beginning on Tuesday. The Interior Ministry said the move is related Iraq's domestic affairs.

The route to the border runs through the cities of Ramadi and Fallujah, west of Baghdad, which have been hotbeds of Sunni anger at the government. Many Sunnis in western Iraq have economic, tribal and cultural ties with Jordanians, most of whom are also Sunni.

Sheik Fakhir al-Kubaisi, a protest organizer in Anbar province, blasted the latest closure plans as "another escalation by the Iraqi government to punish the revolting Iraqi people." He predicted the closure would drive up the prices of food and medicine, and might be tied to a coming security crackdown on protest sites in the area.

The Interior Ministry spokesman, Lt. Col. Saad Maan Ibrahim, insisted the border closure was solely a technical matter and is unrelated to ongoing tensions in the country. He did not elaborate, and said it should reopen within 48 hours.

Iraq temporarily shut the same border crossing in January, weeks after anti-government protests erupted along the desert highway heading to the checkpoint. That angered many Sunnis in western Iraq, who saw it as collective punishment for their rallies.

The International Crisis Group recently warned that the standoff between Sunni



Civilians gather at the scene of a car bomb attack in the southern Shiite city of Karbala, 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Baghdad, Iraq, Monday, April. 29, 2013.

protesters and the central government has begun a dangerous slide toward confrontation.

"The emergence of an arc of instability and conflict linking Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, fueled by sectarianism and involving porous borders as well as cross-border alliances, represents a huge risk," the conflict-prevention group warned. "Failure to integrate Sunni Arabs into a genuinely representative political system in Baghdad risks turning Iraq's domestic crisis into a broader regional struggle."

Monday's deadliest attack struck the southern city of Amarah. Two parked cars loaded with explosives went off simultaneously in the early morning near a gathering of construction workers and a market, killing 18 people and wounding 42, the police said.

That attack was followed by another parked car bombing near a restaurant in the city of Diwaniyah, killing nine people and wounding 23. At least three cars were left charred and twisted from the blast outside a two-story building, and its facade was damaged. Shop owners and cleaners were seen brushing debris off the bloodstained pavement.

Amarah, some 320 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Baghdad, and Diwaniyah, 130 kilometers (80 miles) south of the capital, are heavily Shiite and usually peaceful.

Hours later, yet another car bomb went off in the Shiite holy city of Karbala, killing three civilians and wounding 14, police said. Two early Islamic figures revered by Shiites are buried in the city, about 90 kilometers (55 miles) south of Baghdad.

And in the otherwise predominantly

Sunni town of Mahmoudiya, about 20 miles (30 kilometers) south of Baghdad, a car bomb ripped through a Shiite neighborhood, killing six people and wounding 14, another police officer said.

Ibrahim Ali, a schoolteacher there, was teaching a class when a thunderous boom went off.

"The students were panicking and some of them started to cry," he said, recounting seeing burned bodies and cars on fire at the nearby blast site. "We have been expecting this violence against Shiites because of the rising sectarian tension in the country," he said.

Medical officials confirmed the casualty figures. Like the police, they spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the media.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Monday's blasts. But coordinated bombings in civilian areas are a favorite tactic for al-Qaida in Iraq.

Parliament speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, a Sunni, condemned Monday's bombings and urged the government to step down "in order to save the country from the specter of civil war and sectarian strife." He called for the installation of an interim government, dissolution of parliament and early elections.

He issued a similar call in February for the prime minister to step down and for early elections, but there is little sign for now of that happening.

Sectarian violence has spiked since last Tuesday, when security forces tried to make arrests at a Sunni Muslim protest camp in the northern city of Hawija. The move set off a clash that killed 23 people, including three soldiers.

In Baghdad, al-Maliki met on Monday with the prime minister of Iraq's largely autonomous Kurdish region, Nechirvan Barzani.

A statement from the Iraqi leader's office said the two sides discussed their differences "in an atmosphere of frankness and seriousness and with a common desire to find solutions."

Ongoing disputes between Baghdad and the Kurds over sensitive issues such as ethnically disputed territories and how

to manage the country's vast oil wealth further undermine Iraq's stability as al-Maliki tries to manage relations with the country's Sunni Arabs.

In other violence Monday, several mortar shells exploded in an uninhabited area near Baghdad International Airport around sunset, but no casualties were reported, police said.

An Iranian exile group whose members live in a refugee camp near the airport described the explosions as rocket

strikes. It said they hit water canals at the southern part of the camp.

The group, the National Council of Resistance of Iran, has been pushing for camp residents, members of its Mujahedeen-e-Khalq militant wing, to be moved back to another camp north of Baghdad. Iraq's government wants them out of the country altogether. ■



April 28 2013

## Iraq descending into civil war

By: Kevin Brent  
www.examiner.com

The Iraqi government suspended the operating licenses of the Al-Jazeera news network as well as eight Sunni and one Shiite domestic Iraqi television stations on April 28 on the grounds of inciting sectarian violence between Iraq's Sunni and Shiite Muslims. Tensions between the two sects of Islam in Iraq have been on the rise for the last year. The government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki has cited first 'outside' influences on Iraq and now is blaming the civil war in neighboring Syria.

Before the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the subsequent fall of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, Iraqi politics had been dominated by Iraqi Sunnis. Since Saddam's fall, Sunnis have been forced to take a back seat to Iraqi Shiites led by Prime Minister al-Maliki who has aligned his government policies with both Iran and Shia Islam, marginalizing Sunni influence even over Sunni affairs.

Maliki's policies have led to both Arab and Kurdish Sunnis within Iraq to feel treated as second class citizens. Kurds however have had the one advantage of having self rule in the form of the Kurdish Autonomous Region in northern Iraq with security provided by the Peshmerga; a professional army born of the former anti-Saddam resistance group of the same name. Arab Sunnis have no such autonomy or an official military force of their own.

Since the final departure of U.S. troops from Iraq, violent incidents between Sunni and Shiite have become more and more frequent, beginning with roadside bombs then to car bombings and suicide bombings of mosques by both sides and most recently, large Sunni anti-Maliki protests resulting in firefights between Sunni gunmen and Iraqi security troops. One such series of car bombings in Kirkuk resulted in a month long military standoff between Kurdish Peshmerga and Iraqi Army forces along the internal Kurdish border.

Leading up to the current suspension of Al-Jazeera and the 9 domestic television stations however, were a chain of events beginning immediately after the April 18 provincial elections in which Maliki's State of Law alliance took the lead in 8 of the 12 Iraqi provinces. Following several days of demonstrations against the election results leading to deadly clashes with Iraqi troops, Education Minister Mohammed Ali Tamim and Science and Technology Minister Abdulkarim al-Samarraie, both Sunnis quit the central government in protest on April 23.

On April 24 Sunni militiamen seized of the town of Suleiman Bek just north of Baghdad after defeating government troops in open

street battle; followed on April 25 by the large Sunni protest encampment being stormed by Iraqi Army troops near Mosul, leaving 50 dead. Sunni Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq resigned in protest that same day as Sunni dominated towns and cities one by one, announced the formation of 'military forces' to counter attack the Iraqi Army.

The response from the Sunni Kurds in the north was to deploy Peshmerga forces further south into Kirkuk Province with the announced aim of combating militia forces. The Iraqi Army chief, General Ali Ghaidan Majeed has accused the Kurdish government of trying to seize Kirkuk's oilfields and called the Peshmerga



Sunni Militiamen march in Iraq. Credits: npr.org

deployment a "dangerous development" and a political move in view of the Kurdish governments long stated desire to incorporate all of Kirkuk Province into the Kurdish Autonomous Region.

The suspensions of Al-Jazeera and the nine other television stations will likely be seen as yet another offense by Maliki and further inflame the situation. Adding even more fuel to the fire is the knowledge among Sunnis in Iraq that Maliki was allowing Iranian aircraft to transit Iraqi airspace carrying weapons and supplies to the forces of Syrian Pres. Bashar al-Assad; weapons to be used to fight and kill fellow Sunnis in Syria's civil war. A civil war which like Iraq's building sectarian volcano has come to be viewed as a war against Sunnis.

In Lebanon meanwhile, Sunni youth have answered the call of Sunni Cleric Ahmed Assir and are signing up for an armed Jihad against Hezbollah forces which have crossed into Syria from southern Lebanon to fight in support of the Alawite dominated regime of Syrian Pres. Assad. ◆

## The PKK's withdrawal

# AN HISTORIC STEP

by A.Z. | ISTANBUL

**REBELS** of the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) will begin withdrawing from Turkey to Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq on May 8th. The announcement made last week by Murat Karayilan, a top PKK commander in the field, heralded a strategic shift in the Kurds' long-running struggle for greater rights.

If all goes according to plan the PKK's 29-year armed campaign for Kurdish independence (an aim that was later scaled down to autonomy) will have come to a close. It remains a big if but the potential rewards are huge. Peace with the Kurds would remove one of the biggest obstacles to democratic reform and, in theory, ease Turkey's membership of the European Union. An end to the war that has cost over \$300 billion and 40,000 lives would bolster Turkey's regional ambitions. It would boost the political fortunes of Recep Tayyip Erdogan (pictured above), the prime minister, who is hoping to become the country's first popularly elected president next year.

The decision to pull out by October crowns months of secret talks held between Hakan Fidan Turkey's spy chief, and Abdullah Ocalan, the PKK's leader who has been held in solitary confinement on a prison island near Istanbul following his capture in 1999. The precise terms of the bargain remain unclear prompting opposition parties to trot out tired conspiracy theories about American plans to carve out an independent Kurdish state from Turkey. The claims have wide currency in Turkey where anti-Americanism remains widespread. Members of a government appointed "council of the wise" who have been touring the country to assure citizens that, on the contrary, peace with the Kurds will cement unity have been heckled by outraged nationalists, and, in some instances, forced to flee.

Yet the concessions have come mainly from the Kurdish side. In March the PKK released eight Turkish hostages. Soon after Mr Ocalan announced that the



Kurds would pursue their rights through purely peaceful means and that any thoughts of a separate homeland had been abandoned. The PKK promptly declared a ceasefire and is instead gathering force in Syria where it has begun fighting forces loyal to Bashar Assad, the president. In the immediate term this is a strategic coup for Mr Erdogan who has been openly supporting armed opposition against the Syrian dictator.

Until recently the PKK had been quietly siding with Mr Assad who last summer gave the rebels control over a string of Kurdish towns along the Turkish border. The move set off alarm bells in Turkey amid fears that under PKK tutelage Syria's Kurds would establish an autonomous zone along the lines of the semi-independent Kurdish statelet in northern Iraq. In a counter-move Turkey egged on its Syrian rebel allies to start fighting pro-PKK forces in the town of Ras-el Ain opposite the Turkish border town of Ceylanpinar.

Getting the PKK to switch sides in Syria appears to be part of the deal struck with Mr Ocalan. It is also widely rumoured that Mr Erdogan has persuaded the Kurds to support his bid for the presidency next year. Mr Erdogan calls this a lie. Selahattin Demirtas, the leader of Turkey's largest pro-Kurdish party, known as the BDP, concurred in a recent interview. He said the Kurds had no interest in helping Mr Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development (AK) party to push through constitutional changes that would boost the powers of the presidency.

AK's proposal for a new "democratic" constitution includes provisions that would grant the president power to appoint the cabinet and to dissolve the parliament. In a sop to the Kurds it also scraps ethnic references to Turkish citizenship and articles that effectively block education in the Kurdish language.

Not surprisingly, the main opposition parties have cried foul and it seems increasingly unlikely that a parliamentary commission that is supposed to come up with a draft constitution will meet its October deadline.

This in turn begs the question of what the Kurds will get in exchange for a definitive peace. Mr Karayilan has already made clear that unless Mr Ocalan is set free (he probably means put under house arrest) the PKK will not lay down its arms. This not likely in the near future. What the government can deliver though is legal revisions that would allow thousands of Kurdish activists jailed on thinly supported terrorism charges to walk free.

Even if the new constitution falls through AK could easily (with the BDP's parliamentary support) cobble together a constitutional reform package that would address some of the Kurds demands for greater administrative and cultural autonomy. The key question is timing. Can Mr Erdogan risk further inflaming nationalist passions before nationwide municipal elections that are set to be held in March 2014? AK's performance will be a crucial indicator of how far Mr Erdogan can push the peace process without endangering AK's enduring popularity. And then there is the presidency. He may therefore choose to wait before making any grand gestures.

Meanwhile, the PKK's withdrawal should significantly diminish the ability of potential saboteurs to disrupt the peace process and allow AK to claim credit for ending decades of bloodshed (until the elections at the very least). And a pause in the fighting would enable the PKK to regroup and consolidate, while further cementing its foothold in Syria. "Time" argues a veteran, independent Kurdish politician, "is on the PKK's side." ■

# No PKK support to Kurdish state plans in northern Iraq



*Karayılan said that the withdrawing militants would be deployed to northern Iraq, adding that the PKK expected understanding from the Iraqi authorities.*  
DHA Photo

KANDİL, Northern Iraq – Doğan News Agency

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) would not support an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq, according to Murat Karayılan, a senior leader of the outlawed group which announced yesterday that it would withdraw from Turkish soil starting from May 8.

The PKK “would not say anything” about the foundation of such a state, but it would also not lend its support as it was against the “nation-state,” Karayılan told a group of journalists on the evening of April 25, after making the withdrawal plans public at a press meeting in the Kandil Mountains, the PKK’s base.

Karayılan said yesterday that the withdrawing militants would be deployed to northern Iraq, adding that the PKK expected understanding from the Iraqi authorities,

and particularly from the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

The KRG is at odds with the central government in Baghdad, particularly on oil exports issues, with the latter opposing the autonomous Arbil government’s direct trade, largely via Turkey.

“We support [the idea of] all Middle Eastern peoples living together equally in a democratic environment and in fraternity. This is possible with democratic confederalism and federation. Dictators emerge in nation-states,” Karayılan said.

Karayılan asked for support from “all democratic powers in Turkey” for the ongoing resolution process. “Things will get harder if we give everything to the AKP [the ruling Justice and Development Party],” he said, adding that all segments should lend their support to the process.

Karayılan said he did not find Europe’s support for the process sincere.

“The massacre in Paris is obvious,” he said, in reference to the murder of three Kurdish women in the French capital on Jan. 9 at a time when the efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Kurdish issue had escalated.

Sakine Cansız, one of the founding members of the PKK; Fidan Doğan, the Paris representative of the Brussels-based Kurdistan National Congress (KNK); and activist Leyla Söylemez were murdered by a gun attack as the sole suspect was captured.

“There are three entrances to that building. We do not believe that they are carrying out an effective probe. [Europe] may not want the resolution process,” he said.

“By democratizing, Turkey should take the Kurdish card from the European Union to stop them from using Turkey and Kurds.”

Commenting on the recent fights between the supporters of the PKK and Hizbullah, an Islamist organization accused of many killings in southeastern and eastern Turkey as a part of counter-guerilla activities, at Dicle University in the Kurdish-dominated Diyarbakır province, Karayılan said they did not want to take anyone on in this new period.

“We are not against them as a political organization,” he said. Hizbullah founded a political party, Huda Par, at the end of last year.

“We think that the clashes at the university are planned,” Karayılan said. The statements after the clashes, their language reminded us of what happened in the past.”

There was no consensus between the PKK and Hizbullah at the high-level, he added.

Equally, there were no tensions building between the PKK and Hizbullah despite the events at the university earlier this month, daily Vatan quoted PKK’s Duran Kalkan as saying last week. □



APRIL 28, 2013

## UN envoy hopes talks between Iraqi and Kurdish officials will resolve outstanding issues

Welcoming the meeting set for Monday between the leaders of Iraq and its Kurdistan region, a senior United Nations official said he hopes the talks will help resolve outstanding issues.

Iraq’s Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, and the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Nichervan Barzani, are set to meet tomorrow in Baghdad, according to a news release issued by the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).

“At this critical juncture, sitting together and talking in a constructive spirit is the best way to overcome problems,” said Martin Kobler, the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of UNAMI.

“Both parties need to address once and for all outstanding issues such as true partnership, security, budget and revenue sharing, in a trans-

parent and frank manner,” he added.

“I truly hope this meeting will contribute to finding long-lasting solutions based on the Constitution to overcome Iraq’s current crisis, and to the Kurdish ministers rejoining the Cabinet soon,” Mr. Kobler stressed.

Also this weekend, Mr. Kobler deplored the killing of Jalal Diab, the head of the Movement of Free Iraqis (Ansar al-Huriya), calling it “a shameful and despicable murder.”

Mr. Diab headed a non-governmental organization defending the rights of the black Iraqi minority community in the south of the country. He was assassinated on Friday in Basra province.

“I am deeply saddened by the loss of such an important human rights figure in Iraq, whom I met more than once,” said the envoy, who also condemned the attempted assassination of a young provincial council candidate, Amar Al-Mantifij. ♦



**Special Representative Martin Kobler.**



## Question kurde : Murat Karayılan annonce que le retrait du PKK commencera le 8 mai

PAR JEAN MARCOU

Et si finalement le processus de paix marchait ? C'est bien la question que l'on doit se poser après les derniers développements de l'initiative engagée, depuis la fin de l'année 2012, pour essayer de régler la question kurde, qui depuis 1984 a fait plus de 40 000 victimes et provoqué le déplacement de près de 2 millions de personnes.

Le 25 avril dernier, lors d'une conférence de presse, tenue dans l'une de ses bases arrière en Irak du nord, le commandant militaire du PKK, Murat Karayılan, a annoncé que le retrait des forces de son organisation, du territoire turc, commencerait le 8 mai prochain, en précisant que l'opération devrait être achevée «dans les plus brefs délais». Murat Karayılan a notamment déclaré que le départ de ses troupes s'opérerait en bon ordre et sur des trajets préétablis. Il a appelé, tant les autorités irakiennes (en particulier celles de la région kurde d'Irak du nord), que l'armée turque, à faire preuve de compréhension et de souplesse, afin d'éviter tout accrochage, en précisant que toute attaque contre ses forces provoquerait l'arrêt du retrait en question, et verrait celles-ci user «d'un droit de légitime défense» pour riposter. Le chef militaire du PKK, considéré comme le numéro deux de l'organisation, n'a en effet pas précisé si ses hommes se retireraient en armes ou désarmés, alors même qu'à plusieurs reprises, tant Recep Tayyip Erdoğan qu'Abdullah Gül, ont affirmé que les membres du PKK devraient être désarmés préalablement à leur retrait. Toutefois, Murat Karayılan a affirmé que les modalités de toutes ces opérations avaient fait l'objet d'un échange de lettre avec Abdullah Öcalan, et qu'elles étaient connues des autorités turques.

Selon le chef militaire kurde, le retrait, qui devrait être achevé à l'automne (a-t-il précisé, deux jours plus tard, en rappelant qu'Abdullah Öcalan tenait à ce qu'il soit mené à bien le plus rapidement possible), ne sera que la première étape d'un processus qui en compterait trois au total. La deuxième étape sera la réforme du système, conduite par le gouvernement turc, notamment l'élaboration d'un nouveau texte constitutionnel. Enfin, la troisième étape verra, toujours selon Murat Karayılan, une normalisation définitive, impliquant le désarmement de la guérilla et la libération de tout le monde, y compris du leader du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan.

Après les premières négociations menées par le gouvernement turc avec Abdullah Öcalan, qui s'étaient concrétisées, le 21 mars dernier, à l'occasion de la fête de Newroz, par un appel au cessez-le-feu du leader du PKK (cf. notre édition du 22 mars 2013), ce nouveau développement du processus de règlement de la question kurde, constitue indiscutablement un acquis important. En dépit des premiers succès du processus, on s'interrogeait en effet sur l'attitude des membres de la guérilla kurde et sur leur capacité à accepter le retrait annoncé par leur leader emprisonné depuis plus d'une décennie sur l'île d'İmralı, au large d'Istanbul. Les déclarations publiques de Murat Karayılan et les précisions qu'il a apportées depuis, ont donc confirmé l'adhésion de la branche militaire de l'organisation au processus engagé depuis la fin de l'année dernière.

Un certain nombre d'incertitudes demeurent pourtant. La première concerne le désarmement des militants du PKK. Lors de sa conférence de presse, sans aborder ouvertement la question, Murat Karayılan a situé ce désarmement à la fin du processus, un scénario qui diverge de celui qu'avaient annoncé à plusieurs reprises antérieurement le premier ministre et le président de la



République. Les dirigeants politiques turcs n'ont pas réagi immédiatement aux déclarations du chef militaire du PKK, mais l'on observe que, lors d'une interview, le 26 avril 2013, l'un des principaux conseillers de Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Yalçın Akdoğan, a estimé que Karayılan avait mal interprété l'ordre dans lequel devait se dérouler le processus de paix. Selon lui en effet aucune normalisation ne pourra intervenir avant que le PKK n'ait effectivement déposé les armes. On sait néanmoins que ce problème renvoie à celui de la sécurisation des opérations de retrait. Les membres du PKK redoutent des accrochages, voire carrément des attaques. Les institutions mises en place pour encadrer le processus sont pour l'instant limitées, et leurs compétences restent confuses. Un comité des sages, structuré en 7 groupes régionaux, a été formé par le premier ministre (cf. notre édition du 8 avril 2013). La commission parlementaire établie pour garantir le bon déroulement du processus souffre par ailleurs de l'absence de deux partis politiques sur les quatre que compte le parlement, les nationalistes et les kémalistes ayant décidé de la boycotter ; ce qui aboutit au fait qu'elle est presque exclusivement composée de membres de l'AKP...

A ces polémiques autour du désarmement s'ajoute une seconde incertitude de taille, celle qui concerne la libération des prisonniers, et en particulier celle d'Abdullah Öcalan, considérée comme inéluctable par Murat Karayılan, alors même que le gouvernement et le premier ministre l'ont toujours vigoureusement exclue. Outre les interrogations sur le désarmement et la libération des prisonniers, on ne peut manquer d'observer pour finir que les réformes qui doivent sceller une normalisation de la situation politique n'ont jamais été clairement dévoilées. Celles que l'on peut imaginer sans être grand clerc, et qui touchent à la citoyenneté, à la décentralisation ou à l'enseignement en langue kurde, ne sont pas de surcroît sans poser certains problèmes à la Turquie. Il sera donc intéressant de voir comment le nouveau texte constitutionnel les prend en compte.

Une autre préoccupation concerne, en fait, la perception et les positionnements à l'égard du processus de paix, des principaux partis d'opposition, les kémalistes du CHP et les nationalistes du MHP. L'hostilité totale du MHP et de son leader Devlet Bahçeli, qui a plusieurs fois accusé le gouvernement de trahison, n'a rien d'étonnant. Celle du CHP en revanche surprend par sa véhémence. Le leader du parti kémaliste, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, qui avait pourtant lancé l'an dernier une proposition pour rechercher une solution à la question kurde (cf. notre édition du 7 juin 2012), a qualifié le processus en cours de «première étape avant la formation d'un grand Kurdistan indépendant», en expliquant que l'AKP le conduisait de façon unilatérale et opaque, en coopération avec Abdullah Öcalan et en excluant le parlement. →

→ Les nationalistes et les kémalistes continuent d'accuser, en outre, le premier ministre d'avoir marchandé ce processus de paix et la décentralisation qui s'ensuivra en faveur des Kurdes contre l'établissement d'un régime présidentiel, destiné à permettre son maintien au pouvoir, au-delà du nouveau mandat d'exercice que lui ont ouvert les dernières élections législatives de 2011.

Pour sa part, l'opinion publique turque ne semble pas encore vraiment gagnée au processus de paix en dépit de ses premiers succès. Un sondage effectué par l'Institut Metropoll, publié par Zaman, le 29 avril 2013, montre certes que 66,7% des Turcs préfèrent dialoguer avec le PKK plutôt que continuer la lutte armée avec lui. Mais 51,1% d'entre eux n'approuvent pas le processus de résolution en cours (contre 36,6% qui l'approuvent et 12,3% qui ne se prononcent pas). Ce sondage

indique donc que le parti au pouvoir prend certains risques en menant à bien ce processus, même si son image est loin d'être décrédibilisée dans l'opinion. 36,8% des électeurs turcs voteraient encore pour l'AKP si des élections avaient lieu dimanche prochain, le CHP ne recueillant que 15,3% des voix, le MHP 10,2% et le BDP 3,8% (20,4% des sondés refusant de se prononcer pour une formation politique quelle qu'elle soit). Par ailleurs, le sondage montre que, parallèlement au règlement de la question kurde, l'opinion turque s'interroge sur les choix politiques et institutionnels qui sont actuellement à l'ordre du jour. 39,8% des personnes interrogées sont ainsi contre l'établissement d'un régime présidentiel (contre 35,2% pour), 61,6% rejettent l'idée d'une collaboration exclusive AKP-BDP pour rédiger la nouvelle constitution (contre 28,2% qui l'approuvent), et 54,2% pensent que les journalistes et les écrivains sont actuellement moins libres en Turquie qu'auparavant...

LE FIGARO

26 avril 2013

## Le PKK veut quitter la Turquie les armes à la main

Le retrait des rebelles kurdes marque une nouvelle étape dans les négociations de paix engagées avec le gouvernement turc.

Par Laure Marchand

La guérilla kurde s'engage-t-elle sur un chemin sans retour? Le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a annoncé que ses combattants entameraient leur retrait du territoire turc pour gagner le nord de l'Irak à partir du 8 mai. Ce repli constitue une étape essentielle dans les négociations en cours entre le gouvernement turc et Abdullah Öcalan, le leader kurde emprisonné à vie sur l'île d'Imrali, pour en finir avec un conflit qui a fait plus de 45.000 morts en trois décennies.

Le signal du départ aux quelque 2000 rebelles présents en Turquie a été donné jeudi par Murat Karayilan, le chef militaire du mouvement autonomiste. Depuis la base arrière du PKK, installée dans les monts Qandil, dans le nord irakien, le commandant a détaillé devant un parterre de journalistes turcs les modalités de l'opération qui devrait être achevée en quelques mois, «le plus rapidement possible». Ses hommes devraient se retirer via «les chemins» qu'ils empruntent habituellement entre les deux pays et qui sont donc con-



Murat Karayilan le commandant a détaillé devant un parterre de journalistes turcs les modalités de l'opération qui devrait être achevée en quelques mois. Crédits photo : - /AFP

nus de l'armée turque. Il est prévu qu'ils évitent les villages et les postes militaires afin de diminuer les risques de clash avec les forces de sécurité turques. Mais «le retrait s'arrêtera immédiatement en cas d'attaque», a-t-il mis en garde. Dans ce cas, les rebelles «feront usage de leur droit de répliquer». Ce qui signifie que la sortie de Turquie s'effectuera les armes à la main, contrairement aux exigences du premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Le PKK craint en effet d'être pris pour cible par l'armée turque comme cela s'est déjà

produit par le passé. En 1999, sur les ordres d'Öcalan, les combattants kurdes avaient quitté la Turquie sans arme et plusieurs centaines d'entre eux avaient été tués dans des embuscades. Le gouvernement garantit cette fois-ci que les rebelles pourront se retirer sans encombre. Et l'état-major a assuré qu'il n'entraverait pas la décision du pouvoir civil.

### L'OPTIMISME D'ANKARA

Le ministre des Affaires étrangères s'est montré très optimiste sur les espoirs de paix. Selon Ahmet Davutoglu, une fois que la moitié de la riv-

ière a été traversée «faire demi-tour s'avère plus long et plus risqué». Le retrait, s'il s'effectue sans encombre, consolidera le cessez-le-feu décrété le 21 mars par Abdullah Öcalan. Mais l'aboutissement du processus de paix passe «par des réformes dans le cadre d'une solution constitutionnelle», a précisé Murat Karayilan, renvoyant le gouvernement à ses «obligations» pour les 15 millions de Kurdes de Turquie. Les rebelles réclament entre autre le droit à l'éducation dans la langue maternelle, une autonomie régionale, une amnistie des combattants et la libération de milliers de prisonniers politiques accusés de «terrorisme».

«Le PKK tiendra parole et se retirera, il n'est pas certain que Recep Tayyip Erdogan fasse de même, déclare Altan Tan, un député du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie, la vitrine politique du PKK. Nous n'avons aucune garantie.» Pour l'élue kurde, «le plus grand danger» serait que le premier ministre s'imagine que les Kurdes se contenteront de «quelques friandises».

# Turquie: La longue marche des «sages» pour la paix

ANNE ANDLAUER

Après trente ans de guerre, des négociations de paix ont débuté entre Ankara et la rébellion kurde du PKK. Le gouvernement a lancé une campagne de sensibilisation pour apaiser les inquiétudes au sein de la population

On a poussé les tables, les théières et les jeux de cartes pour qu'une soixantaine de personnes se serrent dans le petit café, les hommes assis au premier rang, les femmes et les enfants derrière, les jeunes debout au fond de la salle. Un concert de tambours annonce l'arrivée de Mithat Sancar et Levent Korkut, professeurs de droit, et d'Ali Bayramoglu, journaliste. Ils font partie des 63 «sages», hommes et femmes, nommés par le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, pour promouvoir auprès de la population le processus de paix avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), entamé en décembre dernier.

## «LUEUR D'ESPOIR»

Chaque «délégation de sages», comprenant neuf membres, s'occupe d'une région. Dimanche dernier à midi, trois «sages» de celle de Marmara posent donc leurs carnets de notes sur la toile cirée de ce petit café à Çanakkale, ville du nord-ouest de l'Anatolie, au bord du détroit des Dardanelles.

Dans l'assistance composée en majorité de Kurdes, une dizaine de mains se lèvent. «J'aperçois une lueur d'espoir parce qu'on n'a pleuré aucun mort des deux côtés depuis trois mois», observe Sehmuz Aslan, un



Manifestation d'opposants au processus de paix avec le PKK, à Istanbul, le 20 avril.

vieux monsieur à la moustache blanche originaire de Mardin (sud-est). «Même si les armes se taisent pour de bon, est-ce qu'on pourra parler de paix tant que les familles n'auront pas été réunies?» interroge Adile Yalçın, une femme au voile fleuri dont la belle-sœur est en prison depuis quatre ans pour, dit-elle, propagande en faveur du PKK.

La voix un peu hésitante, Bayram Isik demande si «la paix et les réformes serviront à quelque chose tant que les mentalités n'auront pas changé». Cet étudiant à l'Université de Çanakkale affirme avoir été battu le mois dernier par d'autres jeunes de son dortoir pour avoir téléphoné en kurde à sa mère, restée dans leur village de la province de Sirnak.

Face à eux, les «sages» prennent des notes, promettent d'inscrire chacune des doléances dans le rapport qu'ils doivent rendre bientôt au premier ministre. «Nous n'aimons pas le terme de «sages», confie le journaliste Ali Bayramoglu, qui préfère parler de «groupes de dialogue». Levent Korkut, juriste et spécialiste des droits de l'homme, décrit leur rôle comme «celui d'une

soupe, d'un tampon voire d'un punching-ball qui doit apaiser les tensions et absorber les inquiétudes de toutes les tranches de la société» à l'égard du processus de paix.

Quand les sept «délégations de sages» ont pris la route début avril, le chef emprisonné du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, venait d'appeler ses combattants à cesser le feu et à quitter la Turquie. Après une série d'échanges entre les services secrets sous l'autorité du premier ministre, les députés du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP pro-kurde), l'aile militaire du PKK dans le nord de l'Irak, et Abdullah Öcalan sur son île-prison d'Imrali, le PKK a finalement annoncé la semaine dernière son retrait du territoire à partir du 8 mai. Ce retrait devrait s'achever au plus tard à l'automne, a fait savoir le commandant militaire de l'organisation, Murat Karayilan.

## VIVES RÉSISTANCES

«Cette annonce et le retrait effectif du PKK devraient atténuer les inquiétudes», veut croire Mithat Sancar, professeur de droit à l'Université d'Ankara, selon lequel «dans le sud-est, 85%

de la population est favorable au processus alors que dans la région de Marmara, les derniers sondages indiquent 67%».

Mer Noire, Egée, Marmara... dans certaines régions, les «délégations de sages» se heurtent à de plus vives résistances qu'ailleurs. «Pendant trente ans, on a fait la guerre à ces terroristes et maintenant, il faudrait leur serrer la main? Et nos martyrs, ils sont morts pour rien?» s'emporte Ali, chauffeur de taxi à Çanakkale.

Ce jour-là, une soixantaine d'opposants agitant drapeaux turcs et portraits d'Atatürk, fondateur de la République, accueillent Mithat Sancar, Levent Korkut et Ali Bayramoglu aux portes de leur hôtel. «Traîtres à la patrie», proclament leurs affiches. Deux jours plus tôt, à Bursa, la police a dispersé des manifestants à coups de gaz lacrymogène et un vétéran de l'armée a brandi sa prothèse de jambe en pleine réunion.

Il arrive aussi que les «sages» n'aient pas de réponses à apporter – autres que leurs opinions personnelles – aux questions qui leur sont posées sur l'avenir du processus. Education en langue maternelle? Réforme de la Constitution? «Ce sera aux politiques d'apporter des réponses», souligne le juriste Levent Korkut. «Le processus en cours consiste à régler les problèmes sans faire couler le sang, renchérit Mithat Sancar. Si cela réussit, nous ne promettons pas le paradis... mais nous promettons la sortie de l'enfer.» ■

# Islamist rebels in Syria create policy predicament for Obama

CAIRO

## Islamists predominate as Obama weighs action on chemical arms issue

BY BEN HUBBARD

In Syria's largest city, Aleppo, rebels aligned with Al Qaeda control the power plant, run the bakeries and head a court that applies Islamic law. Elsewhere, they have seized government oil fields, put employees back to work and now profit from the crude they produce.

Across Syria, rebel-held areas are dotted with Islamic courts staffed by lawyers and clerics, and with fighting brigades led by extremists. Even the Supreme Military Council, the umbrella rebel organization whose formation the West had hoped would sideline radical groups, is stocked with commanders who want to infuse Islamic law into a future Syrian government.

Nowhere in rebel-controlled Syria is there a secular fighting force to speak of.

This is the landscape President Barack Obama confronts as he considers how to respond to growing evidence that Syrian officials have used chemical weapons, crossing a "red line" he had set. More than two years of violence have radicalized the armed opposition fighting the government of President Bashar al-Assad, leaving few groups that both share the political vision of the United States and have the military might to push it forward.

Among the most extreme groups is the Nusra Front, the Qaeda-aligned force declared a terrorist organization by the United States, but other groups share aspects of its Islamist ideology in varying degrees.

"Some of the more extremist opposition is very scary from an American perspective, and that presents us with all sorts of problems," said Ari Ratner, a former Middle East adviser in the U.S. State Department and now a fellow at the Truman National Security Project, a national security leadership institute in Washington. "We have no illusions about the prospect of engaging with the Assad regime — it must still go — but we are also very reticent to support the more hard-line rebels."

Syrian officials recognize that the United States is worried that it has few natural allies in the armed opposition and have tried to exploit that with a public campaign to convince, or frighten, Washington into staying out of the fight. At every turn they promote the notion



A fighter with the Nusra Front in March in Raqqa Province. Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham helped lead campaigns to seize military bases, dams on the Euphrates and Raqqa's capital.

that the alternative to Mr. Assad is an extremist Islamic state.

The Islamist character of the opposition reflects the main constituency of the rebellion, which has been led since its start by Syria's Sunni Muslim majority, mostly in conservative, marginalized areas. The descent into civil war has hardened sectarian differences, and the failure of more mainstream rebel groups to secure regular arms supplies has allowed Islamists to fill the void and win supporters.

The religious agenda of the combatants sets them apart from many civilian activists, protesters and aid workers who had hoped the uprising would create a civil, democratic Syria.

When the armed rebellion began, defectors from the government's staunchly secular army formed the vanguard. The rebel movement has since grown to include fighters with a wide range of views, including Qaeda-aligned jihadists seeking to establish an Islamic emirate, political Islamists inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood and others who want an Islamic-influenced legal code like that found in many Arab states.

"My sense is that there are no seculars," said Elizabeth O'Bagy, who is an analyst with the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington research organization, and who has made numerous trips to Syria in recent months to interview rebel commanders.

Of most concern to the United States is the Nusra Front, whose leader recently confirmed that the group cooperated with Al Qaeda in Iraq and pledged

fealty to Al Qaeda's top leader, Ayman al-Zawahri, Osama bin Laden's long-time deputy. Nusra has claimed responsibility for a number of suicide bombings, and is the group of choice for the foreign jihadists pouring into Syria.

Another prominent group, Ahrar al-Sham, shares much of Nusra's extremist ideology but is made up mostly of Syrians.

The two groups are most active in the north and east and are widely respected by other rebels for their fighting abilities and their ample arsenal, much of it given by sympathetic donors in the Gulf. And both helped lead campaigns to seize military bases, dams on the Euphrates River and the provincial capital of Raqqa Province in March, the only regional capital held entirely by rebel forces.

Nusra's hand is felt most strongly in Aleppo, where the group has set up camp in a former children's hospital and has worked with other rebel groups to establish a Shariah Commission in the eye hospital next door to govern the city's rebel-held neighborhoods. The commission runs a police force and an Islamic court that hands down sentences that have included lashings, though not amputations or executions as some Shariah courts in other countries have done.

Nusra fighters also control the power plant and distribute flour to keep the city's bakeries running.

While many residents initially feared them, some have come to respect them for providing basic services and working to fill the city's security vacuum. Secular activists, however, have chafed

at their presence. At times, Nusra fighters have clashed with other rebels who reject their ideology.

In the oil-rich provinces of Deir al-Zour and Hasaka, Nusra fighters have seized government oil fields, putting some under the control of tribal militias and running others themselves.

"They are the strongest military force in the area," said the commander of a rebel brigade in Hasaka reached via Skype. "We can't deny it."

But most of Nusra's fighters joined the group for the weapons, not the ideology, he said, and some left after discovering the Qaeda connection.

"Most of the youth who joined them did so to topple the regime, not because they wanted to join Al Qaeda," he said, speaking on the condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

As extremists rose in the rebel ranks, the United States sought to limit their influence, first by designating Nusra a terrorist organization, and later by pushing for the formation of the Supreme Military Council, which is linked to the exile opposition group, the Syrian National Coalition.

Although led by a Syrian Army defector, Gen. Salim Idris, the council has taken in the leaders of many overtly Islamist battalions. One called the Syrian Liberation Front has been integrated nearly wholesale into the council; many of its members coordinate closely with the Syrian Islamic Front, a group that includes the extremist Ahrar al-Sham, according to a recent report by Ms. O'Bagy, of the Institute for the Study of War.

Louay Mekdad, a spokesman for the Supreme Military Council, said that its members reflected Syrian society and that it had no ties to Nusra or other radical groups.

"The character of the Syrian people is Islamic, but it is stupid to think that Syria will turn into Afghanistan," he said. "That's just an excuse for those who don't want to help Syria."

The Obama administration has said it needs more conclusive information before it acts on the Syrian government's reported use of chemical weapons. It remains unclear whether such action would translate to increased support for the rebels.

In the past, U.S. officials saw the militant groups' abundant resources as the main draw for recruits, said Steven Heydemann, a senior adviser at the United States Institute of Peace, which works with the State Department.

"The strategy is based on the current assessment that popular appeal of these groups is transactional, not ideological, and that opportunities exist to peel people away by providing alternative support and resources," he said.

Mr. Heydemann acknowledged, however, that the momentum toward radicalism could be hard to reverse.

The challenge, he said, is to end the conflict before "the opportunity to create a system of governance not based on militant Islamic law is lost."

Emile Hokayem, a Middle East analyst at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, framed the rebels' dilemma another way: "How do you de-

nounce the Nusra Front as extremists when they are playing such an important military role and when they look disciplined, resourceful and committed?"

From the start, the Syrian government has sought to portray the rebels as terrorists carrying out an international plot to weaken the country, and the rise of extremist groups has strengthened its case and increased support among Syrians who fear that a rebel victory could mean the end of the secular Syrian state.

Many rebels and opposition activists complain about the Western focus on Islamist groups, some even dismissing the opposition's ideological differences.

"We all want an Islamic state and we want Shariah to be applied," said Maawiya Hassan Agha, a rebel activist reached by Skype in the northern village of Sarmeen.

He said a country's laws should flow from its people's beliefs and compared Syrians calling for Islamic law with the French banning Muslim women from wearing face veils.

"In France, people don't like face veils so they passed laws against them," he said. "It's the same thing here. It's our right to push for the laws we want."

*An employee of The New York Times contributed reporting from Aleppo.*

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## Iraq PM meets Kurdish leader for reconciliation

**B**AGHDAD - Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki met yesterday with the Kurdistan Regional Government's (KRG) prime minister in Baghdad for reconciliation talks as violence continued across the country with five car bombs killing 26 in Shiite areas.

Al-Maliki and Nechirvan Barzani held talks over disputed areas, the military deployment of both sides to these areas, oil contracts the KRG has signed without Baghdad's approval and Kurdish peshmarga deployment in Kirkuk.

The meeting came as five car bombs exploded in Shiite areas of central and southern Iraq.

The blasts, which killed 26 and injured dozens more, come amid a week-long spike in sectarian violence following clashes at a Sunni protest camp in the



*Iraqi PM al-Maliki (R) meets KRG PM Nechirvan Barzani. Baghdad has often clashed with Kurdish northern Iraq over the sharing of oil revenues. AA photo*

north of the country.

Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi called yesterday for the Cabinet to resign and for early elections to be held, as a

seven-day wave of violence killed more than 230 people in Iraq. The initiative is aimed at "national reconciliation and maintaining the gains of democracy," as well as "sparing the country from the specter of civil war and sectarian strife," al-Nujaifi's office said in a statement.

Al-Nujaifi, a Sunni and leading member of the secular, Sunni-backed Iraqiya bloc which has long been at odds with the Shiite al-Maliki, addressed the proposal to the heads of political parties represented in Parliament. He called for the current government to resign and be replaced by a smaller one made up of independent members who cannot stand in the next elections, for the electoral commission to prepare for early polls and for Parliament to then be dissolved.

So far this month, more than 450 people have been killed and over 1,150 wounded in violence across Iraq, according to figures.

*Compiled from AA and AFP stories by the Daily News staff.*