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**IRAQ:
GENERAL ELECTIONS IN A DIVIDED COUNTRY**

The first Iraqi elections since the departure of the US troops took place in a tense atmosphere marked by acts of violence. They began on 28 April as the security forces voted two days before the rest of the citizens, planned for the 30th. Already on the 28th there were bomb attacks on polling stations, causing at least 27 deaths. The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) had already announced that it would carry out reprisals against Sunni Arab Iraqis who turned out to vote.

As far as the Shiites were concerned, bomb attacks on election meetings resulted in 37 dead and many injured, some being in a critical condition.

Thus on the 30th, about 60% of the Iraqis, out of the 18 million elec-

tors, defied the terrorism by turning up at the polling booths to elect 328 members of Parliament for a 4 year term of office. Parliament will then have to elect the President of Iraq, who will then appoint a Prime Minister responsible for forming the government.

The electoral system adopted is proportional representation with open lists. The eighteen constituencies (governorates) must elect their representatives — 7 to 34 depending on the size of the constituency's population. This is the first time this system has been used in Iraq, following a decision of the Supreme Court. Previously the modified Saint-Laguë method was used which allocated a quotient to each seat, thus favouring the bigger parties. This is just the reason the Supreme Court put forward as "discriminating against the smaller

parties" to advocate a change in the polling method. Thus "seven compensating seats" have been allocated to parties whose results, at national level are not reflected in each of the constituencies. Finally, there are eight seats reserved for religious minorities — five for Christians, and one each for the Mandeans, Yezidis and Shabaks.

The Iraqi High Electoral Commission had authorised 276 political entities to field candidates. These entities have formed coalition lists the winning one of which has, according to the Constitution, someone at the top of the list who is due, should it win, become the Prime Minister. This does not, however, prevent the parties from forming new coalitions after the election results have been declared.

The largest political parties in the

field are the State of Law Party, led by the present Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki, the Sadrist Movement (a Shiite militia), Masud Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party, that this time has not formed a coalition with either Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurdistan or with Gorran (an opposition party with which it is negotiating to form a government in the Kurdistan Region). In addition there is the Iraqi National Alliance led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, a pro-Arab secular party that includes Shiite and Sunni Arabs.

Some new parties have formed since the 2010 parliamentary elections, including the "League of People for Truth" that brings together some Shiite paramilitary groups close to Iran and the White Block, a break away from the Iraqi National Movement formed when eight of its members of Parliament left it in March 2011 to form their own group following disagreements with Iyad Allawi. In the 2013 provincial elections they had joint a list led by Nuri Maliki but will be standing on their own for the parliamentary elections.

Because of the increasing political and sectarian tensions in Iraq, everyone expected the vote to be more "community oriented" than inspired by the various lists' political programmes (often pretty laconic). As well as the Sadrist Movement, the "religious" Shiite votes could go to the Iraqi Supreme Islamic Council (ISIC), a religious Shiite party very influential in Southern Iraq, which has, however, lost ground to Nuri Maliki's State of Law party. The ISIC proposes a form of autonomy for the Shiite South, but of a pretty theocratic character.

In addition to the Iraqi National Alliance, Sunni Arab voters have a choice between Al-Hadba, an Arab nationalist movement led by Atheel Al Nujayfi, brother of d'Usama Al

Nujayfi, the present Speaker of Parliament, and the Iraqi National Front for Dialogue, a coalition of five parties, four of which are mainly Sunni Arab and one Christian Party. Al-Hadba has a strong base in the Nineveh-Mosul area where it has often clashed with Kurdish elected representatives on the provincial councils

The results will only be made known on 25 May, after the High Electoral Commission has ruled on the many objections that have been filed with it.

In Kirkuk Province, the final results, as for the rest of Iraq, will be published on 25 May. However, it already appears that the PUK come out top, with an overwhelming victory for the present governor, Dr. Karim Najmaldin, who won 200,000 votes, far ahead of the KDP (63,347) the Turcoman Front (50,000). Then comes the Arab Alliance (30,000), Gorran (23,713) and the two Kurdish religious parties, Yekgirtu and Komal, with 7 and 4 thousand votes respectively.

At first sight, and subject to the final official results, neither Gorran nor the religious parties will win a seat on the Kirkuk Provincial Council.

Since no party will be able to win a majority of the seats, several months of haggling can be expected before a coalition government with a parliamentary majority can be formed.

On the Sunni and secular Arab side, Al-Hadba, led by Atheel Al Nujayfi, is likely to win between 33 and 37 seats, the Iraqi National Alliance, founded by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, is likely to win between 17 and 25 seats and the Iraqi National Front for Dialogue might have another 10 seats.

The Prime Minister, especially, is

hoping to win a third term of office, but he is in conflict with the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs as well as a substantial part of the Shiites. Were he to take office, the country is in danger of breaking up in the coming years.

Since the Parliamentary and Provincial elections were in full swing, the issue of Nuri Maliki's cuts in the budget allocation to the Kurdish Region has not been resolved. In an interview given to the Arabic language daily, Al-Hayat, Masud Barzani expressed the opinion that Iraq was falling apart and that this political reality had to be faced: "*major instability*" and "*rampant terrorism in the Western regions of the country*", that has a Sunni Arab majority and where the ISIL is establishing itself on a lasting basis, and where "*the government has completely lost control of some cities and where some terrorists are operating in a public manner*".

In his view, the heart of the conflict between Erbil and Baghdad is their different interpretation of the Iraqi Constitution: "*Mr Maliki thinks that he is the only one to decide and that everyone else has only to obey. He does not support the Constitution as we in the Kurdistan Region do (...) He thinks that everything belongs to Baghdad*".

As for the Sunni Arab provinces, in a state of quasi insurrection, President Barzani points out that just after the fall of Saddam, he had tried to persuade the Sunni Arabs to form their own region, as had the Kurds, since he already foresaw a bloody conflict with the Shiites: "*It was possible at the time, but they refused and still believed that, in Iraq, power traditionally and historically belonged to the Sunnis. They had not realised the extent of the change that had occurred. Now they are demanding it [to form their own Region] but now it seems harder and more complex to carry out. They are demanding and Baghdad is refusing it*".

IRAQI KURDISTAN: HOLDING PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IN THE REGION

At the same time as the parliamentary elections were taking place in Kurdistan as in the rest of the country, the three Kurdish provinces and Kirkuk were electing their provincial councils.

In 2013 these elections had taken place in most of the Iraqi governorates except the Kurdish provinces and Kirkuk, Nineveh and Anbar. The last two provinces on 20 June 2013.

As for Kirkuk, Article 23 of the electoral law placed the decision about holding and carrying out of provincial elections to a “*multi-ethnic committee*” operating according to a rule of “*general consensus*”. However, in August 2013 the Iraqi Federal Court annulled this Article, on the grounds of its ineffectiveness (the elections had been postponed several times) and the Parliamentary legal commission had drafted a new electoral law that did not depend on the assent of all of the province’s ethnic, religious and political components for approval. This decision of the Federal Court had been opposed, mainly, by the Arab and Turcoman minorities, who feared to lose their political influence in the face of the numerical superiority of the Kurds.

In the rest of the Kurdish Region, these elections and the election campaign that lasted throughout the month of April, had more of an

impact on public opinion than the Parliamentary elections, as several international and Iraqi media noted — especially as the provincial councils had not had any elections for the last eight years. “*This was particularly noticeable with the campaign of posters that plastered the streets there — those regarding the provincial elections outnumbered those for the Iraqi parliamentary elections. The same went for the local media*” (Hayman Hassan in the daily *Niqash*)

There are several explanations possible for this: a “*disillusionment*” or scepticism on the part of the Kurds regarding the real influence that their M.P.s can have on Baghdad’s politics towards them but also an increased interest in the competition between the Region’s three major parties, that have been negotiating since the Regional Parliamentary elections of September 2013 about forming new cabinet. Coming barely 8 months after the PUK’s defeat by the Gorran party, these elections were a way for these political factions either to consolidate their victory (in Gorran’s case) or to avenge its defeat (for the PUK) by rising from 3rd place to 2nd. The religious parties, Yekgirtu and Komal, that had also had a good score, especially in Suleimaniyah, could also hope that their results might be confirmed or even improved.

Above all, the KRG electorate has also changed. Previously, the Provincial governors were directly

appointed by the Region’s Ministry of the Interior. This governor, in turn, could choose and appoint high officials without consulting the provincial councils. Henceforth, however, as part of a determination to decentralise, it will be the Provincial Councils who appoint the governors, which has, obviously, increased interest in these elections, which will determine the weight of the parties in these councils.

Unlike the rest of Iraq, these elections took place in a calm atmosphere, without any terrorist attacks even though, here and there (especially in Suleimaniyah) accusations of fraud were made against the dominant parties who have a certain degree of control of the police and security forces.

The first estimates published on *Rudaw’s* site, indicate that there was some drop in participation, compared with 2011, despite a 216,211 increase in the number of electors throughout the Region, or by Province:

- Duhok : + 62 706
- Erbil : + 60 636
- Suleimaniyah : + 92 869

With these 216,211 new electors, 80,784 less voted than in 2011 (1,887,991 as against 1,968,775 in 2011), giving a 67% turnout for the KRG as a whole, while for each province:

Provisional results of the 2014 elections (GRK + provinces):

	Votes overall	Duhok	Erbil	Suleimaniyah
KDP	727 372 (39%)	322 000 (72%)	323 240 (50%)	82 132 (10%)
Gorran	463 861 (25%)	25 230 (6%)	94 631 (15%)	344 000 (43%)
PUK	463 861 (25%)	25 230 (6%)	94 631 (15%)	344 000 (43%)
Yekgirtu	433 484 (23%)	37 282 (8%)	140 702 (22%)	255 500 (32%)
Komal	153 700 (8%)	57 000 (13%)	33 000 (5%)	63 700 (8%)
Others	109 319 (6%)	4 132 (1%)	51 500 (8%)	53 687 (7%)
Total	255 (0%)	3 (0%)	207 (0%)	45 (0%)

Compared with the September 2013 Parliamentary elections :

	Total Votes	Duhok	Erbil	Suleimaniyah
PDK	743 984 (38%)	310 816 (70%)	340 668 (48%)	92 500 (11%)
Gorran	476 736 (24%)	12 775 (3%)	130 000 (18%)	333 961 (41%)
UPK	350 500 (18%)	25 176 (6%)	91 072 (13%)	234 252 (29%)
Yekgirtu	186 741 (9%)	56 660 (13%)	46 000 (7%)	84 081 (10%)
Komal	118 399 (6%)	4 814 (1%)	46 300 (7%)	67 285 (8%)
Others	92 415 (5%)	33 566 (8%)	52 448 (7%)	6 401 (1%)
Total	1 968 775 (100%)	443 807 (23%)	706 448 (36%)	818 480 (42%)

As can be seen, the KDP lost 16,612 votes in 2014, but its percentage of the vote increased by 1%. It increased its vote by 11,184 in Duhok (+2%) lost 17,428 in Erbil (-2%) and 10,368 in Suleimaniyah (-2%).

Gorran lost 12,875 votes and saw its percentage rise by 1%. It won 12,445 more votes in Duhok (+3%), lost 35,369 in Erbil(-#%) and won 10,039 in Suleimaniyah (+2%).

The PUK won 82,984 votes compared with 2013 and increased its overall percentage by 5%. It won 12,106 more votes in Duhok (+5%), 49,630 more votes in Erbil (+4%) and 21,248 in Suleimaniyah (+3%).

Total of votes lost/won and percentages:

	GRK	Duhok	Erbil	Suleimaniyah
PDK	- 16 612 (+1%)	+ 11 184 (+2%)	- 17 428 (-2%)	- 10 368 (-1%)
Gorran	- 12 875 (+1%)	+ 12 445 (+3%)	- 35 369 (-3%)	+ 10 039 (+2%)
UPK	+ 82 984 (+5%)	+ 12 106 (+5%)	+ 49 630 (+4%)	+ 21 248 (+3%)
Yekgirtu	- 33 041 (-1%)	- 340 (0%)	- 13 000 (-2%)	- 20 381 (-2%)
Komal	- 9 080 (-5%)	- 682 (0%)	+ 5 200 (+1%)	-13 598 (-1%)
Others	- 92 160 (-5%)	- 33 563 (-8%)	- 52 441 (-7%)	- 6 356 (-1%)

Thus, as can be seen, the KDP wins more votes in Duhok, its stronghold but loses in Erbil and Suleimaniyah. Gorran increases its vote in Duhok and Suleimaniyah but gives ground in Erbil. The PUK

is the party that has increased its votes in all three provinces, while on the other hand Yekgirtu lost ground everywhere. Komal lost votes in Duhok and Suleimaniyah but won some in Erbil.

Thus the most marked fact is the unexpected rise of the PUK and the diminishing or stagnation of the vote for the two religious parties, Yekigirtu and Komal.

SYRIA:**CONTROVERSY OVER A LINE OF TRENCHES ALONG THE KURDISH BORDER**

The disagreements between the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government and the PYD, the Syrian branch of the PKK, while not expressed by armed conflict, often resemble media trials of strength with accusations, denials and counter-accusations. Throughout this month the PYD has tried to organise a general protest movement against the digging of a "ditch" along the Syrian Kurdistan border, comparing this with the wall built by Turkey along the Nusaybin border zone to prevent free passage to the PKK, smugglers, refugees and perhaps some Jihadists. Described as the "wall of shame"

and compared to that built by Israel to separate the occupied territories, these measures presented by Turkey as being necessary for "security" have been attacked as aiming to "divide the Kurds".

Thus, when the issue of the border trenches along the KRG borders arose, it was on the same theme of "they want to enclose and strangle Rojava". Some demonstrations were organised along the borders, between Sihela or Simalka and Girê Sor, in which the "Revolutionary Youth" (Ciwanên şoreşger) brought "hundreds of Kurds" mainly from Darik and Qamishlo, to Girê Sor, near the Sêmalka

(Sihela) border to protest against the work under way and the treatment "inflicted on the Kurdish refugees at Erbil", accusing the KRG for depriving the Syrian refugees of "bread and water", beating them and "subjecting them sexual exploitation".

According to the "Jezirah Canton" authorities, these 26 Km long trenches are being installed by the KDP solely in order to inflict "economic sanctions" on the PYD administration.

On 9 April, the Peshmergas opened fire apparently to prevent a raid by the PYD youth on the border bridge, and injured

one of them, but only slightly. Apparently an 18 year old received two bullets in his foot. The next day “thousands of demonstrators” (PYD figures) returned to the border but when the Peshmergas again opened fire (without causing any casualties, probably warning shots) the order was given for the demonstrators to disperse. The pontoon bridge was withdrawn and the pro-PKK and PYD media stated that the KRG flag was replaced by that of the KDP.

On 14 April, an official of the Iraqi Kurdistan Peshmerga Ministry, Hadji Osman, stated to *Rudaw* that the order to dig the trenches was aimed at preserving the Region’s security, threatened by the ISIL and some Jihadist movements, and that the work was continuing. Moreover Hadji Osman recalled that such arrangements had existed for several years to protect Duhok and Erbil from terrorist incursions.

A Peshmerga officer told the Iraqi daily *Zaman* that the decision to dig this trench was jointly taken by the Iraqi and Kurdish government to stop smugglers. However, questioned by *Rudaw*, Ali Mousavi, one of Prime Minister Nuri Maliki’s advisors, denied that his government had taken any such decision. The Kurdish Peshmergas, however, state that similar trenches are being dug along 605 Km of the Iraqi-Syrian border, that they are 2 m deep and 3 m wide and that only 15 km remain to do.

Such security ditches have been in existence for the last ten years to protect the Kurdistan Region. After the terrible casualties of the February 2004 suicide bomb attack, a 35 km long security trench, w m deep and 3 m wide was built to prevent car bombs

from coming over from Nineveh or Kirkuk province by avoiding the check points on the main roads. Following the suicide attack on the security forces at Erbil last September, the KRG decided to extend these trenches by another 200 Km. There are about 6,000 men manning the security barriers and check points will be set up every 250 m, each with an observation tower.

While this impressive arrangement can be explained by the activity of the ISIL, that is active in both Syria and Iraq, and the KRG’s determination to remain that “*other Iraq*”, safe, peaceful and attractive to both tourists and investors, this extension of the trenches, which was fully accepted in 2004 has, this time sparked off protests, perhaps inspired by those of the PYD. The protests, this time were from the Kurdish elected representatives of Kirkuk, mostly from the PUK, who saw them as an attempt to separate Kirkuk from the Kurdistan Region and thus abandoning its demands for integration.

On the same day, Masud Barzani, the Kurdistan President, retorted by accusing the PYD of collaboration with the Baath regime. Speaking on the *Sky News Arabiya TV*, the Kurdish President described the PYD as “*the only Kurdish organisation conniving with the regime and using armed force to control the region*”. He added that “*the gains in Western Kurdistan*” that the Syrian PKK had secured were “*temporary*” and would disappear as the situation developed. According to Masud Barzani, “*the agreements between the PYD and the regime*” did not cover Kurdish autonomy, which he would have considered “*a positive step*” had it been the case. “*I do not believe, however, that such a*

political agreement exists. We have no evidence of any such agreement”.

For its part, the Kurdish National Council is trying to create the cohesion and unity that it has lacked since the start of the Syrian conflict. Thus 4 Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (Al-Partî), the Kurdistan Union Party and two branches of the Kurdistan Freedom Party (Azadî), which are all close to the KDP and on bad term with the PYD have decided to fuse and officially form, as from 3 April, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria.

Moreover, this month, the NGO “Reporters Without Borders* (RSF) published an online report entitled “*Rojava, or how the PYD intends to control the media and bring to heel those active in news and information*”. In this, the ONG says it is “*particularly worried by the degradation of the freedom of information situation in the territories controlled by the Democratic Union Party (PYD). This organisation is aware of the security problems in this region, at a time when the conflict is deepening and where jihadists are threatening the civilian population. Nevertheless, as the authority controlling this part of Syrian territory, it is the PYD’s responsibility too observe the fundamental freedoms, amongst which is the freedom of information*”.

Reporters Without Borders considers, in particular, that the “*Union of Free Media*” that wants to control “*those media that wish to work in Rojava (...) undoubtedly looks like the establishment of a kind of Ministry of Information. Moreover, this organisation has recorded a growing number of abuses of power against Syrian activists in the field of information, mainly by the Asayesh (security forces) and*

the YPG (People's Defence Units)" (that is the armed branch of the Kurdish Supreme Committee, accused of being the armed wing of the PYD). Already, in September 2013, in its report "Journalism in Syria: and impossible mission" RSF had already recorded a number of abuses (pages 9 and 10 of the report).

Basing itself on the evidence of Kurdish journalists working for such press organisations as *Rudaw* or *Zagros TV*, RSF denounces the fact that "the PYD and its henchmen, do not hesitate about arresting and even kidnapping, the overcritical information activists in order to silence them and intimidate the others".

Journalists are, moreover, not the only victims of the PYD's coercive policy, since "a certain number of information activists have also taken the road into exile, fleeing the PYD's threats".

Source : RSF = <http://fr.rsf.org/syrie-le-rojava-ou-comment-le-pyd-entend-01-05-2014,46220.html>

STRASBOURG:

A RESOLUTION BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ABOUT IRAN

On 17 April, Samko Khorshidi, a Kurdish political prisoner, was executed in Kermanshah Prison. Arrested in 2010, he was one of several dozen Kurds who are waiting in death row.

According to a Human Rights report, the Iranian regime has executed over 170 people in the first few months of 2014.

On 3 April, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the European Union's strategy regarding Iran) ([2014/2625\(RSP\)](#), in which it recalls, in the preamble, "the recent declaration of 22 January 2014", and also the special UN report on the Human Rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, warning about the "considerable increase in the number of hanging in Iran". Considers that "the Human Rights situation in Iran continues to be marked by permanent and systematic violation of fundamental human Rights" and "that Iran still refuses to cooperate with UN organs on human rights issues. For example it has refused to issue a visa to the special UN reporter on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran and has prevented him from carrying out his mission freely and independently".

Amongst the subjects covered by the resolution, the question of

human rights is the most frequently mentioned:

(The European Parliament)

"14. Welcomes the release of several prisoners of opinion in Iran, in particular the Human Rights lawyer and Sakharov Prize-winner Nasrin Sotoudeh, and calls on the Iranian authorities to free all the imprisoned human rights activists, all political prisoners, all the Trade Unionists and labour rights activists and all people arrested after the 2009 Presidential elections. It notes with interest President Hassan Rouhani's initiative in drafting a charter of the rights of citizens but nevertheless expresses its persistent concern regarding Human Rights in Iran, particularly in view of the widespread allegations of torture, of inequitable trials (particularly of lawyers and human rights activists) and impunity for those violating human rights. It says it is alarmed by the great number of executions in 2013 and 2014, including of minors, and observes that most of the executions in 2013 took place in the last five months of the year. It condemns the restrictions on freedom of information, freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, religious freedom, academic freedom to teach and freedom of movement as well as the repression and discrimination on the basis of religion, conviction or ethnic origin, of sex or sexual orientation which still exist, including against the Baha'I community, Christians, apostates and those who have converted.

15. Considers that the Charter of Citizens' Rights should fully conform with Iran's international obligations, in particular regarding non-discrimination and the right to life, strengthening the prohibition of torture and the guarantee of total freedom of religion and conviction as well as freedom of expression, which at present is restricted by a measure formulated in a vague manner regarding "offenses linked to national security".

16. This being the case, invites the Union to integrate human rights into all aspects of its relations with Iran. Considers that a high level dialogue on all human rights should be part of the framework of bilateral political relations between the Union and Iran. Calls on the Union to start a dialogue on human rights with Iran that should cover justice and the security forces and set up clearly defined reference criteria whereby progress can be measured. Demands that the Union fully support the work of the UN Special reporter on the Human Rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran and calls on Iran to give him, immediately and unconditionally, a visa. Encourages Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner to accept the invitation of the Iranian authorities to visit Iran and calls on Iran to call a moratorium of capital punishment.

17. Stresses that any future delegation of the Parliament to Iran should strive to meet members of the

political opposition and activists of civil society and to meet some political prisoners.

18. Stresses that it is important to create an atmosphere favourable to the proper working of civil society's organisations, in particular a reformed legal framework. It invites the Union to make better overall use of the European Union's guide-lines regarding human rights as well as the new flexibility provided by the European instrument for democracy and human rights 2014-2020; as well as the European Fund for Democracy recently established by the EU and its member states so as to support the Iranian human rights defenders and the civil society organisations in Iran.

19. Associates itself with the urgent appeal of 772 Iranian journalists to the Iranian President for him to keep his promise and authorise the

reopening of the Iranian Journalists Association.

20. Encourages the Union to study the possibility of extending technical assistance to Iran in partnership with international organisations so as to help in them to reform the procedures of the Penal Code, at present being envisaged by the Iranian Parliament.

Expresses its concern, especially regarding the impossibility of detainees to have a lawyer present during their interrogation; the serious allegations of abuse during detention prior to being charged, of preventive detention and civilians being tried before revolutionary courts all stress that the absence of political interference and the guarantee of a fair trial are the basis of a modern penal code and essential for the question of human rights.

21. Demands that Iran cooperate with the international organisations for the defence of human rights and its NGOs by observing the recommendations of the United Nations, of periodical universal examination and by authorising the international organisations for the defence of human rights to carry out their missions.

22. Is of the opinion that women's rights should necessarily remain a subject of special attention in all dialogues between the Union and Iran; consider that, despite some progress already achieved, the situation of women in Iran remains stained with unacceptable discriminations in legal matters and with regard to family rights and the participation of women in economic and political

FREEDOM OF THE PRESS:

THE LATEST REPORT OF THE CPJ REGARDING IRAQI KURDISTAN

The Committee for the Protection of Journalists (CPN) published this month a detailed report on the "vulnerability" of the press in Iraqi Kurdistan as soon as its journalists tackle "sensitive" subjects like religion, social inequalities and corruption, especially of they link these with political leaders.

It is in this context that it raises the case of the murder of Kawa Garmiyani, chief editor of the daily *Rayel*, whose articles on corruption were particularly aimed at PUK leaders. After receiving death threats in July 2012 from Mahmoud Shangawi, an Army General and member of that party, he was assassinated eighteen months later at Suleimaniyah on 5 December 2013. He was 32 years old and left a widow who gave birth to a posthumous son 17 days after his murder.

Arrested in January 2014, Mahmoud Shangawi insisted on his innocence and was released for lack of evidence. Another PUK member was then arrested and pleaded guilty, but the victim's family doubts that he was the "brains" behind the murder.

Some journalists and Human Rights activists organised demonstrations as from 20 December, openly accusing the PUK of covering the murderer.

The CPJ report is based on the testimony of the Metro Centre Group, a Suleimaniyah based journalist defence NGO, and recalls that in recent years some 700 acts of aggression against journalists there have been recorded, in various forms L threats, harassment, blows, detentions, intimidations and arson. Most of these remain unpunished.

The number of these aggressive acts reached a peak at the beginning of 2011, during bloody demonstrations in Suleimaniyah against corruption and abuses of power by local officials. In the course of 2011, Metro Centre noted 359 attacks on journalists and media, a hitherto unequalled number. This dropped in 2012 (132) and 2013 (193). The election campaigns and the tensions resulting from the competition between the parties have, however, increased these aggressions.

According to the Kurdish government, this drop in attacks is to be seen as paralleled by the increasingly deeper adoption of democratic values in society and an increasing tolerance. Thus the assistant Minister of the Interior explained to the CPJ that his Ministry had invited all the Western experts to come and train the police and secu-

rity officers on the way to behave towards journalists and that the diversity of publications in the Kurdish Region bore witness to its determination to encourage press freedom.

The CPJ recognises that hundreds of publications appear both printed and Internet as well as other media, however the dailies are dominated by the parties in office and often publish interview with leaders printed in full with flattering photos. The independent publications are only weekly or fortnightly. The televised also journals were also very dependent on the major parties until the state monopoly ended in 2011 with the appearance of Nalia, the first private radio and television channel.

The Internet networks are very active, with a number of Websites and very lively social networks like Facebook and Twitter resulting from rapid and high quality Internet connections that are, nevertheless fairly cheap. News broadcasts is therefore widely followed by the public and the debates and confrontations that do not find enough space in the traditional media take place on the Web.

“The newspapers could never play the role played by the social networks”, explained Hermin Lihony, chief editor of Rudaw (which is both an online paper and, recently also televised). He also pointed out that 85% of his paper’s audience comes from Facebook or Twitter. “This is beginning to change the attitude of the politi-

cal parties in every way. Now politicians have to think about people’s reactions before making a statement and how the social media will reflect it”.

While it is not impossible to investigate corruption and other sensitive subject, many journalists say they do some form of self-censoring, especially if their enquiries are aimed at officials and only express themselves in general terms — for example describing a government organ as being riddled with corruption without directly accusing the official responsible. This result is that the articles often are ineffective and remain vague.

For having failed to take such prudent measures — and this in ounce of the most tribal rural regions of Kurdistan, the Germiyan area — Kawa Garmiyani had not hesitated, in his paper *Rayel*, to implicate by name some local officials, which is called crossing the “red line” by Dana Assas, the editor of the paper *Awene*, for which Kawa Garmiyani also worked.

There is an article in Law 35/2007 that forbids the detention or harassing of journalist or the closing gown of papers. This is, in fact an extremely progressive legal measure compared with the general standards of press freedom in the Middle East. However, the restrictions to this freedom in the Constitution are rather vague and there lack of precision gives a wide margin for attacking a publication: *“inciting hatred”, “insulting or offending religious beliefs”, “disclos-*

ing matters of private life”. Many journalists have this been detained (in breach of the law) for *“espionage”, “deviating social standards”* and so are often subjected to fines.

In 2013 the Kurdish Parliament passed a law to guarantee public access to information. However journalists consider that the major problem is not the content of the laws but their application, because, in their opinion, the courts are not independent of the authorities in office.

The CPJ recommends, among other measures, that the KRG investigate and resolve the murders, not only of Kawa Garmiyani but also of Serdesht Osman, another Erbil-based journalist, assassinated in 2010, to provide more training and education to the judicial staff, and the police forces so that no journalist be illegally detained for his professional activities; to amend the press laws so that their content be more precise and less subject to abusive or arbitrary interpretation.

The CPJ also recommends that the political parties encourage open debate and criticism and not encourage violent acts against the press and that UNESCO work for carrying out a Plan of Action by the United Nations on the safety of journalists and the issue of impunity, in partnership with the KRG so as to develop and improve the legislation and the mechanisms for protecting journalists and guaranteeing freedom of expression and information.

CINEMA:

THE RELEASE OF HINER SALEEM’S FILM “MY SWEET PEPPERLAND” ATTRACTED A LOT OF ATTENTION

Hiner Saleem’s latest film, “My Sweet Pepperland” that was part of the official selection of the 2013 Cannes Festival in the “Un Certain Regard” section, was generally released on 9 April:

“At the meeting point of Iran, Iraq and Turkey, in a lost little village that is the hotbed of all kinds of trafficking, Baran, a police officer newly arrived is trying to ensure that the law is observed. This former fighter for Kurdish independence now has to

fight against Aziz Aga, the local big shot. He also meets Govend, the village schoolteacher, a young woman as beautiful as she is rebellious...”

“My Sweet Pepperland” is a “direct tribute to the Western” according

to its director. *"I think that Kurdistan today is like America at the time of the Westerns: oil is being found, roads and schools and infrastructures are being built and they are trying to ensuring that the law is applied"*.

While the four main characters are played by professional actors, including Golshifteh Farahani and Kokmaz Arslan, the rest are played by some inhabitants of Iraqi Kurdistan, where the film was shot.

It has been greatly praised by the critics. Hubert Lizé, in *Le Parisien*, says *"this grim action film in which humour softens the most dramatic situations has the inspiration of the best spaghetti Westerns. And charismatic heroes to whom one is attracted from the opening shots, as to magnificent lonesome cowboys"*. According to *La Croix*, *"a real pleasure for the*

spectators highlights every fresh encounter with Hiner Saleem, who, from one film to the next transforms the pain of exile and human absurdity into serious adventures and burlesque escapades".

In *Nouvel Obs*, Arnaud Schwartz considers that *"Hiner Saleem rediscovers the lode he mined in "Vodka Lemon" and "Kilometre Zero". He breaks with the severity that characterised his French films "On the Roofs of Paris" and "if you die, I'll kill you", both very successful films but commercial failures. So he lets himself go down another slope that is more natural for him and leads to a fantasy coloured by absurdity, like the scene of execution by hanging made impossible by inadequate materials. [My Sweet Pepper Land](#) is a Kurdish Western that against a magnificent countryside gives it more than its due (to [Sergio Leone](#), in particular) and to the beauty of [Golshifteh Farahani](#)"*.

In the opinion of the daily paper *Libération* *"My Sweet Pepperland plays with all the conventions and clichés, circumventing and exploiting them, returning to the eternal myth of the birth of a nation in the heart of a secret land, virtually neglected by the cinema"*.

Finally, according to *Télérama* *"this film-maker's tragic-comic signature has the gift of opening up hidden sores: behind the stylisation we perceive a youth stifled by the family and society. And there is... the Iranian actress Golshifteh Farahani, exiled by the mullahs and resonating in this rebellious role. Her scorching eyes and jet-black hair give her the beauty of a fairy tale. When her silhouette stands out against the mountains at dusk and the soft sound rises of the hang (a bewitching instrument that, oddly enough, was invented by Swiss hippies!) — then we really feel grace has descended. At least in Hiner Saleem's Kurdistan dreamland"*.

Les municipales turques confortent M. Erdogan

En dépit des affaires, l'AKP, le parti du premier ministre, a obtenu 45,5 % des voix à l'échelle nationale

Istanbul

Correspondance

L'adage « qui remporte Istanbul conquiert la Turquie » s'est une fois de plus vérifié. Le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamiste modéré) est resté maître de la mégapole de 15 millions d'habitants, où vote un Turc sur cinq. Et il a balayé les doutes sur l'état de sa popularité au niveau national, recueillant un large succès. A Istanbul, le maire sortant Kadir Topbas, 69 ans, a été reconduit avec 47,9 % des voix, contre 40 % à son principal adversaire Mustafa Sarigül (Parti républicain du peuple, CHP, centre gauche, laïque), dans ce qui était le principal enjeu local de ces municipales, dimanche 30 mars.

L'AKP garde la haute main sur le « grand Istanbul » malgré les manifestations de la place Taksim au printemps dernier et la fronde contre la politique de grands travaux de l'équipe au pouvoir, et malgré les soupçons de corruption et ceux sur l'existence d'un vaste système de malversations et de marchés publics truqués.

L'opposition n'a pas réussi à ravir aux proches de Recep Tayyip Erdogan cette mairie, où le premier ministre avait fait ses armes en politique entre 1994 et 1998. Même le maire de l'arrondissement conservateur de Fatih, Mustafa Demir, arrêté le 17 décembre et soupçonné d'avoir délivré des permis de construire frauduleux, a été confortablement réélu.

Mais c'est surtout par le score national que se mesure cette victoire pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui avait donné à ces municipales des allures de référendum. Avec 45,5 % des voix, en légère baisse par rapport aux dernières élections législatives (49,9 % en 2011), sa popularité s'est à peine érodée. Il améliore même son résultat de 2009 (38,8 %). Les affaires, la publication sur Internet d'écoutes le mettant en cause et les règlements de comptes qui l'opposent à la confrérie de l'imam Fethullah Gülen, ne semblent donc pas avoir affaibli



Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dans un bureau de vote d'Istanbul, dimanche 30 mars. EMRAH GUREL/AP

celui qui domine la scène politique turque depuis 2002.

Au balcon du siège de l'AKP, à Ankara, tard dans la nuit, il a célébré sa « grande victoire » contre le « statu quo » et « la défaite de la politique du montage » menée par ses adversaires. Il a promis de « faire payer » ceux qui, affirme-t-il, ont ourdi cette machination pour le faire tomber. « Nous les poursuivons jusque dans leur repaire. L'heure du nettoyage devant la justice est venue », a lancé le premier ministre. Ces élections, qui constituaient un test crucial pour M. Erdogan, l'auront conforté dans son bras de fer avec la justice et avec le mouvement Gülen. Mais elles ne devraient pas mettre fin à la crise politique qui déstabilise la Turquie depuis un an. D'autres scrutins se profilent dans les prochains mois : la présidentielle en août et des législatives, au plus tard en 2015.

En dépit des sérieux espoirs qu'elle fondait à Istanbul et Ankara, l'opposition n'est pas parvenue à rassembler au-delà de son électorat traditionnel. Le CHP réalise 27,9 % à l'échelle nationale. Son implantation reste forte dans l'Ouest et dans les régions côtières.

Il conserve son fief d'Izmir, la troisième ville turque, et gagne à Hatay, ville fortement marquée par la guerre en Syrie. Mais le CHP a échoué à s'étendre dans les grandes agglomérations. De son côté, le Parti de l'action nationaliste (MHP, ultranationaliste) stagne à 15,2 %. Le report des voix des sympathisants de la confrérie de Fethullah Gülen, qui s'étaient mobilisés pour faire battre l'AKP, n'a donc pas bouleversé les équilibres politiques. L'AKP conserve la grande majorité des grandes villes du pays : Istanbul, Bursa, Samsun.

Ankara, lundi matin, semblait pouvoir rester aux mains de Melih Gökçek, élu pour un cinquième mandat consécutif (44,7 %) après une âpre bataille face à Mansur Yavaş (CHP, 43,8 %). Ce dernier a dénoncé des fraudes de la part du maire sortant alors que le résultat final est demeuré incertain jusqu'aux derniers bulletins dépouillés au petit matin.

Dans le sud-est du pays, à majorité kurde, les électeurs ont, comme lors des précédents scrutins, soutenu le Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (pro-kurde, BDP), la vitrine politique de la guérilla du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan

(PKK). A Diyarbakir, il l'emporte avec près de 60 % grâce à la coprésidente du parti Gültan Kisanak. Il reprend à l'AKP Siirt — la ville natale d'Emine Erdogan, l'épouse du premier ministre — et Mardin.

En renforçant ses bastions, le mouvement kurde est en position favorable pour négocier avec le gouvernement. M. Erdogan souhaite relancer le processus de paix engagé entre Ankara et le PKK, qui est resté au point mort depuis de longs mois. Le BDP est solidement implanté le long de la frontière syrienne, alors que de l'autre côté, au « Kurdistan Rojava » (Kurdistan occidental), région du nord-est de la Syrie à majorité kurde, la mouvance pro-PKK a décrété l'autonomie. En revanche, la tentative de séduction des Kurdes dans l'ouest de la Turquie avec le HDP

(Parti pour la démocratie du peuple) n'a pas été couronnée de

En renforçant ses bastions, le mouvement kurde est en position favorable pour négocier avec le gouvernement

succès.

Rarement un vote en Turquie n'a autant été scruté et décortiqué, notamment sur les réseaux sociaux, malgré les interdictions qui frappent Twitter et YouTube. Signe de l'importance nationale donnée à ce vote, la participation a été très élevée, même si c'est généralement le cas en Turquie,

où le vote est obligatoire. A Istanbul, de longues files d'attente se sont formées devant les bureaux de vote.

La journée a été émaillée de nombreux incidents. Huit personnes ont été tuées, dont six à Hilvan dans la province d'Urfa, et des dizaines blessées dans des règlements de compte locaux, aux quatre coins du pays. Plusieurs centaines de cas d'irrégularités présumées ont fait l'objet de rapports. Des coupures d'électricité ont été rapportées dans 35 villes au moment du comptage. Des soupçons qui ne sont pas de nature, selon le haut conseil électoral, à modifier le résultat de ces élections. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

International New York Times APRIL 4, 2014

Turkey turns its back on the E.U.



Alan Cowell

LETTER FROM EUROPE

LONDON At the height of the Cold War, Turkey's great landmass cemented its place in the Western alliance, its huge conscript army deployed across the sweeping expanse of Anatolia to safeguard NATO's southeastern flank.

Even now, with crisis just across the Black Sea in Crimea and Ukraine, that same geography offers Western strategists an anchor in a troubled region stretching from the borders of Iran, Syria and Iraq to the far-flung outposts of the European Union.

A generation ago, it was Ankara's assumption that its central role in the region's geopolitics would translate into acceptance as a member of the prosperous European Union, now numbering 28 countries.

But that assumption has frayed. After months of increasingly authoritarian rule by an embattled Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the portals of

the club seem more than ever to be closing on Turkey. And paradoxically, Turkey's most recent elections may deepen its estrangement,

"It is becoming clear that Erdogan's Turkey does not belong to Europe."

raising questions not only about European readiness to embrace Turkey but also about Mr. Erdogan's interest in pursuing it. "It is becoming clear that Erdogan's Turkey does not belong to Europe," a prominent German politician, Andreas Scheuer, said after the Turkish leader accepted his party's victory in the municipal ballot on Sunday not just as a personal vindication but also a mandate for what an opponent called a "witch hunt" against his adversaries. "A country in which the government threatens its critics and tramples democratic values cannot belong to Europe," Mr. Scheuer said.

"What happens next will worry many Turks as they hear Erdogan vowing to get even with his critics and opponents," the columnist Simon Tisdall said in *The Guardian*. "That Turkey is now a deeply divided nation is only too clear. That Erdogan's future actions may serve to deepen those divisions is the great fear."

Since the creation of the modern state in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, Turkey has been caught in the overlapping dilemmas thrown into sharp relief by its geography. While it straddles Europe and Asia, only a small fraction of its soil lies west of the Bosphorus that divides the two continents. For all the boutiques and businesses of Istanbul that look west to Frankfurt and Milan, the country's distant east surveys a much rougher neighborhood.

The effort to accede to the European Union — haltingly underway since 2005 — pulls at one set of reflexes, while Mr. Erdogan's style tugs at another. Last

year, he deployed the police against protesters in Istanbul's Gezi Park. In December a major corruption scandal broke over his aides and his family. Just in recent weeks, his government has moved to block Twitter and YouTube — depicted as his enemies' tools in a campaign to besmirch him with faked evidence of malfeasance.

But the elections on Sunday showed something else. While Western-looking, secular, middle-class Turks are frequently hostile to him, Mr. Erdogan and his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party still command the political bedrock among the working class and in the countryside where Islam — Turkey's dominant faith — is strong.

The question of identity is not limited to Turkey. Divided among themselves over the very idea of Turkish membership of their largely Christian club, the Europeans find themselves caught between the Western values they demand of Turkish society and the realpolitik of a volatile region.

"We need Turkey as an important ally," said a German government foreign policy specialist, "but we can't observe with indifference developments in the country."

In an interview before the election, Fadi Hakura, a specialist in Turkish affairs at Chatham House, the policy research body in London, said there seemed to be little appetite in Turkey for the kind of reforms the European Union is demanding to create a more liberal, transparent and inclusive society. "The main concern now," he said, "seems to be to consolidate power, not promote reform."

Mr. Erdogan's uncompromising tone since the vote, Mr. Hakura said later, had merely strengthened that conviction.

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International New York Times

TUESDAY, APRIL 1, 2014

Local Turkish elections buoy the premier

ISTANBUL

Voters hand Erdogan and his Islamist-rooted party a major victory

BY TIM ARANGO
AND SEBNEM ARSU

Even as he faced sweeping antigovernment demonstrations last summer and a stinging corruption investigation that challenged his rule of Turkey, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan held close to the notion that voters had put him in office and would do so again.

On Sunday, voters delivered what appeared to be another resounding victory for his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P., in local elections that had taken on national importance as a referendum on Mr. Erdogan's 11 years in power.

The races were especially close in Istanbul and Ankara, where Mr. Erdogan's candidates won by a few points against the opposition Republican People's Party, or C.H.P., according to unofficial results. In Ankara, the capital, the party prepared on Monday to challenge the results in at least two districts, contending that vote counts were distorted after midnight Sunday.

The results are likely to embolden Mr. Erdogan to seek to extend his time in power, either by running for the presidency this year or by altering the rules of his party to run for a fourth term as prime minister.

"This nation has given a message to Turkey and to the world," Mr. Erdogan proclaimed in an emotional victory speech late Sunday in Ankara in front of thousands of supporters. "They said this nation will not bow, and Turkey will not be defeated."

In claiming victory, Mr. Erdogan, who has cast the protests and the corruption investigation as the work of foreign conspirators, also hinted at more turmoil to come for Turkey. He took direct aim at those he believes have been targeting him and his government: the followers of the Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, who lives in self-imposed exile in Pennsylvania and whose followers have occupied positions in the police and the judiciary and are said to be leading the corruption investigation.

In his speech, Mr. Erdogan repeatedly mentioned Pennsylvania and suggested that the government would forcefully target Mr. Gulen's network of

"I don't think the A.K.P. is perfect, but there is a future under their rule for my grandchildren."

supporters in Turkey, possibly with mass arrests.

"Tomorrow, there will be those who have to flee," he said. "I have personally made criminal complaints against some of them, and they may flee."

While official results had not been released by the time Mr. Erdogan claimed victory, preliminary results reported by news media outlets showed victories in Istanbul and a close race in Ankara — the two most important individual contests — as well as a nationwide plurality that exceeded the A.K.P.'s nearly 39 percent in the last local elections, in 2009.

The elections were for mayors and other local officials. Mr. Erdogan himself was not on a ballot, but he campaigned aggressively and framed the contest as a referendum on the corruption allegations and, more generally, on his time in power.

Turkey has become a place of distinct and competing national narratives, with seemingly little space for reconciliation. On one side is a prime minister, as much a class warrior as an Islamist, who enjoys the support of a religiously conservative base that represents nearly half the country and was once oppressed under a secular elite. On the other side are opponents of various stripes, including urban intellectuals, secular-minded Turks and nationalists — all of them united only in their opposition to Mr. Erdogan.

The C.H.P., a secular party founded by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey, sought to channel the grievances against Mr. Erdogan and expand its constituency in this election, but the results suggest an uncertain future for the prime minister's political opponents.

"This is the first time I've voted in local elections," said Alican Sapci, 62, who voted in Istanbul. "I'm voting for the A.K.P. because I'm terrified of what will happen if the C.H.P. came back to power. We lived like peasants under their rule, walking on streets cleaning rubbish, hiding our wives at home because they wear head scarves. I don't think the A.K.P. is perfect, but there is a future under their rule for my grandchildren."

Mr. Erdogan's opponents have increasingly come to resent what they regard as his authoritarian turn and the increased role of religion in politics under his government, not to mention the allegations of corruption.

Voting against Mr. Erdogan's party "is the first step toward getting rid of



corruption, reclaiming our freedoms and remembering our humanity," said Ali Terzi, 43, who voted in Ankara. "More importantly, it's a strong stance against the manipulation of religion."

For a country once celebrated as a bastion of stability in a chaotic region, Election Day was anything but. As early results were being reported by the news media, opposing candidates claimed victory and alleged manipulation.

As Mr. Erdogan has faced a well-spring of opposition to his rule — voiced angrily on the streets — and accusations of corruption, he has claimed democratic legitimacy because he has won elections, and he has held up his record of economic prosperity and improvements in services.

And even though he claimed victory in another election on Sunday, for many Turks, that was not enough.

"Building roads, parks and bridges is not everything," said Serhan Yilmaz, 33, who lives in Ankara.

As he spoke, his wife, Tugba Yilmaz, interjected with a familiar sentiment among secular Turks: "The A.K.P. has polarized the country. Now there is discrimination against women who do not wear the head scarf. They think of us as nonbelievers."

Tim Arango reported from Istanbul, and Sebnem Arsu from Ankara, Turkey. Ceylan Yeginsu contributed reporting.

Victoire d'Erdogan aux municipales: "Une personnification extrême du pouvoir"

www.lexpress.fr

propos recueillis par Catherine Gouëset

La large victoire aux élections municipales de l'AKP du Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, laisse augurer de nouvelles tensions dans un pays divisé par les polémiques et les scandales. L'analyse de Samim Akgönül, historien et enseignant-chercheur à l'université de Strasbourg.

A quoi ressemble la Turquie après ce scrutin?

Aujourd'hui, la Turquie se divise en trois parties assez distinctes. Une très grande majorité des villes est tenue par le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP). La fine bande côtière de l'ouest du pays (autour d'Izmir) reste aux mains du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP), le parti néo-kémaliste, nationaliste et souverainiste.

Le Kurdistan turc est désormais nettement dirigé par des maires kurdes du Parti pour la paix et la démocratie (BDP). Les villes kurdes qui étaient tenues par d'autres formations ont voté BDP.

Il y a également quelques poches remportées par le Mouvement pour l'action nationaliste (MHP), mais, avec 15% des voix, le parti d'extrême droite fait moins bien qu'attendu: les voix nationalistes ont été en partie captées par l'AKP et le CHP (à Ankara, mais aussi dans un certain nombre d'autres villes, le candidat CHP est un ancien du MHP).

La victoire de l'AKP n'est pas contestable?

Au vu des écarts entre les résultats de l'AKP et de ses adversaires, la victoire de l'AKP est indéniable. D'autant que le taux de participation a été très élevé (87%). Mais les institutions sont dans un tel état de tension que tout le monde soupçonne tout le monde.

Qu'est-ce qui explique la victoire du parti d'Erdogan, en dépit de la sévère crise qui secoue le pays depuis que les révélations de corruption s'accroissent?

A toutes les accusations déversées depuis trois mois sur la prévarication, le pourrissement de l'entourage du Premier ministre et son parti, Erdogan a répondu par des attaques, joué la dramatisation. Il a été jusqu'à parler de "guerre d'indépendance". Cette stratégie a payé. Il a galvanisé la population. On a désormais une personnification extrême du pouvoir, alors qu'on avait affaire à des élections municipales. On



Le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a promis de régler ses comptes avec ses ennemis après sa large victoire aux élections municipales, laissant augurer de nouvelles tensions dans un pays divisé par les polémiques et les scandales.

Reuters/Unit Bektas

peut dire qu'Erdogan est devenu le maire de toutes les villes de Turquie.

Le résultat des municipales relativise le poids politique attribué à la confrérie de Fetullah Gülen...

Le scrutin a montré que Gülen n'a pas de base politique. Il s'agit d'un mouvement élitiste, très infiltré dans l'appareil d'état, certes, mais peu ancré dans les catégories populaires du pays. Pour faire un raccourci, on peut dire qu'il n'y a pas de femmes au foyer, pas de fermiers gülenistes.

Erdogan est devenu le maire de toutes les villes de Turquie

On peut être sûr que l'épuration commencée par le gouvernement contre les gülenistes infiltrés dans les institutions va se poursuivre. Le gouvernement va sans doute s'attaquer maintenant aux associations proches de Gülen, comme la Fondation des écrivains et des journalistes, ou à certaines banques.

Quel autre enseignement tirez-vous de ce scrutin pour l'avenir?

Le BDP a mené campagne seul dans l'est du pays, les régions à majorité kurdes. Dans l'ouest, il a formé des coalitions avec des petits partis libéraux, des partis de gauche, des écologistes, des féministes etc. Mais contrairement aux attentes de beaucoup de "modernistes", ceux qui ne souhaitent voter ni pour l'AKP, ni pour les vieux partis (CHP, MHP) ces listes communes n'ont pas dépassé 6% des voix. Cela augure mal de nouvelles alliances en vue des législatives. Si ces listes communes avaient atteint 10% des suffrages, le BDP aurait pu se sentir encouragé à retenter l'ex-

périence. Mais le résultat du scrutin de dimanche risque de l'inciter à faire cavalier seul pour les prochains rendez-vous électoraux.

Justement, quelles peuvent être les conséquences de cette victoire sur les prochaines échéances électorales?

Les législatives étaient prévues pour 2015. Le très bon résultat de l'AKP aux municipales, en dépit de la crise politique, pourrait amener Erdogan à avancer les législatives en même temps que la présidentielle, en août prochain.

Reste à savoir si Erdogan se lancera dans la course présidentielle. Son ambition initiale était de changer la constitution pour instaurer un système présidentiel. Il lui a manqué quelques sièges, aux législatives de 2011, pour obtenir la majorité indispensable à cette réforme. Les 45% obtenus dimanche ne suffiraient pas à le faire élire dès le premier tour à un scrutin présidentiel -qui sera pour la première fois au suffrage universel. Erdogan pourrait peut-être décider de rester Premier ministre. Il sort tellement renforcé du bras de fer de ces derniers mois qu'il continuera à exercer le pouvoir réel, quelle que soit sa fonction.

Un renforcement du pouvoir qui a de quoi inquiéter...

Le niveau de tension très élevé que connaît le pays depuis le mois de décembre risque en tout cas d'aller crescendo dans la perspective de la présidentielle.

Certains libéraux ont cru que l'AKP serait porteur d'une démocratisation, qu'il avait pour ambition de réformer le système. On constate aujourd'hui que son idée était de s'emparer du système, qui reste identique.

□ □ □

Le Monde
Vendredi 4 avril 2014

Koweït : les fonds pour le djihad en Syrie s'épuisent

Les affrontements au sein de la rébellion et la radicalisation de certains groupes découragent les donateurs privés

Koweït
Envoyé spécial

La pancarte est plantée à l'entrée de la villa de Jamaan Herbash, un ancien député islamiste, qui habite un quartier résidentiel de Koweït City. Sur fond de photo d'Alep, elle appelle à soutenir la Liwa Al-Tawhid, l'une des principales brigades rebelles de la métropole du nord syrien. La collecte de fonds est parrainée par une dizaine de dignitaires religieux et d'hommes politiques dont le visage, invariablement barbu, apparaît en médaillons. En bas de la pancarte, des adresses et des numéros WhatsApp – une application de messagerie par Internet – sont mentionnés à l'intention des donateurs. Montant réclamé : 7 millions de dinars (18 millions d'euros).

« Les gens sont fatigués par cette guerre. Ils ne veulent pas financer des tueries fratricides »
Jamaan Herbash
ancien député islamiste

« On a lancé cette campagne au début de l'année, quand l'armée resserait son emprise sur Alep et que les combats ont éclaté entre les rebelles et Da'ech, raconte Jamaan Herbash, en référence au plus violent des groupes djihadistes opérant en Syrie. Mais pour l'heure, nous n'avons même pas reçu 500 000 dinars. Les gens sont fatigués par cette guerre qui n'en finit pas. Ils ne veulent pas financer des tueries fratricides. »

Dirigeant du Hadas, la branche locale des Frères musulmans, Jamaan Herbash reçoit dans son *diwaniyya*, ces vastes salons bordés de banquettes qui font office de quartier général des mouvements politiques au Koweït. Depuis le début du soulèvement syrien, en 2011, il a multiplié les appels à donations sur les réseaux sociaux, d'abord à des fins humani-

taires, puis très vite, à des fins militaires. S'il resté discret sur le montant qu'il a réussi à amasser, il assure que l'essentiel des fonds sont allés à la Liwa Al-Tawhid, un groupe islamiste modéré, affilié à l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), la branche de l'insurrection soutenue par les puissances occidentales et leurs alliés arabes.

A son instar, des dizaines de personnalités de l'opposition islamiste koweïtienne se sont transformées dans le courant dès l'année 2012 en financiers « free-lance » des combattants anti-Assad. Stimulés par les vidéos de combats téléchargées par les insurgés, les dons se sont mis à affluer, en provenance non seulement de citoyens locaux, mais aussi de leurs voisins du golfe arabo-persique. Un phénomène alimenté par la sauvagerie de la répression, mais aussi par des considérations religieuses. Une partie des contributeurs, en bons sunnites orthodoxes, juge impie le régime Assad qui est à dominante alaouite, un dérivé du chiisme.

Récoltés de la main à la main, lors de soirées spéciales organisées dans les *diwaniyya*, ou bien transférés sur des comptes koweïtiens, les fonds ont été acheminés jusqu'en Syrie, par des porteurs, via la frontière du Liban ou de la Turquie.

Selon un rapport du Brookings Doha Center, des centaines de millions de dollars, au moins, sont ainsi partis ces trois dernières années du Koweït vers les groupes armés syriens, profitant de la relative liberté d'expression qui règne dans l'émirat ainsi que du laxisme de la législation bancaire locale. Le montant de cette aide privée reste nettement inférieur aux versements étatiques, provenant du Qatar et de l'Arabie saoudite, les deux principaux pourvoyeurs en armes de la rébellion.

Mais la multiplicité des canaux et le pedigree de leurs responsables n'ont pas peu contribué à l'émiettement de la rébellion et à sa radicalisation. La plupart des argentiers koweïtiens sont en effet des salafistes, qui tendent à confondre djihad et révolution. Certains ne sont pas



A Raqqa (Syrie), quartier général du groupe djihadiste Da'ech, un panneau portant des versets du Coran enjoint aux femmes de porter le hijab (voile islamique). REUTERS

embarrassés de financer des groupes liés de près ou de loin à Al-Qaida, comme le Front Al-Nosra, Da'ech et Ahrar Al-Cham. « Des personnes se sont mises à soutenir les extrémistes, par inadvertance ou manque d'information, reconnaît Jamaan Herbash, réticent à accuser ses homologues. Avec 150 000 morts en trois ans, il fallait s'y attendre. Dans le chaos qui règne sur le terrain, les clivages entre groupes armés tendent à se brouiller. »

A l'été 2013, plusieurs cheikhs salafistes, emmenés par Shafi Al-Ajmi, un professeur de droit islamique à l'université de Koweït, ont levé de l'argent en vue d'une offensive sur le littoral syrien. Cette opération, conduite par Da'ech, Al-Nosra et Souqqour Al-Izz, a abouti au massacre d'environ 200 civils alaouites. Quelques semaines plus tôt, sur son compte Twitter, Shafi Al-Ajmi promettait d'« acheter ce qui est nécessaire pour expulser les Safavides », un terme péjoratif qui, dans le lexique salafiste, désigne les Iraniens et par extension les chiïtes. Un autre extrémiste, le cheikh Hajjaj

Al-Ajami, apparaissait en photo, il y a quelques mois, aux côtés de Abou Omar Al-Chechani, l'un des chefs militaires de Da'ech, dans le nord de la Syrie. Le mantra de ces boutefeux est une phrase attribuée au Prophète : « Celui qui aide un djihadiste recevra à son tour le titre de djihadiste. »

Mais l'ouverture en début d'année des hostilités contre Da'ech a bouleversé la donne. Les milliers de rebelles morts dans cette guerre intestine ont accéléré la

La plupart des argentiers koweïtiens sont des salafistes, qui tendent à confondre djihad et révolution

désaffection des donateurs. Les collecteurs proches de l'Armée syrienne libre, comme Jamaan Herbash, qui s'est rendu à quatre reprises dans la région d'Alep, avec des valises pleines de cash, ont dû renoncer à voyager en Syrie, pour des rai-

sons de sécurité. Sur Twitter, Shafi Al-Ajmi, soudainement rattrapé par la réalité, passe désormais son temps à vilipender Da'ech. « Il est très affecté par la discorde au sein de l'opposition, confie l'un de ses proches, sous couvert d'anonymat. Il a mis ses activités de financier en veilleuse. Il se concentre sur son travail universitaire. »

Le discrédit croissant qui frappe les organisations radicales opérant en Syrie a aussi incité les autorités koweïtiennes à durcir le ton. Sous la pression des Etats-Unis, une loi prohibant le financement d'organisations terroristes a été votée l'année dernière. L'Arabie saoudite s'est associée à ces pressions contre les adeptes du djihad en Syrie, désormais menacés de lourdes peines de prison. En dépit de leur popularité, certains financiers salafistes koweïtiens ont reçu des appels téléphoniques des services de sécurité, qui les ont à l'œil. L'ancien député Walid Al-Tabtabai s'est vu, par exemple, confisquer son passeport. « Au début du soulèvement, il était impossible pour le gouvernement d'endiquer ce phénomène, décrypte l'analyste koweïtien Ghanem Al-Najjar. L'émotion était trop forte. Maintenant, c'est beaucoup plus facile. L'opposition salafiste est dans l'embarras. »

Tous les circuits de financement des groupes djihadistes sont loin d'être coupés. Mais au Koweït comme sur le terrain syrien, Da'ech a perdu des points. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHÉ

Le repli des djihadistes de Da'ech ouvre la voie au gouvernement rebelle

DANS LA GUERRE au long cours qui les oppose depuis trois mois aux djihadistes de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (Da'ech), les rebelles syriens ont remporté la première manche. En butte à une hostilité quasi unanime, tant de la part des nationalistes de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) que de leurs cousins djihadistes du front Al-Nosra, les combattants de Da'ech ont dû se replier dans l'est du pays, à proximité de l'Irak, le berceau de leur mouvement, d'où ils tirent un appui logistique.

Outre Raqqa, leur quartier général, ils n'occupent plus que quelques localités dans les environs de Deir Es Zor et dans l'est de la province d'Alep, comme Al-Bab et Minbij, ainsi que deux postes-frontières avec la Turquie, Jarablous et Tal-Abyad. Le nord-ouest de la Syrie, qui a longtemps souffert de leurs exactions et de leurs prétentions hégémoniques, est désormais débarrassé de ces extrémistes, notamment la ville d'Alep.

« L'atmosphère a totalement changé, raconte par téléphone Adnan Hadad, un jeune journaliste syrien, qui fait la navette entre cette métropole et Gaziantep, en Turquie. Nous pouvons travailler à nouveau dans ces zones alors que du temps de Da'ech, nous ne pouvions même pas sortir nos caméras en public. De nombreux militants de l'opposition avaient été kidnappés. Tout le monde était terrifié. » Un diplomate occidental en lien avec les activistes syriens confirme cette

embellie. « Il y a plus de vie, plus de mouvement, les rebelles ont les coudées plus franches. Ils n'auraient pas pu lancer l'offensive actuellement en cours dans la province de Lattaquié s'ils étaient encore occupés avec Da'ech. »

La menace des barils de TNT

Cette « libération » est évidemment toute relative. Les localités



concernées restent sous la menace de l'aviation du régime, qui tous les jours ou presque, largue des barils de TNT sur Alep et ses alentours. Mais pour le gouvernement intérimaire, mis en place il y a un an par l'opposition, une opportunité s'est ouverte. L'équipe du premier ministre Ahmed To'meh a désormais la possibilité de prendre pied dans les territoires du nord et d'occuper le vide laissé par le départ de Da'ech. Ses membres viennent d'ailleurs d'emménager dans deux immeubles de Gaziantep, donnant un début de consistance à cette structure, qui en raison de tiraillements internes, est longtemps restée une coquille vide.

Grâce à des financements du Qatar et de la Turquie, une série de projets ont été lancés, destinés à améliorer le quotidien des habitants de ces régions dévastées par la guerre : reconstruction du moulin à blé d'Azaz, réparation du

réseau électrique de Saraqeb, livraison d'ambulances à Alep, etc. « Comme les puissances occidentales ne semblent pas vouloir nous livrer des missiles sol-air, le soutien au gouvernement intérimaire est la dernière carte qui leur reste à jouer, plaide Radwan Zia-deh, un conseiller d'Ahmed To'meh. Il faut remettre ces régions sur les rails du développement. Après l'échec des négociations de Genève, c'est la seule manière d'y apporter un peu de stabilité. »

La tâche est gigantesque. Le retrait de Da'ech ne suffit pas toujours à rendre les émissaires du gouvernement persona grata. « Pour réparer un réseau de télécommunications, il faut parler à dix brigades différentes, s'inquiète Adnan Hadad. Leurs chefs se comportent comme des seigneurs de guerre. Les progrès seront très lents. » ■

B.BA.

PRIME MINISTER ERDOGAN'S REVENGE

His ominous post-election speech threatens to punish his enemies.

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey got what he wanted from Sunday's elections for mayors and other local officials — a strong vote of confidence for his Islamist-rooted Justice and Development Party and its 11 years in power. While it's not surprising that Mr. Erdogan would use this result to solidify his rule and undermine critics, his response — pledging to make sure his political enemies pay a price — was deeply disturbing and undemocratic.

Mr. Erdogan long ago veered from his promises to deliver reforms that would make Turkey freer. He ruthlessly cracked down on antigovernment protests last summer, and has severely constrained free speech and the press in recent years. His postelection threats were particularly ominous, as he told thousands of supporters that his enemies will be "brought to account" and "we will enter their lair." His own name was not on the ballot but nationwide, his party drew about 45.6 percent of the vote, a big jump over the 2009 local elections when it polled 39 percent.

The bitterly fought campaign was dominated by a struggle between Mr. Erdogan and the Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, who lives in exile in Pennsylvania and had at one time been a political ally. Mr. Erdogan now accuses Mr. Gulen of using a network of followers in the

police and the judiciary to fabricate corruption allegations against him. Mr. Erdogan has disparaged his political adversaries as traitors, terrorists and an alliance of evil. In his postelection speech, he repeatedly mentioned Pennsylvania and suggested the government would take aim at Mr. Gulen's supporters, possibly with mass arrests.

This kind of response, especially in an electoral context, shows how far Mr. Erdogan has departed from democratic principles that allow dissent. Shaken by the extensive corruption investigation that has embroiled him and his family, he seems eager to seek revenge against opponents, even suggesting that the inquiry is the work of foreign conspirators. He has already acted aggressively against the Gulenists, purging thousands of police officers and hundreds of prosecutors.

The election undoubtedly strengthens Mr. Erdogan's hand to run for president later this year. But instead of defending himself against the corruption charges according to a legal procedure, Mr. Erdogan seems determined to crush anyone or anything who crosses him — a strategy that almost certainly guarantees more dangerous political polarization and instability in Turkey.

Le Monde

Dimanche 6 - Lundi 7 avril 2014

Turquie : les coups de menton de M. Erdogan

La vengeance plutôt que la main tendue, l'intolérance plutôt que le compromis avec l'adversaire. Vainqueur des récentes élections municipales, le premier ministre turc, Tayyip Recep Erdogan, n'a pas tardé à confirmer un tournant autoritaire de plus en plus inquiétant. C'est une mauvaise nouvelle pour la Turquie.

A peine quatre jours après le succès de son parti — la formation islamo-conservatrice AKP —, au scrutin de dimanche 30 mars,

Toute la « philosophie » politique du premier ministre est résumée dans cette attaque publique contre la plus haute instance judiciaire du pays.

L'élection municipale gagnée, qui était aussi un test de popularité pour M. Erdogan, celui-ci reprend sa lutte contre les magistrats, contre la presse, contre les réseaux sociaux (Twitter et YouTube), bref contre tous ceux qui ne se soumettent pas. Pour lui, la démocratie se résume aux élections, elle n'est pas l'instauration d'un Etat de droit, organisé autour de contre-pouvoirs destinés à équilibrer le pouvoir de l'exécutif.

Le discours postélectoral du premier ministre n'est pas de nature à apaiser le climat de polarisation politique que connaît le pays. L'Etat turc est le théâtre d'une bataille fratricide, notamment dans la justice et dans la police. Elle oppose, d'un côté, le camp de M. Erdogan, et, de

l'autre, celui de l'un de ses anciens associés de la mouvance islamique, la confrérie de l'imam Fethullah Gülen.

Le chef du gouvernement promet de poursuivre ses adversaires et de les réduire à néant. Il a prouvé ces derniers mois qu'il n'hésitait pas à chasser de leur poste des milliers de policiers et de magistrats soupçonnés d'avoir des sympathies pour l'imam Gülen.

M. Erdogan entend rester au pouvoir. A la tête du gouvernement depuis onze ans, il peut décider de se présenter à l'élection présidentielle de l'an prochain — après, si possible, avoir changé la Constitution pour faire du chef de l'Etat le chef de l'exécutif, ce qu'il n'est pas actuellement.

Il peut aussi choisir de solliciter un quatrième mandat de premier ministre en 2015 — après avoir, cette fois, obtenu une modification des règles internes à

l'AKP qui lui interdisent d'aller au-delà de trois mandats.

Il aurait tort de s'imaginer plus fort que jamais. L'AKP a obtenu le 30 mars 45% des suffrages, moins qu'au dernier scrutin législatif, moins que lors des deux derniers référendums constitutionnels. Divisée, l'opposition laïque a empoché, au total, 51% des voix.

Mais, plus important peut-être, M. Erdogan s'est définitivement aliéné, depuis deux ans, une partie des élites urbaines et de la jeunesse, toujours mobilisée. Cultivant une rhétorique de combat, il s'appuie plus que jamais sur une classe moyenne conservatrice, qu'il appelle volontiers « ma nation ».

Est-ce une base suffisante pour préparer le pays à l'avenir : redynamiser une économie qui a montré des signes de fragilité ; participer à la stabilisation d'un environnement régional tourmenté ; enfin, négocier la paix avec les Kurdes de Turquie ? Rien n'est moins sûr. Hélas. ■

ÉDITORIAL

M. Erdogan a contesté, jeudi 3 avril, la levée du blocage de Twitter ordonnée par la Cour constitutionnelle turque. « Nous nous y sommes conformés, mais je ne respecte pas ce jugement », a-t-il lancé, furieux que la Cour ait osé juger illégale l'interdiction de Twitter, qu'il avait décrétée il y a dix jours.

Gorran Leader: We Must Fight to Regain Disputed Territory instead of oil

www.basnews.com
Sulaimaniyah, 2 April 2014

The General Coordinator of the Gorran Movement has said that instead of fighting for oil and budget allocations, political efforts should be focused on regaining control of the Kurdistan Region's disputed areas.

During a speech in a local conference of the Gorran Movement, Nawshirwan Mustafa, the leader of Gorran (Change) Movement said: "I want to send a message to Erbil citizens that they have a historic responsibility on their shoulders, and that every reform in the Kurdistan Region starts from Erbil."

He continued, "I hope that Erbil citizens participate in the upcoming election wholeheartedly, and punish those political parties that are responsible for the current bad



situation in Iraqi Kurdistan."

Mustafa further said that he was disappointed that Halabja would not be entering this election as its own province. As leader of the Gorran Movement, he hoped that the Halabja would become an example of success and coexistence in the economic, social and political development of the Kurdistan

Region.

"We have made the candidate list only in Kirkuk," said Mustafa. "The Kurdish areas separated from the Kurdistan Region are the central places for the Gorran Movement, and are therefore very important to us. Instead of fighting for oil and budget allocations, we will fight to regain those areas for the Kurdistan Region."

He said that he wished for all citizens to participate in a peaceful election, and that the Kurdistan Region is now facing an historic test.

"The last election with all its deficits brought change to the political balance of the Kurdistan Region. We expected the peaceful exchange of political power in the Region. Until now that has not been done, therefore we should welcome the next election with a large turnout to punish those who obstructed the exchange of power," said Mustafa.

The next parliamentary and local elections in Iraq are to be held on April 30. They will be a milestone for Kurdish and Iraqi political parties and will shape the future of the country for the next four years. □

REUTERS

Turkey's Kurdish peace process key to Erdogan's presidential hopes

By Orhan Coskun and Gulsen Solaker - (Reuters)
ANKARA - April 3, 2014

PRIME MINISTER TAYYIP ERDOGAN will be banking on Kurdish support if he bids for Turkey's presidency in an August election and is likely to use his party's strong showing in local polls as a mandate to advance peace talks with Kurdish militants.

Erdogan's AK Party emerged well ahead of rivals in municipal elections on Sunday, increasing its share of the vote including in parts of the Kurdish-dominated southeast. The outcome has bolstered his hand in a peace process in which he has invested much political capital despite staunch nationalist opposition.

Erdogan has made no secret of his desire to run for Turkey's first directly-elected presidency in four months' time. But he could face a united front from opponents who fear his victory would exacerbate what they see as his growing authoritarianism.

Support from Kurds, Turkey's largest minority, accounting for around a fifth of the population, could see off that opposition and help give him the simple majority needed to win in a first round, Erdogan's advisers say.

"The local election results have brought him much closer to advancing the peace process and taking decisive steps. After this the process will accelerate, new concrete steps will be taken," a senior member of his office told Reuters.

"If Prime Minister Erdogan decides to be a candidate for the presidency, the Kurds will give him serious support."

Turkish officials launched peace talks with jailed Kurdish militant leader

Abdullah Ocalan in late 2012 with the aim of ending a conflict which has killed more than 40,000 people and hampered development in the mainly Kurdish southeast.

Advances in peacemaking could re-energize the European Union candidate nation to Brussels, critical of Erdogan's crackdown on street protests last summer, as well as moves including a block on Twitter as he battled a corruption scandal in the run-up to Sunday's elections.

The EU would find it hard to turn its back if Ankara made progress on one of its most pressing issues, diplomats said.

The AK Party won around 45 percent of the vote in Sunday's municipal elections, widely seen as a referendum on Erdogan's rule after last summer's protests and the graft scandal, while the pro-Kurdish BDP and an allied party took around 6 percent.

Time for Erdogan to decide on whether to launch a presidential bid is fast running out. Incumbent President Abdullah Gul, seen as a potential future prime minister should Erdogan win the presidency, expects a decision within weeks.

"This will become clear by the end of April or the start of May," the Hurriyet newspaper quoted him as telling reporters during a visit to Kuwait.

NO FOREGONE CONCLUSIONS

Whatever other reservations Turkey's Kurds may have about Erdogan, he is widely seen as the only modern leader strong enough to have advanced a peace process with militant Kurds long unthinkable in a country where nationalist sentiment runs deep.

Ocalan, jailed on the island of Imrali south of Istanbul, called a →

⇒ ceasefire in March last year and it has largely held. However, his Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants halted their withdrawal to bases in the mountains of northern Iraq in September in protest at what it saw as slow progress on reforms.

During its 11 years in power, the AK Party has pushed through reforms boosting Kurdish linguistic and cultural rights.

But Kurdish support for Erdogan's candidacy is not a foregone conclusion and the BDP and allied HDP party have not yet formally discussed the issue.

"If the government takes steps which satisfy the Kurds and meet their demands, the BDP and HDP may take significant steps in this regard. But for now it would not be right to say whether we support it or not," said senior BDP deputy Pervin Buldan.

She said her party would discuss the way forward with Ocalan himself in talks expected soon.

Buldan's party has presented a bill envisaging measures including the abolition of an anti-terror law which has been used against Kurdish activists, changes in the Turkish penal code and the release of detainees accused of links to the PKK.

HURDLES REMAIN

Truces have been declared and secret talks held with the PKK in the past, but expectations this time have been swelled by the openness

with which the process has been conducted. The path to disarmament and reintegration of militants in Turkish society nonetheless remains long.

Opposition to a closer marriage of convenience with Kurdish parties could undermine support for Erdogan among the more nationalist segments of his conservative support base.

"The BDP is not helping the AK Party as a goodwill gesture," said Hurriyet Daily News editor Murat Yetkin, noting the BDP has pledged to take steps towards building Kurdish autonomy in the provinces it controls following the elections.

The civil war in neighboring Syria, where a group aligned with the PKK wields considerable power much to the consternation of Ankara, could also hamper efforts to advance the process.

Disputes over some of Sunday's elections have also created a hurdle. The PKK decried what it said had been tampering with ballot boxes, the stealing of voting slips and the drafting in of soldiers and state employees to vote in mainly Kurdish areas.

"Our people's resistance against the anti-democratic, repressive and fascist attacks of the AKP is a legitimate one," it said in a statement, and its sympathizers would not recognize disputed mayors. The PKK warned of potential "reprisals". ◯



4 April 2014

Four Syrian Kurdish Groups Aim to Merge into One Party

4 / April / 2014
rudaw.net

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - Leaders of four Syrian Kurdish parties met in Erbil on Thursday in an effort to establish a united front to help move forward their struggle in Syria.

The party representatives said that the person to lead this new front should be based in and chosen among leaders already in Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava), rather than someone who is outside the country.

The move was to unite the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS), the Kurdistan Union Party and two factions of the Kurdistan Freedom Party (Azadi).

Around 620 members and representatives of these groups attended the meeting at Erbil's Saad Abdullah venue.

Though the media were kept out of the venue, Rudaw has learned that the former leaders of the four groups had been relieved of any leadership roles, and are to be replaced by new elected leaders.

The Kurdish areas of Syria have been largely under Kurdish control for the past two years and have remained largely neutral in the war between the opposition and the regime of Bashar Assad.

However, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) is currently the dominant Kurdish party in these areas. Other Kurdish groups, such as the four who



Syrian Kurdish women wave Kurdish flags. Photo: Rudaw

gathered in Erbil on Thursday, claim they are not allowed to have an active role in Rojava.

The decision at the Erbil meeting to have leaders of the new front and their offices on the ground in Rojava acknowledges PYD criticism blaming the smaller Kurdish groups themselves for staying in exile and yet wanting to have a say in the affairs of Rojava.

It is said that the four parties would merge under the KDPS, and 250 members of the conference intend to fill 51 leadership positions that the new party is set to have; 110 of the nominees are

among current senior leaders of these parties.

The Erbil meeting was not without some disagreements among party representatives. Some officials believed leaders of the new party should be elected by the members of the former groups than by the new congress. They also were opposed to the condition that the new leaders would be based in Rojava. □



Iraqi Kurds still deadlocked over new government

Iraqi Kurdish political parties remain in a stalemate over the formation of a new regional government, six months after parliamentary elections were held in Iraqi Kurdistan.



Author Wladimir van Wilgenburg
April 3, 2014
www.al-monitor.com

ERBIL, Iraq — The new government has still not been formed in Iraqi Kurdistan since the regional parliamentary elections were held Sept. 21, 2013. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) President Massoud Barzani insisted April 2 that the new cabinet would be formed before the national elections scheduled for April 30, but the deadlock will likely continue beyond that point.

But Amanj Abdullah of the Kurdish opposition party Gorran, which surprised many by finishing second in the September elections, told Al-Monitor it is unlikely that a regional government will be formed before Iraq's national elections. The frustration at the delayed process has been felt across the Iraqi Kurdish political spectrum.

"We are all disappointed that it has taken this long. But the fact that every political party wants to form the government makes the process more cumbersome and difficult to manage," Qubad Talabani, KRG minister for coordination and follow-up, told Al-Monitor. Qubad Talabani is the son of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, who remains hospitalized in Germany.

The elections changed the political landscape as a result of the electoral defeat of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), led by President Talabani. The party finished third in the regional elections.

The Gorran Party, campaigning on promises to reform the two-party-dominated Kurdish system, won 24 seats, while the PUK won 18. Barzani's Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which holds most key ministries — including oil, security and foreign affairs — won 38 seats.

Despite the electoral loss, the PUK still controls significant financial resources and security forces in the provinces of Kirkuk and Sulaimaniyah. Some also argue that Iran supports the PUK to maintain a position in the government, fearing the loss of influence in the KRG.

In the last elections, the ruling KDP and PUK ran on separate tickets for the first time. The PUK has been facing internal problems following Talabani's December 2012 stroke, and has been absent from the political scene since.

Now, all Kurdish parties want to form an inclusive government. This is a major difference from the 2009 elections, when Gorran chose to run in opposition and the PUK and KDP formed a government together. The PUK and KDP have traditionally dominated the government since the establishment of the KRG in 1992.

"It's always going to be difficult when you have five different political parties with five different beliefs trying to form a government," said Qubad Talabani, who is also a PUK candidate for deputy prime minister. "In previous years, some parties chose to be in opposition. Others chose to form a government. This time, everybody wants to be in."

Saadi Ahmad Pirra, a member of the PUK's political bureau, told Al-Monitor in Erbil that the formation of a government is difficult. "Before, it was easier, because PUK and KDP were on one list. They had an absolute majority. They could form a government without asking other parties to participate. Now, no one has an absolute majority. To form a new government, they need partners," he said.

Many have blamed Iranian and Turkish interference for the delay of the government's formation, but it seems the biggest problem is Gorran's



President of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government Massoud Barzani shows his ink-stained finger at a polling station in Erbil, Sept. 21, 2013. (photo by REUTERS/Azad Lashkari)

wish to control powerful ministries. The ruling parties are reluctant to hand over real power in the next administration.

Gorran is determined to hold the Interior Ministry, the Natural Resources Ministry or the National Security Council, which deals with intelligence and is currently led by Masrour Barzani, the son of President Barzani. Gorran says it wants to remove political party control over security and government institutions.

"We had a political platform during the elections: We are going to exercise power, and this is our platform for the upcoming cabinet. If we cannot materialize our objectives, we will not participate. Our main objective is strengthening citizenship," Gorran member Amanj Abdullah told Al-Monitor.

Gorran leader Nawshirwan Mustafa, a former deputy of Jalal Talabani, told the Kurdish News Network that his party "wants to be part of the political decisions of the KRG, which is the reason Gorran insists on holding the positions. If Gorran does not hold a share of those ministerial posts, how can it be part of the political decisions?"

The new opposition party fears it could lose votes in the future if it becomes part of the government without making any significant changes.

Abdullah suspects that the government formation is being delayed until after the national elections because the KDP wants to see if the PUK manages to hold its former stronghold in the province of Sulaimaniyah, where the PUK lost many votes to Gorran in September.

According to Pirra, it's not practical for Gorran to control the KRG's security ministries, which Gorran wants to reform from party militias into national security institutions.

"Gorran complains that the peshmerga forces, security forces and police forces are members of political parties. If they are members of other parties, how you can appoint a minister of another party? Security is a very sensitive issue and doesn't allow for any mistakes. And we also have a project to solve the problem of party security forces."

The KDP is also showing reluctance to hand the security ministries over to Gorran. "This is something we should take seriously, because the security of Kurdistan is not something we can compromise on," KDP spokesperson Jafaar Eminki told Al-Monitor.

"When we talk about the Ministry of Interior or peshmerga, it's not about an internal issue. It's about a regional issue," he added.

As the political deadlock persists, Iraqi Kurdistan is operating without a proper government. But it's better to form the right government than one bogged down in political bickering, according to Eminki. He said, "It might take time, but I believe it's better to take time than form a government that cannot carry out its work." ♦

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5 avril 2014

Les Kurdes syriens cherchent à s'unir



Un camp de réfugiés syriens à Erbil, dans la région du Kurdistan irakien, le 29 mars 2014. REUTERS/Stringer

Par RFI, avec notre envoyée spéciale à Erbil, Angélique Ferat
www.rfi.fr
5 avril 2014

Quatre partis kurdes syriens ont fusionné ce week-end lors d'un congrès à Erbil, dans la région du Kurdistan irakien, pour créer le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan syrien. Leur idée: essayer en Syrie de contrer la branche syrienne du PKK qui, dans les faits, contrôle le Kurdistan syrien.

Parti démocratique du Kurdistan syrien : l'expression « Kurdistan syrien » est là comme un symbole. Il y a une région kurde en Syrie et les congressistes veulent le faire reconnaître.

La réunion est organisée sous la houlette du président du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani.

C'est une tentative de reprendre la main. Car sur le terrain, c'est la branche locale du PKK - le PYD - qui contrôle la zone kurde en Syrie.

C'est simple, lorsque l'opposition syrienne a refusé de promettre une autonomie aux Kurdes, le PYD a négocié avec Bachar el-Assad. Pas de bombardements, pas ou peu d'arrestations, voilà ce que les Kurdes ont gagné. Et en novembre dernier, ils ont même déclaré l'autonomie.

Osman n'aime pas le PYD, il est depuis 8 mois dans un camp de réfugiés en Irak. Il vit sous une tente. Il a dû fuir son village situé en zone gazière. En août 2013, les islamistes ont attaqué pour prendre le contrôle de la production d'hydrocarbures.

Le PYD a résisté pour protéger son village. Mais pour ce réfugié, il faut trouver une solution pour les Kurdes avec le reste de l'opposition syrienne, pas en solo.

« L'union pour la protection du peuple, le PYD, ne représente pas tous les Kurdes, et donc il faut que les autres mouvements kurdes s'unissent. Dans mon village, par exemple, sur 286 familles, seulement une quinzaine étaient pour le PYD ».

Son voisin de tente, tient à ajouter une chose : « L'opposition syrienne n'a jamais rien voulu nous promettre. Est-ce qu'ils vont vraiment le faire maintenant ? » ♦



11 avril 2014

Les réfugiés kurdes syriens affluent au Kurdistan irakien



Des réfugiés kurdes syriens fuyant les violences, dans le nouveau camp près de la ville d'Erbil, au Kurdistan irakien, en août 2013. REUTERS/Thaier al-Sudani

Envoyée spéciale à Erbil, Angélique Ferat. 11 avril 2014
www.rfi.fr

Fuyant le régime de Damas ou les groupes rebelles, les Kurdes syriens arrivent de plus en plus nombreux au Kurdistan irakien, cette province autonome dans le nord de l'Irak. Près de 240 000 d'entre eux ont trouvé refuge dans les quelques dizaines de camps qui ont poussé autour d'Erbil et de Dohuk.

Beaucoup viennent de Hasaka ou Qamishli. Ils viennent des zones

kurdes de Syrie. Cette région n'a pas connu beaucoup de bombardements, mais il y a longtemps qu'il n'y a plus de travail, et donc la faim apparaît.

Les réfugiés racontent être partis tout simplement parce qu'ils ne pouvaient plus payer au marché les quelques denrées qu'on y trouve encore. Le Kurdistan syrien est sous le contrôle de PYD, l'équivalent du PKK. L'opposition syrienne a refusé depuis le début de la révolution de promettre une région autonome et des droits aux Kurdes. Alors, le PKK a passé une sorte de pacte avec Bachar el-Assad. Et dans les faits, il contrôle toute la région du nord-est.

Pour les milices islamistes nées de la révolution, les Kurdes sont alors devenus des ennemis. Pire, le PKK étant d'obédience communiste, ils sont des « non-croyants ».

Walid Jammo vivait dans un village kurde tout proche d'Alep jusqu'à ce qu'une milice de Daash ne prenne le contrôle de cette bourgade. « L'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIIL) et le Front al-Nosra disent que les Kurdes sont de mauvais musulmans. Ils nous ont menacés. Ils nous ont dit : " vous êtes des mécréants ". Je ne sais pas pourquoi ils disent ça. Les islamistes sont arrivés avec des tanks, ils nous ont dit que nous devions partir. Ils nous menaçaient, ils avaient des listes de noms, ils ont arrêté et exécuté des gens, ils ont égorgé des gens et ont exhibé des cadavres. »

Walid se dit heureux d'être dans ce petit camp de 3 000 personnes au Kurdistan irakien : « Ici, je peux parler le kurde. Je ne sais pas quand je rentrerai, mais ici, la peur, c'est fini. » ♦

La situation des droits de l'homme en Iran ne s'est pas améliorée avec Hassan Rohani

Dix mois après l'élection du président réformateur, les exécutions capitales se poursuivent et la répression des opposants n'a pas faibli

Reyhaneh Jabari avait 20 ans lorsqu'elle a donné un coup de couteau fatal à Morteza Sarbandi, qui essayait de la violer. La justice iranienne a confirmé, le 31 mars, sa condamnation à la peine capitale pour meurtre. Etudiante en graphisme, elle avait été embauchée par le médecin de 47 ans, marié et père de famille, pour décorer son nouveau cabinet. Lors de la visite des locaux, il avait tenté de la droguer et de la violer. Le drame s'est déroulé en 2008. Depuis, Reyhaneh est en prison. Sa famille ne lui a toujours pas annoncé que sa peine de mort par pendaison avait été confirmée. L'histoire de la jeune femme enflamme la Toile iranienne et indignes les militants des droits de l'homme, qui réclament une révision de cette peine « injuste » et sa libération.

L'élection du président modéré Hassan Rohani, en juin 2013, avait fait naître l'espoir d'une amélioration de la situation des droits de l'homme, malmenés par son prédécesseur, l'ultraconservateur Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013). Las, le bilan est décevant, au vu du nombre élevé de condamnations à mort et d'exécutions en 2013.

Selon le rapport annuel d'Amnesty International, publié le 27 mars, au moins 369 exécutions ont été recensées officiellement en 2013 et « plusieurs centaines d'autres ont été signalées par d'autres sources ». Ce chiffre, en nette augmentation – en 2012, il s'élevait à 314 –, place l'Iran au deuxième rang mondial après la Chine.

En octobre 2013, la pendaison collective de 16 prisonniers dans la province majoritairement sunnite du Sistan-Balouchistan (sud-est), où le chef de l'Etat avait réalisé son meilleur score électoral, a particulièrement choqué. Ces exécutions, survenues au lendemain de l'assassinat de 14 soldats iraniens par des « rebelles sunnites », sont apparues comme le fruit d'une véritable vengeance judiciaire.

Sans aller jusqu'à la peine de mort, la justice continue d'avoir la main lourde envers les voix dérangeantes. La jeune Maryam Shafipour a été condamnée, en mars, à sept ans de prison ferme, plus deux ans d'interdiction d'activités sur Internet pour « propagande contre le régime » et « participation à des rassemblements [en 2009, à la suite de la réélection contestée de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad] perturbant l'ordre public ».

« Espionnage »

Quant aux deux chefs de file de l'opposition, Mir Hossein Moussavi et Mehdi Karoubi, ils sont toujours assignés à résidence depuis février 2011, alors que M. Rohani avait évoqué pendant sa campagne la possibilité de libérer « ceux qui sont en résidence surveillée ». Leur retour à la liberté semble dépendre exclusivement du Guide suprême, Ali Khamenei, et l'arrivée au pouvoir du président Rohani n'a eu d'effet positif que sur leurs conditions de détention. Pour la première fois depuis 2011, Mehdi Karoubi a pu passer Norouz, le Nouvel An iranien, le 20 mars, avec sa famille. Et Mir Hossein Moussavi et sa femme, Zahra Rahnavard, retenue avec son mari, ont pu rendre visite à la mère de cette dernière, le 17 mars. Jusque-là, les seuls contacts autorisés du couple se limitaient aux visites hebdomadaires de leurs trois filles, dans la maison familiale. Quand elles n'étaient pas suspendues.

Certains partisans du président Rohani continuent à le défendre face aux critiques sur le manque de progrès en matière de droits de l'homme. Or, une affaire a mis en évidence les dérives du ministère du renseignement, pourtant sous l'autorité directe du président. De retour de Belgique, à l'été 2013, Hamid Babaie, un jeune thésard en économie, a été sollicité par ce ministère qui lui a demandé des

renseignements sur des Iraniens vivant en Belgique. A la suite de son refus, il a été arrêté et a passé trente-cinq jours en cellule d'isolement. L'étudiant a été condamné à six ans de prison ferme, plus quatre ans de prison en sursis, pour « espionnage » et « relations avec les Etats ennemis » au terme d'un procès qui n'a duré que dix minutes. Sa femme, Kobra Parsajou, a demandé au président Rohani, pour lequel le jeune couple a indiqué avoir voté, d'intervenir.

Malgré ce tableau plutôt sombre, le gouvernement d'Hassan Rohani a tout de même obtenu quelques petites avancées. La célèbre Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, condamnée d'abord à la lapidation pour adultère et complicité dans le meurtre de son mari, puis à dix ans de prison, a été graciée, le 18 mars. Autre motif de satisfaction : l'amnistie accordée à l'avocate et lauréate du prix Sakharov du Parlement européen pour les droits de l'homme, Nasrin Sotoudeh. Elle a été libérée de la prison d'Evin à Téhéran, en septembre 2013, ainsi qu'une dizaine d'autres prisonniers politiques. Cette militante des droits de l'homme, arrêtée en 2010 et condamnée à six ans de prison pour « propagande contre le régime » et « atteinte à la sûreté nationale », avait purgé la moitié de sa peine.

Depuis, très peu d'amnisties et de libérations ont été signalées chez les dissidents ou les représentants de minorités religieuses, comme les Bahaïs, nombreux en prison. Et rares sont ceux qui ont bénéficié de permissions de sortie temporaire à l'occasion du Nouvel An iranien. ■

GHAZAL GOLSHIRI



5 avril 2014

Début de campagne électorale pour les législatives en Irak



La campagne électorale en Irak s'affichait aussi sur les murs, Bagdad, le 3 avril 2014. REUTERS/Ahmed Saad

www.rfi.fr

Envoyée spéciale à Erbil, Angélique Ferat
7 avril 2014

Plus de 10 000 candidats sont dans la course et les mêmes partis sont en lice. Si ce n'est la petite liste d'Iyad Allaoui, il n'y a cette fois aucune liste non communautaire ou religieuse. La campagne démarre dans un contexte très tendu alors que le Premier ministre sortant Nouri al-Maliki a déjà annoncé vouloir rester à son poste.

Le dernier Parlement a un mauvais bilan. En quatre ans, il n'a voté

aucune loi importante et les institutions irakiennes sont bloquées par les désaccords entre les trois grandes communautés, kurdes, sunnites et chiïtes. L'envoyé spécial des Nations unies, Nicolai Mladenov, a déploré « cette campagne électorale qui divise les Irakiens ».

Une insécurité chronique

Depuis plus d'un an, les attentats sont en hausse. Près de 600 personnes sont mortes en mars dernier. Depuis le 1er janvier 2014, l'armée irakienne mène une campagne militaire dans une région purement sunnite à l'ouest du pays. Deux villes sont assiégées et certaines tribus ont pris les armes contre l'armée.

Nouri al-Maliki assure qu'il mène une campagne anti al-Qaïda mais beaucoup d'habitants parlent de règlement de compte politique anti-sunnite. De fait, les Irakiens craignent une nouvelle guerre civile.

Tensions avec les Kurdes

Le Premier ministre se dispute aussi avec les Kurdes au sujet du pétrole. Il refuse qu'Erbil, capitale de la province autonome du Kurdistan, vende son pétrole tout seul.

Les Kurdes ont soutenu Nouri al-Maliki pendant deux mandats. Mais, Gobad Talabani, le fils du président kurde d'Irak, Jalal Talabani, est réservé sur un futur soutien : « Nous ne sommes pas contents de la situation en Irak, le pays pourrait être en meilleure santé avec une meilleure direction. Mais, nous réviserons nos alliances et notre choix seulement après le résultat des urnes. »

En réalité, la crainte est que la campagne militaire contre Falluja et Ramadi profite au Premier ministre sortant. Nouri al-Maliki est présenté par beaucoup de médias comme le seul homme capable de tenir l'Irak. ♦

LE MAGHREB 7 avril 2014

Irak : Les Kurdes proposent d'exporter 100 000 b/j via les oléoducs de Bagdad

www.lemaghreb.com
7 avril 2014

La province autonome du Kurdistan irakien s'est engagée jeudi à exporter 100 000 barils de pétrole par jour à travers les oléoducs contrôlés par le gouvernement central pour tenter de résoudre l'impasse avec Bagdad.

Les autorités kurdes et le gouvernement irakien se livrent depuis plusieurs mois une bataille sur le contrôle des exportations de brut: Bagdad estime que le pétrole appartient au pays tout entier, tandis qu'Erbil veut traiter directement avec des compagnies pétrolières.

Dans un geste de bonne volonté, le gouvernement régional du Kurdistan (GRK) a pro-

posé de contribuer aux exportations de pétrole irakien par oléoduc afin de donner aux négociations (entre Bagdad et Erbil) les meilleures chances de succès, a annoncé cette autorité régionale dans un communiqué publié sur son site internet.

Le GRK n'a pas fixé de conditions préalables pour cette initiative, précise le texte.

En janvier, le gouvernement irakien avait menacé de boycotter les entreprises turques et d'annuler des contrats si du pétrole kurde était exporté à l'étranger via la Turquie sans son aval, après l'annonce d'un début d'acheminement de brut du Kurdistan irakien vers ce pays.

Un projet de contrat entre Ankara et le Kurdistan irakien prévoit notamment la construc-



tion d'un nouvel oléoduc d'une capacité de 300 000 barils par jour. Mais pour accentuer la pression, Bagdad a en partie coupé les fonds fédéraux à destination du Kurdistan, où certains fonctionnaires n'ont pas pu être payés dans les temps.

Outre le différend sur le pétrole, un conflit territorial oppose le gouvernement central au Kurdistan irakien, qui jouit d'une importante autonomie et

dispose de ses propres forces de sécurité, gouvernement et drapeau.

Selon des diplomates et des responsables, le conflit entre Bagdad et Erbil représente à long terme la menace la plus importante pour la stabilité de l'Irak, un pays pourtant déjà plongé dans une nouvelle vague de violences ayant fait au moins 2 000 morts cette année. □

Farida B.

Jihadist attack on Latakia raises fear of deeper sectarian warfare

Author Edward Dark

April 8, 2014

<http://www.al-monitor.com>

ALEPPO, Syria — Predictably, as soon as the battle for the strategic Qalamoun area in the mountainous regions between Syria and Lebanon drew to a close — with the regime gaining the upper hand — fresh fronts opened in this seemingly endless civil war. Their location, however, was quite unexpected. Most Syria observers and analysts expected to see the next big battle in southern Daraa province, the birthplace of the Syrian uprising and a stronghold of mainstream rebels backed by the West and regional powers. Crucially, this area is devoid of the radical Islamist groups that have dominated other parts of the war-torn country.

The shock came when a new front opened in Kassab in rural Latakia province, a stronghold of the Syrian regime largely composed of Alawites. Kassab itself was a predominantly Armenian resort town, and fear spread that the extremist Islamist factions that stormed the town might perpetrate genocide against the inhabitants. This fear was not entirely unfounded, as such violence would have been a repeat of the war crimes perpetrated the last time rebels launched an offensive into rural Latakia in August 2013, according to Human Rights Watch.

Importantly, the Syrian regime accuses Turkey of providing the logistical and military support the rebels need to take over the area. This fresh offensive raises already strained sectarian tensions in the country to a dangerous breaking point, as the city of Latakia has become home to hundreds of thousands of displaced Sunnis, especially from Aleppo, joining its native inhabitants of mixed Sunnis, Alawites and Christians. The danger is being taken seriously by both the regime, which has sent reinforcements of its best units to the area, and members of the opposition, with Michel Kilo condemning the Kassab offensive and ringing alarm bells.

Syrian National Coalition head Ahmad Jarba visited the front lines to maintain the appearance of relevance and to reiterate that the goal of the rebels was not ethnic cleansing, but rather fighting the regime. Such words would undoubtedly sound hollow to local residents, who heard much the same when Gen. Salim Idriss of the Free Syrian Army visited the Latakia front lines last August with the same message. Soon after, heinous massacres were committed against the Alawite community.

Latakia is a tinderbox, and the perils there are real and should not be understated. All-out sectarian warfare, ethnic cleansing and disintegration of the Syrian nation into sectarian enclaves are all real possibilities now. Such scenarios might actually be the purpose of some of the radical Islamist groups spearheading the current assault. They realize they cannot win the war and control the country outright, so the next best thing is to carve for themselves a Sunni state from the carcass of a dying country.

Inciting genocide would be the best way of achieving that result. Whether the regional and global powers backing these militants, or indeed the Syrian opposition, are aware of such plans is unclear. But if not, one has to wonder about the strategic rationale justifying such a large-scale military offensive into a sensitive area. Another equally important question is whether the recent direct Turkish involvement in the Syrian conflict was simply a ploy by the Turkish prime minister ahead of local elections, or heralded the beginning of a new phase in which Turkey became actively embroiled in its neighbor's war.

Another front that has heated up, although perhaps for different reasons, is Aleppo. After a succession of rapid military gains by regime and loyalist forces in and around the city, their campaign seemed to be stalled as resurgent Islamist rebel forces began their own offensive in late March.

After the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) withdrew from most of Aleppo province, consolidated its hold in al-Raqqa and concentrated its military effort into fighting the Kurds in Hasakah, the rebel groups in



Rebel fighters pray at the beach of al-Samra in Latakia province, near the town of Kassab, March 31, 2014. (photo by REUTERS)

Aleppo were given a reprieve and a chance to regroup. This lifting of ISIS pressure culminated in an unprecedented assault on the north-western entrance to the regime-held part of Aleppo, dominated by the infamous and powerful air force intelligence headquarters in the al-Zahra neighborhood. The fighting has been fierce and intense, with the sounds of explosions, rockets and missiles piercing the quiet spring nights, while the mostly Islamist rebels took over strategic buildings in the nearby Layramoun area. In the last couple of days, the rebels have also attacked in the northeast — at the Damascus highway — with their sights fixed on the large military academy that dominates that area. The attacks on the two fronts appear to be coordinated to pressure the regime in its most important bases and cut off the only lifeline to the west of the city via the Khanaser military road.

Needless to say, the flare-up in violence has taken a terrible toll on the city's civilian population, with both sides lobbing shells, missiles and rockets in blatant disregard for civilian lives and casualties. Meanwhile, activists have launched an online campaign called "#SaveAleppo," which has drawn considerable attention, mimicking the earlier "#SaveKassab" campaign by the Armenian diaspora. The Aleppo campaign aims to draw attention to the terrible carnage and destruction caused by the regime's use of barrel bombs, which a March 24 Human Rights Watch report describes in horrific detail. Although piling in comparison, the rebel strikes on regime-held west Aleppo have also resulted in a high number of casualties. The past 10 days have been particularly intense, with an average of 20 shells and missiles falling across most neighborhoods daily, killing and wounding dozens. On March 7 alone, rebel shelling on the Hamdanieh area killed 11 and wounded over 30, while on March 6, a shell fell on a relief agency center brimming with people, but failed to explode.

Once again, Aleppo seems stuck in this bewildering and horrendous paradox where each side targets civilians across the divide in tit-for-tat retaliation. The ones dying by the hundreds are all innocent. We, the residents of this godforsaken city, are paying the ultimate price for this futile madness.

All in all, it appears that the Syrian conflict is destined to remain in a bloody deadlock, just as that very stalemate spirals the country dangerously down the path of open sectarian violence. Right now, Syria is at one of the most volatile and dangerous stages in its bloody conflict, and a shift into genocidal free fall is a real possibility. ♦

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Future of Syria may be in decentralization

The regime may agree to local governance if it keeps control of the state's politics.



www.al-monitor.com
 Author Ibrahim Humeidi, April 9, 2014
 Al-Hayat (Pan Arab)

Officials from several Western capitals advised decision-makers in their own countries that the Syrian conflict is likely to continue for five to 10 years and that there must be medium- and long-term strategic policies, not just near-term policies.

According to available information, in recent weeks, political and security meetings between the opposition's allies and the "Friends of the Syrian People" group have intensified. Arab-regional-European-American meetings have been held in Washington, and so have meetings among European countries, and meetings between European countries and the United States. Senior security officials participated in those meetings. There have also been closed-door meetings for planning officials and for political experts in the Middle East to review policy on Syria.

The driving force of these meetings was the failure of two rounds of talks in Geneva between representatives from the regime and from the opposition's Syrian National Coalition. The two sides realized the fragility of the US-Russia understanding, which entailed no more than keeping the two Syrian delegations in Switzerland at an international conference to search for a solution to the Syrian crisis. Also, the tension between Moscow and Washington over Ukraine and the return of the Cold War atmosphere has harmed any fragile understanding on Syria. The slow implementation of the removal of Syria's chemical arsenal has raised questions in Western capitals, especially in Washington, about the success of the policy on Syria in the past three years.

President Barack Obama has faced criticism from Republicans, research centers and opinion-makers in Washington. A former national security adviser said the United States has spent about \$6 trillion after the 9/11 attack to "fight terrorism," and the result is Syria turning into a generator of terrorists rather than Afghanistan. In a closed session, another official said that if US policy doesn't change, one should expect "hundreds of bombings, such as the one in September, coming from the fertile lands in Syria."

The threat from extremists in Syria was the main factor behind the review of "Syrian policy." US and European security services have been following the increasing threat and numbers of jihadists returning from Syria. Intelligence pointed to strong signals that Western countries may be struck by a terrorist attack coming from Syria. Some officials said that terrorism is a threat to the internal security of Western countries and that Syria "has become a domestic problem."

The alarm has reached decision-makers, but they are split on how to respond. Some European countries are considering reopening security cooperation with the Syrian regime and unfreezing diplomatic representation, whether by accepting certain Syrian diplomats in European embassies or by sending diplomats to the Syrian capital, whether secretly or openly. Proponents of that option have unenthusiastically agreed to the "devil you know is better than the devil you don't know" policy as a solution to the regime-jihadists equation.

Other European countries have discussed the possibility of engaging with the regime and concluded that the "regime has lost legitimacy and will not be dealt with now." In this context, countries like France and Britain protested the official visit to Damascus by European Commission representative

Christian Berger because his visit gave the wrong signal to Damascus and had no European consensus.

European policy is divided. The Europeans agree on the risk of jihadists returning from Damascus. They discussed the possibility of opening channels with Damascus but are split over the decision. US officials have declared that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is a "magnet" for terrorists and is "attracting" jihadists to his country. They see the solution as a political settlement and a transitional phase that begins by forming a transitional government grouping the regime and the opposition, leading to the end of Assad's rule. But the problem, according to their opinion, is that the regime is not serious about negotiating. The second problem is that the regime is receiving full military, political, security and economic support from Moscow and Tehran, including support for the presidential elections in the next two months with the participation of President Assad. Also, the Iranian regime is encouraging Assad to make local arrangements in the Damascus countryside, where there are tight blockades around these areas.

Western officials see the equation as follows: Russia and Iran are providing full support for the regime, and Moscow may raise its support after the events of Ukraine. There are no indicators that Tehran's policy will change. The regime is regaining control over areas in the Damascus countryside and is linking them with the coast. It is also increasing its grip on Damascus and closing the supply corridors from Lebanon. The military opposition is divided in the north between moderates and Islamists and between Islamists and jihadists and between the northern and southern fronts. The political opposition is facing challenges. The terrorist threat in northern Syria is rising, while it is limited in the south, and there are indicators that it is expanding in the Golan Heights.

Accordingly, the policy in the coming period is expected to be about "harming, not ousting, the regime" and "changing the regime's calculations, not the regime itself" and "stopping the deterioration of the power balance but without changing the power balance" and "supporting the opposition to prevent a victory for the regime, not to secure a victory for the opposition." Some are predicting "a significant increase in the amount of weapons and a small increase in the quality of weapons," including anti-armor and anti-aircraft weapons.

The West thinks that whenever the regime feels that it has won and has regained control of a certain area, a battle should start somewhere else. At the same time, the opposition will not be allowed to achieve a resounding victory. A good example of this is the "coastal battle," which started days after the regime, supported by Hezbollah elements, recovered the strategic Qalamoun areas. In short, it is the policy of "holes in the barrel" — whenever a hole is closed, another hole is opened.

What does all this mean? It means that Syria is on the verge of a slow bleed and that the parties to the conflict — the Syrian regime and the opposition — are heading to a "war of attrition" amid a regional bleeding. A Western official said that Syria will be Iran's Vietnam, as Vietnam has bled America.

There will be a war of attrition between Hezbollah and Jabhat al-Nusra. The regime will not be allowed to fully collapse in all regions of Syria given the spread of the radical threat. Nor will the opposition and the moderates be allowed to be defeated. Thus, the regime's quest to regain full control of Syrian territory and turn the clock back to 2010 — if any Damascus official thinks that's possible — is nothing more than a mirage. A decisive "military resolution" is also a mirage. And if an oppositionist thinks that the time is ripe to reach the presidential palace in Damascus, that's also a mirage.

The West thinks that once the Syrian and regional parties exhaust themselves, there comes the season of political settlement emanating from the Geneva process, whose sponsors want to extend to a Geneva III conference. The settlement will be according to the division of Syria in the coming period: The regime will have complete control from Damascus to the coast through Homs. There will be areas outside the regime's control, but not under the absolute control of the opposition. There will be a large triangle of Kurdish influence in the north and northeast, with some areas a patchwork of influence of other opposition factions. Further, there will be warlords, a new economic and social class with political ambitions, militias and local leaders in the areas of the opposition and the regime. →

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At the same time, the central Syrian state will have ended, as it ended earlier in Iraq, Libya, Sudan and the Palestinian territories (because of the occupation). The Syrian solution and the social-political contract will be characterized by an increase in the influence of emerging local administrations and leaders and the disintegration of the centralized state. Some even talked about a Tehran-supported proposal by representatives of the regime in the areas of Damascus, whereby locals will manage their areas while politics is left for Damascus, the center.

The project of reorganizing destroyed neighborhoods in the outskirts of the capital could be part of a decentralized Syria. But for now, the

regime is holding on to all the totalitarian tools of propaganda, politics, security and military in the areas under its control as compensation for losing control in other places. But on the road to decentralization, Damascus will be a mirror of the political quotas and balances.

Regional countries and those with influence in Syria will support their allies on a sectarian, religious and ethnic basis. They also expect the Syrian border to no longer be sovereign regarding the flow of fighters and individuals or for cross-border operations and humanitarian assistance. The borders of Syria would be sacred only on paper, in political speeches and in ideological narratives. ♦



8 avril 2014

En Turquie, Erdogan promet de "liquider" ses ennemis

par Jonny Hogg et Gulsen Solaker
8 avril 2014 / Reuters

ANKARA - Recep Tayyip Erdogan a déclaré mardi qu'il disposait désormais, avec la large victoire de son parti aux élections municipales du 30 mars en Turquie, d'un mandat pour "liquider" ses ennemis cherchant à l'affaiblir via un scandale de corruption.

S'exprimant devant les parlementaires de son Parti de la Justice et du Développement (AKP), le Premier ministre turc a ajouté que les "traîtres" répandant des accusations de corruption et responsables de la mise sur écoute illégale de milliers de téléphones auraient à rendre des comptes. Il a prévenu qu'il s'attaquerait à leurs activités à l'étranger et à leurs sources de financement.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan soupçonne le prédicateur musulman Fethullah Gülen, son ancien allié désormais installé aux Etats-Unis, de fabriquer de toutes pièces un scandale de corruption par le biais de son réseau Hizmet, qui revendique des millions de disciples et jouit d'une influence au sein de la police et de l'appareil judiciaire.

Il accuse cette organisation de diriger un "Etat parallèle" ayant espionné des milliers de responsables depuis des années.

"Le 30 mars est le jour où la page de la tutelle a été tournée, où les monuments de l'orgueil ont été abattus et les privilèges (d'une élite) perdus pour toujours", a dit Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"La nation nous a donné un mandat pour la liquidation de l'Etat parallèle. Nous n'aurons pas la moindre hésitation. Nous n'oublierons jamais la trahison", a-t-il poursuivi.

Il a annoncé que son gouvernement s'attaquerait aux ramifications interna-



tionales du réseau et enquêterait sur tous "l'argent et les dons collectés illégalement".

Le réseau de Fethullah Gülen, également appelé Cemaat (la Communauté), est depuis des décennies le fer de lance de l'influence culturelle et du développement commercial de la Turquie à l'étranger, notamment depuis que l'AKP est parvenue au pouvoir en 2002.

Il affirme que le gouvernement turc exerce déjà des pressions sur des pays étrangers pour obtenir la fermeture sur leur territoire des écoles de Hizmet, vecteurs d'influence et de revenus importants pour le réseau.

Ce dernier récuse les accusations du Premier ministre selon lesquelles il est à l'origine, via ses relais dans la police et la justice, de l'enquête pour corruption visant l'entourage de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, des ministres et des hommes d'affaires proches du pouvoir.

AMBITION PRÉSIDENTIELLE

L'AKP, qui plonge ses racines dans l'islamisme, s'est appuyé sur Hizmet pour desserrer l'emprise de l'armée sur la vie politique turque. Recep Tayyip Erdogan présente désormais sa lutte contre le réseau de Fethullah Gülen comme une poursuite de la bataille contre toute forme

de tutelle sur les institutions.

"Ils répondront devant les tribunaux. Mais pas devant leurs tribunaux parallèles, ils répondront devant le tribunal du peuple", a lancé le Premier ministre.

Depuis que les premières accusations de corruption ont fait surface en décembre, le gouvernement turc a limogé ou muté des milliers de policiers et renforcé son contrôle de l'appareil judiciaire et d'internet, via lequel ont été diffusés des enregistrements jugés compromettants pour le pouvoir.

L'accès à Twitter a été bloqué le 21 mars mais l'autorité de régulation des télécommunications l'a rétabli deux semaines plus tard à la suite d'une décision de la Cour constitutionnelle. Cette dernière a jugé que l'interdiction de Twitter portait atteinte à la liberté d'expression.

"Le jugement de la Cour constitutionnelle sur Twitter n'a pas servi la justice. Ce jugement devrait être corrigé", a dit Recep Tayyip Erdogan devant les élus de l'AKP.

La Turquie est plongée dans une intense période électorale. Après les municipales, un scrutin présidentiel est prévu en août avant des législatives en 2015.

L'élection présidentielle sera marquée par un changement institutionnel puisque le prochain chef de l'Etat ne sera pas élu par le Parlement mais directement par les citoyens turcs.

Après trois mandats de Premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan dissimule à peine son intention de se présenter à ce scrutin présidentiel. Il considère que le changement de scrutin va renforcer le statut du président, dont le rôle était jusqu'à présent essentiellement honorifique.

"Le président sera élu par le peuple pour la première fois, en ce sens c'est important", a-t-il dit dans une interview publiée mardi par le journal Sabah.

"Les responsabilités seront différentes après cette élection. Il ne s'agira pas d'un président pour le protocole, mais d'un président qui sue, se démène et travaille dur", a-t-il ajouté. □

TURQUIE-SYRIE

LES KURDES DESSINENT
LEUR PAYS

Recep Tayyip Erdogan est l'arbre turc qui cache la forêt kurde. Avec 45% des suffrages à l'échelle nationale, le parti islamo-conservateur du Premier ministre, l'AKP, a largement remporté les élections locales qui se sont déroulées le 30 mars. Mais le sud-est du pays a donné ses voix au Parti pour la Paix et la Démocratie (BDP), vitrine politique de la guérilla kurde du PKK. La formation pro-kurde détient désormais 11 des 81 provinces turques, notamment celles limitrophes avec l'Iran et le Kurdistan irakien. Elle étend également son influence sur une bonne partie de la frontière avec la Syrie. Une continuité territoriale politique se



Manifestant du PKK lors de la Fête du Printemps

concrétise donc entre le Kurdistan du Nord - situé en Turquie - et Rojava, le Kurdistan de l'Ouest. Les zones kurdes de Syrie, qui ont proclamé leur autonomie par rapport à Damas en 2012, sont administrées par la branche syrienne du PKK. Ce pays kurde est le cauchemar d'Ankara, qui cherche à garder le contrôle sur la région. Le parti d'Erdogan revendique ainsi la victoire sur Ceylanpinar, ville passoire pour les djihadistes qui vont combattre en Syrie. Mais les Kurdes dénoncent une fraude massive. Et les forces spéciales turques quadrillent les rues où toute manifestation est interdite.

LAURE MARCHAND

♥♥ My Sweet
Pepper Land

DE HINER SALEEM

Thriller franco-allemand-kurde.

Avec Golshifteh Farahani, Korkmaz Arslan,
Suat Usta. 1h34.



Des personnages touchants.

Ça se passe au bout du monde, quelque part au Kurdistan, dans la montagne. Un jeune officier de police, à peine nommé, tente de mettre un peu d'ordre. Pas facile : les

traditions, le système des clans, des habitants arriérés, autant d'obstacles. En plus, il tombe amoureux de Govend, fille d'un boss local... Hiner Saleem, après « Vodka Lemon » (2003) et « Si tu meurs, je te tue » (2010), compose un récit simple avec, en toile de fond, la conception (figée) de l'honneur : une femme n'est pas libre de son choix. Le ton est celui d'une comédie absurde annonçant le drame. La mise en scène est simple, le paysage, grandiose, les personnages, touchants. Saleem est le Giono kurde. F.F.



L'OBSERVATEUR DU MONDE

Syrie : l'arme
de la faim

PAR RENÉ BACKMANN

Alors que la guerre en Syrie est entrée dans sa quatrième année et que d'autres crises sur la scène internationale semblent l'éclipser, le secrétaire général de l'ONU Ban Ki-moon vient de remettre au Conseil de Sécurité un rapport accablant pour le régime syrien et certains de ses ennemis. Selon ce document, daté du 24 mars, le gouvernement de Damas mais aussi les djihadistes de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL) violent ouvertement la résolution 2139 du Conseil de Sécurité sur l'accès à l'aide humanitaire. Adopté le 22 février dernier, ce texte demandait la levée « du siège des zones peuplées » et exigeait que « toutes les parties, en particulier les autorités syriennes, autorisent immédiatement un accès humanitaire rapide, sûr et sans entrave aux organismes humanitaires des Nations unies et à leurs partenaires, y compris à travers les lignes de conflit et à travers les frontières des pays voisins ». Destiné à faire le point sur l'application de cette résolution, le rapport de Ban Ki-moon démontre, exemples à l'appui, qu'elle est bafouée jour après jour et que Damas n'hésite pas à user de l'arme de la faim. Du côté du régime, les tirs de mortiers, les pilonnages d'artillerie, les frappes aériennes - y compris les largages de barils d'explosifs - sur les zones peuplées n'ont jamais cessé. Du côté de la rébellion, le recours aux véhicules piégés et aux attentats suicides se poursuit également. Les responsables en sont le Front Al-Nosra et surtout l'EIL. Alors que 175 000 personnes sont assiégées par l'armée du régime et 45 000 par les groupes de l'opposition, aucun cessez-le-feu n'a pu être négocié, depuis février, pour leur porter secours. Damas multiplie les entraves sécuritaires et bureaucratiques à l'aide humanitaire et s'oppose, notamment, au passage des convois d'aide par les postes-frontières du Nord qu'il ne contrôle pas. Erigé en « ligne rouge » par Damas, ce refus oblige l'ONU et les ONG spécialisées à des navettes aériennes ou de longs détours routiers par le Liban ou la Jordanie. Un seul convoi a été autorisé, pour la première fois depuis trois ans, à franchir la frontière turque... trois jours avant l'examen du rapport par l'ONU. Dans les zones tenues par l'opposition, le fanatisme de l'EIL, les risques d'enlèvement, le harcèlement et les combats entre les groupes djihadistes et l'Armée syrienne libre ont « compliqué l'acheminement de l'aide en coupant des routes essentielles ». Alors que la guerre a déjà fait 150 000 morts, 600 000 blessés et 9,1 millions de réfugiés ou de déplacés, l'intransigeance de Damas, fort du soutien résolu de Moscou, et les affrontements au sein de la rébellion, ne laissent entrevoir aucune issue acceptable. R. B.

Cinéma | à l'affiche

Western oriental

Subtil mélange de drôlerie et de drame, « My Sweet Pepper Land », le dernier film de Hiner Saleem, raconte l'histoire d'amour d'un shérif kurde et d'une institutrice villageoise.

« My Sweet Pepper Land », de Hiner Saleem



TéléObs. – « My Sweet Pepper Land » s'inspire-t-il d'événements réels ou est-ce une pure fiction ?

Hiner Saleem. – C'est un mélange des deux. Depuis la chute de Saddam Hussein et la reconnaissance par la Constitution irakienne du Kurdistan irakien, tout est à construire : des routes, des écoles, des hôpitaux... Il faut aussi imposer un Etat de droit. Faire respecter la loi, c'est la mission de Baran, le personnage principal de mon film. En visitant le pays, avant de rédiger mon scénario, je me disais qu'il m'évoquait l'Amérique des westerns, où le shérif doit faire régner l'ordre. Je prenais des notes, j'observais.

La première scène, où les édiles tentent de pendre un condamné à mort, est comique et horrible...

Elle s'inspire d'une situation réelle. Lorsque le Kurdistan a obtenu son autonomie, rien n'était préparé pour faire face à une condamnation. Il n'y avait pas de prison, aucun endroit où détenir un prisonnier. Quant à organiser une pendaison, personne ne possédait le mode d'emploi. Les édiles ont essayé avec une corde, qui a cassé. Puis avec une potence de fortune, qui s'est écroulée, etc. Finalement, le condamné a été tué à la va-comme-je-te-pousse...

L'anecdote donne une dimension absurde à tout le film...

C'est toujours comme ça : au milieu d'un événement tragique, il y a un grain de comédie. Ainsi, je me souviens de cette vieille dame, en 2003, qui a entendu Saddam Hussein dire qu'il allait gazer les Kurdes en les bombardant. Tout le monde s'est précipité dans les magasins pour acheter des rouleaux de plastique afin d'isoler les portes et les fenêtres. Cette



vieille dame a dû emprunter 20 dollars pour le faire. Puis, constatant que rien ne se passait, elle a simplement remarqué : « *Quand je pense que je me suis endettée, et que Saddam n'a même pas bombardé !* »

Comment êtes-vous devenu cinéaste ? Vers 6 ou 7 ans, mon père m'a offert un livre de poèmes kurdes, avec des illustrations. Celles-ci m'ont plu. Je me suis dit : « *Je vais faire ça.* » Découvrir qu'il était possible de devenir peintre, pour moi, c'était comme découvrir l'existence de Dieu. Nous vivions alors dans les montagnes où mon père était maquisard – chez les Kurdes, c'est un état qu'on se transmet de génération en génération. Plus tard, quand nous sommes arrivés en ville, j'ai vu un poste de télévision : l'image bougeait, il y avait de la musique, miracle ! Je suis resté cloué devant pendant trois ou quatre jours, j'étais ivre de ravissement. Je ne comprenais rien à ce qui se disait : les émissions étaient en arabe et à la gloire du panarabisme et de Saddam Hussein. J'ai pensé : « Je dois faire parler cette boîte en kurde. » J'avais 10 ans.

Comment avez-vous sauté le pas ? La peinture, que je pratiquais, ne me permettait pas de relater ce qui se passait dans mon pays. J'ai réussi

Golshifteh Farahani et Kormaz Arslan, dans le Kurdistan irakien.

à me procurer une caméra et, en 1991, j'ai tourné un documentaire – « Un bout de frontière » – que je n'ai pas pu terminer à cause de la guerre qui faisait rage. Mais, quoique inachevé, le film a été présenté à Venise. A partir de là, j'ai pu rassembler les fonds nécessaires pour tourner mon premier long-métrage, « Vive la mariée... et la libération du Kurdistan ».

Depuis vos débuts, vous semblez très attaché à la dénonciation de la condition féminine au Kurdistan...

Mon pays n'est entré que très récemment dans l'ère moderne. Nous faisons des progrès dans tous les domaines – justice, société, éducation, etc. Mais les femmes, elles, sont maintenues en état d'arriération. C'est une honte. Govend, la jeune femme du film, n'est pas libre d'aimer l'homme qu'elle a choisi. Les traditions s'y opposent. L'honneur s'y oppose. Mais, comme le dit Baran, le policier, à son père : « *Tu ne sais même pas ce que le mot honneur veut dire.* » **Vous faites des films pour changer les mentalités ?**

Pourquoi pas ? Mon père avait un fusil. Moi, j'ai une caméra. Chacun sa façon d'être maquisard.

PROPOS RECUEILLIS PAR FRANÇOIS FORESTIER



REPÈRES

- 1964.** Naissance à Acra, dans le Kurdistan irakien.
- 1998.** « Vive la mariée... et la libération du Kurdistan ».
- 2004.** « Vodka Lemon ».
- 2007.** « Dol ou la vallée des tambours » ; « les Toits de Paris ».
- 2011.** « Si tu meurs, je te tue ».

L'achat de pétrole iranien par la Russie complique les négociations sur le nucléaire

Téhéran tenterait de vendre à Moscou jusqu'à 500 000 barils par jour

Moscou
Correspondante

Pour la troisième fois depuis le début de l'année, l'Iran et les puissances mondiales (« 5+1 », soit la Chine, les Etats-Unis, la France, la Grande-Bretagne, la Russie, plus l'Allemagne) se sont retrouvés à Genève, mardi 8 avril, pour une nouvelle session de négociations autour du programme nucléaire iranien.

L'accord final pourrait intervenir dès cet été, mettant fin à une décennie de sanctions et de confrontation. Les mesures qui étranglent l'économie iranienne seraient alors définitivement levées en échange de garanties que l'Iran ne cherche pas à se doter de l'arme nucléaire sous couvert d'un programme civil.

Le coup de froid survenu entre Washington et Moscou du fait de la crise ukrainienne ne semble guère avoir entamé la volonté d'aboutir à un accord, mais un grain de sable

vient compliquer les négociations nucléaires en cours.

Depuis des mois, Moscou discute avec Téhéran d'un éventuel accord « pétrole contre marchandises » d'une valeur de 20 milliards de dollars (14,5 milliards d'euros). La Russie s'approprierait à acheter jusqu'à 500 000 barils de pétrole iranien par jour, en échange de la fourniture de marchandises russes.

En février, Mehdi Sanaei, l'ambassadeur de l'Iran à Moscou, avait confirmé l'existence de ces négociations. Elles portent, selon lui, sur « un ensemble complet de questions économiques, de la banque à l'énergie » prévoyant notamment « la livraison de pétrole iranien » à la Russie, avide de renforcer ses livraisons d'or noir à la Chine. « L'Iran pourrait consacrer une partie des fonds à la construction par des compagnies russes d'un deuxième réacteur de la centrale de Bouchehr », a confié le diplomate dans un entretien avec le quotidien économique russe *Kommersant*, le 17 février.

Soupçonnée par les Occidentaux de chercher à se doter de l'arme nucléaire, la République islamique, a accepté en novembre 2013 de geler une partie de son programme en échange d'une levée partielle et provisoire des sanctions.

La perspective de ce troc irrite Washington. L'Iran a certes le droit d'exporter 1 million de barils par jour depuis la levée partielle des sanctions, et ce jusqu'en juillet, mais la Russie ne figure pas sur la liste des clients (Chine, Inde, Japon, Corée du Sud, Taïwan, Turquie)

autorisés à acheter ce brut.

Si Moscou venait à s'entendre commercialement avec Téhéran avant la fin des pourparlers de Genève, « l'administration doit être prête à restaurer les sanctions », ont prévenu les sénateurs américains Bob Menendez (démocrate) et Mark Kirk (républicain) dans une lettre adressée lundi 7 avril au président Barack Obama.

Pour le moment, l'accord de troc est loin d'avoir été finalisé. « Il n'y a pas encore d'accord, mais nous sommes en contact avec les Russes », explique un haut responsable de la diplomatie iranienne. « Ce n'est pas nouveau. Les Américains cherchent à intimider tout le monde, la France comprise, mais il n'est pas illégal de faire des affaires avec l'Iran. Les lois internationales, même si nous contestons les résolutions du Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, ne interdisent pas, contrairement aux sanctions européennes et américaines, qui n'ont, à nos yeux, aucune légalité. »

L'attitude russe sera révélatrice du vecteur choisi par Vladimir Poutine en politique étrangère. Avant l'annexion de la Crimée, le Kremlin donnait la priorité à l'accord final de Genève plutôt qu'à son négoce

La Russie ne figure pas sur la liste des clients autorisés à acheter le brut iranien

« pétrole contre marchandises » avec l'Iran. Qu'en sera-t-il désormais ? Poussives, les négociations commerciales avec l'Iran incluraient, selon les experts, l'entreprise pétrolière d'Etat Rosneft – la major numéro un – ainsi que Rosneft – le champion des ventes d'armes. Mais aux dernières nouvelles, la vente du pétrole iranien ne devrait plus se faire par Rosneft mais via une compagnie de négoce enregistrée en Russie, ce qui limiterait les moyens de pression de la communauté internationale.

Que va faire la Russie, grande exportatrice de brut, de ce pétrole ? Pour le vendre à la Chine se pose la question du transport. Les gisements iraniens étant situés loin de la Caspienne, il faudra l'acheminer jusque-là, or les infrastructures de transport de brut font cruellement défaut sur cette mer fermée partagée entre la Russie, l'Iran et trois autres pays (Kazakhstan, Turkménistan, Azerbaïdjan). ■

MARIE JÉGO

(AVEC CHRISTOPHE AYAD)

International New York Times APRIL 14, 2014

Gas attack on civilians is reported in Syria

BEIRUT, LEBANON

BY ANNE BARNARD
AND BEN HUBBARD

Syrian state television and antigovernment activists reported over the weekend that poison gas had been used in a rebel-held village in the west-central province of Hama, with each side blaming the other for an attack they both said sickened more than 100 people.

The attack took place on Friday evening in the village of Kfar Zeita, sending streams of choking patients, including children, to poorly equipped field hospitals, according to local medics and videos posted online. Opposition activists said government helicopters had dropped improvised bombs on the village, covering it with a thick smoke that smelled of chlorine.

While the opposition reported the attack soon after it happened, Syrian state television first mentioned it on Saturday in an urgent news banner during a broadcast. It blamed the Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, for the attack, adding that two people were killed and that more than 100 were affected by the gas. A subsequent banner announcement said the Nusra Front was preparing two more chemical attacks. It was the first time since last year that both sides agreed that toxic weapons had been used. On Aug. 21, 2013, sarin

gas attacks in suburbs of Damascus killed hundreds and led President Obama to threaten airstrikes on Syrian government targets. The strikes were averted by a deal to dispose of Syria's chemical weapons stockpiles. Western officials say there is clear evidence that the government carried out the August strikes, while the government blames insurgents.

On Sunday, Samantha Power, the United States ambassador to the United Nations, said the Obama administration was looking into the most recent report.

"We are trying to run this down," she said on the ABC News program "This Week." "So far, it's unsubstantiated."

As to whether confirmation of the use of chemical weapons would prompt a military reprisal from the United States, she said: "Well, I'm not going to get ahead of the president. But the president has made very clear how alarming he finds chemical weapons use, how

outrageous he found it. That's why he put the credible threat of military force on the table."

Allegations of a new attack carry high stakes. If the government used toxic arms now, that would suggest that it felt it could act with impunity because of international reluctance to punish it militarily. Since the Aug. 21 episode, government tactics like starving rebel areas and bombing residential neighborhoods have continued unabated, killing many more people than chemical weapons

have. But the killings have produced little international response beyond a United Nations Security Council resolution calling for an end to the violence and for increased access for groups providing humanitarian aid.

In one video posted online from Kafr Zeita on Saturday, a man walking over rubble from a recent bombing shouted at the activist documenting the destruction: "There is no point in filming! No one responds!"

Le Monde

Jeudi 17 avril 2014

Trois journalistes de la chaîne de télévision du Hezbollah tués en Syrie

La direction de la chaîne Al-Manar, qui soutient le régime de Bachar Al-Assad et couvre les combats en direct, accuse les rebelles sunnites

Beyrouth
Correspondance

Embedded» avec les troupes loyalistes en Syrie, Hamza Hadj Hassan s'était promis de dormir à l'hôtel As-Safir, quartier général des rebelles dans la ville chrétienne de Maaloula, située entre Damas et le Liban. Le journaliste d'Al-Manar, la chaîne du Hezbollah, est mort avant d'avoir atteint son objectif: lundi 14 avril, ce Libanais de 29 ans a été tué avec deux de ses collègues, alors qu'il couvrait les combats.

L'équipe de télévision venait de pénétrer dans Maaloula, dont le régime et les insurgés, menés dans cette localité par les djihadistes du Front Al-Nosra, se disputaient le contrôle depuis septembre 2013. Al-Manar a attribué la mort de ses employés à des «takfiristes»: c'est par ce terme que le Hezbollah désigne les extrémistes sunnites qui, selon le parti chiite, forment le gros des troupes rebelles qu'il combat en Syrie.

C'est la première fois que des employés d'Al-Manar sont tués en Syrie depuis le début du conflit. La chaîne, qui fait appel sur ce terrain à des professionnels syriens ou libanais, est parmi les rares télévisions autorisées à relayer les images de la guerre du côté du régime. Au début du soulèvement contre Bachar Al-Assad, elle se contentait de réaliser des micros-trottoirs avec des

partisans du président syrien. Elle traquait aussi les failles des médias favorables à l'insurrection, comme Al-Arabiya ou Al-Jazeera.

Mais depuis que le Hezbollah a officialisé son entrée en guerre aux côtés de Damas, en avril 2013, Al-Manar est de toutes les batailles: à Qoussair, ville proche du Liban reprise aux insurgés en juin 2013, comme dans le Qalamoun, région montagneuse à l'est du Liban, où le régime mène une offensive depuis novembre. Ces images visent à attester la réalité des conquêtes des pro-Assad. Elles cherchent aussi à justifier l'intervention du parti en Syrie auprès de son public, en mettant l'accent sur les exactions attribuées aux rebelles et sur la présence d'islamistes radicaux.

Guerre médiatique

Si Al-Manar propage la propagande du parti, aucun combattant du Hezbollah en Syrie n'a jamais témoigné à l'antenne; ce sont des militaires syriens qui sont interviewés au milieu des ruines. Le Hezbollah, qui a perdu au moins 300 hommes dans ce conflit, ne rend public le visage de ses combattants qu'à leur mort.

Signe de l'importance que la formation accorde à la guerre médiatique (elle met en scène ses opérations depuis les années 1990, époque où ses hommes combattaient l'occupation israélienne du sud-Liban), le Hezbollah a rendu le

15 avril au journaliste Hamza Hadj Hassan, érigé en «martyr», un hommage similaire à celui réservé aux combattants.

Pour la direction d'Al-Manar, il n'y a toutefois pas de doute: c'est moins comme relais de la ligne du parti que comme journalistes que ses trois employés sont morts, leur «4x4 arborant clairement le sigle "presse"». Deux rescapés de l'équipe ont raconté comment leur convoi est tombé dans un guet-apens à l'entrée de Maaloula.

Cette attaque est symptomatique de la confusion qui entoure la bataille du Qalamoun: peu après la mort des employés d'Al-Manar, lundi, les médias officiels syriens annonçaient la reconquête de Maaloula. En fait, la cité chrétienne n'a pas été sécurisée avant le lendemain. Et, bien que célébrée par le pouvoir syrien comme une victoire éclatante, sa prise ne constituerait qu'un succès mineur, selon une source proche du Hezbollah, qui affirme que les rebelles ne tenaient plus depuis l'hiver qu'une simple portion de la ville.

Le décès de Hamza Hadj Hassan et de ses deux compagnons porte à 31 le nombre de journalistes morts en Syrie depuis mars 2011. Plus d'une centaine de citoyens-journalistes, engagés dans les rangs de l'opposition, ont également été tués, selon les décomptes de l'ONG Reporters sans frontières. ■

LAURE STEPHAN

International New York Times

APRIL 7, 2014

A brittle calm settles in Syria

DAMASCUS, SYRIA

Assad, with upper hand against rebels, still faces deep political grievances

BY ANNE BARNARD

The change of atmosphere here in the Syrian capital is unmistakable. The boom of shelling no longer dominates the days and nights. Tensions over security are draining from the city like air from a balloon. Checkpoints remain ubiquitous, but sentries are relaxed, even joctular, teasing strangers, "Any bombs?"

As government forces seize the last insurgent strongholds along the Lebanese border, securing the strategic corridor from Damascus to the coast, President Bashar al-Assad's home region, the message from the government is clear: It is winning, and it can afford to be magnanimous. It is offering what it calls reconciliation to repentant opponents, and some are accepting.

But the relative tranquillity may be deceptive. Beneath a calm imposed by military force, siege and starvation, the stage appears set for an unstable period of prolonged conflict that could explode again months or years on. Resentment and distrust smolder on all sides. The country remains divided between government areas and the insurgent-held north. In the capital, the ferment seems clamped down, rather than soothed.

Though the government is reasserting control in the crucial center of the country and striking cease-fires in long-blockaded Damascus suburbs, it has resolved none of the deep political grievances that continue to tear at the national fabric. Its opponents, armed and unarmed, are pulling back and accepting defeat in some areas — for now. Yet many say they have not given up, but are merely reassessing their plans and goals with an eye to the future.

Dozens of interviews, in government-controlled areas in Damascus, the western city of Homs and the remote town of Palmyra, reveal that many Syrians — government supporters and opponents alike — doubt official assurances that life is returning to normal. Many among the nine million forced from their homes remain unsure when, or whether, they will go back.

In Sayeda Zeinab, outside Damascus, a woman who fled a Shiite town blockaded by Sunni insurgents said she hoped that her son would join the government fighters on his 15th birthday — in 2027. Nearby, another Syrian Shiite buried her husband, a pro-government militiaman killed in battle. She vowed never to return to her mostly Sunni village, just blocks away, after insurgents, including former neighbors, burned her



Scouts playing the national anthem in Damascus last month. Bustle has returned to the Old City there, but merchants say that customers are broke and that sales are anemic.

family's shop "because we are Shiites." "It's over," she said.

In the heart of the capital, even behind shop security gates newly and uniformly painted with the official Syrian flag, the government's opponents say they are simply keeping their heads down. They say that few refugees trust promises of a safe return to once-rebellious areas.

Some vow to continue the struggle peacefully; others say fighters are giving up for lack of arms, or to spare their towns more destruction and starvation, but not generally from a change of heart.

"Now there is no point, no money, no weapons," said one shopkeeper, who like many others asked not to be identified for his safety. "But I am sure there are thousands of young men who are just waiting for their chance to fight."

Officials declare that Syrians will soon return to living quietly together, and many on all sides fervently hope so. But the complaints about repression, corruption and inequality that set off protests in 2011 remain unaddressed. So do grievances that have grown exponentially during a war that has killed 150,000 people, deepened sectarian and political rifts and left seemingly every family with members killed, wounded, detained or kidnapped.

The scars are more widespread than those from the bloody Muslim Brotherhood insurgency that peaked in 1982, and its repression by security forces that killed tens of thousands and leveled the old city of Hama. Those wounds festered in silence for decades, helping fuel the current conflagration.

In a shift, the government now routinely acknowledges that many Syrians, not just foreigners, are fighting it. But whether to justify amnesties or to avoid making concessions, officials take

the position that most Syrian insurgents are not politically motivated, but bribed, deceived, brainwashed or coerced — simple, illiterate people who will be welcomed back like wayward children.

Mr. Assad's opponents say any reconciliation must be a two-way street. The government, they say, has to acknowledge that it systematically bombarded neighborhoods and arrested, tortured and killed peaceful protesters.

"They have to admit their wrongs and apologize to the Syrian people," said another Damascus businessman. "There will be no political solution without transitional justice. Everyone on both sides who committed crimes must be tried."

But some officials in charge of reconciliation say the state has nothing to apologize for. A political security officer in Homs, his face partly paralyzed by an insurgent's bullet, said he had forgiven

"No political solution without transitional justice. Everyone on both sides who committed crimes must be tried."

his assailant, for Syria's sake. But abuses and war crimes by security forces, he said, are "rumors" that "didn't happen."

He presides over a school building where former insurgents are held for security checks as they trickle out of the blockaded Old City in exchange for laying down their arms.

Hundreds have been released, but scores remain, some with families. In the courtyard, the major draped his arms around young Syrians' necks, calling them new friends who join him for games of chess and soccer.

The men said they had fought for

money or misguided beliefs. Echoing testimony over Skype from fighters inside, they said some rebel commanders had hoarded cigarettes, weapons and food while they starved. "We ate cats," said one. "We were about to eat people."

He added, as the officer listened, "May God protect the army."

Later, another whispered, "Not all we said was true." After his evacuation, he said, "the heart is relieved, but the mind wonders what will happen to us."

The government's supporters in Homs were troubled by its decision to allow evacuations, grant amnesties and provide the limited food aid allowed in January into the Old City.

"They are empowering terrorists," Jamila Ali, 42, said on a street divided by concrete barriers shielding pedestrians from insurgent snipers, whose bullets, she said, her young daughters narrowly escaped.

What few dispute is that the insurgents, at least in central Syria, are struggling.

"We will kiss the revolution in Homs goodbye in the next couple of weeks," one evacuated fighter, Abu Abdo al-Homsi, said by phone after his release from the school. Just 600 of what had been a force of 1,500 fighters remain in the Old City, he said, with a dozen leaving daily.

Mr. Assad has capitalized on strong support from his Syrian base and from Hezbollah, Russia and Iran; the disarray of domestic and international foes; and the rise of extremist insurgents who drained sympathy for the revolt among many early supporters.

Now, he looks ahead to re-election and beyond. New posters depict him as a long-shot victor over a global assault. In Homs, one reads, "Resistance, steadfastness, victory, reconstruction."

Yet in Bab Sbaa, a Homs neighborhood reclaimed from insurgents in 2012, entire blocks still lie gutted. Residents said they could not yet rebuild, or trust former neighbors, because fighting could surge again.

In Damascus, bustle has returned to the Old City, but merchants say customers are broke and sales anemic. The new cease-fires are widely seen as fragile, coerced or insincere.

For now, exhaustion, fear and shock at the steep costs of revolt seem to have central Syria battered down.

A shop owner who favors the insurgents said a painter recently appeared with a government militiaman, offering to adorn his door with the official flag for \$30.

"So I said yes," he said, giggling. "And if they come with the TV, I too will say, 'Bashar is the greatest.'"

Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Syria, and Mohammad Ghannam from Beirut, Lebanon.

International New York Times APRIL 14, 2014

INCHING FORWARD WITH IRAN

Controversy over a new ambassador to the U.N. should not hinder efforts to reach a nuclear deal.

There is no doubt that the negotiations between the major powers and Iran over its nuclear program have been productive. All the nations involved — the United States, Britain, France, China, Germany, Iran, even Russia — appear committed to reaching a deal that will go beyond November's interim agreement and produce a permanent one. The chief negotiators completed a third round of talks in Vienna on Wednesday and plan to meet again on May 13, after which they expect to begin drafting actual text.

As positive as that sounds, it would be naïve to understate how hard it will be to remove the threat of Iran's producing a nuclear weapon and begin to ease three decades of hostility between Tehran and Washington.

Negotiators, who have revealed few details, said this week that significant gaps remained on core issues. In November, the two sides reached a six-month agreement under which Iran suspended some nuclear activities in exchange for modest relief from sanctions. The fact that both Iran and the major powers appear to be fulfilling their commitments under that interim agreement is reassuring.

In a final deal, the powers want Iran to permanently pare back its nuclear activities so that it will not be able to quickly produce a nuclear bomb. In return, there would be substantially more sanctions relief for Iran's battered economy. The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, sounded pretty implacable when he said, "We will not cede any of our gains in nuclear research and development."

Meanwhile, hard-line forces on both sides have been working to undermine any deal. Israel and some members of Congress are insisting that Iran must abandon all nuclear enrichment activities, even for nonweapons purposes. That would be ideal, but it is unrealistic, and insisting on it would scuttle any chance of an agreement.

Iran, meanwhile, nominated Hamid Aboutalebi as its new ambassador to the United Nations. When he was in his 20s, Mr. Aboutalebi reportedly served as an interpreter for the students who took over the American embassy in Tehran in 1979 and held 52 Americans hostage for 444 days.

In Washington, Congress voted to deny him a visa and without signing the bill, which is of unclear legality, President Obama set an unfortunate precedent on Friday by saying he would deny Mr. Aboutalebi a visa.

As the host for the United Nations, the United States is supposed to admit whomever a country designates as its ambassador, barring a direct national security threat. Still, the appointment was a real misstep by President Hassan Rouhani. It's hard to believe he does not know how acutely the embassy takeover affected Americans and did not realize that he was handing hard-liners a new issue. But none of this should divert the two sides from pushing hard to secure a final nuclear deal.

International New York Times MONDAY, APRIL 14, 2014

U.S.-Iran feud reflects lingering power of '79 hostage crisis

PARIS

BY ELAINE SCIOLINO

When Iranian militants seized the United States Embassy and took dozens of Americans hostage on an overcast Sunday morning in November 1979, I assumed it was just a brief anti-American sit-in. My main concern, I told my edit-

NEWS ANALYSIS

ors at Newsweek, was not how dangerous Tehran would be. It was whether it would still be a story by the time I arrived there from Paris the next day.

I sure got that wrong. The "Iran hostage crisis," as Americans called it, lasted 444 days. And as demonstrated by the powerful opposition in Washington last week to Iran's choice for its next United Nations ambassador, it is not over.

During the crisis, President Jimmy Carter froze Iran's assets, broke diplomatic relations, changed his re-election strategy and ordered a military rescue mission that failed and left eight American servicemen dead. The ordeal helped get Ronald Reagan elected as president.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini defied international law, used the crisis to consolidate the power of his Islamic revolution and branded the United States the "Great Satan."

The crisis was also a historic turning point, the first time — and certainly not the last — that the United States would prove impotent in the face of a revolutionary movement in the Islamic world.

Nearly 35 years later, many Americans do not remember or have never heard of that dark episode in American diplomatic history. It took the 2012 film "Argo," which dealt with only one chapter of the crisis, to return it to the American consciousness.

But politically, the hostage crisis has not been forgotten. It still has the power to traumatize Washington.

The current diplomatic firestorm is the result of Iran's nomination of Hamid Aboutalebi, a senior political adviser to President Hassan Rouhani, as ambassador to the United Nations. On paper, he is just about perfect: a fluent French and English speaker with a doctorate in sociology from a prestigious Catholic university in Belgium and a former ambassador to Italy, Australia, Belgium and the European Union.

Mr. Aboutalebi admits that he had a bit part in the hostage drama. He was not part of the takeover of the 27-acre em-



MOHAMMAD BERNO/IRANIAN PRESIDENCY OFFICE, VIA AP
Tehran has refused to withdraw the nomination of Hamid Aboutalebi as U.N. envoy.

At the age of 22, he said, he agreed to be an interpreter and translator a few times. "It was based purely on humanitarian motivations."

bassy compound or even in town when it happened. But the hostage-takers lacked foreign-language skills, and early in the crisis, he agreed to be an interpreter and translator on a small number of occasions. He was 22 at the time.

In an interview in Iran in mid-March, Mr. Aboutalebi said he had been the interpreter for the Vatican's special representative when he visited the embassy. He added that "one or two other times" he had done translations into English or French, including interpreting at a news conference two weeks into the hostage crisis when the occupiers decided to release 13 hostages. "It was based purely on humanitarian motivations," Mr. Aboutalebi said of his involvement.

There is no evidence that Mr. Aboutalebi served as a regular interpreter or translator or participated in interrogations of the hostages.

During the crisis, President Carter called the hostages "victims of terrorism and anarchy." So he could be forgiven for seeking vengeance against Iran today. Instead, Mr. Carter has called on the United States to move on.

"Those were college students at that time, and I think that they have matured," he said on a recent radio program. "It would be inappropriate for the

United States to try to block someone that Iran wanted to choose."

But saying no to Iran over an ambassadorial choice comes at no political cost in Congress, so it was easy for both houses to vote unanimously to prevent Mr. Aboutalebi from entering the United States. And on Friday, the White

House said it would not grant Mr. Aboutalebi a visa, effectively scuttling the nomination.

It remains unproved whether Mr. Aboutalebi was "an acknowledged terrorist," as Senator Ted Cruz, Republican of Texas, who sponsored the Senate bill, branded him, or even a "major conspirator" in the hostage crisis, as Senator Charles E. Schumer, Democrat of New York, called him.

What is true is that the hostage crisis was an improvised affair that evolved over time. The leaders of the takeover had, as I had assumed, planned it as a sit-in that would last at most a few days. Even Ayatollah Khomeini's initial instinct was to liberate the embassy, and it was only when he saw the masses of enthusiastic demonstrators at the front gates that he decided to support the occupation.

The demands and threats of the hostage-takers — and Ayatollah Khomeini — quickly escalated. First it was the return of the deposed Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who had been allowed into the United States for medical treatment, then the return of Iran's financial assets abroad, including the shah's personal wealth.

Positions further hardened early in the crisis, when the occupiers gave journalists copies of documents found in the embassy stating that at least three of the hostages were C.I.A. officers operating under diplomatic cover. Among the documents they handed us was a copy of the C.I.A. station chief's phony Belgian passport under an assumed name, with instructions on how to use it.

That was hard evidence for Iran that the embassy was a "den of spies" that justified the occupation and perhaps criminal trials of the hostages as spies.

Iranians of all classes and political persuasions argue that unlike in other violent acts against Americans in the name of Islam — the Sept. 11 attacks, and bombings in places like Kenya, Iraq and Afghanistan — none of the hostages died during their ordeal.

For Iran, the stakes are high. The ambassadorship in New York is Iran's most important diplomatic post. In the absence of diplomatic relations with Washington, the ambassador is the public face of Iran for the American people.

Iran has not backed down, refusing to withdraw the nomination.

"We do not have a replacement for Mr. Aboutalebi, and we will pursue the matter via legal mechanisms anticipated in the United Nations," Abbas Araghchi, a senior Foreign Ministry official, was quoted as saying on Saturday by the Islamic Republic News Agency.

« My Sweet Pepper Land » : un western aux portes du réel

Le Monde.fr, 8 mai 2014
Par Noémie Luciani

Dans un village perdu au cœur des montagnes kurdes, Baran, jeune officier de police plein d'illusions, rencontre Govend, la nouvelle institutrice. Ils n'ont d'abord en commun que leur statut de paria. Célibataire et vivant seule dans l'école, Govend est soupçonnée d'immoralité par la communauté très traditionnelle. Déterminé à faire enfin appliquer la loi dans cette région de contrebande, Baran menace le seigneur et parrain local, Aziz Aga, déterminé à le faire plier ou disparaître comme ses prédécesseurs. Malgré le regard réprobateur du voisinage, Baran et Govend prennent l'habitude d'aller trouver conseils et réconfort l'un auprès de l'autre.

Né dans le Kurdistan irakien qu'il a quitté à dix-sept ans pour s'exiler en Europe, c'est avec passion que le réalisateur Hineer Salem renoue avec son pays natal, nouveau Far West où la terre est plus aride que le cœur des hommes, la justice encore branlante, où presque tout reste à conquérir.



Korkmaz Arslan dans le film kurde, français et allemand d'Hiner Saleem, "My Sweet Pepper Land".

UN HYMNE À L'AMOUR ET À LA LIBERTÉ

Mi-western, mi-romance contrariée sur fond de réalisme social, My Sweet Pepper Land est un hymne à l'amour et à la liberté qui rayonne autour du visage inoubliable de la belle Golshifteh Farahani, autre exilée célèbre bannie de son Iran natal pour avoir poussé sa carrière jusqu'à Hollywood (Mensonges d'Etat, de Ridley Scott, 2008).

Le mélange des genres ouvre d'abord

des perspectives assez exaltantes, offrant à la caméra l'occasion de se réapproprié l'espace kurde, assez peu attirant au départ, comme espace épique, lieu de tous les possibles narratifs et de l'Aventure majuscule telle que peut la proposer le cinéma. Le duo de solitaires est beau et fort dans ses silences partagés, leur cause est touchante et prend des formes gracieuses, comme ces instants suspendus durant lesquels Govend, seule au milieu du paysage, joue d'un instrument rond aux sonorités étranges.

UN MONDE DE BRUMES

Assez vite cependant, le western trouve ses limites, à mesure que se multiplient les scènes, plus convenues, visant à illustrer l'incompréhension voire l'hostilité dont sont victimes les deux protagonistes : lâcheté du directeur de l'école, révolte de Govend contre ses frères, réticences de l'acolyte de Baran...

Passant de l'exercice de style au discours engagé, jusqu'à une conclusion énigmatique assez révélatrice de ces hésitations, My Sweet Pepper Land ne sait plus s'il faut en appeler à l'imagination ou au réel, et laisse ses deux protagonistes plus seuls que jamais dans un monde de brumes, où l'on ne sait jamais trop ce que l'on est en train de voir.



Des Irakiens d'Al-Anbar réfugiés au Kurdistan risquent de devoir rentrer chez eux

CHAQLAWA (Irak), 11 avril 2014 (AFP)

DES CENTAINES de familles d'Al-Anbar, province de l'ouest de l'Irak théâtre d'affrontements entre armée et insurgés, ont trouvé refuge dans un site de villégiature du Kurdistan, mais l'arrivée de la saison touristique pourrait les obliger à rentrer chez eux.

Depuis janvier, ces milliers de personnes ont choisi de s'installer à Chaqlawa (nord), une ville située à 1.000 mètres d'altitude et offrant ainsi une fraîcheur très appréciée à l'arrivée des grandes chaleurs.

En hiver, nombre de chambres étaient libres et à des prix abordables, mais avec le début fin avril de la saison touristique, les tarifs montent en flèche alors que, dans le même temps, les déplacés voient leurs économies fondre.

Selon les autorités, parmi les 400.000 personnes ayant fui les combats à Al-Anbar, 10.000 familles ont trouvé refuge dans la province autonome du Kurdistan, qui jouit d'une relative sécurité dans un pays confronté à ses pires violences depuis cinq ans.

Ceux qui se sont installés dans le reste du pays sont logés dans des camps de réfugiés, des habitations qu'ils louent ou encore chez des parents.

Sur les 10.000 familles au Kurdistan, quelque 2.500 familles ont choisi Chaqlawa, à environ 350 km au nord de Ramadi, chef-lieu de la province d'Al-Anbar.

Des jihadistes de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL) et des combattants de tribus anti-gouvernementales ont pris début janvier le contrôle de quartiers de Ramadi ainsi que de la totalité de Fallouja, à 100 et 60 km à l'ouest de Bagdad.

Depuis, l'armée a repris quasiment tout le contrôle de Ramadi, mais Fallouja reste sous la coupe des combattants anti-gouvernementaux.

Abou Mohammed, qui refuse de donner son nom pour des raisons de sécurité, a fui Fallouja avec sa femme et ses deux fils fin janvier, après avoir été brièvement enlevé par des insurgés.

Comme nombre d'autres qui se sont installés à Chaqlawa, il n'a même pas essayé d'aller à Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan. Là-bas, les Irakiens arabes qui souhaitent s'installer ont besoin d'un parrain local.

Cette règle ne s'applique cependant pas dans la ville touristique de Chaqlawa.

- Pas de chambre à louer -

Le gouvernement central n'a pas établi de camps de déplacés au Kurdistan, mais il a donné aux habitants d'Al-Anbar qui se sont faits enregistrer une allocation de 250 dollars (182 euros) par famille, ainsi que des couvertures et de la nourriture de base.

"J'ai de l'argent pour vivre", confie Abou Mohammed, mais "beaucoup n'en ont pas". Et "même pour les classes moyennes, l'argent de dure pas éternellement (...). Tout est cher".

Abou Mohammed paie 750 dollars par mois de loyer pour un petit appartement à Chaqlawa, un tarif relativement bas par rapport à ce que d'autres déplacés doivent déboursier, sans compter les autres dépenses.

Et à l'approche de la saison estivale, ces loyers ont doublé, voire triplé.

Contrairement aux Kurdes réfugiés de Syrie voisine et accueillis dans des camps, les habitants d'Al-Anbar sont dispersés, ce qui complique l'organisation de l'aide, explique Alia al-Bazzaz, représentante à Erbil du ministre des Emigrés et des Personnes déplacées.

Et la majorité des déplacés ne parlant pas le Kurde, ils peinent à trouver un emploi pour reconstituer leurs économies, note-t-elle.

"Même s'ils avaient de l'argent au départ, ils l'ont dépensé en deux trois mois", dit-elle.

Désormais, à court d'argent et de solutions de repli, nombre de déplacés d'Al-Anbar craignent de devoir rentrer chez eux.

Les autorités de cette province ont tenté de convaincre qu'un certain calme était revenu et ont appelé les habitants à rentrer, mais les violences se poursuivent à Ramadi et Fallouja.

"Chaque jour, des familles rentrent à Fallouja", dit Abou Mohammed. "Mais, dans le même temps, il y a des familles qui arrivent toujours de là-bas".

Les habitants d'Al-Anbar résidant à Chaqlawa se plaignent que de nombreux appartements et chambres d'hôtels sont volontairement maintenus vides.

"Quand quelqu'un vient maintenant à Chaqlawa et trouve un logement libre, il n'est pas à louer. Ils attendent les touristes", déplore Abou Mohamed. ●

CINÉMA Un western burlesque au Kurdistan

Le 9 avril, *My Sweet Pepper Land* sort en France. Le réalisateur, Hiner Saleem (*Vodka Lemon*, *Kilomètre zéro*) donne au Kurdistan irakien un petit air de *Far West*. Rencontre.

www.courrierinternational.com
9 avril 2014

Courrier international : D'où vous est venue l'idée de *My Sweet Pepper Land* ?

Hiner Saleem : Depuis quelques années, j'avais envie de retourner filmer au Kurdistan irakien et de réaliser un film en langue kurde. J'ai donc écrit cette histoire d'un shérif qui lutte contre la corruption, dans un village perdu. Quand je regarde le Kurdistan irakien aujourd'hui, je vois un pays qui est né devant mes yeux, où tout est en chantier : on construit des routes, des ponts, des écoles, des hôpitaux, on amène l'électricité partout, et également la loi et l'ordre. Cela me rappelle l'Amérique du XIXe siècle, telle que représentée dans les westerns, et c'est de là que j'ai tiré l'inspiration pour mon film.

Votre film se distingue des autres productions kurdes par son humour et sa légèreté. C'est un parti pris ?

Je ne fais pas de films folkloriques ou ethniques, je suis un réalisateur, un artiste avant tout. J'ai la chance de connaître très bien le Kurdistan, mais aussi l'Occident, donc je suis assez ouvert et universel. Je ne fais pas d'orientalisme. Selon une blague kurde, "Dieu a créé dix Kurdes, puis un



L'actrice Golshifteh Farahani, qui incarne Govend, et l'acteur Korkmaz Arslan, qui joue le shérif Baran.

onzième pour les faire rire". Je crois que les Kurdes ont ce don de l'humour. Je parle souvent de sujets assez sérieux, assez graves, l'humour me permet de les rendre universels, accessibles à tout le monde.

Vos héros affrontent une société qui paraît très archaïque...

La société kurde est encore en grande partie une société traditionnelle où la culture patriarcale est prédominante. Il y a donc beaucoup de conflits. D'un côté, une nouvelle génération qui a accès à Internet et peut voyager, une jeunesse qui a des aspirations légitimes et veut s'émanciper. De

l'autre, une société rigide qui ne respecte pas l'égalité entre hommes et femmes. En tant qu'homme kurde, je suis convaincu que la libération du Kurdistan est impossible si elle ne s'accompagne pas de l'émancipation des femmes. C'est pour moi une cause pour laquelle il vaut la peine de se battre. J'ai envie que les femmes comme Govend [l'institutrice du village] et les hommes comme Baran [le shérif] gagnent ; ils représentent pour moi l'avenir du Kurdistan.

Au Kurdistan irakien, les conditions sont-elles aujourd'hui réunies pour que cette nouvelle génération puisse l'emporter ?

Le problème de la nouvelle génération kurde, c'est que, comme tous les jeunes du monde, elle aspire à avoir de belles choses, à voyager et à avoir de l'argent, contrairement à la génération précédente dont je fais partie. Nous avons un idéal politique, nous sommes devenus des exilés qui combattaient pour la liberté, la démocratie, le sécularisme. Aujourd'hui, le Kurdistan irakien est libre politiquement, chacun peut s'exprimer librement. Que nous soyons de gauche, de droite, religieux ou non, nous ne risquons pas d'être arrêtés. Nous avons accès à Internet, nous pouvons voyager, nous avons tout. Les Kurdes n'ont jamais eu dans leur histoire autant d'argent et autant de liberté, mais le confort matériel n'amène pas forcément à la culture. Il a fallu le siècle des Lumières pour que la France atteigne le rayonnement que nous connaissons, illustre ces valeurs, cette civilisation. Par ailleurs, si la situation des Kurdes est bonne en Irak, il ne faut pas oublier que 80 % des Kurdes sont toujours privés de liberté en Turquie, en Iran et en Syrie. ♦

USA: des élus veulent ôter les partis kurdes irakiens d'une liste terroriste

WASHINGTON, 11 avril 2014 (AFP) — Des parlementaires américains ont déposé vendredi une proposition de loi pour retirer de la liste des organisations terroristes les partis kurdes PDK, du président du Kurdistan irakien, et UPK, du président irakien, une initiative soutenue par l'administration de Barack Obama.

Les sénateurs John McCain et Robert Menendez entendent mettre fin à cette classification qu'ils qualifient d'obsolète, selon laquelle le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) du président du

Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani, et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du président irakien, Jalal Talabani, sont considérés par Washington comme des organisations terroristes.

Cette classification date de 2001, sur la base de la résistance armée du PDK et du UPK contre le régime de Saddam Hussein dans les années 1990.

"Il est temps que nous cessions de traiter le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan comme des terroristes", a déclaré John McCain. Cette désignation

"trahit nos amis et alliés kurdes, qui ont été des forces de stabilité dans la région et ont fait preuve d'une loyauté constante à l'égard des Etats-Unis depuis des années".

Selon un communiqué sur le site de la représentation du Kurdistan irakien à Washington, Massoud Barzani refuse de se rendre à Washington tant que les deux partis restent qualifiés officiellement d'organisations terroristes. Sa dernière visite remonte à avril 2012, quand il avait rencontré Barack Obama à la Maison Blanche.

En février dernier, un responsable de l'exécutif américain avait apporté son soutien au vote d'une loi autorisant la déclassification, selon lui indispensable.

"Le peuple kurde, l'UPK, le PDK figurent parmi nos plus proches amis dans la région, depuis des décennies. Nous estimons qu'ils doivent être retirés de cette liste aussi vite que possible", a déclaré Brett McGurk, responsable du département d'Etat pour l'Irak et l'Iran, lors d'une audition à la Chambre des représentants. ●

Syrian Kurdish groups offer best path for future

Syria's Kurds are better placed to build upon their own experiences, rather than counting on Kurdish movements in other countries.



www.al-monitor.com

Author Rustom Mahmoud , April 10, 2014

Al-Hayat (Pan Arab)

The current Syrian scene involves two Kurdish movements that seem to summarize the developments of the Syrian Kurdish political movement. The first is the Democratic Union Party (PYD), which is close to the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). The PYD's military and security formations are widespread in Kurdish regions in Syria and it has been engaged in violent confrontations for months now against armed terrorist groups aiming to control the Kurdish areas. This party has a societal project to symbolically and effectively control the Syrian Kurdish community. Its political platform — represented by the autonomy project — is based on a form of local governance in these areas with ideas similar to those of PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan.

In its two approaches, the party seems to be alien to Syria's deep-rooted societal environment, of which the Kurds are a constituting element. Syrian society, which took to the street in an overwhelming revolution to reject political and symbolic hegemony of a specific ideological or political party, will not accept being subjugated to a similar local hegemony similar to that exercised by the Syrian regime. This kind of speech sets forth the idea of ensuring protection, keeping the memory of martyrs alive and promoting hostility toward the outside world. Moreover, the party's political project is based on superior standards, options and acts, which do not stem from the will, desire or choice of those who are to be subjected to this political bureaucracy program. It is rather based on language, tools and standards that are unfamiliar to them. This programming is theoretical and ambiguous. It lures people into believing that it will realize many wishes, while it lacks the necessary conditions or tools.

This feeling of alienation stems from the nature of the relationship between the popular bases and elites of the PYD and the rest of the Kurds and Syrians. The popular bases of the party hail from the Kurdish environment, which is the most deprived and violated. Therefore, it was the most isolated, which led to the emergence of a feeling of disparity with other communities and a lack of integration with the overall Syrian society at the economic, social, cultural and symbolic levels. This Kurdish environment of destitution has its own world, requirements and formulas.

At the core, this community stands out from numerous Syrian society axioms, as well as from a large part of Kurdish society itself. On the other hand, an elite group of this party has become the most isolated from the elite of "public work" in Syria, especially during the last decade and a half of Syria's contemporary history, which witnessed forms of integration of the elite of the Syrian Kurds into all Syrian categories. This elite group seems to be a Turkish-Kurdish group, mentally and spiritually preoccupied with the questions, circumstances and struggles of Turkey's Kurds who are demanding their rights. The Kurds in Turkey have a discourse similar to the overall discourse of the PKK, in that they see the Syrian issue as a temporary and non-centralized issue.

They have no deep knowledge of Syria's political, economic, cultural, artistic and social matters. There are numerous misunderstandings between them and the Syrians, as well as between them and a broad spectrum of Kurds from the middle and upper classes, who are the most similar to the overall Syrian classes. The latter enjoy good levels of societal knowledge and experience.

On the other hand, the Kurdish political opponent of this party does not seem to be more efficient in this field. The Kurdish Democratic Party of Syria (KDP-S) wants to regroup several of its political wings under a single organization called the "Political Union." This party is under the political leadership of the Barzani family and is politically, ideologically and even in a regulatory way affiliated with the Kurdistan Democratic Party. The latter revolves around a retrospective standardization of conservative societal relations and political patriarchal hierarchy, based on the sanctification of families, tribes and dominating personalities that the party seeks to re-promote and revive in the Syrian-Kurdish community.



Syrian Kurds in Aleppo wave a Kurdish flag and hold a picture of jailed Kurdish militant leader Abdullah Ocalan of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), March 21, 2014. (photo by REUTERS/Hosam Katan)

This political movement seems to be the least aware of the current situation in Syria and of Kurds. In essence, it seems similar to Islamist Syrians who are still praising past illusions of society. This party and its political elite are not aware of the fact that the Syrian Kurdish rural region — which accounted for nearly 90% of the Syrian Kurdish community at the time of formation of the party in the mid-1950s — no longer exists and the Syrian Kurd populations have become the absolute majorities in urban regions. Significant portions of them have lived for many years in the cities of Damascus and Aleppo. Therefore, standardizing their societal and political structural relations according to a blood affiliation and loyalty no longer entices even the most naive Kurdish categories, let alone hundreds of thousands of Kurdish youth. The latter have received higher education, been integrated into global society and have social aspirations similar to those sought by the Syrian revolution, especially in terms of self-dependence and individualism.

Apart from the local societal contradiction, the orientation of the party and that of the rest of the political spectrum in which it orbits do not show any similarities with overall Syrian society. It seems as if it was an alternative project to a societal and political system outside Syria. This system was absolutely transcended by Syrian society and by the most vibrant and dynamic class of Syrian Kurds, which are only interested in their own lifestyles and everything that provides them with decent means of living.

The main point here is that this party will not be able to form a shared space with the rest of the Syrian elite. There is no common political language, codes or frames of reference between them and the new generation of Syrians. Moreover, the tools that this party uses to control part of the Kurdish community are partially based on political money and heavily rely on the political achievements of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. At the end of the day, it is a political movement unable to provide any concrete results for Syrian Kurds.

Throughout the last decade and a half of Syria's contemporary history, a Syrian Kurdish political movement witnessed high levels of integration in the Syrian worlds of politics. This interaction derived from the Syrian Kurdish middle class, which was integrated with and similar to its Syrian counterparts. This class was not as isolated as the poorest and the most conservative classes of Syrian Kurds. The Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party led by Abdul Hamid Darwish and the Kurdish Democratic Unity Party in Syria led by Fuad Aliko were the most representative of the Syrian Kurds' inclination toward modern political choices.

This movement seems to be currently the most decayed, but it remains the most capable of creating a shared space with the vital Kurdish middle class and with all Syrian nationals. This is where the objective interest of Syrian Kurds resides. ♦

Barzani: Kurdish independent state to come, Kurdistan is towards confederation with Iraq

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www.hurriyetaidailynews.com

Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced on April 8 that an independent Kurdish state is to be established, pointing out that they are moving towards a confederation with Iraq.

Barzani's remarks came during an interview with Sky News Arabia TV, briefed by "Shafaq News." Barzani pointed out that the Kurdish state has become a reality and this indepen-

dence should be achieved in the near future. He stated that the events occurring in Iraq will lead to a confederation system. Iraq cannot "bear more conflicts" and the leaderships should sit together to end the current crises, Barzani added.

The relations between the Iraqi Kurdish region and Baghdad have been witnessing the highest degree of tension in the last period due to the lack of agreement on a number of outstanding issues repeated every year, including the problem of the Iraqi public budget, the export of



oil from the region and the application of the constitutional Article 140, as well as political differences on power management in Baghdad. ○

New Tensions over Trench Between Kurdistan and Rojava

rudaw.net
14/ april /2014

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – A 26-kilometer trench dug by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), separating the Kurdish areas of Iraq and Syria, has stirred new tensions and accusations between political parties on both sides of the border.

The Democratic Union Party (PYD), that rules Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava), says that the trench is a project to isolate the Kurdish areas of Syria. It blames the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) for the idea.

But Kurdish authorities say the trench is a preventative measure against Islamist and insurgent groups that have flourished in the area since the start of the Syrian war three years ago.

"Because a terrorist group has emerged in the area, we have devised a plan similar to ones in Erbil and Kirkuk, to dig this trench on Rojava border," deputy Peshmarga minister, Anwar Haji Osman, told Rudaw.

He referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), whose fighters are active across the border and have recently crossed into Iraq to wreak havoc in the Sunni provinces of Anbar and Nineveh.

Osman described the border



Officials say the trench is three meters wide and two meters deep, aimed at preventing smugglers and terrorists from infiltrating into Kurdistan. Photo: Rudaw

areas as complicated, due to previous tensions between Kurdish forces and the Iraqi army. "It is a complicated and sensitive border. It was taken over by Peshmarga forces last year. During the crisis between the Iraqi army and Peshmarga forces, we moved and deployed our forces there."

In a statement the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is considered the main backer of the PYD, accused the KDP of engineering the plan and condemned the project.

"The trench-digging was quite an unexpected development for the Kurdish public opinion. Just like everybody else, we were

astonished by this," read the PKK statement.

Osman said the KRG is committed to finishing the trench as soon as possible, despite opposition by some groups, including the PYD. He said reports identifying the trench as a KDP decision were "unfounded." "It's the KRG's decision and the policy of the ministry of Peshmarga."

Meanwhile, the chief of staff of the Ministry of Peshmarga, Jabbar Yawar, said that his ministry was unaware of the trench being dug on the border with Rojava.

The border area was previously under control of the joint

security committee between the KRG and Iraq. According to the Peshmarga official, the inability of the Iraqi army to protect the border triggered his ministry to act and deploy Peshmarga forces in the area.

Asked about the main aim of the trench, he said, "It is to protect the border and provide security."

Osman claimed that many people have been arrested on the border, trying to smuggle arms. "Previously, we have not been able to protect the border as required. Until now, nearly 1,000 people have been arrested with light and heavy weapons."

The Peshmarga official said the weapons were of Iranian and Russian origin.

Senior border officials who spoke on condition of anonymity said that some of those arrested were members of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). "We have arrested people who trafficked weapons and turned out to be ISIS members after interrogation."

PYD supporters staged demonstrations on the Rojava side of the border against the trench. In the meantime, in sympathy with Rojava, some people in Sulaimani held a demonstration condemning the trench and called it "un-Kurdish."

According to security officials, the trench is three meters wide and two meters deep, aimed at preventing smugglers and terrorists from infiltrating into Iraqi Kurdistan. □

Mardin elects 25-year old Christian woman as mayor

Februniye Akyol, a 25-year-old Syriac Christian and a political novice, was elected co-mayor of Mardin, thus becoming the first Christian woman to lead one of Turkey's 30 metropolitan municipalities.



www.al-monitor.com
Author Susanne Güsten
April 14, 2014

MARDIN, Turkey — A 25-year-old student has burst onto the political scene in Turkey as the first Christian woman to govern a metropolitan city in this predominantly Muslim republic.

Put forward as a candidate by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), Turkey's main Kurdish party, in municipal elections on March 30, Februniye Akyol was elected co-mayor of the southeastern city of Mardin together with Ahmet Turk, 71, a widely respected veteran Kurdish leader. The BDP splits all top posts between a man and a woman to boost female participation in politics.

"The Kurdish party has enabled me to fight for my people and its rights, and this is what I am going to do," Akyol told Al-Monitor in an interview in Mardin this week. "I'm not here as an ornament."

Akyol, the daughter of a silversmith, is a member of the Syriac community, an ancient branch of the Christian faith whose followers still speak a version of Aramaic, the language of Jesus Christ. The region of Tur Abdin near Mardin, a plateau dotted with monasteries that go back to the fourth century, is the Syriacs' historical heartland.

Turkey has had Christian mayors of smaller towns before, and in 2011 the Syriac politician Erol Dora, also running on a BDP ticket, became the first Christian member of parliament in Ankara since the 1960s. But Akyol is the first Christian to govern one of Turkey's 30 metropolitan municipalities.

The Syriac community, which numbered around 200,000 people in Tur Abdin a century ago, was decimated by the massacres of Anatolian Christians during World War I, when Syriacs shared the fate of the Armenians. In the decades that followed, many survivors and their descendants fled poverty, persecution and the war between the Turkish state and Kurdish rebels in the region to settle in Europe. Today, a total of 150,000 Syriacs live in Germany, Sweden and Switzerland. Some 15,000 are in Istanbul, but less than 5,000 remain in Tur Abdin.

Although Turkey began issuing appeals for Syriacs to return to their homeland in the early 2000s and strengthened social and religious rights under the country's EU membership application, Akyol said her community did not yet enjoy full democratic privileges. "Syriacs here are still not free, they can't live in peace," Akyol said.

The newly elected mayor's own name is a case in point. Born and christened Fabronia Benno, she had to run for office under her official Turkish name, Februniye Akyol, because of long-standing restrictions on the cultures and languages of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey. Since the Syriacs are not officially recognized as a religious minority by the Turkish state, they are not allowed their own schools to teach their ancient language to their children. Many Syriac villages were destroyed in the war between the Turkish military and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), a rebel group fighting for Kurdish self-rule since 1984.

It was jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan who launched Akyol into her



Februniye Akyol, 25, was elected co-mayor of the southeastern city of Mardin with Ahmet Turk, 71, a widely respected veteran Kurdish leader, in the March 30 municipal elections. (photo by Facebook/Mardin Büyükşehir Belediye Eşbaşkan Adayı Februniye AKYOL)

political career. Shortly before the March elections, Ocalan, still considered the top leader of Turkey's estimated 12 million Kurds, despite serving a life sentence on the prison island of Imrali near Istanbul since 1999, decreed that the BDP should field a female Syriac candidate for co-mayor in Mardin.

Following Ocalan's order, BDP officials asked Akyol, a student for a master's degree in the Aramaic language at Mardin's Artuklu University, to run with only two months to go before election day. "This is how I came to office," Akyol said.

Contemplating a partnership with her Kurdish running mate was difficult at first, she admitted. Kurds played a major part in the massacres against Syriacs and Armenians in southeastern Anatolia between 1915 and 1917. "Yes, Kurds persecuted us Christians, and the trauma is deep-rooted," Akyol said. "I used to have prejudices [against Kurds] myself."

But Ahmet Turk, chief of an influential Kurdish clan in the Mardin area, helped Akyol to overcome her doubts. He became the first Kurdish leader in Turkey to officially apologize to the Armenian, Syriac and Yezidi communities for the killings of 1915. "Our forefathers mistreated these peoples, and we apologize as their grandsons," Turk said.

As a political pair, Turk, an old hand in Turkish politics with 40 years of experience, and the political novice Akyol jointly faced their first challenge even before taking office in Mardin. They said the outgoing municipal administration engaged in foul play by handing over municipal assets to other state institutions before vacating office, leaving Turk, Akyol and their new city administration without desks, computers, vehicles or even the town hall itself.

Turk called the maneuver an act of sabotage by the Justice and Development Party (AKP) of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which was defeated by the BDP candidates in Mardin on March 30. After officially taking office on April 8, the new mayors vowed to fight back and litigate. "We will spoil that game together," Turk said. But for now, Februniye Akyol is using her private car to get around town. ♦

Susanne Güsten is a foreign correspondent reporting from Turkey. Based in Istanbul since the 1990s, she travels extensively through the country, reporting for American, French, German and Swiss media. Before coming to Turkey, she lived in Nigeria, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Germany and the US. On Twitter: @Susannelstanbul

Kurdish president: totalitarian political culture fragmenting Iraq

In an interview with Al-Hayat, Iraqi Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani says that while the region will await the results of US mediation between Baghdad and Erbil, if Baghdad sticks to its position not to provide financial assistance the region could live off its own resources.



www.al-monitor.com

Author Ghassan Charbel , April 14, 2014

Al-Hayat (Pan Arab)

Massoud Barzani, Iraqi Kurdistan president, said that regional authorities are awaiting the results of US mediation with the government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who made the decision to cut off the region's [federal] budget. He stressed that if he becomes hopeless about the mediation, the region will have to rely on its own resources, holding Maliki responsible for any rupture [between Erbil and Baghdad] that may occur. He said that "cutting off the region's livelihood is almost as dangerous as the bombing of Halabja [in reference to the chemical weapons attack by Saddam Hussein in 1988]."

Speaking to Al-Hayat, Barzani held what he called the "totalitarian political culture" responsible for pushing Iraq toward fragmentation. He expressed his concern regarding "repugnant sectarian cleansing" operations witnessed in the Diyala province, and pointed out that continuing to deny the existence of a Shiite-Sunni conflict fuels the disputes and does not help to resolve them.

THE TEXT OF THE INTERVIEW FOLLOWS:

Al-Hayat: Mr. President, I am surprised by your calm, given that the area surrounding Iraqi Kurdistan is inflamed.

Barzani: We thank God for the blessing of stability. This is thanks to the culture adopted by the Kurdish people. It is a culture of tolerance, coexistence and avoiding revenge. We have turned a new page with ourselves and with others. Stability is the result of the vigilance of the people and the security services.

Al-Hayat: Is the reason for this that the situation of the people of the Kurdistan Region [of Iraq] is better than it was in the past?

Barzani: It's clear that [the situation] is better, and we want to develop. We want stability and prosperity, and to provide job opportunities, advanced universities and real development.

Al-Hayat: For the past few years, every time I have visited Iraq I have felt that it is increasingly fragmented.

Barzani: This is unfortunate. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime we tried to transfer the experience of the [Kurdistan] region to the rest of Iraq. We should adopt a culture of tolerance and draw lessons from the past. This did not happen. Unfortunately, many have resorted to revenge and counter-revenge. Now I feel that there is a great danger to the future of Iraq.

Al-Hayat: [Is there] a great danger to the unity of Iraq?

Barzani: Definitely. Iraq is falling apart. We had hoped things would be different, but we have to deal with facts and realities. There is a massive case of instability. Terrorism is rampant in the western regions of the country. There are cities outside the government's control, and terrorists carry out their activity in public.

Al-Hayat: Did the post-Saddam political process in Iraq fail?

Barzani: It is on the verge of failure.



Iraq's Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki (R) walks with the President of Iraqi Kurdistan Massoud Barzani (2nd L) at the airport during his visit to Erbil, 310 kilometers (190 miles) north of Baghdad, May 31, 2010. (photo by REUTERS/Iraqi government)

Al-Hayat: Why does it seem that an understanding between the different components of Iraq is hard to achieve?

Barzani: [The parties'] principles are self-serving. There is no belief or faith in democracy or accepting the other. The culture of totalitarianism is still dominant. Rejecting the other leads to threats, confrontation and chaos.

Al-Hayat: Do you think that the culture of authoritarian rule in Baghdad is currently causing the fragmentation of Iraq?

Barzani: Yes, it is the main reason. This culture is the reason for the nonapplication of the constitution and is pushing Iraq toward fragmentation. It prevented the implementation of the agreements and doubled the distance between the components.

STRENGTH IN IRAQ

Al-Hayat: A politician told me that Iraq cannot handle the presence of two strong men, one in Baghdad and the other in Erbil. Is this true?

Barzani: I think that the actual strong [force] should be the people and the opinion of the people. Officials gain strength through the confidence of the people and through respecting the constitution and [state] institutions. Our current situation in [Iraqi] Kurdistan is the result of direct elections. [On the other hand,] the "strong man" in Baghdad came through a consensus of political forces. Whether in Baghdad or Erbil, the people should have the final word and this should be done through [state] institutions. Linking the fate of a country or region to the will of a single man and his temperament is a dangerous thing that brings us back to practices that past experience proved were costly.

Al-Hayat: Do you regret supporting the arrival of Nouri al-Maliki to the post of prime minister?

Barzani: You cannot judge a past stage based on current data. In this sense, I do not regret my support for Mr. Maliki. Furthermore, I don't want to personalize this issue. The tragedy began after that.

Al-Hayat: Why do you and Maliki not establish a normal work relationship, under the [provisions] of the Constitution?

Barzani: Because there are two interpretations of the constitution and the system of governance. Perhaps he [Maliki] believes that everything should revert back to Baghdad. For us, however, things are different. We view Iraq as a country made up of two main ethnic groups, not a single one. →

⇒ The Kurdish people have made enormous sacrifices that cannot be denied or ignored. Maliki considers that he is in charge and others must obey. He did not abide by what was specified in the constitution for Iraqi Kurdistan, and he did not adhere to what we agreed upon. This is the reason.

Al-Hayat: The Iraqi army is currently fighting in Anbar. Do you fear that one day it will try to "chastise" the Kurdistan region?

Barzani: I hope that no one in Baghdad is thinking about returning to the use of the army to break the prestige of the Kurdistan region, or to attempt to subject it to or engage in a conflict of wills with it. We are not in any way thinking of a return to the era of war and fighting, and I'm not afraid of any army. What worries me is the culture of the use of force and the army to subdue the people. This culture scares me because it means a repeat of the tragedies of the past. I hope no one is reckless in this way. Many rulers tried, and they had large armies, yet the results were the same. Any such attempt is doomed to failure.

Al-Hayat: How do you look at what is going on in Anbar?

Barzani: The protest movements in Anbar began in a peaceful manner, and they raised fair demands. The people were suffering from a lack of services, discrimination and misguided and unfair policies. Any citizen is entitled to demand his rights. The government delayed and procrastinated, and this paved the way for some military clashes. The atmosphere of violence allowed terrorists to infiltrate some of the ranks of protesters, and they almost gained control of the scene.

The problem is that when you try to strike a terrorist who is holed up in a city, you kill innocent people as well. Yes, [the protesters'] demands are fair and justified. Yet, on the other hand, one cannot be lenient with terrorists in any way. It has become difficult to distinguish between those making just demands and the terrorists.

Al-Hayat: There are those who consider this an expression of the Sunni-Shiite conflict. Is it still possible to deny this conflict?

Barzani: Many people try to deny the existence [of this conflict] or give it other names. Unfortunately, this conflict is both old and new. The conflict exists, and what is needed are rational policies that restrain it rather than fuel it. Just a short time ago, the town of Buhriz in the Diyala province witnessed repugnant sectarian cleansing operations. This was [sectarian] cleansing in every sense of the word. Massacres occurred, and [violations] were committed by both sides, and cannot be covered.

Al-Hayat: Do you think that coexistence has ended?

Barzani: Unfortunately, I'd almost say yes. Honestly, I can say that we are strongly working to keep the coexistence between Arabs and Kurds from going in the direction of failure, and we're doing our best to maintain Shiite-Sunni [coexistence] as well. Escaping reality does not work. Solving problems begins with recognizing their existence and roots.

Let's set aside diplomatic phrases. Coexistence is almost nonexistent between the [Iraqi] components, at least among those that maintain control [over these components] and groups that do not know the reality of things. I think that the historical relationship between Arabs and Kurds must remain, and it is unfortunate that those who are searching for popularity [among a certain group] seek to incite problems with another. The goal of this tension is to generate popularity and win elections. This is a major disaster, and people must be educated and warned about those who use fanaticism.

Al-Hayat: Do you expect Sunni Arabs to demand a [federal] region for themselves?

Barzani: The Constitution gives them this right. After the fall of the [former] regime, I tried to convince the Sunni Arabs of the idea of a [federal] region, because I feared that the Shiites and Sunnis would slip into a bloody conflict. This was possible at the time. They refused and still believed that power in Iraq was traditionally and historically for the Sunnis. They did not comprehend the extent of the change that had occurred. They are now demanding [a federal region], but achieving this seems difficult and complex. They demanded and Baghdad refused.

Al-Hayat: What if the Iraqi prime minister decides to halt all financial provisions to the Kurdistan region?

Barzani: This decision has already been taken. And this is the situation now. US mediation is currently underway, and we are giving this mediation a chance. I believe that cutting off the region's livelihood is almost as dangerous as the bombing of Halabja with chemical weapons, or more dange-

rous. We await the results of the mediation, but I am confident that the region will not be silent about this measure in the event that it continues, and the region will not remain a spectator. We have a program and a plan we will carry out. I hope that the mediation leads to a solution. We will go to the end of the road to find [a solution], but if [the halting of financing] continues, everything will change.

Al-Hayat: Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs, Hussain al-Shahristani, has accused the Kurds of stealing Iraq's oil ...

Barzani: These are bad words, and they should not have been said or issued by a person in a position of responsibility. Mr. Shahristani knows the Kurds and their history and struggles. Everything we do in the field of energy we are doing in a public manner and in accordance with the constitution. If they want to speak in such language, the response is: "for a hundred years you have been looting Kurdistan's oil. The Iraqi state would not have been able to stand on its feet after World War I, when it was founded by the British, and to withstand and survive without Kurdistan's oil.

Al-Hayat: Do you mean Kirkuk's oil?

Barzani: Yes, of course. I do not like to talk in this manner, but the Kurds should not be addressed in such a bad way.

Al-Hayat: You were also angered by Maliki's comments after a Kurdish officer from the presidential guards [for President Jalal Talabani] murdered a journalist in Baghdad.

Barzani: It's an unfortunate incident, and the crime was condemned. Justice must be implemented. Guards who are not from the Peshmerga were dismissed, and I do not have much information [about the incident]. The crime is condemnable and the judiciary must decide whether the crime was intentional or occurred due to a dispute. It is not reasonable for the prime minister to say sharply in front of TV screens: "I am the avenger of blood, and blood for blood." A prime minister should not utter such words. He is the "avenger of blood" for all Iraqis. More than 400 university professors have been killed in recent years, who will avenge their blood?

Al-Hayat: You mean that they were assassinated?

Barzani: Yes, assassinated. More than 400 of them. And what about the sectarian cleansing? Who will avenge the blood of these victims? Such talk is very dangerous. If they addressed us or threatened us in such language, do they want us to respond: Who is the avenger of blood for the 182,000 Kurds killed during the Anfal campaigns and for the 5,000 martyrs — mostly women and children — killed in Halabja? Who is the avenger of blood for the 8,000 members of the Barzani clan buried in mass graves in the deserts of southern Iraq? Who is the avenger of blood for the 12,000 young Kurds arrested [in the era of Saddam Hussein] whose fate is unknown? We don't say "blood for blood," rather we said "let's turn a new page." The families of our martyrs hosted Iraqi soldiers when the army collapsed in [Iraqi] Kurdistan. We did not seek revenge. We will not accept a return to the language of blood and revenge.

ELECTIONS

Al-Hayat: Is it possible that the parliamentary elections to be held in Iraq later this month will lead to some form of change?

Barzani: I hope and wish that the elections are held. They could lead to a change, and we support holding them on schedule. Change is possible if all the forces agree on a specific program.

Al-Hayat: Could you support Maliki remaining in power after the elections?

Barzani: First, let's wait for the results of the elections and the positions of other powers. I don't want to personalize the issue. I respect Maliki and from a personal standpoint he was and still is a friend and a brother. Our dispute is about the method of rule and the behavior adopted in state administration. The issue is not personal. Even if someone else came [to power] and continued with the same approach, we would not be content with [merely] objecting to this person staying in power, and perhaps everything would change.

Al-Hayat: There are those who accuse Maliki of subjecting other components to a difficult choice: either submission or breaking away

Barzani: I'll address the heart of the dispute. The truth is that the budget and other problems can be solved if there is a political will. The most dangerous issue is for there to be someone who dreams of breaking the prestige of the [Kurdistan] region and subjecting it to a one-man rule in Baghdad. Frankly, this will not happen ... this is impossible. We will ⇒

⇒ not kneel, and we will not succumb. We will not allow someone to break or harm the prestige of the region and violate the dignity of its people. This is the origin of the problem. I will summarize my response in one sentence: We will not be subordinate. We welcome being partners, brothers or allies. As for subordinates, we will not be subordinate to anyone. We will remain partners and will not accept being subordinates.

THE SYRIAN SCENE

Al-Hayat: Is it possible for Syria to return to what it was before the outbreak of the events?

Barzani: I think this is unlikely and very difficult. At the same time, is very unfortunate to see in Syria rivers of blood, painful scenes and all this ruin. I do not think that a return to the past is possible.

Al-Hayat: Do you think that Syria will disintegrate?

Barzani: The current scene suggests disintegration.

Al-Hayat: Do you mean that it will experience a problem relating to coexistence between Sunnis and Alawites, and between Arabs and Kurds?

Barzani: Syria is currently fragmented. The authorities control part of the country, and other areas are controlled by various forces. And there is terrorism.

Al-Hayat: Do you think that the nation's borders have collapsed? The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) is entering from Iraq, while Hezbollah is entering from Lebanon, not to mention the thousands of [other] fighters coming from abroad?

Barzani: This is the reality of the situation. The borders of Syria have practically fallen and opposing forces are each trying to seize the largest part possible.

Al-Hayat: There are those who believe that the fall of coexistence and the fall of the borders will push each group to entrench itself in its own territory.

Barzani: All of the entities that were created after World War I could disintegrate and return to their natural situations. The only possible salvation is for these countries to adopt the principles of coexistence, democracy and real partnership. [They must embrace] democracy and partnership or otherwise risk disintegrating into countries with diverse compositions. The world has changed and the people woke up. The subjection of people and groups is no longer possible. No longer will anyone accept injustice, discrimination or exclusion. Its either full partnership or disintegration.

SYRIAN KURDS

Al-Hayat: Did you, as [Iraqi Kurdistan], offer military aid to Syrian Kurds?

Barzani: We have not offered any military aid. In the beginning, I called on organizations and figures, and we held discussions. I suggested that we work under one umbrella. They formed the [Kurdish] Supreme Committee. We told them that any decision they make in consensus we would support. My opinion was that we should avoid getting involved in the fighting because it would pit groups against them. Unfortunately, there are currently internal disagreements [between Syrian Kurds]. We have offered humanitarian support, and we will continue to do so. We did not provide military assistance, and we do not want to offer aid of this kind, which will entail legal repercussions for the region.

Al-Hayat: Is there any Iranian-Turkish attraction to Kurdistan territory, and are you subjected to pressure?

Barzani: Fortunately, and I say this in all honesty and sincerity, we are establishing balanced relations with Iran and Turkey, and these relations are developing. There is no pressure on us from either side, and if there were we would refuse it. In Kurdistan we reject tutelage from any country in the world, whether near or far.

Al-Hayat: Even from the United States?

Barzani: Yes, we do not accept any form of tutelage. The Kurdish people did not offer all these sacrifices to live again under tutelage.

Al-Hayat: In September of last year, [the region] was subjected to a terrorist attack that violated the stability of the Kurdistan region. Where did the terrorists come from?

Barzani: We have about 230,000 displaced persons from different parts

of Iraq. We had strict procedures that ensured security, and they were applied to Kurds and Arabs alike. Some Arabs complained about these procedures, and friends advised us to ease them, so we complied.

Terrorist groups, including ISIS, exploited the easing of procedures, and members of these groups entered Erbil under the pretext that they were coming to work. Members of the network monitored the city for six months, then four non-Iraqi terrorists carried out an attack during which they were killed.

Within a week, the security services managed to arrest the members of the network that had prepared this attack, with the exception of the network's official who fled to Syria. It was learned that he alone knows the identity of the four perpetrators. The detainees confessed that they belong to ISIS.

Al-Hayat: You are the son of a historical leader of the Kurds, but you achieved what he could not. Does the leader compete with his father?

Barzani: I am proud to be the son of Mullah Mustafa, a symbol of the nation. I was his pupil, and I spent all my life with him until his death. At the same time, I am proud of my identity, my path and what I have done. There is no doubt that being the son of Mullah Mustafa gave me a chance and helped me, but you have to deserve this opportunity and gain the confidence of the people through your sacrifices and efforts. I have given everything in my power.

In relation to the birth of the [Kurdistan] region, one must note that the circumstances in the days of my father were different internally, regionally and internationally. And we must say that what was achieved was based on the foundation laid by the work of Mullah Mustafa.

Al-Hayat: Would the Kurdistan region have been possible had the United States not decided to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime?

Barzani: Let's go back to the beginning. Had the regime not invaded Kuwait, then the United States and other Western countries would not have advanced to confront it. The world's attention turned to the suffering of the Iraqi people and to the long suffering of the Kurds. But out of respect for the truth, we will say that the overthrow of Saddam would not have happened without US intervention. The opposition had tried and didn't succeed. We did not intend to surrender, but the fighting would have gone on for years and years.

Al-Hayat: What is your comment on the victory of Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's party in the municipal elections in Turkey?

Barzani: First, I would like to extend to him my warm congratulations. The people renewed their confidence in him, and he deserves it. To understand the outcome of the elections one must take into account the situation of the Turkish economy prior to the arrival of Erdogan.

Al-Hayat: What about the economic situation in the [Kurdistan] region?

Barzani: We are having some difficulties now because of the action taken in Baghdad. We will give US mediation a chance, and when we become hopeless regarding the situation we will do what we are entitled to, without relying on Baghdad.

Al-Hayat: Can the Kurdistan region live based on its own resources, if Baghdad took the decision to cut off any financial provisions?

Barzani: We are trying to not reach this point. If Baghdad sticks to its position, we have huge amounts of oil and if we started selling it, the region could carry on without the need for [money from] Baghdad. ♦

Irak : le Kurdistan, refuge des Kurdes syriens

par Georges Fitzpatrick - 14 avril 2014
geotribune.com

La province autonome du Kurdistan irakien accueille de plus en plus des Kurdes syriens, qui ont réussi à fuir le régime ou la rébellion dans leur pays d'origine.

Ce flux a contribué à l'élargissement rapide des camps de réfugiés situés à proximité d'Erbil et Donuk. Plus précisément, 240 000 Kurdes syriens s'y sont établis. En toute logique, la plupart sont originaires de Hasaka ou Qamishli, des zones kurdes de leur pays. Paradoxalement, celles-ci ont été, en grande partie, épargnées par les affrontements. Mais, leurs habitants ont décidé de les quitter, faute de



trouver de l'emploi et menacés par la famine.

Comme si cela ne suffisait, l'avenir semble bien sombre pour les Kurdes syriens. En effet, le PYD, qui est quasiment

une branche du PKK, contrôle le Kurdistan syrien. Et, suite au refus catégorique de l'opposition syrienne d'accorder l'autonomie à cette région ainsi que des droits aux Kurdes, cette formation politique s'est rapprochée du chef d'Etat syrien qui a, à présent, la mainmise sur cette région. Les Kurdes syriens se sont donc retrouvés entre le marteau et l'enclume : d'un côté, les milices djihadistes formées au cours de la révolution les considèrent comme des adversaires ; et, de l'autre, du fait de leur idéologie communiste, le PKK les assimile à des mécréants.

Dans ce contexte, beaucoup de Kurdes syriens n'ont eu d'autre choix que de décider de partir; d'autant plus qu'au fil du temps, les menaces devenaient de plus en plus violentes. Selon des témoignages, les islamistes auraient même exécuté certains civils et, par la suite, exhibé leurs dépouilles dans un village kurde près d'Alep. ♦

Le Kurdistan irakien creuse une tranchée pour sécuriser sa frontière avec la Syrie

www.orientlejour.com
15 avril 2014 (AFP)

ERBIL (Irak) — La région autonome du Kurdistan irakien a entrepris de creuser une tranchée le long de sa frontière avec la Syrie pour se prémunir de l'infiltration d'insurgés et de contrebandiers, ont annoncé mardi des responsables.

"La tranchée doit permettre d'empêcher l'infiltration de membres de groupes terroristes et stopper les contrebandiers", a expliqué à l'AFP Halkurd Moullah Ali, porte-parole du ministère des peshmergas, les forces de sécurité du Kurdistan irakien.

Les contrebandiers "ont commencé à opérer dans ces zones parce que les autorités syriennes en ont perdu le contrôle et elles sont devenues dangereuses", a-t-il ajouté.

La tranchée, d'une profon-

deur de deux mètres et d'une largeur de trois mètres, doit s'étendre sur 17 km, le long de l'étroite portion de frontière entre la Syrie et le Kurdistan irakien, selon M. Ali, qui n'a pas précisé quand l'ouvrage serait terminé.

Ce dispositif est une "partie de la stratégie du gouvernement (fédéral)" de Bagdad, pour protéger les 600 km de frontière



avec son voisin syrien, en proie à une guerre civile depuis plus de 3 ans, a-t-il assuré.

"Nous avons arrêté des terroristes et des contrebandiers qui tentaient de s'infiltrer au Kurdistan", a assuré le général de brigade Peshmergas Hashem Yeti, ajoutant avoir reçu "des demandes de la part des habitants des zones frontalières

réclamant qu'on empêche ces infiltrations qui constituent pour eux une menace".

Le Parti de l'Union démocratique (PYD), un puissant parti politique kurde syrien, a condamné le projet de tranchée, y voyant une tentative de bloquer les Kurdes syriens, et a fermé samedi son poste-frontière en signe de protestation.

Des centaines de personnes attendent depuis pour traverser la frontière.

Les Kurdes syriens ont tenté au début de la guerre civile de ne pas s'impliquer dans le conflit entre le régime de Bachar el-Assad et la rébellion, jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient attaqués par les jihadistes qui se disputent le même territoire à la lisière de l'Irak. ■

Le Monde

Vendredi 18 avril 2014

Bachar Al-Assad marque des points dans la guerre d'usure

Fort de ses avancées militaires, le régime syrien desserre l'étau rebelle à Damas et s'apprête à organiser une élection présidentielle jouée d'avance

Cinq mois après le début de la bataille du Qalamoun, un massif montagneux en lisière du Liban, le régime syrien approche de son objectif. Ce haut plateau, que les rebelles avaient transformé en base arrière de leurs attaques dans la banlieue nord de Damas mais aussi la banlieue sud et chiïte de Beyrouth, est sur le point de repasser sous le contrôle des troupes gouvernementales et de leurs alliés du Hezbollah.

La prise du village chrétien de Maaloula, lundi 14 avril, est venue parachever la contre-offensive des loyalistes, qui, depuis novembre 2013, se sont successivement emparés de Qara, Al-Nabak, Deir Atiyah, Yabroud et Rankous. Obtenue par un mélange de pilonnage intensif et d'arrangements ponctuels, comme à Yabroud, où une partie des combattants a été autorisée à fuir, la réoccupation du maquis du Qalamoun offre au camp Assad une victoire d'étape appréciable. Elle lui permet de sécuriser à nouveau la route Damas-Homs-Lattaquié, la colonne vertébrale du régime.

Si l'armée régulière et ses supplétifs chiïtes parviennent dans les prochains jours à déloger les rebelles de leurs ultimes positions le long de la frontière libanaise, à Zabadani et Hoch Arab, ils peuvent espérer couper leurs lignes de ravitaillement depuis le pays du Cèdre. « Il n'y a pas de mystère. En matière d'armements, d'effectifs et d'organisation, l'avantage est du côté du régime, concède Burhan Ghalioun, un cadre de la Coalition nationale syrienne (CNS), la principale formation d'opposition. Mais est-ce que cela veut dire qu'il va gagner ? Non, il n'a rien à gagner, pas de cause, sinon la survie d'une famille. Et d'ailleurs ses gains dans le Qalamoun sont réversibles. »

Le président syrien, Bachar Al-Assad, semble convaincu du contraire. Devant les étudiants de l'université de Damas, il a présenté les dernières avancées de ses soldats comme un « tournant » dans la guerre civile qui ravage son pays depuis trois ans. « En Syrie, il y a une réalité objective que l'Occident devrait admettre », a renchéri

depuis Beyrouth le cheikh Naïm Kasseem, numéro deux du Hezbollah, à l'intention des parrains de la rébellion. « Le choix est clair : soit s'entendre avec Assad et parvenir à

La réoccupation du maquis du Qalamoun offre au régime Assad une victoire d'étape appréciable

un résultat, soit faire durer la crise en sachant pourtant que le président Assad continuera à diriger le pays », a poursuivi le dignitaire chiïte. A quelques semaines du scrutin présidentiel, qui devrait se tenir entre la mi-juin et la mi-juillet – la date exacte sera annoncée la semaine prochaine –, ces propos visent à persuader les chancelleries occidentales de renoncer à leur ligne anti-Assad et d'avaliser la réélection programmée du maître de Damas.

Une rhétorique sans grand succès puisque l'Union européenne a d'ores et déjà qualifié de « parodie de démocratie » cette consultation, à laquelle aucun responsable de la CNS ne pourra se présenter.

« Le régime est plus entreprenant depuis quelques mois, analyse un diplomate européen qui se rend régulièrement à Damas. Il veut donner l'impression qu'il reprend la main. C'est important vis-à-vis de ses partisans. Mais c'est du grignotage, des coups tactiques, dont le seul mérite est de faire gagner du temps à Bachar. Sur le fond de la confrontation, rien ne change. »

Faute de prendre un ascendant décisif sur ses adversaires, le régime marque des points et améliore sa position par petites touches, ce qui n'est pas négligeable dans la guerre d'usure en cours. Outre la reprise du Qalamoun, il a réussi à desserrer la pression des rebelles dans la Ghouta, la banlieue agricole de Damas.

De guerre lasse, certaines localités de cette région, assiégées et affamées pendant des mois, ont fini par signer au début de l'année des accords de trêve avec l'armée. Ces arrangements, négociés par des notables locaux, prévoient de rendre aux civils leur liberté de mouvement et de faire entrer quelques convois de nourriture. En échange, les combattants sont censés abandonner leurs mortiers, lance-roquettes et autres canons et ne conserver que leurs armes légères.

A Beit Sahm, Babila et Yilda,



Des militaires dans le village de Maaloula, au nord-est de Damas, dont l'armée syrienne a repris le contrôle, lundi 14 avril. KHALED AL-HARIRI/REUTERS

dans la périphérie de Damas, des insurgés ont été autorisés à quitter les lieux, après interrogatoire par les services de sécurité, rapporte Yezid Sayigh, chercheur à l'institut Carnegie de Beyrouth, dans un récent article où il estime que « le régime mène aux points ». « Ces trêves locales sont parfois présentées comme des accords de réconciliation nationale et s'accompagnent d'une levée du drapeau syrien au-dessus des zones autrefois encerclées », détaille-t-il.

Ces compromis sont très fragiles et certains d'entre eux ont déjà été violés. Mais ils permettent à l'armée, en manque chronique d'effectifs, de réaffecter certaines de ses unités sur les fronts les plus

A Damas, dans les cercles du pouvoir, on reconnaît à demi-mot que le conflit est loin d'être terminé

chauds. « C'est une stratégie qui me fait peur, confie Naïm Kossayer, un militant de la CNS, basé à Paris. Militairement, le régime ne peut pas gagner. Mais sa politique de terreur

peut porter ses fruits. Assiéger la population, l'affamer, couper peu à peu les insurgés de leur base et négocier des cessez-le-feu locaux. C'est de la contre-insurrection, comme les Russes ont fait en Tchétchénie.»

Bien conscients qu'ils ont tout à perdre dans une guerre de positions, les rebelles ont attaqué fin mars la région de Lattaquié, via la

Turquie. Même si les forces prorégime ont vite arrêté les assaillants, elles peinent pour l'instant à les refouler de l'autre côté de la frontiè-

re. A Alep, les rebelles ont également pris l'initiative en lançant un assaut contre le siège des services secrets de l'armée de l'air, l'une des principales positions loyalistes dans la métropole du nord. «Pour que l'opposition s'effondre, il faudrait qu'elle soit abandonnée par ses sponsors, et l'on est très loin de cela», prédit Peter Harling, analyste à l'International Crisis Group. Preuve en est la récente livraison de missiles antichar TOW, de fabrication américaine, à un groupe

armé de la région d'Idlib.

Dans les cercles du pouvoir, nonobstant les sorties triomphatrices du président, on reconnaît à demi-mot que le conflit est loin d'être terminé. «L'une des formules en vogue à Damas, parle de "couper des têtes et des langues pendant dix ans"», raconte un bon connaisseur des milieux pro-Assad. Comme si, emporté dans une course éperdue pour sa survie, le régime ne pouvait plus se passer de la guerre... ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE
(AVEC LAURE STÉPHAN,
À BEYROUTH)

Le Monde

Vendredi 18 avril 2014

L'opposition accuse Damas d'attaques chimiques à l'aide de chlore à l'état gazeux

LE RÉGIME ASSAD, qui a consenti à se débarrasser de son arsenal chimique pour neutraliser le risque d'une intervention militaire occidentale en septembre, aurait-il des regrets ? Selon la Coalition nationale syrienne (CNS), les forces gouvernementales auraient fait usage d'armes toxiques à au moins neuf reprises depuis le début de l'année, dont six au cours du seul mois d'avril, causant quelques morts et des dizaines de blessés par suffocation. Un bilan bien moins dramatique que lors de l'attaque au sarin du 21 août dans la banlieue de Damas (1 500 morts), mais suffisant pour inciter la CNS à demander une enquête à l'Organisation pour l'interdiction des armes chimiques (OIAC), chargée de la destruction du stock syrien.

«Nous prévenons que le régime va réutiliser ces armes prohibées à une échelle plus grande si personne ne le restreint et ne le force à cesser sa guerre contre le peuple syrien», a déclaré Badr Jamous, le secrétaire général de la CNS.

Les accusations de l'opposition reposent sur une série de vidéos tournées dans des cliniques de fortune, où l'on voit des hommes et des enfants présentant des symptômes d'étouffement, le visage recouvert d'un masque à oxygène pour certains. Ces scènes ont notamment été filmées à Kafr Zita, un gros bourg des environs de Hama, dans le centre de la Syrie, qui est régulièrement visé

par l'aviation du régime, depuis que la rébellion en a pris le contrôle, il y a un an et demi. Les 11 et 12 avril, selon la CNS, ces bombardements ont pris la forme de barils d'explosifs remplis de chlore à l'état gazeux (dichlore) d'aspect jaune-verdâtre et à l'odeur âcre, qui ont tué deux habitants et blessés 70 autres. Utilisée durant la première guerre mondiale sous le nom de bertholite, cette substance endommage les voies respiratoires et peut, à forte dose, provoquer la mort par asphyxie.

Cylindre en acier

A l'appui de ses dires, la CNS a produit la photo d'un cylindre en acier, portant l'inscription Cl₂, le symbole chimique du chlore à l'état gazeux. La télévision officielle syrienne a reconnu l'usage de ce gaz à Kafr Zita, tout en l'imputant au Front Al-Nosra, une milice djihadiste affiliée à Al-Qaïda, déjà mise en cause par le régime dans l'hécatombe du 21 août, sans convaincre ni Washington ni Paris qui avaient conclu à la responsabilité de Damas. «Le régime Assad est la seule partie du conflit capable de déployer des avions», souligne l'opposition, qui a recensé plusieurs autres bombardements aux barils toxiques : à Harasta, en périphérie de Damas, les 11 et 27 mars, à Tamanaa, dans la région d'Idlib, le 12 avril, et à Atshan, près de Hama, le 14 avril. Mercredi 16 avril, la rébellion accusait le régime

d'une nouvelle attaque à Harasta.

Des échantillons ont été envoyés pour analyse en Turquie. La CNS espère que ces examens valideront ses accusations et permettront de déclencher une enquête internationale. Rien n'est moins sûr pour l'instant. Le chlore à l'état gazeux, qui est une substance industrielle, à usage dual, ne figurait pas sur la liste des agents chimiques déclarés par Damas, tels le sarin et le gaz moutarde, en cours de destruction ou de transfert hors de Syrie.

Certes, depuis que la Syrie a adhéré, fin septembre 2013, à la Convention sur l'interdiction des armes chimiques, il n'est plus nécessaire de passer par l'ONU pour saisir l'OIAC. Il suffit qu'un ou plusieurs Etats membres le demandent à son président, le Turc Ahmet Uzumcu, en avançant des éléments permettant de penser que les autorités syriennes ont fait un usage militaire du chlore à l'état gazeux. Mais, contrairement au sarin, qui est un liquide, il est très volatil et se fixe moins facilement sur des tissus humains ou végétaux. Quant aux pays occidentaux, ils paraissent plus préoccupés par l'avancement du processus de démantèlement de l'arsenal chimique syrien, qui a atteint 68 % et doit s'achever en juin, que par une nouvelle enquête sur les agissements de Damas. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE
ET STÉPHANIE MAUPAS (À LA HAYE)

La France veut saisir la CPI sur la Syrie

Le « rapport César », élaboré à partir de 55 000 photos de cadavres de prisonniers suppliciés dans les geôles du régime syrien depuis 2011, a été présenté au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU, mardi 15 avril. Ces images, souvent insoutenables, d'hommes, mais aussi de femmes, de mineurs et de vieillards, tués dans d'atroces tortures et manifestement affaiblis, ont été prises par un employé de la sécurité militaire chargé d'enregistrer les décès en détention à la morgue de l'hôpital militaire de Damas. Surnommé « César » pour protéger son identité, il a fait défection en août. Ses clichés ont été confiés à un cabinet d'experts juridiques britannique, rémunéré par le gouvernement du Qatar. Ce financement maladroît – Doha est un bailleur de fonds de la rébellion – et la publication des premières révélations la veille des pourparlers de paix de « Genève 2 », en janvier, ont suscité une polémique sur le rapport. Depuis, le patient travail d'archivage et d'identification se poursuit, tandis que David Crane, l'ex-procureur général du Tribunal spécial pour la Sierra Leone, milite pour des poursuites judiciaires sur la base de ces « preuves directes et précises ». Paris a annoncé, mardi, son intention de proposer au Conseil de sécurité la saisine de la Cour pénale internationale (CPI) pour « tous les crimes » de guerre et contre l'humanité commis en Syrie. Moscou et Pékin, qui disposent d'un droit de veto, ont annoncé leur opposition.

Un « al-Qaida land », de la Syrie aux portes de Bagdad

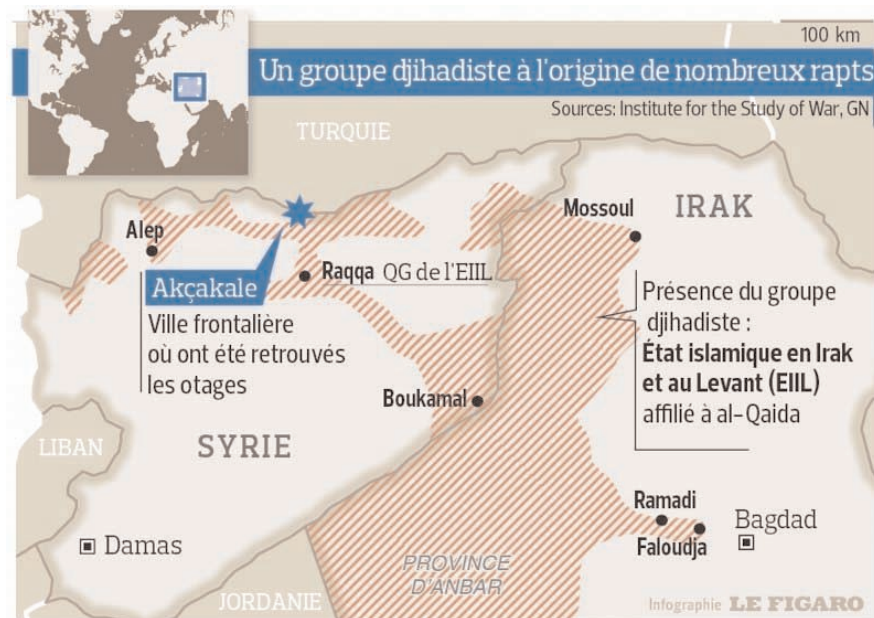
Par Georges Malbrunot,
Service infographie du Figaro

INFOGRAPHIE - Le groupe ravisseur des journalistes français, l'État islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIIL), a pour but de faire la jonction avec l'Irak voisin, où son antenne locale occupe depuis trois mois la ville de Faloudja à 60 km à l'ouest de Bagdad.

La libération des journalistes français est-elle le résultat de la guerre qu'a lancée en début d'année à leurs ravisseurs de l'État islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIIL) le groupe al-Nosra, qui représente al-Qaida en Syrie, et des factions salafistes qui ne pouvaient plus tolérer leurs exactions contre la population? Toujours est-il que, depuis, l'EIIL a dû se replier sur son bastion de l'est de la Syrie, au terme de luttes fratricides qui se poursuivent.

Mais même affaibli, le groupe djihadiste le plus radical de la rébellion anti-Assad est loin d'avoir dit son dernier mot. Sur le terrain, son objectif est désormais de faire la jonction avec l'Irak voisin, où son antenne locale occupe depuis trois mois, avec l'aide de tribus, la ville de Faloudja à 60 km à l'ouest de Bagdad, ainsi que des quartiers de Ramadi, un peu plus au nord. L'EIIL a toutefois subi un revers il y a dix jours, lorsque ses rivaux islamistes l'ont bouté de la ville frontalière de Boukamal en Syrie, l'obligeant à se replier vers un site pétrolier voisin, dont l'exploitation constitue une précieuse ressource.

Créé en janvier 2012, huit mois après le début de la révolution contre Bachar el-Assad, l'EIIL n'est rien d'autre que le prolongement syrien d'al-Qaida en Irak (AQI), la terrifiante organisation terroriste responsable des pires sauvageries contre leurs ennemis: les chiites, l'armée américaine et irakienne. Ses chefs militaires sont des Irakiens ou des Libyens, ses cadres religieux, plutôt des Saoudiens et des



Tunisiens, tandis que les combattants sont en majorité syriens - soit au total plus de 10.000 hommes. Et c'est auprès de l'EIIL que vont combattre des dizaines de jeunes Français attirés par le djihad.

ANCIENS OFFICIERS IRAKIENS

«Au début, l'État islamique a fait venir en Syrie les étrangers qu'il ne pouvait plus garder en Irak», souligne Moktar Lamani, l'ancien représentant de l'ONU à Damas. «Plus aguerri qu'al-Nosra, avec lequel l'EIIL a collaboré contre Assad jusqu'au début de l'année, l'EIIL, grâce à un solide réseau de bailleurs de fonds dans le Golfe, a commencé de recruter parmi al-Nosra, parce qu'il avait besoin de Syriens, ce qui a fait naître de premières frictions», ajoute l'expert.

Jusqu'aux affrontements du début de l'année, le groupe ravisseur des Français était la force montante de l'insurrection syrienne. «Ses combattants jouent sur la surprise, c'est un groupe très fermé», relève

Moktar Lamani. Rien d'étonnant. La plupart des cadres de l'EIIL sont en fait des anciens officiers de la garde républicaine ou des services de renseignements de Saddam Hussein, renvoyés par les Américains après la chute de Bagdad en 2003, qui ont embrassé ensuite la cause djihadiste.

Leurs expériences militaires, renforcées par des années de guérilla anti-américaine, expliquent leur capacité à faire exploser le même jour une voiture piégée à Bagdad, à tenir Faloudja et Ramadi, à attaquer de l'autre côté de la frontière des positions de l'armée syrienne et à résister aux ripostes d'al-Nosra et des salafistes. Sans oublier leur faculté à garder en otages pendant de longs mois et dans un contexte délicat plus d'une douzaine d'Occidentaux. Mais contrairement à l'ex-chef d'al-Qaida en Irak, le sanguinaire Abou Moussab al-Zarqoui, qui faisait systématiquement exécuter ses captifs au milieu des années 2000, l'EIIL en Syrie sait négocier ses otages.

Les sicaires du djihad global se sont sentis suffisamment forts pour dire non à Ayman al-Zawahiri, lorsque le chef d'al-Qaida, caché entre le Pakistan et l'Afghanistan, leur a demandé de rentrer en Irak pour ne pas aggraver la fracture interdjihadiste. S'ils auront du mal à régner sur un «al-Qaida land» de l'est de la Syrie aux portes de Bagdad, ils entendent en revanche sanctuariser leur organisation dans l'est de la Syrie, pour en faire un trou noir propice à l'extension de la guerre sainte contre le Liban, la Jordanie et Israël, après une éventuelle chute d'Assad. ■



Des combattants de l'État islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIIL) sur le point de détruire des cigarettes confisquées, le 2 avril dernier à Raqqqa, en Syrie.

Kurdistan president Barzani accuses Syrian Kurdish PYD of collaborating with Assad Regime

ANF - Hewler, April 14, 2014

firatnews.com

ERBIL-Hewlêr, Kurdistan region 'Iraq,— Massoud Barzani, the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, has accused the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) of controlling Syrian (West) Kurdistan [Rojava] by armed force in collaboration with the Syrian regime. Barzani said "Only one Kurdish organisation is in league with the regime and using armed force to control the region." Kurdish officials have made contradictory statements regarding the digging of ditches.

Speaking to Sky News Arabiya TV, Massoud Barzani made serious accusations against the revolution in Syrian Kurdistan. "The gains in West Kurdistan are only temporary!"

Barzani said: "The gains are temporary and when the conditions change they will disappear." While on the one hand Barzani accused the PYD of collaboration, he contradicted himself by saying he did not believe there was an agreement between the PYD and the regime.

Barzani said: "If there is an agreement



between a group and the Syrian regime regarding autonomy for Kurds in Syria, then I would consider that a positive step, but I don't believe there is any political agreement. We have no evidence of such an agreement."

Barzani's statement came after protests by the people of Syrian Kurdistan on 9 and 10 April against the ditches being excavated on the Syrian Kurdistan border, demanding the removal of borders that divide Kurdistan. Turkey is also digging a ditch on its border with Syrian Kurdistan in parallel with that of the Kurdistan Democratic Party KDP.

The ditch is a government decision

The Federal Kurdistan authorities have also made conflicting comments regarding the ditches. While it has yet to make an official

statement, the Deputy Peshmerga Minister Anwar Haji Osman said on Rudaw TV that the ditch had been dug on the orders of the Kurdish administration and Peshmerga Ministry, not of the KDP. Osman said the reason was 'border instability'. Osman also accused the PYD, saying he did not understand why the matter had been so exaggerated. Osman said the ditch between West and South Kurdistan was no different to the ditch between Erbil [Hewlêr] and Kirkuk.

However, according to a statement published by Rudaw, Peshmerga Minister Jabbar Yawar said he knew nothing about the ditch. Osman remarked that Yawar was 'not well'.

Peshmerga Commander: the decision was the Iraqi government's

In another development, a Peshmerga commander told the Zaman newspaper in Iraq that the reason for the ditch on the border was to prevent smuggling. The commander said the decision was a joint one of the Baghdad and Hewler governments.

Iraqi government: decision was not ours

Ali Mousavi, an advisor of the Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri Al Maliki, told Rudaw that the Iraqi government had not taken a decision to dig a ditch. Peshmerga sources say there is a project to excavate a 605-kilometre ditch along the Iraq-Syria border, and that only 15 kilometres remains to be completed. The ditch is in general 2 metres wide and 3 metres deep.

■ ■ ■



18 April 2014

New Agreement for Kurdish Cabinet Does Not Include PUK

rudaw.net

18/ April /2014

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) said it has signed the final agreement for the next Kurdish government with two other parties, while its strategic partner the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) said its leaders were still mulling options.

The KDP said it concluded an agreement Thursday for a coalition government together with the Change Movement (Gorran) and the Islamic League (Komal).

"We signed the final agreement to form the government," said the head of KDP's negotia-



Chief KDP negotiator, Fazil Mirani (R), with his Gorran counterpart, Omar Said Ali, as they announce their agreement on Thursday. Photo: Rudaw

ting team, Fazil Mirani.

The negotiations over the next cabinet, still ongoing seven months after the September 21 elections for the Kurdish parliament, have turned into a circus for Kurds awaiting the next Kurdistan Regional Government

(KRG).

At the polls, while the KDP maintained its dominant position as the largest vote-getter, its strategic partner in the outgoing cabinet, the PUK, fell into third place, behind the rival Gorran.

Talks have been deadlocked

over the PUK's insistence on key security posts that other parties do not feel it deserves any longer, given the lesser seats it now has in parliament.

Last week, a KDP source had said that five parties, including the PUK, had agreed on a new cabinet, but that appears to have changed.

In addition the PUK, which is heavily backed by Iran, most recently called in Iranian negotiators who met with KDP and other party leaders, presumably in a bid to muscle them into giving in to PUK demands for key security positions, including control over the Peshmarga ministry.

Along with the PUK the Islamic Union (Yekgirtu) now also says it will wait to give its final answer. The KDP had warned it would declare a government by the end of this month, with or without the PUK.

"Next week the parliament ➤

will convene and Gorran will chair the session," said Omar Said Ali, the chief negotiator for Gorran, which has secured the important Peshmarga and finance ministries, as well as the Parliament Speaker post.

After the latest KDP-Gorran deal, the PUK released a statement saying its leaders are still mulling over their choices and pursuing options, which some interpret as a warning the party might go into opposition.

Meanwhile, PUK negotiators met Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani at the Pirmam resort for more discussions.

And on Thursday, Lahur Sheikh Jangi, the head of the anti-terror squad in Sulaimani who is a PUK member, warned all parties against sidelining the PUK.

Jangi wrote on his official Facebook page that the KDP-Gorran agreement was an attempt to undercut the PUK. He warned of potential dire consequences if the 2005 strategic agreement between the KDP and PUK is ignored.

But the KDP and Gorran appeared to be putting their new agreement into practice, stressing the need for parliament to meet next week.

Based on the same agreement, Komal will have the ministry of agriculture and the department of the environment in the government of Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani.

Abdulstar Majid, a senior Komal official, confirmed that his party had "agreed with the KDP to take part in the eighth cabinet of the KRG."

He added that several important points have been included in the deal, the most important being a pledge to fight corruption.

"A committee from the participating parties will devise the government program that will

include measures to fight corruption, increase transparency and justice," he said.

The Talks between the KDP and Yekgirtu failed to end in agreement. According to a Rudaw correspondent, Yekgirtu wants the electricity ministry it has been assigned to be exchanged for another ministry.

Asked if the KDP is ready to appease Yekgirtu by offering it another ministry, Mirani said, "If we can, we will do it." □

POLITICAL PARTIES AGREE TO FORM NEW KRG CABINET

By Salih Waladbagi
www.kurdishglobe.net
21 April 2014

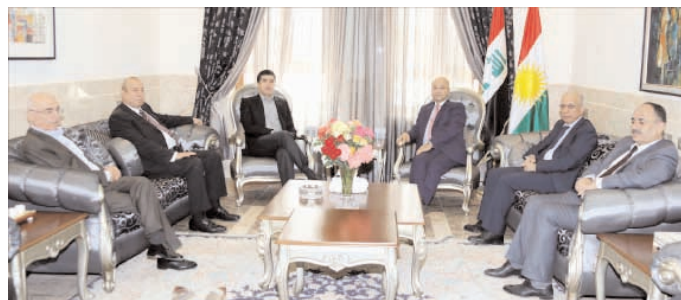
The KDP, CM and KIG have agreed to form the KRG cabinet, while the PUK and KIU have not decided to join the government yet. The PUK seems very upset as its ally refused to give it the key security posts in the cabinet.

The KDP, CM and KIG have agreed to form the KRG cabinet, while the PUK and KIU have not decided to join the government yet. The PUK seems very upset as its ally refused to give it the key security posts in the cabinet.

The three winning parties of the last September elections have signed the final agreement on forming the new government cabinet after 208 days delay. Meanwhile, the third winning party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), has not decided to join the cabinet yet and still thinks over the options.

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Change Movement (CM) as well as the Kurdistan Islamic Group (KIG) have signed the final agreement to form the Kurdistan Regional Government cabinet soon.

The KDP negotiating committee, led by the secretary of the KDP politburo Fadhil Mirani, met with the CM committee in the



Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani's house in Erbil on Thursday 17 April, 2014.

Following the meeting, Mirani said: "We have signed the agreement to form the cabinet." Kurdistan residents have been waiting for this news for seven months.

According to the newly signed agreement, the CM is going to take the ministries of Peshmarga, Finance and Economy, Endowment and Religious Affairs, Trade and Industry plus the post of the Parliament Speaker and head of the Investment Board.

The KDP is going to fill the posts of the next Prime Minister as well as the ministries of Interior, Natural Resources, Planning, Municipality and Education.

KIG is going to take the Ministry of Agriculture and Regional Minister for Environment Affairs, the agree-

ment read.

Regarding the offer presented to the Kurdistan Islamic Union, the KDP representative confirmed that the party has suggested the ministry of electricity, but the KIU has refused it.

The KIU asked the KDP committee to change it to one of the ministries of Planning, Municipality, Education or Health.

It is expected that the Kurdistan Parliament is going to hold its first session a week after the agreement to select the presidency board. Then the Parliament would assign the next Prime Minister, who is his Excellency Nechirvan Idris Barzani, to form the cabinet within the period of only thirty days.

Political analysts say that the next cabinet without PUK's participation would be incomplete because the party controls the political, security and financial affairs in the province of

Sulaimani and Garmiyan Region.

The KDP won the elections and maintained its position as the largest vote-winner, while CM came second with everyone's raised eyebrows and the KDP's strategic partner since the 90s, the PUK, fell into the third place.

Despite its defeat in the polls, the PUK insisted on taking key security ministerial posts in the new cabinet, while other parties, especially the KDP and CM, think that it no longer deserves such positions.

The KDP had warned the political parties, especially the PUK, that is going to announce the cabinet at the end of April with or without the PUK. The PUK which is largely supported by the neighboring Iran asked the Iranian mediators to convince the KDP and the CM to give it the ministry of Peshmarga.

It seems that the two parties have rejected the proposals of the Iranian mediators.

Following the announcement of the agreement, the PUK issued a statement saying it has already "predicted" that the two parties would sign the agreement.

The agreement made many of the PUK supporters upset. Meanwhile, the PUK politburo announced that it will have its own say but in an appropriate time. The statement read that all the options are open for the PUK.

It also read that the problem is not the announcement of the agreement but it is something else. ●

Interview with Jabhat al-Akrad Commander

firatnews.com

April 20, 2014

(ANF/AZAZ) Jabhat al-Akrad – or “Kurdish Front” as it is sometimes known – was founded as a part of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) in 2013 and is composed largely of Kurds living in Kurdish-areas outside of Aleppo but has fighters of many different backgrounds. In a new interview for ANF, Bahoz Deniz has spoken with the commander of the Jabhat al-Akrad, Heci Ehmet El Kurdi, about the beginnings of the organization, its mission, and the state of the conflict in Syria more generally. Below is a translation of that interview into English.

‘We Joined The Revolution In Our Own Name’

Jabhat El-Akrad is a project for a ‘Democratic Syria.’ We are not like the YPG (People’s Defense Units) which is the national defense force of the Rojava Kurdistan and carries out activities in Rojava. We on the other hand carry out our activities throughout the whole of Syrian territory. During our foundation process, we told almost all circles and belief groups about our project and asked their opinion. We announced our formation on February 20th, 2013. El-Akrad is not an organization that consists of Kurds alone. It consists of fighters from all belief groups and nations. The objective of our foundation is to defend all Kurds outside Rojava and all those who demand help, and at the same time to take part in the revolution in our own name and under the umbrella of the Free Syrian Army. Arabs call Kurds ‘Akrad’ and this is why our name is Jabhat El-Akrad (The El-Akrad Front), Kurdish Front in other words. We deliberately chose the word Kurd in order that we are present with our Kurdish identity and do not act on behalf of other groups. We formed our first organization in the Ezaz region and our first fighters were Kurdish youths.

The military success of the YPG in Rojava also had an effect on the Kurdish youths outside Rojava and led them to join our ranks in crowds. We started with two brigades and increased this number to 41 in a short time. Youths outside Kurds and from other nations and belief groups also joined us in the later period. We are now able to carry out activities in all regions of Syria with thousands of fighters. We are able to display our strength in all



The Jabhat al-Akrad unit. Photo: Algal TV

the areas we fight, and become a power to be taken into account.

-How did you capture Ebu Musab?

The FSA was formed in 2011, and we were formed in 2013. However we made up for the difference in military capacities quite quickly. The reason that we were able to become so effective in such a short period of time was that there were already Kurds all over Syria only they were not organized. When it became known that such an organization had been formed and that once more it used the word “Kurd” it was not difficult to find recruits. Our organizational discipline is at the highest level and our fighters become well-trained professionals in a short time through both military training and the ideological education which precedes it.

Our first battle was with ISIS. In that battle we captured the ISIS commander Ebu Musab alive. In all honestly we did not know how important he was at first. After we captured him the whole world knew who we were. Many different states wanted to establish contacts with us. Even the United States came around. They would come to us through back channels with passed along messages like “give this man to us and we will do what you want.”

But we paid no attention to those states or their promises. When we took Ebu Musab prisoner the ISIS went into many villages in the area, took a lot of civilian hostages and told us they would kill them he we didn’t let [Musab] go free. We thought the lives of those hundreds of civilians were more important and we let the commander go free.

Turkey Set A Special Table For Us

As we grew stronger various political games

developed around us. Many different states made moves on us and Turkey most of all. We had just been formed four months earlier when Turkey set a special ‘table’ for us. They plied us with different policies and maneuvers at a table in Antep at which the district governor was present. They were thinking that for them it would be disastrous if going forward we were to grow strong in the regions of Rojava not under YPG control and take it under our control. They saw the importance of it all from the beginning. They organized gangs against us and had them attack us, principal among them being ISIS. ISIS produces fetwas in regions like Tel Ebyad and Tel Aran saying that it was religiously permitted to kill, rape and steal from Kurds and massacred a large number of Kurds. We fought against them and dealt them a serious blow. They attacked Kurds everywhere. Most recently they attempted to attack Kurds in Kobanê but the fell apart before the YPG. We are going to hit that gang like the YPG and finish it off.

The FSA Has Deviated From Its Objective

We were from the first day under the umbrella of the FSA and we are still that way. We are one of the members of the FSA’s military council. But the FSA has deviated from its objective. We do not make decisions together. The high command is located in Turkey. But there is no mechanism by which a central decision can be made and carried out. The YPG for example isn’t like that. It has a high command and the decisions it makes are applicable to all its units. No unit can make a decision apart from the central command. Because the FSA is disorganized no group works together with other groups. Every group moves according to its own objectives. Every organization attempts to achieve superiority in the area it operates. When we meet with FSA groups we tell them to “stay away from ISIS, they are not from here and are a dark organization. Tomorrow they will turn on you and destroy you.” But they answered that they were ‘mujahideen.’ Today when we look at the results we were justified. ISIS liquidated many FSA groups and took their place. At the moment FSA groups are directed by whoever is paying them and they have them attack where and whom they want. They have given these groups an endless amount of weapons and money to fight against Kurds. Right now are revolution has gone of course. No group is thinking about the revolution but are counting the money they have taken from international powers. They are not supported by any people, and have simply become the tools of the states who give them money. Every group has a state, an intelligence organization behind it. It has become such that intelligence organizations of Western states come and meet with them and the first question they ask is “how many fighters do you have?” This is enough to explain the civil war in Syria. Without any support from the people, or organization or common goals they have not been able to take one step forward. Those most organized and connected with the people in Syria are

first and foremost the Kurds. For this reason they will never be defeated. After the Kurds come the Islamic groups. Some of them have some connection with the people. But the FSA groups that have come out talking about revolution can do nothing in their existing state and with their existing logic, and as soon as foreign support is cut they will fall apart and disappear.

We take all our support from the people. We take our strength from the people in every sphere. We get no support from anywhere else. We have no partnership with the YPG or TEV-DEM. They are Kurdish organizations and are carrying out very successful activities in their own areas. We will never fight with the YPG or any other Kurdish formation.

The Future Of Syria Is Dark

As regards Syria there is no serious project

on the horizon. Kurds have already organized their own regions under the leadership of the YPG and have founded a system. Other than the Kurds there are only some Islamic groups which are carrying out series work for the people and the future. Both radical groups and more enlightened Islamic groups are carrying out projects. Right now a large part of the aid which Western states are sending is ending up in the hands of Islamists.

In Practice Iran Is Governing Syria

If it had been left to the state Syria would have fallen long ago. It went beyond the state a long time ago. It is Iran and Hezbollah which are keeping the regime on its feet. There is the Baath regime but unofficially the country has passed [under the control of] Iran and Iran is governing. It is Iran and Hezbollah which are controlling [the situation] and doing the fighting. On the Syrian War Council there

are five people; two are from Iran and two are from Hezbollah. One is from the Syrian regime. In Syria the brain is Iran and the body is Hezbollah.

Our Goal Is A Democratic Country

We as Jabhat El-Akrad want and have as our goal a democratic Syria. We want a free country in which every people can live freely, those of different faiths can find their own space to live, and all constitutional rights will be guaranteed. Our foundational philosophy is to create a free and united country, not to destroy each other. We are fighting for this reason. It is our duty to show respect to every people and faith and to protect them. It is our responsibility to protect the lives and property of whoever comes to us for help, no matter who they are.

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Los Angeles Times

APRIL 23, 2014

Turkish leader offers condolences to Armenians over massacre

www.latimes.com
By Carol J. Williams
April 23, 2014

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan offered condolences to Armenian descendants of massacre victims in a message ahead of the 99th anniversary of the atrocity that Turkey still refuses to describe as a genocide.

The statement issued in seven languages and published widely in Turkish media laments the "shared pain" inflicted on those of all religions and ethnicities whose forebears were killed during the expulsions and brutalities that occurred as the Ottoman Empire collapsed during World War I.

"The 24th of April carries a particular significance for our Armenian citizens and for all Armenians around the world, and provides a valuable opportunity to share opinions freely on a historical matter," the statement said of the start of the years-long atrocity. "It is indisputable that the last years of the Ottoman Empire were a difficult period, full of suffering for Turkish, Kurdish, Arab, Armenian and millions of other Ottoman citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnic origin."

Erdogan called for an end to disputes over "hierarchies of pain," a reference to Armenian criticism of Turkey's equation of other peoples' suffering with their own in the atrocities committed by Ottoman sol-



Turkish government ministers and lawmakers applaud Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan after he read in parliament what was perceived in Turkey as a conciliatory message to Armenians on the eve of the anniversary of the 1915 massacre. (Associated Press / April 23, 2014)

diers that some claim took 1.5 million Armenian lives.

The prime minister's statement was hailed by Turkish scholars as historic for its more conciliatory tone but derided by Armenian social leaders as little changed from nearly a century of genocide denial by modern Turkey.

"Ending a 100-year-long denial gives hope to everyone. Following a strict denial policy by Turkey, it is hopeful to get a message of condolences from the prime minister himself. It is the start of healing," Turkish

lawyer and human rights activist Orhan Kemal Cengiz told Today's Zaman newspaper. "It is a very important step that for the first time a prime minister has extended condolences without adding a 'but' on April 24. From now on, the Armenian issue will be discussed in Turkey more freely."

The head of the Armenian National Committee of America, however, dismissed Erdogan's statement as a "cold-hearted and cynical ploy" to diminish the suffering inflicted on Armenians in what many countries consider the first genocide of the 20th century.

"Increasingly isolated internationally, Ankara is repackaging its genocide denials," Aram Hamparian, the Armenian group's executive director, said in a statement posted on the committee's website.

Erdogan reiterated in his statement Ankara's call for a joint historical commission to study what happened a century ago "in a scholarly manner."

"Having experienced events which had inhumane consequences -- such as relocation -- during the First World War should not prevent Turks and Armenians from establishing compassion and mutually humane attitudes toward one another," Erdogan said. "In today's world, deriving enmity from history and creating new antagonisms are neither acceptable nor useful for building a common future." ●

M. Erdogan présente ses « condoléances » aux Arméniens pour les massacres de 1915

Istanbul
Correspondance

Pour la première fois depuis 1915, la Turquie, dans un communiqué officiel publié mercredi 23 avril sur le site du premier ministre, a présenté ses « condoléances » aux descendants des 900 000 Arméniens, massacrés il y a près d'un siècle par les troupes ottomanes. « Nous souhaitons que les Arméniens qui ont perdu la vie dans les circonstances qui ont marqué le début du XX^e siècle reposent en paix et nous exprimons nos condoléances à leurs petits-enfants », a déclaré Recep Tayyip Erdogan dans cette longue mise au point, qui a été rendue publique la veille du 24 avril, le jour annuel de commémoration.

Le reste de son message est plus conforme à la ligne de déni poursuivie par l'Etat turc depuis sa fondation en 1923. La reconnaissance du caractère génocidaire de ces crimes et la question des responsabilités sont loin d'être à l'agenda. Mais pour le journaliste arménien d'Istanbul Etyen Mahçupyan, l'acte est « très important » : « Cette allusion est une première, même symbolique ».

L'annonce a été publiée en huit langues, dont l'arménien, pour donner une portée internationale au message. Par cette opération, le premier ministre turc et le ministre des affaires étrangères Ahmet Davutoglu – dont le style transparaît tout au long du texte – ont pris tout le monde de court et ont pimenté la tâche des conseillers de Barack Obama et de François Hollande. Les présidents américain et français doivent tous deux prononcer une allocution jeudi.

La Maison Blanche marque chaque année le 24 avril mais évite généralement de prononcer le mot génocide. M. Hollande participe, lui, à une cérémonie officielle à Paris, quelques mois après une visite en Turquie au cours de laquelle il avait appelé Ankara à « faire son travail de mémoire ». A Istanbul, une cérémonie publique en mémoire des victimes du génocide se tient sur la place Taksim, à 19 h 15.

La prise de position d'Ankara a été accueillie avec scepticisme par les Arméniens à travers le monde

Ce geste symbolique intervient à la veille de la date anniversaire du déclenchement du génocide



Le premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, mercredi 23 avril, au Parlement, à Ankara. AP

et par la société civile turque qui s'est engagée dans la reconnaissance du génocide de 1915. Pour le politologue Cengiz Aktar, l'un des intellectuels turcs qui avaient initié une demande publique de « pardon » aux Arméniens en 2008, « il ne faut pas tirer de conclusion hâtive sur une reconnaissance dans la

« Les Arméniens ont perdu la vie, mais on ne sait pas comment ils l'ont perdue et qui la leur a prise »

Osman Kavala

Homme d'affaires

perspective du centenaire. « Les condoléances ne sont pas des excuses », souligne pour sa part l'universitaire Ahmet Insel, autre acteur de cette évolution. « C'est un petit pas, mais pas une rupture profonde. C'est le pas en avant, très lent, de la société turque sur la question. »

L'homme d'affaires et mécène Osman Kavala note que, dans le discours de M. Erdogan, « les Arméniens ont perdu la vie, mais on ne sait pas comment ils l'ont perdue et

qui la leur a prise ». La Turquie admet en partie les déportations et les massacres mais refuse catégoriquement le qualificatif de génocide. Au contraire, M. Erdogan fustige toujours les revendications de ceux qui « utilisent les événements de 1915 comme prétexte pour créer de l'hostilité contre la Turquie ».

Politiquement, l'appel lancé par le premier ministre turc est « une répétition pour 2015, car la Turquie se positionne pour tenter de sortir de l'affrontement stérile entre la revendication et la posture négationniste », estime M. Insel.

Ankara s'inquiète devant la campagne de mobilisation et d'information qui s'annonce à travers le monde, mais aussi en Turquie, pour l'année du centenaire. Et sous l'impulsion de M. Davutoglu, elle a essayé d'affiner sa stratégie. La nouvelle rhétorique turque parle de « souffrances partagées » des citoyens de l'empire ottoman

et met sur le même plan le sort des Arméniens et celui des « musulmans » victimes de massacres dans les Balkans. Les descendants des victimes n'y voient souvent qu'une forme plus sophistiquée de négation. « Reconnaître les souffrances de chacun n'exclut pas de reconnaître les spécificités de chacune de ces souffrances », a répondu mercredi, depuis Erevan, Giro Manoyan, le secrétaire général de la Fédération révolutionnaire arménienne, qui possède de solides réseaux dans la diaspora.

En 2015, Ankara pourrait aussi jouer la carte de la concurrence des mémoires, sur fond de centenaire de la première guerre mondiale. De fastueuses cérémonies, en présence de nombreuses délégations étrangères, sont prévues pour l'anniversaire du déclenchement de la bataille des Dardanelles, le 25 avril. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Massacres des Arméniens : Erdogan présente les condoléances de la Turquie

Le Premier ministre turc s'exprime pour la première fois aussi ouvertement sur ce drame reconnu comme un génocide par de nombreux pays.

www.lepoint.fr

Par Laurence Neuer

La Turquie a fait un geste en faveur des Arméniens massacrés sous l'Empire ottoman, adressant mercredi pour la première fois ses condoléances aux descendants des victimes de ce drame, reconnu en tant que génocide par de nombreux pays. "Nous souhaitons que les Arméniens qui ont perdu la vie dans les circonstances ayant caractérisé le début du XXe siècle reposent en paix et nous exprimons nos condoléances à leurs petits-enfants", a déclaré le Premier ministre islamo-conservateur, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, la veille du 24 avril, considéré comme étant la date anniversaire du début du génocide arménien.

C'est la première fois qu'un responsable turc de ce rang se prononce aussi ouvertement sur les événements qui ont marqué les dernières années d'un Empire ottoman sur le déclin sans pour autant utiliser le mot "génocide", que la Turquie nie catégoriquement. "C'est un devoir humain de comprendre et de partager la volonté des Arméniens de commémorer leurs souffrances à cette époque", selon le communiqué, qui ajoute : "On ne peut contester que les dernières années de l'Empire ottoman aient été une période difficile, générant des souffrances pour des millions de citoyens ottomans, turcs, kurdes, arabes, arméniens et autres, quelle que soit leur religion ou leur origine ethnique."

PREMIER GÉNOCIDE DU XXE SIÈCLE

Le 24 avril 1915 avait donné le coup d'envoi du premier génocide du XXe siècle. Des centaines de milliers d'Arméniens de l'Empire ottoman, accusés de complot avec l'ennemi russe, avaient été déportés par le jeune gouvernement turc pendant la Première Guerre mondiale, nombre d'entre eux ayant été tués (1,5 million, selon les Arméniens, 500 000 environ, selon les Turcs) et la plupart de leurs biens confisqués. Dans son message, Recep Tayyip



Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Le Premier ministre turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan. © Sergey Guneev / AFP

Erdogan évoque la nécessité d'une réconciliation entre Arméniens et Turcs, renvoyant à une initiative de normalisation entre la Turquie et l'Arménie, lancée en 2007 mais qui n'a pas abouti, tout en dénonçant aussi la volonté de saisir le prétexte de ces massacres pour attaquer la Turquie.

"La République de Turquie continuera d'aborder avec sagesse toutes les idées conformes aux valeurs universelles du droit. Mais se servir des événements de 1915 comme d'un prétexte pour être hostile envers la Turquie et les transformer en conflit politique est inacceptable", dit-il. "C'est très important. Cette allusion aux souffrances et ces condoléances, c'est une première, même si elle est symbolique", a commenté Etyen Mahcupyan, intellectuel turc d'origine arménienne, sur la chaîne de télévision d'information CNN-Türk.

MAIN TENDUE À LA DIASPORA

Le chroniqueur du journal Zaman estime par ailleurs que la Turquie souhaite ainsi tendre la main à la diaspora arménienne et aux pays qui accueillent et soutiennent les Arméniens avant la célébration du centenaire du début de leur déportation en 1915 à travers le monde, qui risque de mettre la Turquie dans une situation particulièrement inconfortable sur la scène internationale. La France fait partie des pays qui ont reconnu en tant que génocide (2001) les massacres des Arméniens. Cette reconnaissance a été suivie en France de tenta-



Des Arméniens rendent hommage aux victimes du génocide perpétré il y a 99 ans sous l'empire ottoman, le 24 avril 2014 à Erevan (Photo Karen Minasyan. AFP)

tives législatives avortées pour en pénaliser la négation, ayant provoqué une nette détérioration des relations franco-turques.

Même si l'État turc refuse d'attribuer toute volonté génocidaire au gouvernement ottoman de l'époque, le génocide est timidement commémoré par la société civile turque depuis quelques années. Cette année encore, plusieurs organisations non gouvernementales (ONG) de défense des droits de l'homme turques ont prévu de manifester jeudi à Istanbul, qui sous le nom Constantinople était la capitale ottomane. L'année dernière, pour la première fois, une délégation étrangère, composée notamment de dirigeants de la diaspora arménienne, a pris part aux commémorations en Turquie, en réponse à un appel à la solidarité lancé par la société civile turque.

Mais pour une grande partie de la population turque, même s'il ne représente plus un tabou, le mot "génocide" provoque le courroux dans un pays où les victimes turques des nationalistes arméniens qui ont profité du démembrement de l'"homme malade", l'Empire ottoman, se compte en milliers dans l'Est anatolien. □

Crise syrienne: la Turquie à l'épreuve pour rester un leader régional



Aghiad Ghanem
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www.huffingtonpost.fr
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Il y a quelques semaines le gouvernement turc interdisait YouTube pour éviter la diffusion d'une discussion interceptée entre le ministre des Affaires étrangères Ahmet Davutoğlu, et le chef des services secrets turcs Hakan Fidan. On y entend les deux hommes envisager une attaque militaire contre la Syrie. C'est le résultat de trois ans de tentative de leadership dans le dossier syrien, avec l'appui des Etats-Unis, de la France, de l'Angleterre et du Golfe. Le Premier ministre Recep Tayyip Erdoğan a été parmi les premiers à réagir aux révoltes en Syrie.

Depuis plus de dix ans en effet la Turquie prétend au rôle de puissance régionale, motivée notamment par les théories d'Ahmet Davutoğlu, professeur en science politique converti conseiller d'Erdoğan puis ministre des Affaires étrangères en 2009. Ce dernier est à l'origine du "zéro problème avec les voisins", qui prône l'apaisement et la coopération avec tous les pays de la région. C'est ce qui mène les Turcs à s'engager dans des contrats avec l'Iran concernant le gaz, des coopérations économiques et sécuritaires avec le Kurdistan irakien notamment.

UNE DÉCENNIE DE RAPPROCHEMENT AVEC LE RÉGIME DES ASSAD

La Syrie rentrait tout à fait dans ces calculs. Le dialogue était tendu entre les deux Etats à cause de la question kurde et des enjeux de l'eau. Hafez al-Assad soutenait en effet le PKK (parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), qui revendique par la force les droits des Kurdes en Turquie. En 1998, Hafez al-Assad remet le leader du groupe Abdullah Öcalan aux autorités turques, les relations deviennent plus cordiales entre les deux pays.

Cette détente se poursuit pendant la présidence de Bachar el-Assad, Erdoğan allant jusqu'à considérer ce dernier comme un "ami". En 2004 lors d'une rencontre officielle un accord de marché commun est signé, ratifié en 2007. C'est dans ce climat de bienveillance que la révolte a commencé en Syrie, alors qu'Erdoğan place son gouvernement comme un modèle islamique modéré et démocratique. Dans une volonté de maintenir le soft power turc, le président Abdulah Gül fait pression sur Bachar el-Assad dès le début de la révolte pour que ce dernier engage une transition démocratique.

ERDOĞAN LE NOUVEAU "CALIFE"

N'ayant pas de signe de bonne volonté de la part du président syrien, Erdoğan et Davutoğlu changent de politique vis-à-vis du régime. Il n'est plus question pour la Turquie que Bachar el-Assad reste, le choix de l'opposition est fait, la Turquie va jusqu'à accueillir à Istanbul la réunion fondatrice du Conseil national syrien en octobre 2011. Le revirement est clair: il n'est plus question de soutenir la cohésion nationale en Syrie comme A. Gül le souhaitait, mais bien de favoriser l'opposition dont la communautarisation est déjà con-

nue. La rupture avec le "zéro problème avec les voisins" est tout aussi évidente. En effet en choisissant l'opposition à majorité sunnite et soutenue par le Golfe, la Turquie assume d'entrer dans une logique de confrontation avec l'axe chiite composé de l'Iran, le régime syrien et le Hezbollah. Selon Bachar el-Assad en 2012, Erdoğan se prend alors pour un nouveau "calife", souhaitant réunir sous son influence tous les pays sunnites de la région.

Dès le début de l'année 2012 la Turquie passe des contraintes politiques et économiques à l'encontre du régime aux menaces militaires. A l'occasion du flux de réfugiés en provenance d'Alep et des tensions qui en ont découlé dans la région frontalière, Erdoğan a proposé la création d'une zone tampon entre la Syrie et la Turquie. L'escalade est alors amorcée entre les deux Etats, avec des provocations de part et d'autre.

En juin 2012, le régime syrien abat un avion militaire turc, considérant que ce dernier avait passé la frontière syrienne. Ce même mois, Erdoğan place des tanks à la frontière. En octobre la même année la Turquie force un avion de ligne syrien en provenance de la Russie à atterrir à Ankara pour un contrôle de sécurité, les autorités turques le soupçonnant de transporter du matériel militaire illégalement.

L'APPEL À LA COMMUNAUTÉ INTERNATIONALE

En avril 2012, le gouvernement turc a renoncé à la résolution régionale du conflit pour le placer dans un contexte international, en mobilisant à la fois l'ONU et l'OTAN. A partir de ce moment-là une stratégie offensive est envisagée par Davutoğlu qui menace de répondre à tous les tirs qui viennent du côté syrien, et surtout qui tente de lancer une coalition américaine et européenne contre le régime syrien.

Après une courte accalmie les tensions reprennent à l'occasion du débat autour de l'utilisation par le régime de gaz sarin en août 2013. Erdoğan et Davutoğlu sont alors en contact constant avec Barack Obama pour soutenir auprès de lui l'idée de frappes contre la Syrie. Auparavant les deux pays étaient en lien selon le journaliste du New-Yorker Seymour Hersch dans le cadre de la "Rat line" (ligne d'exfiltration) qui acheminait les armes des guérillas libyennes aux rebelles en Syrie.

La Turquie a pris un grand rôle dans cet accord conclu selon le même journaliste au début de l'année 2012. En septembre de cette même année la Turquie doit faire face au retrait des Etats-Unis de cette stratégie suite à la mort à Benghazi du consul américain. Erdoğan n'ayant pas réussi à empêcher le revirement d'Obama concernant les frappes en Syrie, il est confronté à un abandon de la part de ses alliés alors qu'il est toujours plus soucieux de tirer bénéfice de la situation en renversant le régime des Assad au profit d'un gouvernement islamiste allié.

En mars dernier la Turquie abattait un avion syrien alors que ce dernier passait la frontière à la poursuite des rebelles. L'attaque militaire est envisagée de plus en plus sérieusement, surtout dans un contexte d'instabilité interne. La population est divisée quant au rôle de la Turquie dans le conflit syrien. Mais il est certain qu'il existe une réelle frustration à l'égard des réfugiés syriens qui seraient 600.000 selon l'ONU. Des régions comme celle de Hatay dans le sud de la Turquie ont été bouleversées par l'afflux des réfugiés qui amènent avec eux des tensions communautaires et politiques.

Lancé dans une escalade qu'il ne peut enrayer, Erdoğan cherche aujourd'hui les solutions qui lui permettraient d'étendre son influence comme il le souhaiterait, il est prêt pour cela à soutenir des organisations reconnues comme terroristes. Il doit alors assumer la confrontation avec l'Iran et la Russie, l'opposition d'une grande partie des Turcs, et ce avec des alliés, les Etats-Unis, la France et le Royaume-Uni notamment, qui sont de plus en plus en retrait. ■

Irak: les Kurdes espèrent un changement de gouvernement

Par W.G. Dunlop (AFP)

<http://www.lepoint.fr>

29 avril 2014

Erbil (Irak), — A la veille des législatives du 30 avril les Kurdes irakiens, qui rêvent d'indépendance, espèrent la défaite du Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, au pouvoir depuis 2006 et candidat à un troisième mandat.

De nombreux différends opposent M. Maliki, un chiite, à la région autonome du Kurdistan. Ces désaccords qui portent principalement sur le pétrole, les enjeux territoriaux et la répartition du pouvoir, font du Premier ministre la bête noire des Kurdes.

"Sa politique contre les Kurdes est mauvaise", explique Mohsen, 38 ans, entre deux coups de plumeaux pour dépoussiérer son stand de lunettes de soleil à Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan irakien. Le commerçant voudrait un Premier ministre "qui traite toutes les communautés de la même façon".

Les politiciens kurdes se plaignent depuis longtemps de ne pas recevoir les 17% du budget fédéral qui leur sont normalement alloués, et accusent Bagdad de payer en retard l'argent qu'il veut bien leur verser, blâmant le gouvernement fédéral pour les difficultés budgétaires et les retards dans le paiement des salaires.

Massoud Barzani, le président du Kurdistan qui a pourtant soutenu le Premier ministre en 2010, accuse aujourd'hui M. Maliki de monopoliser le pouvoir, et a appelé à sa démission.

"M. Maliki n'a été bon pour personne, que ce soit les Kurdes ou les Irakiens", et il est temps de changer de Premier ministre, explique Tariq Jawhar, candidat aux élections sous les couleurs de l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK) du président irakien Jalal Talabani.

La politique menée par le Premier ministre a attisé les tensions entre Arabes et Kurdes, et entre sunnites et chiites, renchérit M. Jawhar, qui va jusqu'à dresser un parallèle entre les méthodes de Saddam Hussein et celles de M. Maliki.

"Saddam Hussein a été chassé (en 2003,

AFP - Des militaires kurdes montrent leur doigt après avoir voté le 28 avril 2014 à Erbil



ndlr) mais ses méthodes et son héritage sont encore bien présents dans l'esprit de beaucoup de leaders irakiens", estime le candidat. "Saddam faisait usage de la force militaire contre les Kurdes, Maliki use des sanctions économiques".

- INDÉPENDANCE ÉCONOMIQUE -

Un bras de fer oppose depuis des mois le gouvernement central de Bagdad aux autorités du Kurdistan sur la gestion des ressources naturelles de l'Irak.

Le gouvernement régional kurde considère que le pétrole et le gaz produits dans cette région sont la propriété du Kurdistan, et cherche à vendre le pétrole à l'international sans passer par les autorités fédérales de Bagdad. De son côté, le gouvernement central lui conteste ce droit et estime que l'énergie produite dans toutes les régions d'Irak appartient au pays tout entier.

Le Kurdistan irakien, qui jouit d'une importante autonomie et dispose de ses propres forces de sécurité, gouvernement et drapeau, s'est également attiré les foudres de Bagdad pour avoir signé des contrats avec des firmes énergétiques étrangères.

Dans les rues d'Erbil, qui s'animent à la nuit tombée de coups de klaxons et de pancartes à l'effigie des candidats, rares sont ceux qui ne souhaitent pas un changement de gouvernement et une plus grande autonomie.

"Les Arabes nous ont toujours opprimés", affirme Bestoon, 35 ans, membre des

peshmergas, les forces de sécurité kurdes, tenue camouflage et carabine à la ceinture. Ce qu'il souhaite pour sa région ? "L'indépendance" et "la séparation d'avec les Arabes".

Tarza, 25 ans, ne pense pas autrement. "Je ne me sens pas irakienne", lance l'étudiante.

Mais la route vers l'indépendance politique, si elle existe, doit d'abord passer par l'indépendance économique souligne Jutyar Adil, candidat du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK), précisant qu'il n'est pas, pour l'heure, favorable à une partition. "Nous devons gagner notre indépendance économique" d'abord, souligne-t-il.

Car qui dit indépendance politique dit perte des subventions fédérale. Charge alors pour le Kurdistan de produire suffisamment de pétrole pour compenser le vide.

Au même moment à Erbil, certains doutent que le résultat des élections change quoi que ce soit.

"Je ne m'attends pas à un grand changement", soupire Zhilwan, 38 ans, professeur à l'université de Salaheddine. "Ce sera juste un nouveau groupe qui s'enrichira à la place d'un autre". □

International New York Times APRIL 23, 2014

Turkey was inept, not evil, in Syria

Mustafa Akyol

Contributing Writer

ISTANBUL History is full of failed grand narratives. Just as George W. Bush's idealistic "freedom agenda" crumbled when his occupation of Iraq produced a divided and bloody country, the freedom agenda of Turkey's Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan — a much less belligerent but similarly idealistic vision of the Middle East — ran aground in Syria.

Mr. Erdogan's idealism was boosted with the Arab Spring of 2011, when secular dictatorships fell, opening the way for popular Islamist parties. Mr. Erdogan believed that his own success story in Turkey would be repeated all across the Middle East.

However, mere election victories didn't secure any of these nascent democracies: Islamists still had to reconcile with the more secular segments of society. So far, this has succeeded only in Tunisia. In Egypt, a secular backlash led to a ruthless military coup; Libya never recovered from civil war; and even in Turkey, which was supposed to be a "model" for Arabs, civil liberties are on the decline and political polarization is on the rise.

The real nightmare has been Syria. Turkey emerged early on as a key supporter of the opposition there but couldn't realize its dream of a democratic and pro-Turkish Syria. What Mr. Erdogan got instead was more than 700,000 refugees and constant threats from both the Syrian regime and opposition extremists.

Turkey, like much of the Western world, was wrong in its calculations about Syria, and perhaps unwittingly contributed to the chaos. But was Turkey malicious, as well — to the extent of intentionally killing hundreds of defenseless civilians?

That's what the prize-winning journalist, Seymour Hersh, recently claimed in *The London Review of Books*, where he presented one of the most intriguing conspiracy theories of late: That a chemical attack on the Damascus suburb Ghouta in August 2013, widely believed to be the work of the

Syrian regime, was in fact orchestrated by Turkey. In other words, a war crime that killed some 1,500 civilians was not

Erdogan's foreign policy has been characterized more by idealistic delusions than malicious conspiracies.

another monstrosity perpetrated by President Bashar al-Assad, but rather by Mr. Erdogan, who supposedly wanted to create a pretext for an American military intervention in Syria.

This wild argument has probably been well received in Damascus, Tehran and Moscow. Yet, both Washington and Ankara have unequivocally denied it. Moreover, many independent analysts of the Syrian civil war have pointed out flaws in Mr. Hersh's argument, the bulk of which is based on an unnamed "former intelligence official."

Mr. Hersh dismissed key facts related to the behavior of the Syrian regime: After the chemical attack on Ghouta, for example, Mr. Assad's forces kept bombing the area with conventional weapons, and did not allow the United Nations investigation team to examine the area for four days.

With regards to Turkey, Mr. Hersh makes a series of wild claims: Turkey's national intelligence agency must have first secretly produced sarin gas (while Turkey's whole military arsenal is conventional and NATO-compliant). Then, it must have obtained Russian-manufactured rockets, modified them to look like the rockets used by Mr. Assad's armed forces, then secretly smuggled at least a dozen of these two-meter-long missiles into a regime-held part of Damascus, where they were fired into an urban area, willfully killing hundreds. It depicts a Turkish government that is not just very proficient, but also very cruel.

Yet both claims crumble under closer scrutiny. First, Turkish intelligence is not that dexterous. One of the key pieces of "evidence" that Mr. Hersh misinterprets — the wiretapped audio files of a secret meeting at the Turkish Foreign Ministry — unveils a Turkish government that feels threatened by the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, or ISIS, an Al Qaeda offshoot, while discussing, fruitlessly, what could be done against this menace within the bound-

aries of international law. At some point, the Turkish intelligence chief, Hakan Fidan, says in passing that if Turkey decides to strike ISIS, a pretext can be created by "firing a few rockets into empty land."

Some members of the Turkish opposition and Mr. Hersh see a grand conspiracy in this loose statement. But it actually confirms the opposite: the moral and physical limits of Turkey's covert actions. (Meanwhile, the very fact that the meeting has been wiretapped and exposed on the Internet calls into question Mr. Hersh's portrayal of Turkey's masterfully competent intelligence agencies.)

Nor is Ankara malicious enough to orchestrate a chemical attack on civilians. In fact, Turkey's internationally praised accommodation of hundreds of thousands of refugees shows that it genuinely cares for the tragedy suffered by ordinary Syrians, and especially of Sunnis, whose identity deeply resonates with Turkey's ruling elite. There is an affinity that goes beyond realpolitik.

There's no doubt that Mr. Erdogan is becoming an increasingly authoritarian leader at home. But an unprovoked attack on the Syrian civilians he has been striving to protect is beyond the pale.

If there's anything that characterizes Mr. Erdogan's foreign policy, it's not well-crafted conspiracy, but rather an idealism tainted by excessive emotion, ideology and delusions of grandeur. At first, he thought Turkey could persuade Mr. Assad to become a democrat. When that failed, he believed Turkey had enough power to topple Mr. Assad by supporting the opposition. And finally, he believed that America was willing to do the job.

All of those were miscalculations. But America and Turkey are now closer to each other than ever before when it comes to Syria because Turkey recognizes the threat from radical jihadists within the opposition. Extravagant conspiracy theories should be cast aside, and Ankara and Washington should actually begin discussing new ways to end the disastrous civil war. A Syria free from jihadist terror, and from the state terrorism of Mr. Assad, is their common goal.

MUSTAFA AKYOL is a columnist and the author of "Islam Without Extremes: A Muslim Case for Liberty."

Unravelling culture in Iraq's Kurdish region

Weaving and handicrafts are being re-taught to a younger generation of Iraqi Kurds, but not without challenges.

Lara Fatah

20 April 2014

<http://www.aljazeera.com>

Erbil, Iraq - In the heart of the ancient city of Erbil, capital of the Iraqi Kurdistan region, stands the Erbil citadel, or Qalat, as it is known locally. A walk along the city walls, which are currently under restoration, brings people to one of the region's gems: the Kurdish Textile Museum.

It is here that the lost art of weaving and handicrafts is being re-taught. Shereen Fars Hussan, one of 40 women trained in weaving at the museum since 2009, sits quietly in the building's cool upper interior as her colleagues chatter with pride at having learned these traditional skills.

Hussan, 30, remembers how she used to watch her grandmother weave carpets and kilims (tapestry-woven carpets). "She would tell us stories about the old ways of life in Kurdistan, how she would weave carpets with the patterns that her own grandmother and mother had taught her from childhood, but war and genocide meant that she couldn't pass on the skills to my mother and me," Hussan told Al Jazeera.

Lolan Mustafa, director of the Kurdish Textile Museum in Erbil, has long had a passion for Kurdish culture and handicrafts. "From childhood I have been interested in Kurdish textiles. My grandparents raised animals close to

Many people come and ask if I know anyone that can still make these beautiful carpets, but sadly I have to say no. They have all passed away or are too old to weave.

- Aram Ismail, carpet trader in the Sulaymaniyah bazaar

Erbil and had good relations with many of the nomadic tribes that would pass through the plains in winter," he told Al Jazeera.

But it would not be until attending university in Europe that his passion became more academic.

"After taking an anthropology class, I wrote a paper on Kurdish nomads. During the research process I found a few books on Kurdish carpets and that was it; I was hooked," he said.

In 2004, Mustafa returned to Kurdistan and was determined to do something with the



It is getting harder for Iraqi-Kurdish vendors to find stock of genuine Kurdish handicrafts [Lara Fatah/Al Jazeera]

large collection of carpets and kilims he had amassed in Erbil. By then, he had lectured in the United States and exhibited some of the carpets at an exhibition in Sweden. The local Directorate of Antiquities granted him a six-month lease for one of the large houses in the citadel.

Ten years later, the museum is still there. It has just undergone a refurbishment and officially reopened this month.

Traditionally the carpets and kilims exhibited in the museum were woven in the villages of Iraqi Kurdistan, or by nomadic Kurdish tribes, on small transportable looms, which were often hung from door frames.

It is almost impossible to find a carpet or kilim produced in the Kurdistan region of Iraq after the mid-1980s. Following various Kurdish uprisings in the 1960s and 1970s, Saddam Hussein's regime embarked on a mission to destroy the villages in Kurdistan, and with it much of the unwritten history and culture of Iraqi Kurds.

The culmination was the 1988 Anfal campaign, which Kurds consider a "genocide", during which the Ba'ath regime waged a systematic assault on more than 4,000 villages in Iraqi Kurdistan.



Kurdish carpets are distinctive in their bright, vibrant colours [Lara Fatah/Al Jazeera]

Up to 182,000 people lost their lives, and many nomadic tribes were exiled to settlements in the south of Iraq, losing their centuries-old way of life. A trip to the bazaars of any of the region's big cities, such as Erbil or Sulaymaniyah, will reveal only a handful of shops that sell real Kurdish carpets.

Aram Ismail, a carpet trader in the Sulaymaniyah bazaar, lamented that one would be hard-pressed to find one of the original weavers. "Many people come and ask if I know anyone that can still make these beautiful carpets, but sadly I have to say no. They have all passed away or are too old to weave," he told Al Jazeera.

Ismail's shop is piled high with examples of woven and hand-knotted Kurdish carpets, some of which date back over 100 years.

"In the 1990s, Kurdish carpets went out of fashion locally and many were thrown out, destroyed or sold out of the poverty of war. Many people regret it and come looking to buy old carpets, but most of my customers are either foreigners or Kurds that come back from Europe. They love them," he said.

The carpets and kilims, known locally as Barra, are distinctive in their use of vivid colours, from burnt oranges and fuchsias to deep reds



Iraqi Kurds are fighting to preserve their cultural heritage through textiles and weaving [Lara Fatah/Al Jazeera]

and browns. The dyes used were all organic, often made from indigenous plant roots or flowers by the nomadic Kurds who would trade them with villagers on their migration paths from the plains to the mountains.

The old kilims sell for between \$60-\$150, whereas those produced by the weaving project cost close to \$2,500 and take up to six months to weave. It is hard for these new rugs to compete with new factory-woven kilims from Iran and Turkey, which can start from as little \$150.

In Ismail's corner of the bazaar, there is a cluster of shops selling these old colourful local carpets, with maybe one or two others across the city. It is getting harder and harder for them to find stock.

"Every so often from a house clearance or from villagers coming to town to trade we can find more local carpets to sell - but once our stock is gone that's it, there will be no more. We will have to import them from other parts of Kurdistan," he said.

In order to help preserve this local tradition, ➔

in 2009, alongside the museum, Mustafa set up a programme to teach young girls how to weave carpets, kilims, jajims (decorative covers/wall hangings), lebat (pressed felt) and highly decorated windbreakers for nomadic tents.

Selling the region's history is something Mustafa fervently opposes: "We really shouldn't be selling off the final pieces of our history so cheaply. We should be preserving them and treasuring them."

It has not been an easy programme to run; fun-

ding has been intermittent and finding experienced weavers to teach the girls was no easy feat - most had passed away or were too old. The museum and weaving programme have benefited from grants from USAID, the German Consul and the Erbil Governorate, but consistent funding for their work remains problematic.

Shereen and co-weavers Khanda, Eman and Awin lamented the lack of work for the last six months.

Khanda, 23, enthused about how proud they

all were to work on a project that is preserving the culture for future generations. "It was not an easy learning process, but I am glad that we mastered all the knots and patterns to produce the carpets and kilims," she told Al Jazeera.

"I just hope that at some point we resume work and perhaps we can pass on our skills to others too." ■



22 April 2014

Barzani: KDP Will Retain Interior Ministry; Kurds Considering Confederation

rudaw.net
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ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani said in a speech to his party that the new Kurdish government must be formed before the end of this month, and poured cold water on the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's (PUK) demand for control of the interior ministry.

In the wide-ranging speech on Monday, Barzani said that his own Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) would retain the interior ministry. He also commented that Erbil was looking into a confederation with Baghdad or outright independence, and defended a line of trenches the Kurdistan Region is digging to create distance from the civil war in Syria next door.

"The order to form the government will be issued before the elections and I prefer to have the names of ministers announced," Barzani declared.

The KDP won the largest number of votes in the September polls for Kurdistan's legislature. However, a new cabinet has been delayed for the past seven months over PUK demands for key security posts. It said this week that it must have the interior ministry before agreeing to join a coalition government.

But Barzani declared that the

interior ministry will and should remain in the hands of the KDP, and that the PUK has other portfolios to choose, such as the post of vice president. He added that the vice president would have the authority of deputy commander-in-chief of all armed forces.

Elsewhere in his comments, Barzani indicated that Erbil's patience was running thin in the oil and budget rows with Baghdad, and that Kurdistan was considering options for a lasting solution.

"If the situation continues like this with Baghdad, we will declare confederation or independence. We have studied that confederation will resolve our issues," he said.

Baghdad has frozen the autonomous Kurdistan Region from the national budget, in response to Kurdish plans to export their own oil and gas to markets in Turkey and beyond.

Barzani also touched on the issue of Kurdistan's constitution, which last year a number of parties -- and recently the PUK -- had demanded must be returned to parliament for amendment. The president said the constitution would not be taken back to parliament, "but we may need to work on a new constitution."

Barzani defended a new and controversial line of trenches that Kurdish authorities are digging on the border between the Kurdistan



Barzani: 'If the situation continues like this with Baghdad, we will declare confederation or independence.' Photo: Rudaw

Region and Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava), as a security belt to stop the Syrian war from creeping across the border.

"Security officials have deemed it necessary, and legal ways are open for normal traffic," the president explained.

The trench project has been criticized by some political groups in Kurdistan, and most vocally by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its ally the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Rojava. They have described it as a project that will further divide Kurdistan.

To demonstrate his party's goodwill towards the PKK, Barzani disclosed that in 2006 American and Turkish military officials had shared with him a

plan for a major assault on PKK bases, which he had rejected outright. "But the PKK is not grateful for these things," he said.

Barzani also blamed the PKK for the delay over the Kurdish National Congress, scheduled for last summer. He said the PKK is trying to impose its control over the meeting.

"The Kurdish National Congress has been delayed because the PKK demanded half of the members of the congress. It asked for the congress to have two leaders. Decisions cannot be made when there is friction," said Barzani. "We don't accept the PKK imposing its culture on us." □

OPINION

A Kurdish State: Keeping the Regional Balance



*By Ako Mohammed
21/ april /2014
<http://rudaw.net>

Often after listening to some foreign experts one would feel that Kurdish leaders have failed to see the respectable weight the Kurdistan Region is gaining on the international stage.

Foreign observers, researchers and visitors to Kurdistan see the story from a different angle and speak from the point of view of the strategic balance in the region.

For instance, Arab countries and the Gulf region were stubbornly against Kurdish aspirations, particularly Kurdish independence. But now, voices can be heard from research centers in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, believing that an independent Kurdish state in northern Iraq would build a counterbalance for the Sunnis in the wider region.

This view takes into account the marginalization of the Sunnis in a

majority-Shiite Iraq and the country's sandwiched position between Iran, Syria and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Attaching Kurdistan to Iraq was, in the first place, to lend strength to the Sunni state. But ever since the Shiites came to power in Iraq a decade ago, that calculation has changed.

Since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, Iraq has had complicated and uneasy relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States. Therefore, they now believe that a Kurdish state which is not Shiite and that can be a reliable corridor to Turkey and Europe, can bring back that lost balance.

Also recently, the London-based Centre for Global Studies wrote that within two years the Kurdistan Region can build its economic infrastructure, separate from Iraq and declare independence. The study points out the strong economic ties between Kurdistan and Turkey, Iran's efforts to sell more

oil -- which would reduce Iraq's weight in OPEC -- and Syria's dire situation, which cannot stand against such policies.

The report mentions the presence of American and European oil companies, their economic interests in the Kurdistan Region and their satisfaction with the deals they have signed with Erbil.

In short, Kurdistan is important. But the issue is that this is not really understood within Kurdistan itself. This may cause us to miss yet another great opportunity, as we did in the 1920s. An agreement and appreciation of the Kurdistan Region's international reality is very crucial in order to walk towards the independence of at least this one part of Kurdistan. A golden opportunity has risen for the Kurds to achieve their goals, now that smaller nations seem be deciding their own fates.

Therefore, I believe that the Change Movement (Gorran) and Islamic League (Komal) made a

wise decision last week to join the new cabinet of a national Kurdish government. By the same token, the insistence of the Islamic Union (Yekgirtu) to swap one ministry for another should not become a serious obstacle.

Meanwhile, putting aside its role in the triumphs and failures of Kurdistan for a moment, I think the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is making a mistake by not being part of the government and political process at this stage.

The PUK should not minimize itself and its weight because of the absence of its leader Jalal Talabani. It should not go from an active participant to becoming an observing opposition.

Getting one post or another in parliament or the cabinet should not really matter that much. What matters is that the PUK should put its act together and put forward some active and skilled people in their posts.

The PUK will achieve nothing by staying on the sidelines and mocking the new agreement between Gorran and the KDP. Through some wrong analysis, the PUK should not burn its past record in governance and its long-term future. □

Barzani informs Washington the reasons for security deterioration

22 April 2014
english.shafaq.com

Shafaq News / The President of Kurdistan Region confirmed that Iraq has reached a very serious stage, and hoped that the results for the upcoming parliamentary elections would end the security crisis because the accumulation of political problems is a man source for it.

"Barzani met in Erbil on Monday with a delegation from the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, headed by the official of the Office of Security Cooperation in the Embassy Gen. Bednarek in the presence of U.S. consul in Erbil, and a number of officials and military advisers in the U.S.

Embassy," The statement for the presidency of Kurdistan Region reported for "Shafaq News".

The statement said that Bednarek submitted at the beginning of the meeting, a brief overview of the security and military plans carried out to meet the "terrorists" in Iraq, noting that he expressed his growing concern about acts of "terrorism" and the expansion of the power of "terrorists" in different areas of Iraq.

The statement added that Barzani pointed out that the security situation in Iraq has reached a very serious stage, and hoped that the outcome of the upcoming parliamentary elections would contribute in the end of the security pro-



blems because its source comes from the accumulation of political crises.

Barzani stressed that security problems will end when the political crisis would completely be solved in Iraq.

The statement added that the two sides discussed the political situation and elections of the Iraqi parliament, referring to search for solutions that could contribute to the improvement of the security situation in Iraq.

It is scheduled to hold elections in the Iraqi parliament of the thirtieth of current April ○



www.ekurd.net

News in brief :

U.S. GOVERNMENT UNVEILS AN IRAQI REQUEST TO BUY 24 APACHE HELICOPTER

April 23, 2014

Baghdad: Head of the Office of Security Cooperation and the senior representative of the U.S. government in the affairs of defense in Iraq, Lieutenant General Mick Bednarek, revealed Iraq's request for the purchase of 24 aircraft Apache attack helicopters. The site of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) quoted Bednarek as saying that "there is an Iraqi request at the moment to buy 24 aircraft Apache and the rental of six others, and when the two sides sign this contract we will go forward and they will be in Iraq within nine months, and in the case of signing this matter we need the approval of the Iraqi government and the qualities that they want and to transfer money from the central bank and other things, and we are working with the Iraqi army Aviation in this matter." He pointed out that "68% of the 140 tanks, that have been delivered to Iraq are ready for action, and showed that the Iraqi government put in its priority to buy other weapons instead of tanks, adding that" there is an intention to buy other tanks, but the priorities of the Iraqi government is not to buy tanks now, but to buy other weapons." ninanews.com

IRAQ'S SUNNIS INCREASINGLY BACK KURDISH INDEPENDENCE

April 25, 2014

Anbar: Sunni Arabs in troubled Iraq's Anbar province, where forces of the Shiite-led government in Baghdad are locked in fighting with tribes and insurgents, now say they understand why the Kurds would want to separate from the rest of Iraq. "I see no future for Sunni Arabs or the Kurds under the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki," said Sheikh Abdul Ali al-Dulaimi, a tribal leader in Sunni Anbar province, which since the start of this year has been a battlefield between government forces and Sunni tribes and insurgents. The events in Anbar have many Sunnis accusing Maliki's Shiite-led government of alienating the Sunnis and driving the Kurds toward thinking about independence. The Sunnis complain of discrimination and marginalization by the government. Early this year, Maliki sent in troops to break up year-long Sunni protests in Anbar. Since then, the province has been a battlefield, with refugees fleeing in the tens of thousands. "Maliki is the one who pushes the Kurds toward secession," Dulaimi told Rudaw. He added that Maliki is not only cutting the Kurdish budget, but is eager to impose a blockade on them in any way he can. He "wants to break the will of the Kurdistan Region."...rudaw.net

11 KILLED IN SUICIDE BOMB ATTACKS IN ROJAVA

April 25, 2014

Serêkaniyê : The YPG Press Centre reports that 11 people were killed and 11 wounded in two car bomb attacks carried out by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the Serêkaniyê (Ras al-Ayn) district of West Kurdistan. The first attack targeted a YPG centre on the outskirts of Serêkaniyê, followed by a second attack in the Tel Halaf district 4 kilometres away which targeted the police station. According to the YPG Press Centre, one YPG fighter was killed in the first attack, while 4 police and 6 civilians were killed in the second attack. 11 people, including children, were wounded in the two attacks.

The YPG blamed ISIS gangs for the attacks, stressing they came immediately after successful YPG operations in the area.

Tel Halaf is on the opposite side of the border from the Ceylanpınar Agricultural Enterprise Directorate. Before it passed under YPG control it was one of the main crossing points from Turkey into Syria for the gangs.

YPG forces liberated at least 25 villages, including the strategically important ancient settlement of Tel Halaf, in revolutionary operations launched on 1 November 2013 that lasted 5 days. Kurds, Arabs, Chechens, Turkmens and Christians live in Tel Halaf. [ANF -http://en.firatnews.com](http://anf-http://en.firatnews.com)

NECHIRVAN BARZANI: PKK ACTING MONOPOLISTICALLY, IRAQI KURDISTAN GOVT WANTS UNITY AMONG SYRIAN KURDS

April 30, 2014

Erbil: The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani blamed the Turkey's Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) for following monopolistic policies in Syrian Kurdistan and stated the Iraqi Kurdistan backs unity among Syrian Kurds. Speaking with Rudaw TV, Barzani said some of the PKK moves surprise us. "They severely lash out at us. But in reality we want unity among Syrian Kurdish parties. The PYD (Democratic Union Party) is unfortunately cooperating with the Bashar al-Assad's (Syria President) regime," he said, continuing that "no party is allowed to impose itself on people and we have made no connection with the Kurdish cantons in Syria as they have been founded unilaterally." Barzani further said the president of Kurdistan Region has taken many steps for the Syria Kurds, adding the region wants Kurdish parties in Syria to work together. He ultimately called the protests of the PKK supporters to the trench dug on Kurdistan Region with Syria Kurdistan "hyperbolic" and stated Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the ruling party in Kurdistan Region will soon hold a meeting with the PKK. kurdpress.ir

TWO ISIS ISLAMIC-JIHADISTS KILLED IN KOBANÊ

April 30, 2014

Kobane: Two members of the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham) were killed and a ditch of the ISIS was destroyed after their attacks on the three villages in the east of Kobani canton in Syrian Kurdistan (village Afaduki, Kandale village, village Birkitek) with heavy ammunition and mortars. The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) put up a fight against the attacks of the ISIS mercenaries on the two villages of Al-Susek and Birkeno. After fierce battles, there were two deaths among the ISIS mercenaries; furthermore it has also been an ISIS ditch in the village Susek destroyed in the east of the Kobani canton. The Media Center of YPG has reported that a group of four ISIS mercenaries have attacked a YPG fighter in the village Zahr Al-Arab in the town Derbasiya. After that the people's protection units searched the whole area and were able to kill the assassin. In addition some suspects were arrested, and their weapons were seized. The information of the Media Center also said: "These terrorist attacks that hit our people's protection units, are a proof that the mercenaries have begun a new phase of its terrorist attacks on our territories and that they have strengthened their military operations." On the other hand, ISIS mercenaries killed in the village Magluja, which is located 30 km south of Tal Tamer, 15 Arab civilians after they refused to pay protection money to the ISIS mercenaries. The information of some sources said that ISIS mercenaries have exercised pressure on the civilians of the village Jabal Adulaziz in the district of south Tal Tamer lately to demand money from them. Two months earlier the ISIS mercenaries have beheaded two young men because they were in the accusation of supporting the regime. firatnews.com

WHAT DID IRAQI AND KURDISH OFFICIALS SAID AFTER CASTING BALLOTS?

April 30, 2014

Baghdad/Erbil/Sîemanî: After the polls have been opened, the voting process has witnessed a remarkable turnout by senior officials in the Iraqi state. Perhaps the first of the officials was the head of government and leader of State of law bloc, Nuri al-Maliki who casted his vote, Maliki said that the victory of his list in the parliamentary elections is certain". He explained that State of Law coalition would ally with blocs that "believes in unified Iraq." For his part, the prime minister of Kurdistan region, Nechirvan Barzani and after casting his vote in Erbil said that change is possible in this election. He said about the formation of the new government and his expectations, "certainly, it will witness a delay in that." For his part, the leader of the Islamic Supreme Council, Ammar al-Hakim said after casting his vote that "this day will determine the present and future of Iraq, the decision today is for every citizen to give his vote at polling stations. " While the Kurdish leader of Change (Gorran) movement, Nawshirwan Mustafa said on Wednesday after voting that there is great potential in transferring power in civilized way through the results of this election and must meet the ambitious of people...shafaaq.com ○



April 23, 2014

Diyarbakir: micro-cosm for Turkey's Kurdish question

While Diyarbakir's Kurds hope for an economic dividend, it still remains unclear what the end result of Turkey's Kurdish political process will be.



www.al-monitor.com

Tulin Daloglu,
April 23, 2014

The Diyarbakir of today is a far cry from the strife-ridden city of the 1990s, where the military's fight against the separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was at its peak. Although it still remains underdeveloped, its streets are blooming with people, new businesses, coffee shops and just plain liveliness. The riot vans are still parked in the city center, but people walk around without any signs of tension or unrest.

"I remember the meeting we had with the late Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit at the Prime Ministry," Sahismail Bedirhanoglu, the president of the Southeastern Industrialists and Businessmen Association (GUNSIAD), told Al-Monitor in Diyarbakir. "He was telling us that the problem of the region was all about economic reasons. He believed that if the region could be economically developed, and if the people could find satisfactory employment opportunities, the Kurdish issue would automatically resolve itself." He added, "That was the mistake of the old Turkey. They did not understand the fact that even if you raise the economic standards of the Kurds to the highest economic standards possible, this issue won't get resolved before Kurds are recognized as a nation, with their own language and the right to govern themselves."

In Diyarbakir, Bedirhanoglu is a highly respected person. The family has a long history embedded in Kurdish nationalism. "I have always lived here, just like my grandfather, and his grandfather," he said. His family roots are also partly the reason why he was chosen by the government to be the leading engine in putting together a contact group aimed at fostering dialogue on the Kurdish issue.

"The region's underdeveloped nature created an easy excuse for people to go up the mountains and join the PKK, but this was not the whole story," he told Al-Monitor. "It was not only the poor who sided with the PKK, but also the sons and daughters of many wealthy Kurdish families took arms with them. They had a purpose, and they had a mission. Without their violent rebellion against the many previous Ankara governments, the state would never have had to really register that they have a clear demand." He added, "This should not mean a breakaway from the country, but there is certainly a desire to re-establish the republic under a more autonomous, or federal system."

All that said, though, Bedirhanoglu demands that the state meet its duty to help improve economic standards in the region. "In the 1920s, Diyarbakir was listed as one of the top three developed cities in this country, after Istanbul and Bursa. It is, however, now between 63rd and 67th on the list. Once you



People gesture while others wave Kurdish flags during a gathering celebrating Nowruz, which marks the arrival of spring and the new year, in Diyarbakir, March 21, 2014.

realize that Diyarbakir is the most developed of all the other [Kurdish-dominated] cities in this region, and once you see that 18 out of 20 least-developed cities are from the east and southeast part of this country, you inescapably face how big a problem this is for Turkey. In a way, we're hijacking Turkey's future. ... This cease-fire is now allowing people the chance to seek new opportunities to do business," he said.

He said Urfa has roughly 54% potential farmland, while the figure for Diyarbakir, Batman and Mardin is 50%. "We have at least double the average farmland compared with other parts of the country. Once the irrigation canals are completed, it will mean an area of 1,060,000 hectares [4,092 square miles] will be ready for cultivating. We produce the second-best cotton in the world here. We have a serious potential in energy resources. From the various dams here, we provide 36% of the country's electricity needs; 70-80% of oil production of Turkey takes place in Batman. Yet, we lack infrastructure and remained in the dark for many years."

Bedirhanoglu argues that the government needs to take more favorable actions toward the Kurds when allocating public funds. "They are calculating incorrectly in Ankara. They should not take into account how much tax they collect from us here, but they should take into consideration how much our energy resources contribute to the industrial development of the country. They should then calculate how much public funding they should allocate to us — including the taxes collected from all the industry that benefited from our energy resources."

As Al-Monitor reported on April 17, the PKK has in fact emerged as the sole representative of the Kurdish people in the region. From the taxi drivers to the shopkeepers in Diyarbakir, people seem to have embraced the PKK as never before. There is a romantic illusion about this terror organization that claims that it only killed to defend the Kurdish people against the military — denying that the PKK targeted civilians. Kurds consider themselves righteous no matter what, because they claim victimhood from the state's wrongdoing.

Kurds by and large consider the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan a hero on the streets of Diyarbakir. "People were scared to openly talk about Ocalan as their role model in the past because there was a strong state intimidation. That pressure is no more today, and the truth has just come forward as is," Bedirhanoglu said.

The jury, however, is still out on whether the country as a whole could embrace Ocalan in such fashion, and whether the PKK could be accepted as a political movement that seals the ultimate peace deal with the state.

Tulin Daloglu is a columnist for Al-Monitor's Turkey Pulse. She has also written extensively for various Turkish and American publications, including The New York Times, International Herald Tribune, The Middle East Times, Foreign Policy, The Daily Star (Lebanon) and the SAIS Turkey Analyst Report. On Twitter: @TurkeyPulse



April 17, 2014

Is fate of Kurdish issue tied to Erdogan's future?



www.al-monitor.com

Tulin Daloglu,
April 17, 2014

Despite sending strong signals that he intends to run for the Turkish presidency in August, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has again asserted that he remains undecided. He gathered his party's lawmakers on April 16

to discuss the matter and announced, "I have not made my decision yet." He added, "And I don't approve of announcing names [for the presidential bid] at this point. There will be no chaos in the party if I decide to run or choose to stay [as the prime minister]. The most important thing is the institutional structure of our party."

Erdogan's stated position, however, defies reality simply because of his control-oriented, and some would say self-centered, leadership that dominates all aspects of his party and members' actions. The party's success is explained more by Erdogan's leadership than its institutional structure. In fact, many party insiders tie the fate of the resolution of the Kurdish issue to the prime minister's political future. They consider the Kurdish vote to be in Erdogan's pocket if he decides to run in Turkey's first direct election of its president.

Al-Monitor talked to some of the key Kurdish figures selected by Erdogan's government to play a role in resolving the Kurdish issue. Their voices could reflect the way in which the government decides to approach this controversial issue.



“There is no doubt that Erdogan will receive Kurdish support if he runs for the presidency,” said Sahismail Bedirhanoglu, head of a business association in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir and the man who put together a contact group aimed at fostering dialogue on Kurdish issues with the consent of the government. “The thing is, we concluded one election [on March 30] and stepped into the sphere of the presidential election. And this ongoing election season makes it more difficult for the government to take some crucial and much-needed steps to assure the advancement of this process. That raises the risk of this issue sliding once again into violence.”

Zubeyde Teker, a member of the government-appointed Wise People Commission, agrees. “Look, the Justice and Development Party [AKP] could consider this process as being equivalent to Erdogan. We don’t see it that way. They scared the people [by telling them] that the graft probe targeted this [Kurdish] process, but the truth is that corruption has always been widespread in this country, and the moral ground in the country is sinking lower everyday,” she told Al-Monitor. “In all sincerity, we couldn’t care less whether Erdogan gets the presidency or not. This process does not depend on Erdogan’s person, because the state decided to keep this process ongoing. [At the same time], we don’t feel like being dependent on this process to get our well-deserved rights.”

Defining the problem of the government as lacking ideology, Teker praised the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) for its ideological standing. “The main thing about Zubeyde,” said Teker, referring to herself, “is that she loves [the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah] Ocalan very much. It is so fulfilling, especially as a Kurdish woman, to take the ideological walk with Ocalan,” she said to Al-Monitor. “I have stated this numerous times. I believe the state owes us an apology. The best way of doing that is to write a new civilian constitution that brings about real democracy.”

Teker heads the Federation of Law Solidarity Unions for Prisoners’ and Convicts’ Families and is the spokesperson for the group Freedom for Ocalan. “If the state carried out a coup on Feb. 28 [1997] against the Islamist politicians, then this government launched a coup against the Kurds’ legal political movement, Koma Civaken Kurdistan, on April 14, 2009. They have now released 48 of them [on April 13] and expect us to be happy about it. That just makes us feel more aggravated,” Teker said. “The state started to talk with Ocalan in 2006, and these people were not imprisoned then. They are playing a cat-and-

mouse game with us. If they are sincere, all the PKK prisoners should be immediately released.”

Bedirhanoglu told Al-Monitor that the Kurds are now all united in support of the PKK. “I have argued against violence for many years, but the state failed to take a step toward the Kurds during the cease-fires since 1993, and that wiped out all other influential Kurdish voices. Ocalan and the PKK now represent the Kurds in this country. No one should be fool enough to deny it,” he asserted.

Sedat Yurttas, a former parliamentarian from the pro-Kurdish Democracy Party (banned by the Constitutional Court in 1994), agreed. Yurttas, who works closely with the government by taking part in meetings of nongovernmental organizations, said, “We are witnessing a process of Ocalan walking in the footsteps of [the late South African leader Nelson] Mandela,” he told Al-Monitor. “Since he was imprisoned, he expanded his sphere of political influence. He improved his ability to analyze. He reached out to more people, including Turks, more than ever. It would be misleading to characterize him solely as an imprisoned individual.”

The question now is whether the PKK will be satisfied with full recognition of the Kurds’ cultural rights. “This would be a very narrow perspective. One can only say such a naive thing if one is totally ignorant of what the PKK or the KCK [Kurdistan Communities Unit] is all about,” Teker said. “The issue is an all out democratization of this country, tearing down the old republic and rebuilding a whole new one.” Bedirhanoglu concurred, stating, “The Kurdish people will not settle on an agreement that [only] recognizes its cultural and linguistic rights. This is a political movement seeking a political outcome.”

Yurttas sees the situation in the same light. “Former President Ahmet Necdet Sezer in 2004 vetoed the local governance law proposed by this government. People create a tempest in a teapot [now] when we talk about autonomy, but that law was going even beyond that. In five to 10 years, it will get easier to talk about these issues,” he told Al-Monitor. He added, “I attended a closed-door meeting in March 2013 where Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu spoke. He is a visionary man, and he talked about the artificial borders that divide Kurdistan [spread across Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria]. He talked about the need to make these borders irrelevant, just as they are on the European continent.” ♦



24 April 2014

One Man’s Crusade to Reconcile Erbil and Rojava

rudaw.net
24/April/2014

SULAIMANI, Kurdistan Region—Veteran Kurdish politician Muhammad Amin Penjwini, has launched a personal crusade to reconcile the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK).

Penjwini who is known to be a close friend of Abdullah Ocalan, PKK’s jailed leader, believes that “Unless the KDP and PKK reach an agreement on the situation in Western Kurdistan (Rojava), a great opportunity will be missed” for Kurds in that country.

Penjwini told Rudaw that he recently met with Kurdistan Region Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani to arrange a possible face-to-face meeting between the leaders of both parties.

“PKK friends had asked me to inform Barzani that they are always ready to meet the KDP leadership and Barzani had a positive

response,” said Penjwini.

According to Penjwini, PKK and KDP leaders have in the past held positive talks to solve their differences; particularly on Rojava, and that the latest attempt at mediation is his personal initiative.

“My last meeting with Nechirvan Barzani came at my request and the PKK was aware of it,” Penjwini added.

Relations between the KDP and PKK have soured recently mainly over Rojava. The KDP accuses PKK’s local branch—the Democratic Union Party (PYD)—of sidelining minor Kurdish groups while the PKK says that the KDP is trying to impose its own dominance on Syrian Kurds.

However, Penjwini says that the PYD is willing to accept other groups in Rojava’s politics, in particular the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (KDPS) that was established recently.

“The PYD has no problem



“I think the cantons have become a reality and it is necessary to deal with them,” says Muhammad Amin Penjwini. Photo: Rudaw

with that but it has some reservations that need to be solved through negotiation,” he said. “The solution would be to have all forces under a unified leadership.”

Penjwini said that in return the KDP should recognize the autonomous cantons the PYD

established in the Kurdish areas of Syria late last year.

“I think the cantons have become a reality and it is necessary to deal with them,” he added.

Penjwini said that KDPS’s demand for equal power-sharing in Rojava is not practical and that they should instead build on common interests they have with the PYD.

“A 50/50 power-sharing will not be successful, but there are common points of interest,” he explained. “They can start from there and later on work on their differences. The PYD is willing to negotiate the participation of the KDPS in the security forces.”

Penjwini believes that a KDP-PKK agreement will save the day for everyone in Rojava. He also urges the leaders of both parties to “Let Rojava Kurds decide for themselves.”

While meeting KDP leaders in Erbil, Penjwini says that he has also contacted Ocalan and asked him to use his influence and encourage the PKK and PYD to end the tensions.

“Ocalan has urged the PKK to work out their disagreements with other political parties,” said Penjwini. □

Iran's ethnic minorities

April 23rd 2014

<http://www.economist.com>
Economist Intelligence Unit

In last year's presidential election, Hassan Rowhani pledged to improve the situation of ethnic and religious minorities. Among the many challenges he faces is how to balance demands from minorities for greater rights against fears of weakening national unity at a time of international pressure and regional tension between Sunni and Shia Muslims. Although Iran is over 85% Shia, around 10% of its population is Sunni, alongside smaller groups of Zoroastrians, Armenian Christians and Jews. The ethnic balance is more complex, with only around 50% Persian.

The largest minority, the Azeri, who number 15m-20m, are Shia and arguably the most integrated and well represented in the capital, Tehran, including the bazaaris, the traditional merchant class in Iran. However, there were riots in the Azeri-speaking north-west in 2006 after a Tehran magazine published a cartoon of a cockroach speaking Azeri. Two other large minorities, who are mainly Sunni—the Baluchis and Kurds—have shown the greatest signs of unrest in recent years, with political violence in Baluchistan and the Kurdish region. Mr Rowhani's approach has been to stress that all Iranians, regardless of ethnicity, enjoy equal rights. In a speech in Zahedan, the capital of Sistan-Baluchistan province, south-east Iran, on April 15th he said that Iran did not have "second-class citizens".

The speech followed the release of four border guards held by Jaish al-Adl, a militant Baluchi Sunni group who had executed a fifth. The province, Iran's poorest and bordering both Pakistan and Afghanistan, has seen many attacks on Iranian soldiers and officials over several years. Meanwhile, a moderate course has been taken by Abdul-Hamid Esmaeel-Zehi, the provincial Sunni Friday prayer leader who played a significant role in securing the guards' release, in his long campaign for Sunni rights.

CIVIL RIGHTS CHARTER—RESISTANCE IN TEHRAN TO "ETHNIC RIGHTS"



During last year's presidential election, Mr Rowhani took up a reformist call for a civil rights charter and, in turn, a commitment to improve the position of ethnic minorities. Mr Esmaeel-Zehi endorsed Mr Rowhani during the election and was one of the first to meet him following his victory. But the publication of a rather vague draft for the charter in November disappointed reformists and is unlikely to satisfy all among minority ethnic groups.

Many in Tehran are wary of any concessions to minorities, whom they view with suspicion. For example, newspapers criticised Mr Esmaeel-Zehi for not moving more decisively to secure the guards' release. This reflects a wider suspicion of ethnic minorities among the Persian population that can be exploited by populist politicians. Complicating matters further is growing international tension between Shia and Sunni. Iran is surrounded by mainly Sunni countries and has long accused rivals, including the US and Saudi Arabia, of trying to manipulate Iran's Sunni minorities. When the Iranians in 2010 captured Abdul-Malek Riggi, the leader of Jundallah, a militant Baluchi group, they alleged that he had been in direct contact with US forces.

THE BALUCHIS—A MIX OF POVERTY, SMUGGLING AND POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Sistan-Baluchistan is the most deprived province in Iran and its proximity to Afghanistan has fed narcotics smuggling. Baluchis allege discrimination, with official posts going disproportionately to Sistanis, who are generally Shia. There has been intermittent violence in Sistan-Baluchistan for years, both as Iranian forces fight well-armed smugglers and from militant Baluchi groups whose activities (including beheadings) and language have often echoed al-Qaida and who have contacts with Arab media in the Gulf. When the Iranian authorities captured and executed Mr Riggi they claimed that the Baluchi insurgency was over. But this claim has been belied by the emergence of Jaish al-Adl, which in one attack in October killed 14 border guards.

Problems with the Baluchis also tie up with Iran's relationship with Pakistan, which has been strained over Pakistan's failure to go ahead with a planned gas pipeline, despite Iran having completed its leg and it offering a soft loan of US\$500m for Pakistan to build its section. ➔

► (There have been reports last month of Saudi Arabia paying Pakistan US\$1.5bn not to go ahead.)

THE KURDS—SYRIAN COMPLICATIONS FOR IRANIAN POLICY

Arguably, the Kurds have been the most alienated minority within Iran for many years, usually showing the lowest turnout in elections. Like Baluchistan, the Kurdish region is heavily militarised according to a doctrine of "strategic depth" and smuggling is rife, especially along the border with northern Iraq. The then main Kurdish party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran, based in Iraq, ended its military struggle in the early 1990s, and has probably lost support to Pejak, the Party of Free Life, which has carried out armed attacks in Iran and which is allied to—and follows the ideology of—the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which last year suspended its two-decade armed struggle in Turkey. The PKK has apparently moderated its commitment to an independent Kurdistan embracing Kurds of all countries.

The emergence of de facto autonomy of Syrian Kurds during the country's two-year civil war is complicating regional politics and alliances. The main Syrian Kurdish group, the Democratic Union Party (PYD), is a PKK offshoot of which Turkey is wary, and there are suspicions in Ankara that

Iranian intelligence is bolstering both the PYD and the PKK. This is despite examples of co-operation of Turkish and Iranian forces against the PKK/Pejak.

Iran is probably attempting a balancing act. The PYD has a better relationship with the Syrian regime, an Iranian ally, than do rival Syrian Kurdish groups, and the PKK itself has had sometimes close ties with Syria. However, any strengthening of the PKK runs the risk for Iran of strengthening Pejak. At the same time, at a popular level Kurds in all countries look to the Kurdistan Regional Government in a federal Iraq as a positive example, even if Turkey and Iran are very suspicious of a model of Kurdish autonomy within international borders.

POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR MR ROWHANI TO CONSIDER

A possible concession Mr Rowhani could make to the Kurds would be recognising and admitting the fact that the current Kurdistan province covers only part of Iran's Kurdish areas. But the suggestion in January from one Kurdish parliamentary deputy of a new "northern Kurdistan" province with Mahabad as its capital—during government-launched discussions on redrawing provincial boundaries—provoked criticisms from Azeris, who probably constitute a majority in West Azerbaijan province, where Mahabad is

situated.

Mr Rowhani also has the option of appointing Sunnis to senior positions, including as governors of mainly Sunni provinces. Another possibility would be allowing the establishment of a Sunni mosque in Tehran. But such moves would need calibration, as they would upset, among others, the Shia religious establishment in Qom at a time when the president needs to rally support for international policies, including a possible nuclear deal.

The diversity of Iran's ethnic minorities and their lack of co-ordination perhaps weakens them. Most members of the minorities probably believe that they can achieve their rights within Iran, and a coalition of ethnic-based parties opposed to the Islamic Republic has made no headway since setting up in 2005 a Congress of Iranian Nationalities for a Federal Iran, advocating a "federal democratic" system based on "the separation of religion and state".

Ethnic issues, however, remain sensitive and have the potential to play into broader factional struggles, and low-level insurgencies in Kurdish and Baluchi areas will continue to drain security resources and increase nervousness in Tehran over international and regional threats. ■



26 April 2014

Kurdish Newspapers: KDP has no red lines on third term for Maliki

26 April 2014
english.shafaq.com

Shafaq News / A Kurdish newspaper reported on Saturday, that Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), led by Kurdistan Region's President, Massoud Barzani has no red lines for Iraqi Prime Minister, Nuri al-Maliki to take over a third term, while noted that the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Iraqi President, Jalal Talabani confirms unity of the Kurdish position after the election.

Hawal newspaper wrote in news briefed by "Shafaq News", that "KDP supports al-Maliki to get a third term in the upcoming elections, quoting from the Member of KDP, Mahma Khalil as saying that his party does not have red lines on Maliki's being a prime minister again.

For its part, the newspaper quoted a member of the parliament for



the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), Burhan Mohammed as saying that the Kurds must unite their position after the elections in order to support the demands of Kurds.

Mohammed added that al-Maliki's position with Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds is not good and that's why it would be a mistake for Kurds to accept Maliki as prime minister because he made a lot of problems for Kurds over the past four years.

For its part, Awena electronic

newspaper indicated that Change Movement will not participate in the elections of the Iraqi parliament in the provinces of Diyala, Nineveh and Baghdad, quoting a source in the movement as saying that the non-participation of the movement in these provinces comes because of their inability to obtain significant results in it and its failure in the previous elections in these provinces and to intensify their efforts on the three provinces of the region and Kirkuk.

The Newspaper pointed out that there are hundreds of thousands of voter Kurdish in the mentioned provinces, especially Nineveh and Diyala provinces, which are located within the disputed areas.

It is scheduled to hold elections in the Iraqi Parliament in 30th of current April ○

Iraq suicide bomb at Kurdish political rally kills 30

A suicide bombing at a rally in north-eastern Iraq has killed 30 people, security officials say.

www.bbc.com
28 April 2014

The attack took place at a political gathering in the town of Khanaqin, which has a large Kurdish population.

It was the deadliest bombing among a wave of attacks to hit Iraq on Monday.

Iraqis are voting in the country's first parliamentary election since the withdrawal of US troops almost three years ago, but it comes amid the worst unrest since 2008.

People at the rally had gathered to watch television footage of Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, casting his vote in Germany. Mr Talabani suffered a stroke in December 2012 and has been receiving treatment in Germany.

"The attacker snuck among the crowds near the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan's [Mr Talabani's party] headquarters and blew himself up, causing a tragic massacre," a police officer told Reuters news agency.



An Iraqi policeman inspects the site of a suicide attack at a polling centre in Kirkuk, Iraq, 28 April 2014. Several polling centres were hit by bomb attacks on Monday

At least 50 others were injured in the blast. **POLLING STATIONS TARGETED**

The attack was one of several attacks across Iraq on Monday. A total of at least 50 people were killed.

A bomb at a polling station in Baghdad's Mansour district killed at least three security officers.



Suicide bombers also launched attacks near voting centres in the Kirkuk and Tuz Khurmatu in the north.

Meanwhile, journalists in the northern city of Mosul who were covering the vote were injured after their security convoy was struck by a bomb.

Many of the attackers were disguised in army and police uniforms, Reuters said.

On Friday, at least 31 people were killed as a series of blasts targeted a Shia election rally in Baghdad. The Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant - an al-Qaeda offshoot also known as ISIL - said it had carried out the attacks.

Soldiers, police and advance voters were casting their ballots on Monday. The majority of Iraq's electorate will vote on Wednesday.

More than 9,000 candidates are competing for 328 parliamentary seats. There will be no voting in parts of Sunni-dominated Anbar province, where security forces still battle Islamist and tribal militants for control of the provincial capital Ramadi and nearby Falluja. ●

PKK leader does not rule out renewed conflict

www.hurriyetaidailynews.com
ISTANBUL, April/27/2014

Outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Öcalan has not ruled out a restart of conflict, but said the peace process is set to continue.

In his latest message released after Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) deputies visited İmralı Prison on April 26, Öcalan said the peace process was changing.

"The [peace] process is changing its character. Every moment the opportunities of deepened solutions and possibilities of conflict are present," Öcalan said in his message. "Especially the steps that the government will take might remove the possibility of conflict and might develop solutions."

The resolution or peace process, also dubbed the "negotiations," refers to an ongoing government-led initiative aimed at ending the long-running Kurdish issue



BDP deputies Buldan (L) and Önder read out Öcalan's Nevruz message in this file photo.

by ending the three-decade-old conflict between security forces and the PKK.

Öcalan began talks with Turkish officials in late 2012 to halt the conflict that has left more than 40,000 people dead over the past three decades. In March 2013, he ordered his fighters to observe a cease-fire. Many militants have also withdrawn from

Turkish soil in what was dubbed as the first step of the peace process, but the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), which shares the same grassroots as the PKK, has been urging the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to take legislative steps to start the second phase.

As part of the process, BDP deputies paid visits to Öcalan at İmralı Prison and the PKK leader's latest announcement came after the latest meeting with lawmakers Pervin Buldan, İdris Baluken and Sırrı Süreyya Önder.

Öcalan said he was not unhappy with the process, despite setbacks.

"I do not regret carrying the process to where it is now, although I had many problems. I find [the process] very important," Öcalan said. "The process is [well-rooted] enough to make the most important contribution to Turkey's democracy moves. I invite all parties to do what they can in this regard. If those in political power want to have armed militants return to the community, it should continue the legislative works. There is a historical importance to complete the legislative regulations immediately," he added.

Öcalan also congratulated all workers on the upcoming May Day, adding that he would release another statement on the issue before May 1. ●

Two more Kurdish politicians end exile

www.hurriyetdailynews.com
ANKARA, April/28/2014

Two more Kurdish politicians returned to Turkey ending their decades-long exile.

Şerafettin Kaya and Yusuf Sedat Bucak, who have been outside of Turkey for 35 and 22 years, respectively, arrived in Turkey from Germany April 28, after

receiving a guarantee from the state to not be arrested.

The two politicians are facing charges of forming and leading an armed organization, along with 29 other people.

Kaya and Bucak followed Yaşar Kaya, the founder of the now-defunct Democracy Party (DEP), who returned to Ankara on April 17 after living in self-exile in Germany for more than two decades as a political refugee. Kaya's return was dubbed as a show of support for the government-led peace process.

On March 6, the Ankara 11th Heavy Penal Court issued non-arrest assurances to exiles Kaya, Yusuf Serhat Bucak and Şerafettin Kaya if they returned to the country within three months, in consideration of their age and health situation.

The peace process is aimed at ending the three-decade-long conflict between



Prominent Kurdish politician Yaşar Kaya cries after arriving in Turkey after decades in exile. AA Photo

Turkey's security forces and the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in order to hopefully pave the way for the resolution of the decades-long Kurdish issue. ●

\$46bn projects to boost Kurdish economy

Erbil (Kurdistan)

April 30, 2014

www.tradearabia.com

The Kurdistan region of Iraq is set to launch \$46 billion worth of projects in the energy, construction, tourism and basic infrastructure sectors as part of its efforts to boost the region's economy.

Kurdistan has long been considered as a business-friendly environment for foreign companies and a gateway for doing business elsewhere in the country. But recent developments have seen an upsurge in business activity making it one of the fastest growing economies on earth, said industry experts ahead of a key seminar on the Kurdish region's development.

The Kurdistan Projects conference, is being organised by Meed from June 8 to 10 at The Rotana, Erbil. It will provide a comprehensive overview of the projects market by sector and outline where the main opportunities lie for investors, financiers, contractors, and suppliers.

It is supported by the Kurdistan Regional Government and Department of Foreign Relations, UKTI, Taqa as Strategic Event Partner, as well as US-Kurdistan Business Council (USKBC) and Kurdish Europe Dutch Business Community (KDBC).

Meed's Kurdistan Projects conference 2014 shows why the Kurdish region, long seen as a platform for doing business elsewhere in Iraq, has now become a hotspot for investments, said the organisers.



"We are delighted to work with the Kurdistan Regional Government and major private sector investors on this ground breaking conference set to reveal opportunities across key sectors including: oil & gas, power, real estate, industry, hospitality & tourism, water & agriculture and banking & finance," said Edmund O' Sullivan, the chairman of Meed Events.

"Being the only event catering to all major areas of the region's economy and attracting all the region's leading stakeholders, this is a must attend event for any organisation looking to expand existing business in the Kurdistan Region or enter this booming market to explore new business opportunities," he stated.

Other healthy signs indicating Kurdistan's steady march to progress has been the growing inflow of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Kurdistan is open for business and the National Investment Law of 2006 has attracted more than \$20 billion to the region already with the

government actively encouraging further investment most notably in the water, agriculture, industry, tourism and power sectors.

As of June 2013 there are now in excess of 2,300 foreign companies registered in addition to the 15,000 local companies.

"The welcoming business environment, coupled with the rapid growth and enormous opportunities for investment across the economy – including in the oil & gas and power & water sectors – are driving the sense of optimism in the Kurdistan region and boosting the enthusiasm of investors," remarked Leo Koot, the president of Taqa Iraq.

The cornerstone of the region's economy is the untapped natural resources proving highly attractive for oil companies. The region is moving rapidly from exploration to production, and with political stability and security unrivalled elsewhere in Iraq, there are numerous openings throughout the hydrocarbons value chain, he added.

Erbil has also been called "the next Dubai", thanks to the huge construction boom currently under way. Its build-it-and-they-will-come attitude is now maturing as the Kurdistan region develops, with the Prime Minister releasing details on a plan to improve the quality of future property developments including the implementation of building regulations and an active building control department, said O' Sullivan.

Tourism is likely to receive a major boost as Tourism Erbil has been named the Arab Tourism Capital 2014 by the Arab Council of Tourism.

"Hotels are springing up in the city and further afield, and Kurdistan is taking advantage of its safe reputation to develop attractions and leisure projects that will attract more visitors," he added. -TradeArabia News Service ○

International New York Times THURSDAY, APRIL 24, 2014

Battered city may be key to Syria's future

HOMS, SYRIA

Homs looms as a test of how to stitch battered country back together

BY ANNE BARNARD

On the edge of the Old City here, children play beside a house blown open by shelling. An antique wood-framed mirror leans against the wall, so that soldiers can watch for threats from around the corner. A block closer to one of the city's last front lines, trash, rubble and rusted cars litter streets of charred and sagging buildings.

The government retook this neighborhood, Bab Sbaa, from insurgents more than a year ago. But few of its residents, once a mix of Christians and Sunnis, have returned. Government supporters whisper that insurgents could attack again. And some opponents say they prefer to remain in still-restive areas despite the shelling, rather than live among the military checkpoints here, where soldiers peer from storefronts converted to miniature army posts.

Now, as insurgents who long held much of the Old City make what could be their last stand against withering bombardment, and the government declares it is on the verge of fully controlling the city, Homs — not for the first time — represents an important turning point for Syria. If the government is victorious here, it will control a devastated landscape, a physically fragmented and socially divided city where many community bonds, not just houses, have been destroyed.

A government victory in this battle would serve to lay bare the more vexing challenge confronting all Syrians after more than three years of civil war: how to stitch the country back together.

For both sides, Homs, a central crossroads city whose diverse prewar population was one million, is crucial to the future. The government hopes it will be a showcase of rebuilding and reconciliation. The exile opposition coalition, condemning the continuing blockade of the Old City, last week called Homs “key to a democratic solution for a united Syria.”

But achieving either side's vision will be a challenge. At least several hundred thousand residents remain displaced, inside or outside Syria, where the few lucky ones with Internet access broadcast nostalgia for their city and its repu-



A soldier with the Syrian Army is reflected in a mirror on a blasted, rubble-strewn street in Homs. The city, not for the first time, represents an important turning point for Syria.

tation for stubbornness and humor. Those who remain inhabit neighborhoods that feel like islands — some intact but fearful, others in ruins — and are increasingly sorting themselves by sect and political affiliation.

Homs has long been regarded by government opponents as the capital of the revolution. It held some of the earliest and largest protests in 2011, drawing violent crackdowns. Government opponents here were among the first to bear arms, and the Syrian Army first unleashed heavy artillery here, in the Baba Amr district. In this way, Homs offered a foreshadowing of what awaited the rest of the country.

Lately, Homs has become a center of the government's strategy of blockading and starving insurgent-held areas. A February cease-fire, which included an amnesty, allowed 1,500 civilians, subsisting on grass and leaves, to depart the Old City, and brought brief hope that Homs might find a path to common ground.

But the challenge is to overcome not just the shattered infrastructure, but also the deep resentments that come from being bombed, starved and run out

of the city. The amnesty alone left hard feelings on all sides. Some government supporters are enraged that hundreds of fighters, some of whom had killed their relatives, have been allowed to go free.

“This is natural,” the Homs governor, Talal al-Barazi, who lost a cousin in the fighting, said in an interview. “Initially, we said we had to take revenge on these armed groups. But if you have a bird's-eye view of the benefit of the country, reconciliation is more important than individual emotions and interests.”

But with some civilians and former fighters who accepted the evacuation still detained by the government for background checks that were part of the deal, fears of reprisal remain.

Outside the neighborhood, trust is also in short supply. From her rooftop in the government-held Zahra neighborhood, Saada Qassem can see the Old City skyline, ragged like a mouthful of broken teeth. Somewhere in there, her son disappeared two years ago while driving a taxi — kidnapped, she believes, because he, like President Bashar al-Assad, belongs to the Alawite minority. More recently, a bullet from that direction

International New York Times APRIL 30, 2014

grazed her young grandson's sternum, and a neighboring street was hit by one of many insurgent car bombs.

Across the street lives a woman from the Sunni majority who dominate the opposition, married to an Alawite man. Her Sunni relatives face shelling and food shortages, but she said they would not be welcome in her neighborhood amid the rising sectarian divisions.

Still, recent history here provides some glimmer of hope. United Nations staff members have praised Homs administrators for trying to serve all areas, carrying out water projects amid conflict at the cost of workers' lives. Syrian Arab Red Crescent workers here have risked and lost lives to aid both sides.

And early in the rebellion, demonstrators here called for sectarian unity, and Christians remained in the Old City. One, Leena Siriani, who later fled to Damascus to escape the shelling, said local rebels never disturbed her and fixed her street's electricity after battles.

But her husband said he suspected sectarianism because demonstrators demanding democracy and an end to

"Each one is a rooster crowing on his rubbish pile. Now that they have guns, will they agree to go back to their old lives?"

corruption gathered at mosques. (The protesters said mosques were the only place groups could legally meet.)

Others say insurgents attacked Christians from the beginning. Abu Nizar, one of the few who stayed in Bab Sbaa throughout the unrest and who would only give a nickname for security reasons, said fighters, including longtime neighbors, threatened him and demanded he pay a tax for non-Muslims.

Each side blames the other for fueling sectarianism. Now, all but a few of the Old City's tens of thousands of Christians are gone, along with most of its Muslims.

In their place are men with guns, on both sides, with vested interests in continued conflict. Elia Samaan, a Homs native advising the Reconciliation Ministry, said that after dark, a front line near his home becomes "a supermarket," where pro-government militiamen sell overpriced cigarettes to insurgents.

"Each one is a rooster crowing on his rubbish pile," he said, citing a proverb. "Now that they have guns, will they agree to go back to their old lives?"

Hwaida Saad contributed reporting from Homs and from Beirut, Lebanon, and Mohammad Ghannam from Beirut.

Turkey to press U.S. to extradite preacher

ISTANBUL

But legal experts say request could face long odds if seen as political

BY SEBNEM ARSU
AND BRIAN KNOWLTON

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday that Turkey would officially request the extradition from the United States of a Turkish preacher whose pro-Islamic network has been accused by Mr. Erdogan's supporters of seeking to undercut the government through illegal wiretaps and spurious claims of corruption.

The extradition request for the self-exiled preacher, Fethullah Gulen, which Mr. Erdogan confirmed to reporters in Ankara, marks a new low point in a once-close relationship between the two sides and reflects the sensitivity of the corruption claims against Mr. Erdogan's close circle, including his son and the sons of some of his ministers.

It also calls new attention to the complex, and often politically tinged, field of extradition law, following the unsuccessful American request to Russia for the return of the former National Security agency analyst Edward J. Snowden.

In Turkey, the Erdogan government and Mr. Gulen's thousands of supporters had once made common cause against staunchly secular critics there until the two sides broke during a power struggle last year.

Mr. Gulen, 73, has lived in rural Pennsylvania since the late 1990s, when he left Turkey amid growing pressure after allegedly urging the overthrow of the secular government. He denied the charges, and the Islam-friendly Erdogan government later dropped them.

Asked on Tuesday whether legal action would now begin for Mr. Gulen's extradition, Mr. Erdogan said, "Yes, it will begin," CNN Turk television reported.

Speaking a day earlier to the American interviewer Charlie Rose of PBS, Mr. Erdogan laid out what he said was the illegal nature of telephone transcripts — leaked, he said, by Mr. Gulen's backers — that appeared to indicate widespread corruption in the government. The leaked calls seized public attention ahead of local elections in March but had little impact on Mr. Erdogan's overwhelming popularity.

Mr. Erdogan told Mr. Rose that he ex-

pected the United States, a close NATO ally, to respond positively to his extradition request, after Turkey granted several American requests.

The countries signed an extradition treaty that disallows most requests of a "political character" in 1979.

The State Department has a policy of not commenting on pending extradition requests, but legal specialists said that the Turkish request faced tough odds.

"This extradition request has no legal basis," said Ergun Ozbudun, professor of law at Istanbul Sehir University, pointing to the considerable difficulty surrounding the process even when suspects are charged with serious crimes. "The request for Fethullah Gulen's extradition therefore would be a political one, and I don't think would produce any results."

Lawyers for Mr. Gulen, who has permanent resident status in the United States, agreed. "There is neither an investigation or an arrest warrant" issued by a court to submit to the U.S. authorities, said Nurullah Akbayrak, an Istanbul-based lawyer who represents Mr. Gulen. "This is not something that political will can decide."

Mr. Gulen, who leads a secluded life on a remote compound in northeastern Pennsylvania, has rejected portrayals of himself as a powerful, behind-the-scenes political manipulator.

His moderate and Western-friendly version of Sunni Islam has attracted thousands of followers who have built a global network of businesses and schools. Mr. Gulen's strength in Turkey, analysts say, lies in the influence held by well-educated sympathizers who hold critical positions in state institutions.

But Mr. Gulen has strongly denied that he encouraged his followers — believed to be particularly influential in the judiciary and the police — to file a graft investigation last year against Mr. Erdogan's close circle after relations between the two sides began to sour.

"Such suggestions are only a cover-up perpetuated to distract public attention from the corruption investigations," Mr. Gulen, who is said to be in poor health, said in response to questions e-mailed to him earlier this year by the International New York Times. "It is out of the question for me to give orders to state officials and compel them to do something."

He added that investigations conducted by the judiciary "should be allowed to continue unimpeded."

Brian Knowlton reported from Washington.

L'Irak revendique pour la première fois une attaque contre des jihadistes en Syrie

Des hélicoptères irakiens ont tiré sur un convoi jihadiste en territoire syrien pour l'empêcher d'entrer en Irak, tuant huit personnes.

Par Francetv info avec AFP
www.francetvinfo.fr
27 avril 2014

L'Irak entre dans le conflit syrien. Des hélicoptères irakiens ont tiré dimanche 27 avril sur un convoi jihadiste en territoire syrien pour l'empêcher d'entrer en Irak, tuant huit personnes.

L'IRAK CONTRE LES JIHADISTES DE L'EIIL

Les hélicoptères de l'armée ont mené le raid dans l'est de la Syrie contre un convoi de camions qui s'approchait de la frontière irakienne pour "délivrer (en Irak) du carburant à l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIIL)", un groupuscule sunnite jihadiste, a indiqué le porte-parole du ministère de la Santé, Saad Maan. L'attaque a été menée "sans coordination avec le régime syrien", a ajouté le général de brigade Maan, soulignant la responsabilité pour les Irakiens de "protéger la frontière", d'un côté comme de l'autre.

La porosité des 600 kilomètres de frontières qui séparent l'Irak de la Syrie a profité aux jihadistes de l'EIIL, qui ont fait de la région irakienne frontalière d'Al-Anbar leur base arrière. Né en Irak après l'invasion américaine en 2003 et apparu en Syrie au printemps 2013, l'EIIL est haï par le reste de la rébellion syrienne à cause de la brutalité de ses méthodes à l'encontre des civils et son



Des hélicoptères irakiens dans le ciel de Bagdad, le 6 janvier 2012, lors d'une parade. (ALI AL-SAAD / AFP)

refus de coopérer avec les autres groupes dans la lutte contre le régime de Bachar al-Assad. En Irak, il contrôle la ville de Fallouja, dans la province d'Al-Anbar, d'où l'armée n'est toujours pas parvenue à le déloger.

DES INTÉRÊTS POLITIQUES AVANT LES LÉGISLATIVES

C'est la première fois que les autorités irakiennes revendiquent une attaque contre des jihadistes en Syrie en proie à une guerre dévastatrice entre rebelles et le régime. A l'approche d'élection législatives, prévues pour le 30 avril, le pays sort peu à peu de sa neutralité. Déjà, en mars, le Premier ministre Nouri Al-Maliki avait accusé les monarchies du Golfe, principaux alliés de la rébellion syrienne, de "soutenir le terrorisme".

Le conflit syrien alimente la spirale de vio-

lences en Irak, en attisant des divisions confessionnelles déjà profondes. Des Irakiens aussi bien chiites que sunnites sont partis combattre en Syrie, au côté du régime pour les chiites et de la rébellion pour les sunnites. L'Irak en outre accueille près de 40 000 réfugiés syriens dont quelque 25 000 enregistrés auprès de l'ONU. L'approche des élections législatives n'a pas apaisé les tensions, multipliant au contraire les discours partisans, chaque candidat jouant sur les allégeances tribales et confessionnelles de ses électeurs.

L'IRAK PRIS EN TENAILLE ENTRE L'IRAN ET L'ARABIE SAOUDITE

L'Irak est pris en tenaille entre l'Iran, principal allié régional du régime syrien, et l'Arabie Saoudite, un soutien de la rébellion. Bagdad souhaite une solution politique en Syrie et rejette l'idée d'armer la rébellion, ce que souhaitent ardemment les monarchies du Golfe.

Même si Nouri Al-Maliki, un allié de l'Iran, est donné favori pour un troisième mandat, le choix du futur Premier ministre - un chiite, selon un accord non écrit sur la répartition confessionnel du pouvoir - est devenu un enjeu régional majeur, vu la situation géopolitique importante de l'Irak par rapport à la Syrie. La majorité des Irakiens sont chiites et ne voient pas d'un bon oeil l'idée de soutenir les rebelles sunnites en Syrie. ♦



Turquie: deux soldats turcs enlevés par un commando kurde

Istanbul, 27 avril 2014 (AFP)

DEUX MILITAIRES TURCS ont été enlevés samedi soir par un commando kurde dans le sud-est de la Turquie, a annoncé dimanche l'agence officielle turque Anatolie.

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

Toutefois, rien ne permet à ce stade d'établir clairement un lien direct entre le commando et le PKK, qui a conclu en mars une trêve avec le gouvernement turc.

Le groupe armé a enlevé les deux soldats turcs après avoir arrêté un autobus près de la ville de Lice (sud-est) sur une route bloquée par des Kurdes qui manifestaient depuis cinq jours contre la construction d'un poste militaire turc à cet

endroit, selon l'agence turque.

Selon l'agence de presse Firat News, considérée comme la voix officielle du PKK, le commando aurait indiqué après l'enlèvement qu'il ne libérerait les deux militaires qu'après l'annonce officielle de l'arrêt de la construction de ce poste militaire.

La manifestation avait dégénéré samedi en affrontements au cours desquels les militaires turcs avaient tiré sur les tentes des manifestants kurdes, sans faire de victimes.

Mis en difficulté par les accusations de corruption qui minent son pouvoir, le Premier ministre turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a réaffirmé récemment qu'il ferait "tout ce qu'il faut" pour mettre un terme au conflit kurde.

Mais les Kurdes ne s'en contentent pas et pressent Ankara de faire d'autres gestes. Dans son message du Nouvel an kurde, Abdullah Öcalan avait exigé le mois dernier la mise en place rapide d'un "cadre légal" pour relancer les discussions.

Un des chefs militaires du PKK, Murat Karayilan, avait été plus menaçant: "Le processus de paix s'arrêtera si le gouvernement ne prend pas de mesures".

Irak: 30 morts dans un attentat suicide dans la province de Diyala

www.lepoint.fr

Baqouba - 28 avril 2014 - (AFP)

Le vote des forces de sécurité irakiennes a été endeuillé lundi par une série d'attentats qui a fait au moins 57 morts, laissant présager le pire pour les élections législatives de mercredi.

Policiers et militaires ont voté deux jours plus tôt pour pouvoir surveiller le déroulement de ce premier scrutin national depuis le départ des troupes américaines fin 2011.

Lors des précédentes législatives, en 2010, des attentats avaient fait près de 40 morts et des dizaines de blessés.

Depuis, l'Irak s'est enfoncé dans une nouvelle spirale de violences, qui a fait près de 3.000 morts depuis le début de l'année, dont quelque 600 membres des forces de sécurité.

Craignant une escalade à l'approche du vote, les autorités ont décrété 5 jours fériés --de dimanche à jeudi-- pour tenter de sécuriser le scrutin, auquel un peu plus de 20 millions d'électeurs sont inscrits.

Mais lundi, au moins 57 personnes, en majorité membres des forces de sécurité, ont péri dans des attaques qui ont également fait plus d'une centaine de blessés.

La majorité des attentats ont été perpétrés par des kamikazes contre des bureaux



Un attentat suicide a fait 9 morts près d'un bureau de vote à Kirkuk.



de vote, mais des convois de l'armée et un rassemblement ont également été pris pour cible.

L'attaque la plus meurtrière a frappé le nord-est du pays, où un kamikaze a tué au moins 30 personnes lors d'un rassemblement de partisans du président irakien Jalal Talabani, un Kurde hospitalisé en Allemagne depuis 2012.

Les victimes s'étaient rassemblées dans les rues de Khanaqin, ville majoritairement kurde près de la frontière iranienne, pour célébrer la diffusion d'une vidéo montrant, selon la chaîne de télévision, M. Talabani en train de voter.

A Kirkouk (nord de Bagdad), un attentat suicide contre un bureau de vote a tué au

moins 8 policiers et fait 9 blessés.

Un autre bureau de vote de la ville a été visé par un attentat suicide qui a fait un mort, et une bombe contre un convoi y a tué un soldat.

Dans la capitale, un kamikaze a fait détoner sa charge dans un bureau de vote, tuant sept policiers et faisant 15 blessés, selon des responsables de sécurité.

Mossoul (nord) a été frappée par plusieurs attaques, dont deux attentats suicide qui ont fait 8 blessés. En outre, au moins six journalistes irakiens ont été blessés dans l'attaque du bus qui les transportait vers un bureau de vote de la ville. □

Question arménienne : des paroles et des actes

Par Ömer Taşpınar, 28 / avril / 2014
<http://www.zamanfrance.fr>

On associe généralement l'autoritarisme de la politique nationale à une politique étrangère imprudente et dépourvue de tact. La Turquie s'est forgée une image de plus en plus autoritaire au cours des deux dernières années. La répression violente des manifestations de l'été 2013, les restrictions de plus en plus fortes de la liberté d'expression et les affaires de corruption ont révélé une nouvelle image de la Turquie. En plus de la perte d'influence régionale dans le sillage de la guerre civile en Syrie, l'image positive d'un pays démocratique, prospère et influent a été rem-



placée par un autoritarisme politique, la corruption économique et une politique étrangère dans l'impasse. La semaine dernière, dans ce contexte politique plutôt sombre, le Premier ministre Erdogan a, contre toute attente, présenté un message d'empathie et de condoléances aux Arméniens à l'occasion

de l'anniversaire des événements de 1915 que l'Occident qualifie généralement de génocide.

Ce message de condoléances était un petit pas pour les personnes qui attendent de la Turquie qu'elle reconnaisse les événements de 1915 comme un génocide et qu'elle présente des excuses claires. Pourtant, ce qu'on doit reconnaître, c'est que même un geste aussi limité est un pas énorme pour un leader qui n'est pas connu pour son engagement envers la démocratie libérale, la tolérance et la liberté d'expression. Alors pourquoi Erdogan a-t-il fait ce pas inattendu qui a surpris à la fois ses amis et ses ennemis ? Avant de répondre à cette question, il faut se rappeler que ce n'est pas le seul paradoxe de la situation turque actuelle. Le même leader autoritaire est également le premier leader turc à avoir accepté de négocier avec le PKK et qui semble prêt à adopter des mesures majeures pour résoudre le problème kurde. Il est donc difficile de considérer ➤

➤ Erdogan comme un autocrate typique.

LIMITER LES DOMMAGES

Comme pour la question kurde, certains verront une mesure de façade, stratégique et creuse dans ce geste d'Erdogan sur les événements de 1915. Après tout, la Turquie est sous la pression de l'Occident pour la fermeture de Twitter et YouTube et l'image du pays au niveau international en a pris un sacré coup à cause des journalistes emprisonnés et des affaires de corruption. On peut donc aussi voir dans le geste d'Erdogan une tentative pragmatique pour limiter les dommages. Certains ont déjà prévu qu'un Erdogan ciblé par les critiques en Turquie, puisse prendre des mesures inattendues en politique étrangère – une ouverture à Chypre, un geste

envers l'Arménie, une normalisation avec Israël – pour apaiser les critiques occidentales. Bien évidemment, si la Turquie réussit à prendre toutes ces mesures, on pourra à ce moment-là dire qu'elles sont un changement politique majeur plutôt que des mesures de façade.

S'ÉLOIGNER DU NATIONALISME TURC

Pourtant, même si vous pensez qu'Erdogan n'est pas sincère dans ces gestes de politique étrangère, on doit reconnaître qu'il est capable de s'identifier au statut de victime. Après tout, il avait adopté un discours similaire en s'appuyant sur le fait d'être musulman pieux sous l'hégémonie kémaliste laïque. Dans le contexte kurde, les dynamiques sont plus ou moins les mêmes. Nous pourrions assister à

une coalition de musulmans pieux et de Kurdes prenant leur revanche sur les cercles kémalistes. Une telle approche implique naturellement de prendre de la distance par rapport au nationalisme turc. Si Erdogan peut s'éloigner du nationalisme turc, cela ne l'aiderait-il pas à éprouver de l'empathie pour les victimes arméniennes de ce nationalisme turc ? Il est trop tôt pour le dire. Erdogan l'autocrate peut dire des choses surprenantes sur les fronts kurde et arménien. Mais de telles paroles doivent être accompagnées d'actes et de mesures concrètes, comme l'ouverture de la frontière avec l'Arménie et la création de relations diplomatiques.



Repères. L'Irak aujourd'hui : un pays riche en pétrole, fragilisé par les violences

Bagdad — 30 avril 2014 — (AFP)

L'IRAK, QUI ORGANISE mercredi les premières élections législatives depuis le retrait des troupes américaines fin 2011, figure parmi les principaux pays pétroliers, mais est fragilisé depuis début 2013 par une recrudescence des attentats.

SITUATION GEOGRAPHIQUE: Pays de la péninsule arabique, frontalier de la Turquie, l'Iran, la Syrie, Koweït, la Jordanie et l'Arabie saoudite (438.317 km²).

CAPITALE: Bagdad.

POPULATION: 34,8 millions (Banque mondiale). Les Kurdes (15 à 20%) habitent essentiellement la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien (nord-est).

LANGUE: Arabe et kurde (langues officielles).

RELIGION: L'islam est la religion officielle. 97% de la population est musulmane (chiites 60-65%, sunnites 32-37%). Les chrétiens ne sont pas plus de 400.000 contre plus d'un million avant 2003, soit 3% de la population avec les Yazidis, Sabéens, Chabaks.

HISTOIRE: Ancienne Mésopotamie, l'Irak, parfois appelé "pays des deux fleuves" (le Tigre et l'Euphrate), est créé en 1920 sur les débris de l'Empire ottoman. D'abord sous mandat britannique, il devient indépendant en 1932. La monarchie est abolie en 1958 lors d'un coup d'Etat militaire, et la République instaurée.

Saddam Hussein, un des hommes forts depuis la prise du pouvoir par le parti Baas en 1968, s'empare de la présidence en 1979.

Le pays est secoué par la guerre avec l'Iran (1980-1988), puis la "guerre du Golfe" (1991) menée par une coalition internationale après l'occupation du Koweït par l'Irak en 1990. En 2003, l'invasion par une coalition américano-britannique met fin au régime de Saddam Hussein. Ce dernier est pendu le 30 décembre 2006.

Après le départ des derniers soldats américains fin 2011, le pays reste plongé dans une grave crise politique, sur fond de violences.

Celles-ci se sont multipliées depuis un peu plus d'un an. Depuis mars 2003, elles ont tué plus de 123.000 civils, selon l'ONG Iraq Body Count.

POLITIQUE: La nouvelle Constitution adoptée par référendum en 2005 ins-



AFP/Archives - Une femme devant le drapeau irakien

taure une République fédérale. Le Parlement (325 membres actuellement - 328 pour les élections de mercredi), élu au suffrage universel direct, désigne le président.

Le président Jalal Talabani est kurde, le Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki est chiite et le président du Parlement Oussama al-Noujaifi est sunnite. Sur les 18 gouvernorats, trois se sont regroupés pour former la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien.

ECONOMIE: Membre fondateur de l'Opep, l'Irak a des réserves prouvées de 143,1 milliards de barils de pétrole, et 3.200 milliards de mètres cubes de gaz naturel, parmi les plus importantes au monde.

En février 2014, ses exportations pétrolières se sont établies à 2,8 millions de barils/jour selon le ministère du Pétrole. Les exportations de brut représentent 70% du PIB et 95% des revenus de l'Etat.

En mars 2013, le Fonds monétaire international (FMI) a estimé que l'Irak souffrait encore de "graves faiblesses structurelles", notamment un chômage "élevé", un mauvais climat des affaires et un secteur non pétrolier très limité.

"PIB: 221,8 milliards de dollars (Banque mondiale, 2013)

"PIB/h: 6.377 dollars (Banque mondiale, 2013)

+MONNAIE: dinar irakien.

DEFENSE: 271.400 hommes, dont 193.400 pour l'armée de terre, selon l'Institut international des études stratégiques (IISS, 2014). Les forces du ministère de l'Intérieur comptent 531.000 hommes (IISS).

SITES WEB: www.iraqipresidency.net; www.cosit.gov.iq/en/. ●

Jihadist takeover in Anbar Province portends a divided Iraq

BAGHDAD

BY TIM ARANGO
AND DURAJD ADNAN

Snipers line the rooftops across the central Iraqi city of Falluja, waiting for a chance to shoot at government soldiers, should they try to invade. Homes have been wired to explode, too, just in case the government rushes the city. And roads have been studded with countless steel-plated bombs, of the type that killed so many American soldiers here.

Perhaps more than any other place in Iraq, Falluja and greater Anbar Province embody the extreme lengths to which the United States went to tame a bloody insurgency unleashed by its invasion. But now, much of the region is again beyond the authority of the central government, firmly controlled by the Islamist State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS, a jihadist group so radical that it has broken with Al Qaeda in part because it insisted on being allowed to kill Shiites indiscriminately.

That reality, which the government appears powerless to remedy, offers a sobering postscript to the American-led war and a volatile backdrop to national elections scheduled for Wednesday. The vote will be Iraq's first nationwide election since the withdrawal of United States forces at the end of 2011, and it is clear that it will be held amid spiraling violence and sectarian bloodletting. On Monday, six suicide bombers struck polling sites around the country as security-force members voted, killing at least 27 people, officials said.

The greater fear, though, is that there is no way back this time, that the sectarian division of the nation will become effectively institutionalized as the government concentrates its forces on protecting its seat of power in Baghdad. With fighting in Abu Ghraib, on the western edge of Baghdad and less than 20 miles from the city center, the government recently shut down the local prison. Insurgents have gained strength in Salahuddin Province, to the north of Baghdad, and in Diyala Province, northeast of the capital.

"All arrows are pointing toward Baghdad now," said Jessica D. Lewis, research director at the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, who has closely followed the fighting in Anbar.

Iraq's security forces, trained by the United States at a cost of billions of dollars, have been unable to dislodge the militants. In trying to help, the United States may have unwittingly made matters worse when it pressed the government to arm the tribes to fight the radic-

als, a strategy that worked the first time it tried to pacify the region.

A year ago, the United States rushed guns and bullets to the fight, including 14 million rounds of ammunition and more than 250,000 grenades. But arming the tribes did not work. Indeed, some of the tribes have sided with the jihadists, and some of those American-supplied weapons are now in the hands of militants, having been captured during clashes, officials and tribal leaders say.

"Arming the tribes in Anbar was a big mistake," said Sheikh Laurence al-Hardan, a tribal leader in a village named Kharma, near Falluja, who said he was opposed to both the central government and the radical Islamists controlling his villages. "That allowed the tribes to fight other tribes. And large numbers of weapons were taken by the armed groups when they took control of some police stations. And other weapons were taken because the army will attack an area and then retreat, leaving their weapons behind."

Adding to the bleak landscape, with the militant gains in Anbar, the insurgency in Iraq has increasingly converged with the civil war in Syria, and experts and officials are beginning to speak of a vast territory — stretching from Aleppo in Syria through Anbar Province and up to the doorstep of Baghdad — that is controlled by Islamist extremists.

As the Iraqi security forces have lost territory, and suffered casualties rumored to be in the thousands but undisclosed by the government, militants have destroyed bridges and seized a dam, cutting off an important supply of water to the south and flooding areas of Falluja. To flout their gains, insurgents have even held military parades in Falluja, driving down a central street in trucks seized from Iraqi special forces.

The fighters in Anbar, now a mix of extremists and local tribal fighters, are better trained than the ones who faced the Americans. And the local Sunni population, including some tribal sheikhs, are now — after months of seeing the strength of the insurgents on the battlefield, and the authority they have wielded within communities — more inclined to side with the extremists than the government of Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki. Tribal militias are also fighting one another in some places, adding to the complexity of the battle.

Maria Fantappie, an Iraq analyst for the International Crisis Group, a conflict resolution organization, said that some tribes that were on the fence when the conflict began at the end of December had aligned with ISIS, if only for their

own survival. "At the end of March it became a real military alliance" between ISIS and some local tribes, she said.

Ms. Fantappie said that in the face of an impossible fight in Anbar, Mr. Maliki was likely to shift his strategy and put more resources toward defending Baghdad. "My fear, as an analyst, is that Anbar and Falluja will shift to Syria, and more and more the Iraqis will focus on protecting the Green Zone," she said, referring to the fortified center of the capital where most important government buildings are.

The election is largely seen as a referendum on Mr. Maliki's eight years in power, but it will also be a crucial test of the Sunni community's commitment, or aversion, to the political process.

There will be only a few polling stations within Anbar, which will surely affect Sunni turnout in the election. Officials say those who have been displaced from Anbar will be able to vote in the places where they have sought refuge, such as in the northern Kurdish region.

Meanwhile, ISIS has actively tried to dissuade Sunnis from voting, threatening violence through leaflets and postings on social media if they participate.

The election is equally fraught for candidates in Anbar, some of whom have withdrawn because of threats. One former candidate from a village near Falluja, who was too terrified to give his name, said that he was recently abducted by armed men who showed up at his house in a sport-utility vehicle. "They told me, 'You should withdraw from the elections or we will kill you, your family and burn your house. The Islamic State has given its orders.'"

He got the message.

"I withdrew and took my posters down," he said.

The United Nations has estimated that hundreds of thousands of Anbar residents have fled the fighting, perpetuating a cycle of exodus and return that began after the American-led invasion in 2003.

With the residents that remain in Falluja, the militants have taken a slightly lighter approach than the harsh Islamic rule that extremists aligned with Al Qaeda established a decade ago before being dislodged by United States Marines in bloody fighting.

Still, recent interviews with residents inside Falluja painted a dystopian portrait of fear, uncertainty and lives interrupted, particularly for women and children. Schools have closed, marriages have been canceled. The few local journalists who remained have been threatened with death.

Maliki tested in first vote since U.S. withdrawal

BAGHDAD

Premier adopts image of strongman to appeal to conflict-weary Iraqis

BY TIM ARANGO AND MICHAEL R. GORDON

When a well-known journalist was shot dead at a checkpoint here last month, Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki rushed to the scene. Speaking to a television camera, he promised “blood for blood.”

In a city where hundreds die every month from explosions and gunshots, it was unusual for the prime minister to make a fuss over a single murder. That scene, though, coming as it did just before elections, was a vivid demonstration of what diplomats and analysts say is Mr. Maliki’s best and last hope for securing a third term as prime minister: playing the strongman, a role that Iraqis, for better or worse, are accustomed to seeing in their leaders.

“Maliki is a man of power,” said Salah al-Robaie, 46, a university professor in Baghdad, who also called him “wise,” and “tough” and a “great leader.”

A strategy of showing toughness may win votes among his Shiite constituency, but as Iraqis prepare to vote on Wednesday in the first national elections since the withdrawal of American forces, it is far from certain that Mr. Maliki will be able to secure a third term.

A long list of political rivals are determined to unseat him. Many American officials, who supported his rise to power, now want him gone. So, too, it seems — judging by their subtle calls for “change” — do the Shiite religious authorities who hold great sway over Iraq’s Shiite majority in Najaf, the holy city in southern Iraq. Many Iraqis, while acknowledging their desire for strong leadership, also say they are weary of the violence and political dysfunction that have defined life under Mr. Maliki.

Yet, while six months ago, with few genuine accomplishments to point to, Mr. Maliki’s re-election hopes may have seemed bleak, today they are much brighter. Heavy fighting against Sunni Islamist extremists in Anbar Province and other areas of the country has allowed him to put forward an image of toughness, even as his military cam-



A banner in Baghdad promoting Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki’s re-election. Many rivals are determined to unseat him.

paign against the insurgents has failed. He has campaigned as a wartime leader and presented himself to the Shiite majority as the leader of an existential fight that he has defined on starkly sectarian terms.

“All the elements are working in his favor,” Izzat Shabender, a Shiite politician who was once allied with Mr. Maliki but now wants him out of power, said with a measure of exasperation.

Referring to the crisis in Anbar, a Western diplomat said, “It seems to be helping his electoral prospects.”

Either way, Mr. Maliki, 63, will face stiff opposition as he fights to remain in power. Iraqi voters are likely to deliver him a plurality of seats, political experts here say, but far from a majority that will assure him a new term.

After the election, the back-room negotiating will begin, chiefly between Mr. Maliki and his Shiite rivals, but Sunni and Kurdish leaders will be players, too. The post-election period is expected to be messy and protracted — not atypical in Iraq, but this time experts say it could be even longer, perhaps as long as a year.

It was the American ambassador to Baghdad, Zalmay Khalilzad, who encouraged Mr. Maliki to seek the prime minister’s post in 2006, after concluding that his predecessor, Ibrahim Jaafari, was ineffectual and overly sectarian.

Now, many American officials would like to see Mr. Maliki replaced, and American intelligence assessments have warned that another term for Mr. Maliki would increase the chances of another civil war.

Iran, perhaps Mr. Maliki’s most im-

portant supporter as he consolidated power in recent years, has supported his re-election campaign with millions of dollars, according to a United States intelligence report. But Iran has also given similar sums to Shiite rivals of Mr. Maliki, demonstrating that Iran’s chief aim is to maintain Shiite dominance, not necessarily Mr. Maliki’s rule.

In 2010, Mr. Maliki secured a second term, ultimately with the backing of American officials, who thought he was likely to prevail anyway and appeared to be the most acceptable candidate to the fractious Shiite majority.

In an effort to bridge the political and sectarian divide in Iraq, the Obama administration sought to persuade Mr. Maliki to share power with his bitter rival Ayad Allawi, who was the leader of a bloc with broad Sunni support. President Obama went so far in a November 2010 phone call as to ask Jalal Talabani, the Iraqi president and a Kurd, to give up his post so that it could be occupied by Mr. Allawi.

But the Obama administration pushed to establish the power-sharing arrangement, and Mr. Maliki never developed the inclusive government the White House had hoped for.

Western experts believe that his accumulation of power, his inability to compromise with other Iraqi factions, Sunni or Kurd, and his military failures against Islamic extremists threaten to tear the country apart.

American officials also say that a peaceful transition of power in Iraq would set an important precedent for the future.

Mr. Maliki’s character, shaped by his decades in the political underground

working to overthrow Saddam Hussein, has largely defined his governing style. In exile, in Iran and Syria, Mr. Maliki was in charge of military operations inside Iraq for the Shiite Islamist Dawa Party, a life experience that has instilled a lasting sense of paranoia.

"I think the very core of his problem is his fear," said Maria Fantappie, Iraq analyst at the International Crisis Group. "He sees enemies everywhere. It can be the Kurds, the Sunnis, even his own Shia advisers."

A theme of Mr. Maliki's campaign has

"He sees enemies everywhere. It can be the Kurds, the Sunnis, even his own Shia advisers."

been to put the blame for the violence in Iraq on foreign Sunni countries, namely Saudi Arabia and, by extension, Iraq's own Sunni leaders, who he believes have not supported him in his fight against terrorism and are supported by regional powers.

"Voters have no excuse before God and history if they do not make the right choice," Mr. Maliki said in a recent speech. "Iraqis know who is supporting the rebuilding of the country and democracy, and who his supporting terrorism and seeking to destroy the country."

Ramzy Mardini, an Iraq expert at the Atlantic Council, said: "Maliki is not a democrat, he's not a nationalist or sectarian ideologue. His ideology and doctrine are grounded in survivalism. In many ways Maliki is a typical Arab ruler — paranoid and conspiratorial."

In the village of Janajuh, Mr. Maliki's

hometown in southern Iraq, garbage is strewn across the irrigation canal that runs past the low, crumbling house that was his childhood home. The village looks like any other in Iraq: poor and rundown, with no evident sign that the country's vast oil wealth has been put to use.

"They have done nothing," said Shakur Jabour, one of Mr. Maliki's cousins. "Look at the garbage."

Mr. Jabour said the state of the village showed that Mr. Maliki had larger concerns.

"I'm telling you, in all honesty," Mr. Jabour said, "when you look at this neighborhood, he says, 'You are the same as any other place in Iraq. I can't do anything special for you.'"

Many, though, are troubled by what they describe as Mr. Maliki's attempt to build a family dynasty, which inevitably, for Iraqis, recalls the legacy of Mr. Hussein. He has given his son, Ahmed, broad, vaguely defined powers over security within the prime minister's office and inside the Green Zone. And both of his sons-in-law, who currently work for his office, are running in the election.

Hussain al-Maliki, a son-in-law, has campaigned by promising jobs in the security forces.

"I am ready to help you to join the army, which will give you the best opportunity to face the enemies of Iraq," he said in a recent campaign speech.

In streets near Mr. Maliki's village are campaign posters featuring his sons-in-law standing next to him. Another banner shows his nephew with the words, "I am Maliki's nephew." The head of Mr. Maliki's tribe is also running for office in Basra, the southern port city.

Many of the campaign posters that

have blanketed this city, dressing the drab urban landscape in greens and yellows, call for change. So do ordinary Iraqis, their capacity for endurance in the face of suffering tested by a new surge in violence. Wednesday's vote will be the fourth since the American-led invasion in 2003, so Iraqis are familiar with the mechanics of elections. But they are weary of what they have produced: bickering, corruption, violence and a sense of permanent stasis.

"My life?" said Firas Younis, 33, who owns a clothing store in the northern city of Mosul. "I don't have one. Explosions, blast walls blocking the ways, no services. And because of all this my business has stopped."

Despite all of this, Latif Rashid, a senior adviser in the office of Mr. Talabani, the president, said many within Iraq's political class believed that Mr. Maliki would find a way to stay in power for another term.

Mr. Rashid said that indications — anecdotal, at best, given the lack of reliable polling data in Iraq — were that Mr. Maliki retained strong support on the Iraqi street, partly because of a reluctance to change leaders when the country was facing a growing insurgency.

Still, that Mr. Maliki seems to be in a strong position, despite the condition of the country and the rivals arrayed against him, is confounding, he said.

"There are lots of things I don't understand," he said. "Do you understand why people are blowing themselves up? Do you understand why people are bringing car bombs to a school?"

Duraid Adnan contributed reporting from Baghdad, Yasir Ghazi from Seattle, and an employee of The New York Times from Mosul, Iraq.

Le Monde

Mardi 29 avril 2014

Rivalités aiguisées à l'approche de la présidentielle turque

Le président Gül exclut un scénario à la Poutine-Medvedev avec le premier ministre Erdogan

Istanbul

Correspondance

Abdullah Gül ne sera pas le Medvedev de Recep Tayyip Erdogan. A quatre mois de l'élection présidentielle prévue en août, la candidature de l'actuel premier ministre et chef incontesté du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) depuis douze ans, ne fait guère de doute. Mais pour garder les mains libres à la tête du régime turc, de type parlementaire, M. Erdogan aura besoin d'un chef de gouvernement docile. Un rôle que l'actuel président, M. Gül, refuse d'endosser.

Un échange de postes, à la manière de Vladimir Poutine et Dmitri Medvedev en Russie en 2008, hypothèse souvent avancée, ne semble pas d'actualité. « La for-

mule n'est pas nécessairement adaptée à la Turquie », a déclaré, vendredi 18 avril, l'actuel président de la République, au cours d'une visite dans la ville de Kutahya. « Je n'ai pas de projet politique dans les conditions actuelles », a-t-il ajouté.

Risque d'implosion ?

La stratégie présidentielle de M. Erdogan a été renforcée par la large victoire de l'AKP aux élections municipales du 30 mars. Un succès conquis dans les urnes, en dépit des affaires de corruption qui le cernent depuis décembre et des scandales révélés grâce à des écoutes clandestines. Sûr de sa popularité, le premier ministre ne cache plus ses ambitions et devrait briguer le fauteuil présidentiel. Reconduit trois fois consécutivement à la tête du gouvernement,

les statuts internes de son parti lui interdisent, a priori, un nouveau mandat. Mais la présidentialisation du régime qu'il envisageait ces derniers mois paraît difficile à mettre en œuvre d'ici à l'été.

M. Erdogan devra donc placer un homme de confiance à la tête de son cabinet. Depuis vingt ans et leur ascension au sein de la mouvance islamiste turque, c'est Abdullah Gül qui a, le plus souvent, joué ce rôle de numéro deux. Ce fut le cas en 2003, pour assurer l'intérim comme premier ministre lorsque M. Erdogan était encore sous le coup d'une peine d'inéligibilité. Mais en 2007, il a su s'imposer pour la présidence de la République. Un poste qu'il se verrait bien conserver aujourd'hui.

L'indépendance revendiquée par M. Gül accentue la rivalité

entre les deux hommes, déjà perceptible depuis les manifestations de la place Taksim, au printemps 2013. Une situation qui pourrait conduire à une implosion de l'AKP.

Pour le politologue Ali Carkoglu, professeur à l'université Koç d'Istanbul, l'hypothèse paraît peu probable. Et les déclarations d'Abdullah Gül, qui a indiqué qu'il allait s'entretenir avec M. Erdogan à ce sujet, « pourraient être le signal qu'ils ont déjà décidé de maintenir un statu quo ». « Ils ont toutes les raisons de continuer à travailler ensemble. S'ils se divisent, ils y perdront tous les deux », complète-t-il. Pour couper court aux spéculations, l'AKP a annoncé qu'il tiendrait une réunion au mois de mai pour désigner son candidat pour la présidentielle. ■

GUILLAUME PERRIER

Armed Kurdish group kidnaps two Turkish soldiers

www.dailystar.com.lb
Agence France Presse - April 27, 2014

ISTANBUL: An armed Kurdish group has abducted two Turkish soldiers in the southeast of the country, the state-run Anatolia news agency reported Sunday.

The abduction took place late Saturday, after the jailed leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) issued a statement warning of a possible return to violence.

However it was not clear whether the kidnappers were linked to the PKK, which declared a landmark truce with the Turkish state last March.

Anatolia said the assailants seized the soldiers after stopping a bus on a highway near the town of Lice which had been blocked by Kurdish protesters demonstrating against the construction of a military

outpost.

According to the Firat news agency, a PKK mouthpiece, the group said it would not release the soldiers until the authorities announced that construction of the post was halted.

An operation was under way to find two soldiers, Anatolia said. The PKK has abducted Turkish troops in the past during its armed insurgency seeking self-rule in the southeast.

Pro-Kurdish media outlets reported that the demonstration, which has been going on for five days, turned violent on Saturday when soldiers clashed with protesters and briefly opened fire on their tents.

No one was killed or injured.

The Kurdish peace process stalled after the rebels announced in September they were suspending their retreat from Turkish soil, accusing the government of failing to



In this June 14, 2013 photo, rebels of the Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, are seen during a funeral in Beytussebab, Hakkari, Turkey, close to the border with Iraq. (AP Photo/Firat News Agency)

deliver on promised reforms.

"There is both the opportunity for a profound resolution and possibility of clashes in the current process," Ocalan said in the statement relayed Saturday by pro-Kurdish lawmakers who visited him in his prison cell.

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APRIL 28, 2014

Turkey's pro-Kurdish BDP MPs officially join HDP party, promise new beginning

www.ekurd.net
April 28, 2014

ANKARA,— The pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) MPs officially joined the HDP at a brief ceremony in Ankara Sunday, says an article in Monday's Özgür Gündem. The ceremony was attended by HDP co-Presidents Sebahat Tuncel and Ertuğrul Kürkçü; BDP co-President Selahattin Demirtaş; Independent MP from Diyarbakir Leyla Zana; Independent MP from Wan and DTK co-President Aysel Tuğluk; co-mayor of Greater Diyarbakir Municipality Gülşan Kışanık; co-mayor of Greater Mêrdîn Municipality Ahmet Türk; Independent MP from Wan Kemal Aktaş, together with all BDP MPs as well as various officials and members of the HDP.

A NEW BEGINNING

HDP co-President Tuncel spoke first, telling those present that "we are starting a stronger process. At the same time we now have an even greater responsibility in the period which lies ahead. Our unity will be a great contribution to Turkish politics and to the forces of democracy. Yes we are growing but our responsibility is also increasing. I welcome all the BDP MPs to our party."

Following Tuncel HDP Co-President Ertuğrul Kürkçü spoke about the important days in which the party now found itself, saying "the bearers of the freedom struggle of Kurdistan are joining with the democratic forces of Turkey."

The people of Kurdistan have change their fate with their struggle and have opened away for the peoples of Turkey. We are heading out with a new strategy. A new political possibility has been opened before us. We will do what we need do. We will walk this road together. It has been a painful process and we have been blessed by fate. In order to brighten the future we will not only walk this road in parliament but in Kurdistan and Turkey and we will finish this journey. I



Nineteen deputies from the BDP joined the Peoples' Democracy Party for the latter to be able to establish a parliamentary group.

welcome the BDP MPs to their new home."

WE WILL BE THE RESPONSE OF ALL PEOPLES

BDP Co-President Selahattin Demirtaş also spoke at the event, where he affirmed the importance of the HDP as the part for all oppressed segments of society, saying "We started this in 2011. We promised our voters and our people and now we are fulfilling this promise. We are obliged to be the common voice of all the oppressed. The time has come for the formation of a strong people's power. We are making this power official."

Demirtaş went on to explain that the BDP would adopt a new formula, while all work in parliament would take place under the common auspices of the HDP, saying "the HDP will embrace the →

⇒ differences of Turkey's society. We will move forward to the 2015 elections with this understanding. We will put an end to the AKP-CHP stalemate and the 90-year power struggle. We as the HDP will continue the struggle from where we left off."

WE WILL BE THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Co-mayor of Greater Diyarbakir Municipality Gültan Kışanak affirmed that both the BDP and HDP would be at home in Amed (Diyarbakir), saying "we will do everything we can as far as local government. I believe that the HDP with its platform for all of the oppressed will come out big time. We are beginning a strong process through which our people will come to govern themselves and will take part in government."

A CALL FOR UNITY FROM TÜRK

Co-mayor of Greater Mêrdîn Municipality Ahmet Türk told those present that the 35 freedom struggle had brought Kurds to this point, saying "as a result of this struggle the denial of the Kurds has been

defeated but rights have not immediately been granted. The rights of Kurds must be accepted. Freedom can be reached through common struggle and we can take our rights. Kurds are struggling for justice and equality together not only with all the peoples of Turkey but of the Middle East. Diyarbakir is the capital of Kurdistan, Mardin is the capital of Mesopotamia. I want to see our friends in Mardin."

Following the remarks BDP MPs joined the HDP, putting on party pins; it was also announced that current BDP members would continue to join the HDP in the future.

HDP'S FIRST GROUP MEETING

HDP MPs will hold their first group meeting in parliament since the arrival of BDP MPs today. With the new members, the number of HDP MPs in parliament has increased to 27. ●

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April 30, 2014

Iraqi election could lead to partition

Iraqi parties across the political spectrum seek to break Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's monopoly on the central government.



Author *Mustafa al-Kadhimi*, April 30, 2014

Translator(s) *Rani Geha*

www.al-monitor.com

Today, with the country locked in a fateful election, the parties to Iraq's conflict are using the issue of partition to threaten their opponents — and the electorate.

Two key approaches will determine the Iraqi elections and the country's unity. One is led by Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, who thinks that the current elections should produce a strong majority government that preserves the power of the central government. This is an implicit threat that a different kind of government, one that doesn't include a third term for Maliki, would mean that Iraq will be lost in the political and geographical bickering, subject to the whims of the "partitionists" and that the country will split into political fiefdoms that will eventually secede.

Maliki — in his speeches, statements to those close to him and in private circles — claims that Iraq is going through a dangerous phase with major terrorist threats and explicit external interference, and that Iraq needs a capable central government that can preserve the country's security and unity before the sectarian leaders partition the country.

On the other side stand the other political parties. They may disagree on many things, but all agree on the need to end Maliki's reign and break up what they consider an unprecedented monopoly by the prime minister.

The parties that hold that view include most Kurdish and Sunni parties in Iraq, in addition to Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and to a lesser degree the Al-Muwaten current headed by cleric Ammar al-Hakim. This front generally claims that Maliki's policies are leading to Iraq's partition and that if he stays in power, the Kurds and the Sunnis will seek greater autonomy to escape the pressures of the central authority, thus leading to the country's partition.

It seems clear that the Kurds don't wish to remain part of Iraq under a central authority as Maliki sees it. And the Sunnis are standing behind the demands of Iraqi Kurdistan, believing that Maliki's policies are the cause of this action. Prominent cleric Ahmad al-Qubaisi told Al-Monitor that the elections will determine whether Iraq stays unified.

Major provinces like Basra are working tirelessly and continuously toward demands of secession into semi-autonomous regions by complaining that the central government is preventing them from investing their resources without tiresome complications.



Employees of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) count ballots during the Iraqi parliamentary elections in Baghdad, April 30, 2014. (photo by REUTERS/Wissm al-Okili)

Given these interlocking routes, it is difficult to consider one side more right than the other, but certainly the division card is being used as leverage, to threaten and to warn.

Clearly, no one in Iraq is advocating compromise solutions for this equation. The high degree of centralization that puts all the power in the hands of a person, party, sect or ethnic group in a diverse and conflictive country like Iraq would effectively cause the country to split. But emptying the central authority of all its strength and handing that power to sectarian leaders or sectarian regions is not the ideal solution either, because that wouldn't necessarily prevent partition, but may in fact speed up the process.

A realistic solution would be to balance the center, the regions and the provinces. The needed balance among the legislative and executive powers and the laws would prevent a person or a party from monopolizing power. Achieving such a balance requires consensus, and this would be different from agreeing to divide the ministries, the departments and the quotas. Rather, consensus would mean an agreement that preserves the country's unity, and that agreement can be reached if everyone makes concessions. ♦

Mustafa al-Kadhimi is an Iraqi writer specializing in the defense of democracy and human rights. He has extensive experience documenting testimonies and archiving documentaries associated with repressive practices.

Kurds fight out internal rivalries in Iraq vote

By Isabel Coles - April 29, 2014 - (Reuters) -
SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq

CELEBRATORY GUNFIRE broke out in Iraq's Kurdish north as the octogenarian was shown on television raising an ink-stained finger after casting his vote thousands of miles away in Germany.

The man was Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and his silent appearance at an early ballot for the election due at home on Wednesday was the first footage of him since he suffered a stroke late in 2012 and was flown abroad for medical treatment.

In Sulaimaniyah, capital of the province of the same name where his Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) is headquartered, cars blared their horns and people, some wearing T-shirts printed with Talabani's face, danced on the streets.

Cause for festivities may be short-lived. Wednesday's election marks a new round in an internal power struggle that risks turning violent and skewing the balance of power in Kurdistan between influential neighbors Iran and Turkey.

The parliamentary vote is being contested as bitterly within each of Iraq's ethnic and sectarian constituencies as between them -- if not more so.

Among the Kurds, long at odds with Baghdad and in charge of their own quasi-state in the north of the country, rivalries have prevented the formation of a government more than seven months after elections in the oil-rich enclave.

This election, amounts, for them, to a referendum on Talabani's PUK, left rudderless and internally riven without the ailing statesman, known affectionately as "dear uncle".

The PUK's fading star has upset the region's time-worn political order, raising concerns about stability, particularly in Sulaimaniyah province, which Talabani's party has controlled since Kurdistan gained autonomy more than three decades ago.

Last week, gunmen waving the PUK's green flag drove past a branch of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) on Sulaimaniyah's main street and opened fire. The mayor said "dark hands" were behind the incident, in which there were no casualties.

Member of parliament Ari Harsin later stood guard at the scene with a machine gun slung over his shoulder. "I took up arms because no-one is in charge of Suleimaniyah," he said in a television interview. "I am defending democracy".

The shooting took place just days after an agreement was signed to finally form a new cabinet that would sideline the PUK, which has shared power with the KDP for almost a decade but fell to third place at the polls last September.



It was overtaken by opposition party Gorran (Change), which grew out of a former wing of the PUK and quickly gained popularity among Kurds fed up with the corruption of the region's traditional ruling elites.

In this election, the PUK is hoping to regain stature through Kirkuk - an ethnically mixed city where the party enjoys support outside the formal boundary of Kurdistan. That would give the PUK much-needed leverage in ongoing negotiations over government formation.

"They lost the (local) election and they must accept it," said the head of Gorran's electoral list Aram Sheikh Mohammed at the party's hilltop headquarters in Suleimaniyah, from an office that commands a view of the mountains surrounding the city.

"The PUK needs to wake up: they are still in a deep sleep".

SHIFTING SANDS

Formed at a cafe in the Syrian capital Damascus in 1975, the PUK gathered disparate left-leaning Kurdish groups under its umbrella as an alternative to the KDP, which revolves around the Barzani tribe and dominates the region's other two provinces.

With no clear chain of command, cracks in the PUK have widened and the party is now incapacitated by competition between different factions, one of which is led by the wife of its infirm leader. But talk of its demise may be premature.

In Sulaimaniyah, the PUK's financial and military muscle is still unrivalled. The party has its own security apparatus, "peshmerga" fighting force, and a vast network of patronage built around a business empire that includes fuel trading and real estate.

Faced with being left out in the cold, some members of the PUK have made veiled threats, reminding people they owe allegiance to political parties over and above the institutions of the relatively young Kurdish regional government.

But if the PUK's patronage system begins to unwind, loyalties could shift. Several members of the PUK have already jumped ship and joined the KDP in recent weeks.

"It's never going to simply slide away into nothing quietly," said Gareth Stansfield, Senior Associate Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI).

"It could change with more defections from the party to others; it could see some form of reunion with Gorran, as seemed to be happening before Talabani's illness; or it could fail catastrophically, and by that I mean a decline into conflict."

The acid test may be provincial elections, to be held this week alongside the Iraqi national vote, but in Kurdistan alone, and for the first time since the birth of Gorran, which could come out on top.

"It's difficult to envisage how they will behave," said a source close to decision-makers in all three main parties. "I don't think any party wants to go as far as confrontation."

For now, they are waging war through the media. PUK outlets have sought to smear Gorran's candidate for governor by publishing poems he wrote for a newspaper of the Baath party of deposed dictator Saddam Hussein, who presided over the mass killing of Kurds in the 1980s.

But many worry there is a potential for conflict in a region where →



➔ many men own firearms and the older generation fought a guerilla war against Saddam's forces before turning their weapons on each other. "Kurds don't point fingers, we point guns," the head of Kurdistan's security council Masrour Barzani told a U.S. diplomat in 2009 during a discussion about elections, according to a cable released by anti-secrecy site Wikileaks.

"CHAOS"

Officials in the KDP are worried about the PUK's implosion at a time when insurgents are gaining ground in the rest of Iraq, and across the border in Syria, warning that security in Sulaimaniyah is a "red line".

A rare bombing in the regional capital Erbil days after the election in September has been followed by several smaller attacks in Sulaimaniyah. Sticky bombs were attached to the vehicles of two officers and an explosive device was detonated outside the house of a colonel.

The head of the security services in Sulaimaniyah took umbrage at the suggestion the province was not secure, and said his men had recently managed to thwart an attack by militants from the Islamic State in Iraq

and the Levant (ISIL).

The PUK's health is also of concern for Iran, which shares a long border with Suleimaniyah province and has historically been close to Talabani and his party, counteracting Turkey's growing influence over the KDP.

"Iran is very, very concerned about the future of the PUK," said a senior KDP official on condition of anonymity. "Talabani is out of the picture, but the PUK has some institutions Iran needs".

As early as 2008, Kurdish Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani fretted about PUK succession, predicting "chaos" could follow Talabani's exit and create opportunities for Iran to meddle more in Sulaimaniyah, according to a U.S. diplomatic cable released by Wikileaks.

Since the September election, PUK leaders have gone to Tehran for talks, and Iranian officials have visited Kurdistan to lobby on behalf of the ailing party and preserve its own interests in the region.

"It's a dangerous neighborhood," said another KDP source who declined to be named. "They (our detractors) can easily destabilize us, especially if we are not united" ○



29 April 2014

Iran-Erbil Agree on Energy Deals and Boosting Trade

Iran is the second-largest trade partner of the Kurdistan Region. Tehran-Erbil trade exceeded \$4 billion in 2013.



rudaw.net
29/april/2014

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Tehran and Erbil agreed to boost trade and energy ties, agreeing to build a gas pipeline to fuel power stations in Kurdistan with Iranian gas, and another to transport Kurdish fuel to Iran, officials said.

The plans were discussed Monday between a delegation headed by Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani and a visiting Iranian team headed by Rostam Qasemi, a former oil minister who now heads the Iran-Iraq economic development committee.

"Energy ties between the Kurdistan Region and Iran were discussed in the meeting and we agreed on two points that both are related to energy," said Abdulla Akreyi, head of the KRG-Iran relations. "We agreed on building two pipelines from Iran to Kurdistan. The second one is for the KRG to export oil to Iran; in return Iran would supply 3-4 million liters of fuel for the power stations (in the Kurdistan Region)," he added.

Qasemi also met with the KRG Minister of Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami.

According to a statement posted on the KRG's website,

Iran and the Kurdistan Region are to form several joint committees to work on bilateral economic and trade relations.

"Both sides are to work on ways to increase trade and expand cooperation in the energy field," said the statement.

"We have delegated the work to a joint committee to finalize the agreement," Qasemi said.

Iran is the second-largest trade partner of the Kurdistan Region, after Turkey. Tehran-Erbil trade exceeded \$4 billion in 2013.

"Compared to Turkey we have less trade with the Kurdistan Region, and we are hoping to double the size of economic ties after this visit," Qasemi told Rudaw.

The Iranian official estimated that Kurdistan would need a massive volume of gas to power its industry, generate electricity and for household usage.

"The Kurdistan Region is in need of 25 million cubic feet (Mcf) and Iran can supply that volume," said Qasemi. "Natural gas is used for industry, electricity-generation, and household use, and Kurdistan can benefit from it as it gets cold here during the winter and it's cheap," he added.

According to the initial agreements, Iran will construct a

180-kilometer pipeline inside its territory, reaching its border with the Kurdistan Region.

Rudaw learned, from a source speaking on condition of anonymity, that the Iranian delegation has pledged to finish the project within six months, pending agreement by the KRG.

The source added that the Iranian delegation had also offered the KRG access to Iran's ports on the Persian Gulf to sell Kurdish oil. The plan would require the KRG to get its oil overland to the Gulf. The KRG is said to be studying the proposal.

Qasemi also rejected claims that Kurdish oil is being smuggled into Iran. "We absolutely deny that Kurdistan oil is smuggled into Iran," he said. Iraqi officials have in the past accused Erbil of illegal oil sales to Iran.

Qasemi said that Tehran wants Erbil and Baghdad to resolve their energy disputes through dialogue, and encouraged both sides to agree on cooperation.

Baghdad opposes plans by the KRG to export Kurdish oil independently through a pipeline to Turkey. Baghdad says only it has the authority to control oil and gas sales from any part of Iraq, a claim the Kurds reject. Both sides invoke

the constitution to back their claims.

"We are using all our efforts to resolve the issues between the Kurdistan Region and Iraq," Qasemi said. "We are happy to see cooperation between all parts of Iraq, and we inform our friends to have active and constant relations with the Kurdistan Region."

Iran holds great sway over Baghdad and the government of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki, who is a staunch ally of Iran and a fellow Shiite.

A Kurdish official, speaking on condition of anonymity, explained that, "If we finalize the agreement with Iran to export oil, then Iraq will be compelled to acknowledge the authority of KRG to sell its own oil."

Akreyi, the KRG official, believes that Iran has come to terms with the KRG's right to export its own oil and gas, hence the visit by the Iranian delegation.

"Certainly, there will be agreements between KRG, Baghdad and Iran," he said. "The situation is favorable, that's why Iran is coming. If they knew the constitution would not allow it (independent oil- and gas sales), they would not have come." □

Législatives irakiennes : Nouri Al-Maliki favori en dépit de son bilan sécuritaire

Le premier ministre chiite affronte une large coalition qui dénonce une économie au point mort

Bagdad
Envoyé spécial

Seul contre tous. Alors que les Irakiens sont appelés à élire un nouveau Parlement, mercredi 30 avril, le premier ministre sortant, Nouri Al-Maliki, candidat à un troisième mandat, fait figure d'homme à abattre. Au pouvoir depuis 2006, le chef d'Al-Daawa, un parti islamiste chiite, s'est brouillé avec tous ses anciens alliés, tant au sein de sa communauté, majoritaire en Irak, qu'avec les formations sunnites et kurdes.

À l'exception des membres de sa Coalition de l'Etat de droit, la quasi-totalité de la classe politique a juré de l'empêcher de réaliser la passe de trois. Elle brandit pour ce faire le médiocre bilan du chef du gouvernement, marqué par un développement économique au point mort, une corruption endémique et une nette aggravation des violences confessionnelles, attisées par l'insurrection des sunnites de la province de l'Anbar et la réaction très brutale du pouvoir central.

Une alliance informelle, sur le mode « tout sauf Maliki », s'est ainsi mise en place, en prévision des tractations d'après scrutin, destinées à former la coalition de gouvernement. Elle réunit la coalition Wataniya (« Patriote ») de l'ancien premier ministre Iyad Allaoui, un chiite laïc, qui s'adresse à la classe moyenne libérale, principalement sunnite ; le mouvement Ahrar (« Libres ») de Moqtada Al-Sadr, chef de file des déshérités chiites ; le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan



Portrait de Nouri Al-Maliki sur écran géant, dans une rue de Bagdad, le 28 avril. LÂM DUC HIÊN POUR « LE MONDE »

de Massoud Barzani ; le parti Moutahidoun (« Unis »), la branche irakienne des Frères musulmans, dirigée par Oussama Al-Nujaifi, le président de l'actuel Parlement ; et le bloc Mouwaten (« Citoyen ») d'Amr Al-Hakim, un religieux chiite très proche de l'Irak.

« Nous refusons tous que Maliki soit reconduit à son poste », prévient le député Aiaa Makki, membre de la liste Wataniya. Il n'est plus possible d'ignorer les revendications des sunnites, comme la libéra-

tion de prisonniers et la réforme des services de sécurité, qui ne sont rien de plus que des milices avec le permis de tuer. Le pays risque de basculer dans la guerre civile si les élections ne débouchent pas sur un changement. »

Mais en face, Nouri Al-Maliki, 63 ans, a la carapace solide. Persuadé que la poigne de fer et l'expérience de ce dernier à la tête de l'Etat séduisent une population en quête de stabilité, l'entourage de Maliki escompte un score nettement supérieur aux 87 sièges qu'il avait obtenus en 2010, sur un total de 325 sièges (328 aujourd'hui). Arrivé cette année-là en deuxième position, derrière le Mouvement de l'entente nationale (liste Iraqiya) d'Iyad Allaoui, l'homme aux fines lunettes et à l'immuable complet gris n'avait réussi à se maintenir au pouvoir qu'au prix de coûteuses acrobaties.

En formant une coalition très large, avec toutes les formations chiïtes, Massoud Barzani et plusieurs personnalités sunnites, le

tout avec l'assentiment des Etats-Unis et de l'Irak, les deux tuteurs de l'Irak post-Saddam Hussein.

Mais ce montage n'a pas résisté aux tensions entre Bagdad et Erbil, la capitale de la région autonome du Kurdistan, qui ont frôlé la guerre, en décembre 2012, et à l'intifada des sunnites de l'Anbar, au printemps 2013, qui s'est estimée discriminée par les autorités.

En y répondant par la manière forte, Nouri Al-Maliki a amorcé un nouveau cycle de tueries qui a débouché sur la prise de Fallouja par les djihadistes de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL) en janvier. Privé de majorité au Parlement, le gouvernement est de facto en panne depuis deux ans, incapable de faire passer son budget ainsi que des lois cruciales pour le développement du pays, comme celle sur les investissements ou les revenus pétroliers.

Une paralysie que les partisans du premier ministre s'efforcent de retourner à leur profit. « Le peuple a compris que la corruption et le ter-

Raid irakien contre des djihadistes en Syrie

L'armée irakienne a lancé, dimanche 27 avril, un raid aérien contre un convoi djihadiste en Syrie qui tentait d'approcher la frontière de l'Irak, tuant au moins huit personnes, a annoncé le ministère de l'intérieur. C'est la première fois que l'armée irakienne revendique une attaque en Syrie depuis le début de la guerre. Des hélicoptères ont mené le

raid dans l'est de la Syrie contre un convoi de camions qui tentaient de pénétrer en Irak pour « délivrer du carburant à l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant », un groupe sunnite djihadiste, a précisé le général de brigade Saad Maan, porte-parole du ministère. L'attaque a été menée « sans coordination avec le régime syrien », a ajouté M. Maan.

rorisme sont le produit de cette coalition intenable, avance Mohamed Al-Faysal, le président de l'Ordre des avocats irakiens, membre de la liste Maliki. Il sait qu'en votant massivement pour nous, il nous donnera la possibilité d'agir pour le bien du pays. Nous visons 100 à 120 sièges.»

Selon toute vraisemblance, la Coalition de l'Etat de droit devrait remporter la compétition interne au camp chiite, ce qui placerait M. Maliki dans une position idéale, le poste de premier ministre devant revenir, selon une règle non écrite, à un chiite. «Son principal rival, Ammar Al-Hakim, a une image beaucoup moins fermée, ce qui l'handicape au moment où les chiites se sentent menacés par le soulèvement sunnite», analyse le politologue Ihsan Al-Chammari.

Le premier ministre devra néanmoins se méfier des sadristes, qui ont fait campagne sur le thème de la lutte contre la corruption. Leur cote pourrait bénéficier des récen-

Le premier ministre est persuadé que sa poigne de fer et son expérience séduisent une population en quête de stabilité

tes déclarations de plusieurs dignitaires chiites, qui ont appelé au «changement», en remettant au premier plan la question de la pauvreté, éclipsée par la guerre contre l'EIL. La charge la plus violente est venue de l'ayatollah Bachir Al-Najafi, un marja (réfèrent religieux dans l'islam chiite), qui a comparé Nouri Al-Maliki à Saddam Hussein et enjoint expressément aux fidèles de ne pas voter pour lui.

Côté sunnite, au moins cinq listes sont en compétition, alors qu'en 2010, la plupart des figures de cette communauté s'étaient ras-

semblées sous la bannière d'Iraqiya. Cet éparpillement fait doublement l'affaire du premier ministre : il écarte le risque qu'Iyad Allaoui émerge une nouvelle fois en tête et il facilite le futur débauchage d'un partenaire de gouvernement.

Pour le natif d'Al-Hindiyya, un village de la province de Kerbala, le principal danger vient en définitive de ses rivaux chiites. «S'ils persistent à s'opposer à son maintien au pouvoir, l'Iran pourrait le forcer à s'effacer, pour éviter un retour d'Allaoui, dont les liens avec Riyad ne sont pas du goût de Téhéran», prédit Ihsan Al-Chammari.

Dans ce cas de figure, peu probable, la Coalition de l'Etat de droit proposerait au poste de premier ministre un candidat alternatif : Tarek Najem. Actuel responsable des affaires électorales de la coalition, il est jugé acceptable par les Etats-Unis et l'Iran. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

Premiers votes marqués par une série d'attentats

Le vote des forces de sécurité irakiennes, qui s'est déroulé lundi 28 avril, a été endeuillé par une série d'attentats qui a fait au moins 57 morts, laissant présager le pire pour les élections législatives de mercredi.

Policiers et militaires ont voté deux jours plus tôt pour pouvoir surveiller le déroulement de ce premier scrutin national depuis le départ des troupes américaines fin 2011. L'attaque la plus meurtrière a eu lieu dans le nord-est, dans la ville à majorité kurde de Khanaqin, où un kamikaze a tué une trentaine de personnes. Pour tenter de limiter les risques, le gouvernement a proclamé une semaine de congés et interdit l'usage des voitures dans les grandes villes pendant 24 heures, à partir de mardi soir.

Le Monde

Mercredi 30 avril 2014

Damas reprend le contrôle de la frontière libanaise

J eudi 24 avril, après une semaine de bombardements sur Zabadani, à l'extrémité sud du massif du Qalamoun, le régime syrien annonçait sur l'air de la victoire la «capitulation imminente» de cette ville, la dernière le long de la frontière libanaise encore tenue par les rebelles.

Les télévisions officielles syriennes et iraniennes filmaient des «combattants repentis», rendant leurs armes contre la promesse d'une «amnistie». Le lendemain, les bombardements reprenaient, tandis qu'aux derniers points de contrôle de la ville, de violents combats opposaient les brigades rebelles du Front islamique et d'Al-Nosra aux troupes loyalistes, appuyées par des hommes du Hezbollah.

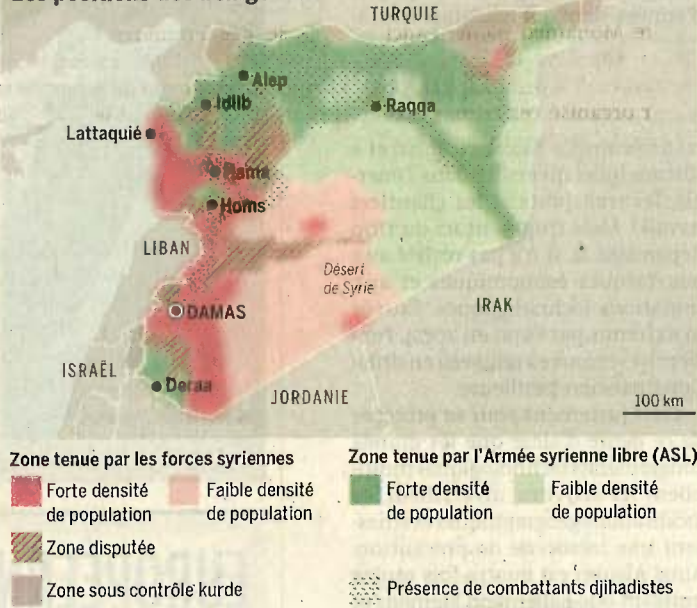
Samedi 26 avril, un militant de l'opposition, Tayem Al-Qalamouni, a déclaré devant les caméras d'Al-Jazira : «Les combattants ont été forcés d'accepter la trêve. Toutes leurs lignes de ravitaillement étaient coupées et il n'y avait plus de corridors de secours pour évacuer les civils.» Zabadani, première cité de Syrie à être passée sous contrôle de la révolution, le 18 janvier 2012, avait déjà été reprise brièvement par les loyalistes. L'opposition espère que sa chute, cette fois encore, ne sera que temporaire.

Pour Bachar Al-Assad, la séquence médiatique est incontestablement favorable. Alors que sa candidature à l'élection présidentielle a été annoncée officiellement lundi 28 avril, et après six mois d'offensive militaire sur le massif du Qalamoun, il peut prétendre avoir bouclé la frontière libanaise, coupant théoriquement la rébellion de ses bases arrière et sécurisant l'autoroute du nord, qui mène à Homs et, via la côte, à la région alaouite. Le gouvernement a d'ailleurs annoncé la réouverture de cet axe, samedi 26 avril au soir.

Au-delà des discours triomphalistes de Damas, la réalité sur le terrain est plus nuancée. Une partie des combattants a préféré se replier dans les reliefs inaccessibles du Qalamoun ou dans les zones désertiques, de l'autre côté de l'autoroute. Cette région très étendue, au relief particulièrement accidenté, est difficilement tenable pour le régime, à moins d'y poster en permanence d'importants effectifs militaires – dont il ne disposerait plus actuellement selon l'opposition.

Depuis le début de l'insurrection, et contrairement aux rebelles du nord de la Syrie, qui bénéficient d'une continuité territoriale jusqu'à la frontière turque, les

Les positions des belligérants



rebelles de la capitale et de ses faubourgs, la Ghouta, n'ont pas d'accès facile à un pays étranger.

Au nord-ouest, les montagnes du Qalamoun, trois aéroports militaires et onze bases de l'armée – occupées entre autres par des unités de blindés, d'artillerie, de missiles Scud, toutes sous le commandement de la III^e division de l'armée

d'Assad – les séparent du Liban.

Ils n'ont jamais eu d'accès direct pour leur ravitaillement en armes, en munitions et en vivres, ni pour l'acheminement de leurs blessés vers ce pays. Les combattants de la Ghouta pouvaient seulement contourner ces obstacles ou bien s'y faufiler.

Hamza analyse sans difficulté l'avancée des troupes de Damas dans le massif du Qalamoun. Proche d'un commandant de l'armée gouvernementale, il a rejoint la révolution dès la mi-avril 2011, à Homs. En juin 2013, il a rejoint sa ville de Rouhaybeh, au nord de la capitale, où, caméra au poing, il filme et combat avec l'Armée de l'islam, une katiba modérée, membre du Front islamique, la coalition de brigades rebelles la plus importante de Syrie.

Il évoque d'abord ceux qui ne sont plus là : Abou Khalil, son cousin à la bonne humeur indéfectible, mort d'une infection de la jambe restée sans soins, ou Abou Ghadab, tué dans les bombardements gouvernementaux dans Zamalka, un quartier à l'est de Damas. C'était un grand gaillard barbu avec des grappes d'enfants toujours accrochés à ses jambes. Hamza dit que les positions rebelles dans Damas et sa banlieue est n'ont pas bougé depuis un an, que les combattants sont quasiment encerclés, et qu'« ils mangent ce qui ne se ne mange pas : des racines, des arbres... ».

Hamza explique que dans le Qalamoun, « pour prendre Qara, continuer vers le sud en longeant la frontière libanaise et s'emparer d'Al-Nabak, Yabroud, Rankous et, aujourd'hui, Zabadani, l'armée de Bachar a, à chaque fois, employé la méthode de la terreur en bombardant d'abord avec des missiles, des barils de TNT, puis à l'artillerie. Ensuite, les batailles ont été planifiées et menées avec le Hezbollah, des mercenaires irakiens [chiites] et d'autres étrangers ».

Certaines villes jouissaient d'une paix toute relative grâce à des arrangements informels avec les forces locales du régime, comme ne pas attaquer les convois lors de leurs passages sur l'autoroute de Homs pour, ainsi, éviter d'être bombardées. « Ces petits accords réduisaient les dispositifs de surveillance et l'attention des troupes gouvernementales sur les routes du Qalamoun, et permettaient à nos rebelles une circulation clandestine pour accéder au Liban, en particulier le passage vers la ville d'Ersal, de l'autre côté de la frontière », ajoute Hamza.

Selon Rima, une jeune syrienne de Damas venue au Liban pour

ensuite rejoindre la rébellion à Yabroud, la bataille pour cette ville a été entachée de « trahisons dans les rangs de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL) ». Des tentatives de corruption du Hezbollah par les rebelles auraient échoué. Des combattants du Hezbollah auraient pénétré dans la ville vêtus d'uniformes de l'ASL, avant sa chute. Les rebelles manquaient d'armes lourdes et se seraient retirés de Yabroud après un mois de combats sous des bombardements intensifs. « Résister davantage aurait coûté trop de vies humaines », affirme Rima, qui ajoute : « Une partie des combattants s'est dirigée vers Ersal au Liban. Les autres, comme les hommes de la katiba Al-Ghouraba, originaires de Yabroud, installent des camps pour rester cachés dans les montagnes. »

Dans la guerre pour le contrôle du Qalamoun, l'entraide entre les différents groupes rebelles n'a pas toujours fonctionné. Les divergences d'objectifs de certains de leurs soutiens, comme le Qatar ou l'Arabie saoudite, se seraient ressenties sur le terrain. « On dit que des groupes recevant des aides saoudiennes seraient arrivés après la bataille », rapporte Rima. Selon les combattants de son entourage, les alliés du régime de Bachar Al-Assad auraient perdu 420 hommes et une vingtaine de chars auraient été détruits. Les rebelles syriens, pour leur part, reconnaissent avoir perdu une cinquantaine d'hommes.

De Rouhaybeh, encore tenue par les rebelles, Hamza explique que si les hommes de sa brigade étaient partis soutenir Yabroud, les troupes gouvernementales auraient attaqué leur ville en leur absence. « On a donc fait diversion en menant des opérations contre des unités et des dépôts d'armes de la région, explique-t-il. Cela nous permettait de mobiliser des forces ennemies qui ne pouvaient plus se rendre à Yabroud. Cela correspond aussi à notre tactique : ne pas affronter l'armée à nos portes, pour ne pas provoquer de bombardements sur notre ville. » Il ajoute : « Nous avons l'habitude des montagnes et du désert et nous partons en opération à l'extérieur. Nos Konkurs [des missiles filoguidés anti-char performants, armes qui ont toujours manqué aux rebelles

Sur le plan militaire, le bilan des opérations dans le Qalamoun reste discutable, mais sur le terrain de la propagande, la victoire est indéniable

syriens], nos dix tanks, nos munitions... nous les avons tous pris à l'armée syrienne. »

« La tentative du Hezbollah et du gouvernement pour nous isoler est efficace, concède le jeune rebelle, mais en partie seulement. Nous avons encore la possibilité d'accéder à la Turquie ou à la Jordanie, par l'est. Vers la Turquie, la présence d'éléments de l'Etat islamique en Irak et au Levant (EIL) complique la route. Si on les rencontre, c'est la

« Bachar n'a pas vaincu. Il a démoli des maisons et les civils ont fui la boucherie. La rébellion n'a pas péri »
Un rebelle

confrontation directe. Mais on finit par trouver des passages. Quant à la Jordanie, il y a toujours les pistes du désert. »

Sur le plan militaire, le résultat des opérations menées dans le Qalamoun depuis novembre 2013 par les forces du gouvernement reste discutable, mais sur le terrain de la propagande, la victoire est indé-

niable. Non seulement cela lui permet d'annoncer la reprise d'une région stratégique pour la survie du régime, mais cela lui a aussi don-

né l'occasion de parader devant les caméras, le 15 avril, dans les ruines de Maaloula, une petite ville à majorité chrétienne de la région. Le jour du dimanche de Pâques ne pouvait être mieux choisi pour soigner son image de protecteur des minorités religieuses du pays.

Pendant ce temps, l'opposition armée poursuit ses opérations. « Nous sommes 3 000 hommes environ, explique Hamza, nous pouvons nous mettre d'accord et, ponctuellement, mener des batailles avec des katibas d'Al-Nosra, ou avec des combattants de l'ASL. » « Ces derniers, ajoute-t-il, reçoivent de l'entraînement et des armes de l'étranger, comme des Red Arrows [un missile filoguidé moderne et performant utilisé notamment comme arme anti-char], même des Américains, mais sur le champ de bataille, ils ne sont que dix quand nous sommes quarante. »

« Bachar n'a pas vaincu, conclut le jeune homme. Il a démoli des maisons et les civils ont fui la boucherie. La destruction des villes du Qalamoun n'est pas un problème pour nous. La rébellion n'a pas péri, elle a décidé de partir. Elle s'est déplacée. Les groupes ont pris le maquis dans les montagnes ou sont partis dans le désert. Les troupes de Bachar ne contrôlent que des décombres. » ■

CÉCILE HENNION

ET LAURENT VAN DER STOCKT

Bachar Al-Assad candidat à la présidentielle de juin

« Moi, le citoyen Bachar Hafez Al-Assad, souhaite me porter candidat au poste de président de la République syrienne », a annoncé le président syrien, lundi 28 avril. Six autres candidats, dont une femme, se sont déjà présentés à l'élection annoncée pour le 3 juin, qui est en théorie la première présiden-

tielle depuis plus d'un demi-siècle. Bachar Al-Assad et son père Hafez, qui dirigea la Syrie d'une main de fer de 1970 à 2000, ont en effet été nommés à l'issue de référendums. Le scrutin a d'ores et déjà été qualifié de « farce » et de « parodie de la démocratie » par l'opposition en exil et les pays occidentaux.