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THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ISIS: THE KURDS RETAKE SINJAR AND ADVANCE TOWARDS RAQQA

On the 13th of this month, the President of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regiona, Massud Barzani, held a Press conference near the city of Sinjar to announce that the city had been completely rre-taken from ISIS.

Sinjar (called Shegal in Kurdish), a little mountainous region whose principal city bears its name, lies on the Syrian borders. Mainly inhabited by Yezidis, who form a non-Moslem religious community, considered "Devil-worshippers" by ISIS. it has been occupied by the latter on August 2014. About 50,000

unarmed civilians had to seek refuge in the surrounding mountains, without food or water. Nearly 5,000 men and children were massacred in the town and the surrounding Yezidi villages. The Syrian Kurdish PYD party succeeded in opening a corridor that enabled a large part of the Yezidis trapped in the Sinjar mountain massif to escape from te Jihadists by going towards Rojava (Syrian Kurdistan) on the ther side of the Syrian border. However, thousands of Yezidi women, perhaps as many os 5,000 of them, were captured by the Jihadists and either forcibly "married " to its activists, sold into sexual slavery or murdered.

At the time UNO denounced this as an attempted genocide — thousands of them are still in ISIS's hands.

In December 2014 Peshmerga units of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) had succeeded in driving ISIS out of the Northern part of the Sinjar Massif, though the city, in the Southern part was still in the hands of the Jihadists. Early this month the Peshmergas began to deploy with the aim of winning back the Southern part of the Sinjar Massif and the city itself.

The loss of Sinjar is a serious defeat for ISIS as this region lies

on the organisations strategic line of communication between its “capital”, Raqqa, and Mosul, its principal stronghold in Iraq. Indeed, Masud Barzani also stated that the liberation of Sinjar would have an important impact on the liberation of Mosul. Many experts agree that ISIS probably set of the Paris terrorist attacks on the same day as its lost Sinjar so as to minimise its loss in the world news.

While the recovery of Sinjar is an important advance in the struggle against ISIS, it also raises a variety of other problems.

The first of these is the future of the recovered area. While the Yezidis are overwhelmingly Kurdish speakers, Sinjar is one of the areas subject to dispute between the Iraqi central Government and the KRG, and is not officially part of the Kurdistan federal region. Yet, in his speech, Masud Barzani pointed out that as *“the city was been liberation by the blood of the Peshmergas it would thus be incorporated in the Kurdistan Federal Region”*. Prime Minister Neçirvan Barzani later made a statement of the same import: *“I am glad to tell our beloved people of Sinjar that we are going to take the legal and administrative measures to support their demand for making Sinjar into a province in its own right”*. The Iraqi central Government cannot fail to be annoyed by such a decision although it is in no position to oppose it.

It is interesting to note that this decision had already been approved by Murat Karayilan, the leader of the PKK, the Turkish Kurdistan party, whose troops had part in the battle, though not mentioned by Masud Barzani. He said, in this respect *“We see no reason for separating Sinjar from Kurdistan”*.

Indeed, the battle for the city was co-ordinated by the KRG with the help of anti-ISIS Coalition — US Special Forces were present as advisors to the Kurds as well as a number of other forces. The KRG announced it had deployed 7,500 Peshmergas, but these were organised on the front in groups according to their political affiliations. Thus in addition to the Barzani’s KDP Peshmerga units, to which were added some Yezidis, the PUK Peshmerga units also took part. Many Yezidis, who had lost confidence in the Peshmergas after the ISIS attack, had formed their own fighting units, sometimes organised on a tribal basis. The PKK, who had about 5,000 fighters in the region and the PYD, its Syrian brother party, also took part and had formed their own Yezidi militia groups... The recapture of the city proper had been delayed by differences between the various Kurdish forces — thus the KRG had asked the PKK to leave the region, to which the PKK had replied that it would when ISIS had been driven out.

Following their retaking of the city, the Kurdish fighters spent some weeks clearing the town of the booby traps that had been hidden there by the Jihadists. Also over a dozen mass graves were discovered near the city by the end of the month, mostly containing the bodies of murdered Yezidi women.

Immediately opposite Sinjar, on the Syrian side of the border, the Kurds had also dealt ISIS a severe blow. On the 14th of the month the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a Kurdish-Arab alliance, essentially organised round the PYD and supported by the anti-ISIS Coalition, won back from ISIS the small town of Al-Hawl, to the East of Hassaké Province. Like Sinjar, Al-Hawl lies on the main road linking

Mosul and Raqqa. This is the first significant success for the SDFs, officially created with US support the month before. It is a step towards the liberation of Hassaké as a whole, which was the declared objective of the SDF. On the 17th, the SDF’s spokesman, Talal Ali Sello, announced that the organisation had driven the Jihadists from 200 villages in the province.

ISIS seems to be taking the threat to their “capital” seriously — the leading Jihadists are evacuating their families from Raqqa but also expelling Kurdish families from the town to Palmyra, accusing them of providing information to the YPG (People’s Protection Units), a PYD aligned militia.

On another front, the YPG, backed by Russian fighter aircraft, advanced on the 28th in the d’Al-Azaz area, North of Aleppo, waging fierce battles against the Al-Nosra Front, an al-Qaïda affiliate. This is an important area for the PYD, since it separated the two Kurdish “Cantons” of Kubané and Afrin. Its control would enable the Kurds to set up a continuous, and more defensible territory. This implies taking control of the town of Jerablous, at present held by ISIS. Turkey has repeatedly declared that it would not accept such a move. However the YPG seems to enjoy the support of both the Russians and the Americans — which would make any Turkish intervention politically delicate... Russia has stated that it does not consider the PKK (or its brother party the PYD) terrorist organisations and the United States have sent some of their Special Forces to Kobané to train and advise the Kurds.

Sources differ on the US position, some saying that the ameri-

cans have confirmed the Turkish ban on crossing the Euphrates, while others say that the

American might advise the YPG to just take Jerablous — thus sealing the border through

which foreign Jihadists have been joining ISIS for several months.

TURKEY: AFTER WINNING THE ELECTIONS, ERDOGAN CONTINUES HIS ANTI-KURD CAMPAIGN

The AKP won a comfortable victory in the early elections of Sunday 1st November. With 49% of the votes and 317 seats out of 550, President Erdogan has regained control of Parliament, which he lost in the June elections. Winning 10 points more than in the previous election, increasing its score in 84 of the country's 85 constituencies, the party won back the 3 million votes it had lost last June. The strategy Mr. Erdogan adopted has this paid off — by refusing any alliance that could have enabled the formation of a coalition government, the AKP will be able to continue running the country on its own. However, he has not secured the 367 members of parliament needed to amend the constitution without needing a referendum for the "Presidentialised" constitution Mr. Erdogan wants.

How did this victory, which upset the forecasts of all the opinion polls, take place? First by hunting for votes in the areas and adopting the policies of the ultra-nationalist MHP party, using a far Right rhetoric based on tension and fear, and especially by attacking the Kurds as the "enemy within". Indeed, in publishing the election results, the opposition daily headlined the as "The Victory of Fear". And it was certainly the MHP that lost most heavily in this election — 2 million votes, mainly to the AKP. This political about turn did not arouse any internal discussion with the AKP — any moderates who might have opposed it had been purged months before.

The second large vote loss was sustained by the pro-Kurdish progressive organisation the HDP, which scored a million votes less than in June, as the HDP had been designated the main enemy by the AKP throughout the summer. After the Suruç suicide attack by ISIS activists, the PKK had made the mistake of breaking its unilateral cease fire to execute two Turkish police, accused of having collaborated with ISIS in preparing that operation.

Whether it really was a PKK action or a provocation, the Turkish government exploited the situation to the full, using it to justify a completely disproportionate military attack that virtually amounted to renewing an all out civil war as in the 90s.

The air strikes against the PKK in Iraq, and against those of the PYD in Syria replaced the against ISIS, which was completely ignored. In parallel, the HDP was again subjected to the usual accusations of having links with the guerrillas and, by implication, of being terrorists — while ISIS was hardly mentioned. Even in its Kurdish stronghold of Diyarbakir, the HDP's score dropped from 79.2 to 72.7%. was the only town of the "South-East— Sirnak where the HDP maintained its previous score.

Indeed, it seems that some more conservative Kurds, having voted for it in June were scared by the renewal of the civil war in their region and of its continuing if the AKP did not win, and so played safe by voting AKP

The AKP also had the matchless advantage of being in power. It thus used this to claim an almost unlimited use of the media: 20 hours on the TRT channel for Mr Erdogan, 30 Hours for his party — and only 18 minutes for the HDP, 5 hours for the CHP (kemalist) and 70 minutes for the MHP. If that was not enough, the party in office took the precaution of taking control of the media that did not support it — or having them attacked by its supporters.

Whereas, after the Ankara bomb attack, campaign activities in public places were reduced to a minimum (in particular by the HDP, targeted by the two earlier attacks, that wished to protect its supporters) this all out media plugging played a major part in the AKP's victory.

Moreover the campaign and the actual poll took place in an atmosphere of extreme tension, especially in Kurdistan. The inflammatory declarations by Mr. Erdogan and by Prime Minister Davutoğlu and many AKP candidates, mingling Islamist and nationalist references that were sometimes openly threatening to the Kurds, were accompanied by concrete acts of violence by the security forces, assisted by some auxiliaries of very suspicious nature. Hundreds of HDP offices were attacked throughout the country and many HDP candidates arrested. At an election meeting in Van, the Prime Minister made threats of the "return of white Renaults" — a reference to the cars used by the death squads, at the end of the

90s, to kidnap Kurdish activists they then killed. To make his remarks clearer Mr. Davutoğlu added *“the unsolved crimes will recommence...”*

In the centre of Diyarbakir, the “capital” of Turkish Kurdistan, where, on polling day the walls still bore the scars of the fighting between young activist and the police in mid-October, the police were deployed even inside some polling stations — a measure of intimidation denounced by the HDP leaders in Siyarbekir. Cizre and other towns with a Kurdish majority population were placed under a curfew and placed under a virtual siege by the Army for up to ten days, with tanks and helicopters. Some mysterious hooded police auxiliaries, who called themselves the “Lions of Allah” cried “Allahu Akbar” as they carried out attacks on Kurdish towns and quarters — a behaviour more

evocative of Islamist organisations like ISIS than the police forces of an allegedly secular State...

As Selahettin Demirtaş, the co-president of HDP pointed out, the campaign was *“neither fair or equitable”*.

Following the announcing of the election results, the AKP was quick to draw the conclusions and confirm its “militarist” line regarding the Kurds: *“If the government must take measures regarding the Kurds they will be carried out unilaterally — we don’t need the HDP any more”* stated an AKP cadre at Diyarbakir, adding *“From this evening on there is no longer a Kurdish question in Turkey”*.

Nevertheless, while the HDP has suffered a set back it was not a collapse. It maintained a score of 10.4% — slightly more than the

10% threshold needed to be present in Parliament. This threshold had been introduced into the Constitution after the 1980 *coup d’état* with the sole purpose of preventing the Kurds from being represented in the country’s Parliament. Yet, if the HDP representation has dropped from 80 to 59 seats, its maintenance in parliament in such an unfavourable context could be considered a success, that marks the permanence of this new political force, both progressive and representing the Kurdish population in the Turkish political landscape

In such a violent context, it is probable that the newly elected Kurdish Members of Parliament will, as in the 90s, find themselves exposed to all kinds of pressure and that the AKP’s victory will not really be a guarantee against the assassination of Kurdish activists.

DIYARBEKIR: THE WELL-KNOWN LAWYER TAHIR ELÇI WAS SHOT DOWN IN THE MIDDLE OF A PRESS CONFERENCE

On Saturday 28 November, Tahir Elçi, a well known Kurdish lawyer and head of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, was killed by a bullet in the head.

Elçi wanted to hold a Press conference in Diyarbakir to draw attention to the destruction caused by the incessant acts of violence of the previous four months. He chose the little road in the Sur quarter, and old walled town now part of Diyarbakir, where the four-pillared minaret of the Sheikh Mutahhar mosque is located. This building that dates back to about 1500 is well known in the town and had been seriously damaged by gunfire during the clashes between the young Kurds and the police. Well

known for his restraint, Elçi was distressed at the turn being taken by the “anti-terror” campaign adopted by the government following the June elections and extended at a security meeting run by the Prime Minister, on 4 November.

In this chain of violence, many towns of Turkish Kurdistan have been subjected to curfews — sometimes of weeks on end. These include Diyarbakir, Hakkari, Mardin, Sirtak and Van. The week preceding Elçi’s death, the curfew had been imposed on 26 different quarters of Hani and Lice, in Diyarbakir Province. For nearly two weeks the town of Silvan, under a curfew, had seen tanks and police snipers hunting members of the YDG-H (an organisation of young PKK fight-

ers, often dug in behind barricades and trenches) and firing at numerous civilians. According to the Human Rights association (IHD) over 100 civilians have been killed since July during clashes between the security forces and the PKK.

Elçi was shot just after saying: *“We do not want clashes, guns and operations in this historic place”*. Last August, while receiving a delegation of journalists he had clearly expressed the opinion that the armed conflict should remain outside residential areas. He blamed the acts of violence on both the security forces and the PKK. He had recalled that the Geneva conventions applied to States as well as to armed groups. Four days before his assassination, he had signed a

joint statement with the head to the Mardin Bar Association calling on the PKK to leave the residential areas.

Elçi unhesitatingly criticised the PKK strategy — for all that he was no friend of the State. He had represented hundreds of victims of the Turkish security forces before the European Court for Human Rights: residents of villages shelled in 1994, people who died while in detention by the police or the Army, victims of torture, children crippled by anti-personnel mines... He had won many cases there against Turkey, he was also the lawyer for many journalists recently arrested, including the Iraqi Kurdish journalist of Vice News, Mohammed Rasool, who is still in jail after the expulsion of his British colleagues.

After stating, on *CNN Turk* that the PKK was not a terrorist organisation but “*an armed political movement that sometimes resorted to actions of a terrorist kind and which employs considerable support in society*” a charge was levelled against him by an Istanbul Public Prosecutor of “*terrorist propaganda*”. He was released pending trial and was assassinated although he was under judicial control and forbidden to leave the country.

Witnesses report that some unknown attackers opened fire on Elçi and on about 40 other activists as the Press conference was ending. The police exchanged some shots with the attackers without wounding any of them.

A police officer was killed and eleven people injured during the shoot out, including some journalists and two policemen, one of whom later died of wounds. The Diyarbakir Governor's Office stated that Elçi was killed

during the exchange of shots, but his lawyer, Yunus Murat, stated that the head of the Bar association had been killed by the police. The HDP, moreover, made a statement incriminating the AKP — the party in office. The official new agency, Anatolia, stated that the assassination was carried out by the PKK, while President Erdogan declared that he was saddened by Elçi's death, adding “*This incident shows that Turkey is right in being determined in its struggle against terrorism*”.

Nevertheless, the KCK (Union of Kurdistan Communities), an organisation linked to the PKK, condemned the murder of Tahir Elçi and stated that the videos taken at the time of the assassination clearly show the responsibility of the police, one of its commanders telling one of the attackers to flee before being seen. These videos have spread like viruses on Turkish Internet.

Following the lawyer's death, over 50,000 people, including lawyers coming specially from all over the country — including the President of the National Council of the Turkish Bar, Metin Feyzioğlu, followed his coffin, which was covered by a Kurdish flag. Clashes broke out with the police in many places, where angry crowds shouted “*You can't kill us all*” and “*The State be brought to account for this*”. The police used tear gas and water crannons to disperse the demonstrators. The US Embassy in Ankara expressed its shock, describing Elçi as a “*brave defender of Human Rights*”. The International Federation for Human Rights and Human Rights Watch demanded an independent inquiry into the lawyer's death.

The widely read daily paper *Hurriyet* compared Elçi's murder

with that of Vedat Aydın, a member of the Human Rights Association, IHD, and leader of the pro-Kurdish party of the period, the HEP, who was kidnapped from his home in July 1991. Aydın was found dead a few days later, and his body showed signs of having been tortured. This was the first case of those “*murders by persons unknown*” so characteristic of the bloody 90s. While those years have often been condemned by present day governments, they have never sought to bring those responsible to account. At the beginning of the month a retired colonel of the Gendarmerie and seven other members of the security forces were acquitted of the murder of 21 Kurds during that period.

A further worrying fact in this context: a few days before Elçi's assassination, the HDP announced that its co-President, Selahettin Demirtaş, had just escaped an attempted assassination. After spending a day travelling round Diyarbakir, his companions found a 3cm-long mark of an impact on the rear window of his car, which they said was just at the level of the passenger's head. Fortunately the bullet did not go through the window as it was armoured. The Diyarbakir Governor's Office stated that it was not the impact of a bullet, preferring to talk of “*a blow from a very hard object*”, and stating that “*during his stay in Diyarbakir, Demirtaş had enjoyed police protection and that at that time there had been no attack on him or his vehicle*”.

Are we seeing the beginning of a fresh period of “*murders by persons unknown*”? The Kurds, for their part, have always called these “*murders by well known people*” — namely the killers of the Turkish authorities' paramilitary forces.

ERBIL: A COMMEMORATION OF DANIELLE MITTERRAND'S DEATH

A very moving ceremony took place on 23 November at the Erbil Conference Centre to commemorate the 4th anniversary of Danielle Mitterrand's death.

Before over a thousand people, including several ministers and Members of Parliament, President Masud Barzani, just returned from the Sinjar front, recalled the crucial role Danielle Mitterrand had played in arousing awareness of the Kurdish tragedy in the 80s and 90s.

"It was the first time I saw a non-Kurdish person weeping at the fate of Kurd like a mother saddened by her children's' misfortunes" he testified. *"That is why we call her the Mother of the Kurds and why we mourn her death and will never forget her"* said Masud Barzani.

The French Consul General, M. Alain Guépratte, in a notable speech in French and in Kurdish, spoke of the rich history of French-Kurdish friendship, and the excellence of these relations as illustrated by President Hollande's historic visit to Erbil and by France-Kurdish cooperation, including military.

Gilbert Mitterrand, the guest of honour, opened his speech in these terms: *"My dear Brothers and sisters, as I feel I must call you, since we share the same mother"*. He then recalled how his mother had taken the Kurdish cause to heart and how she spoke about it at family gatherings but also with public figures she met officially as the Republic's First Lady and as President of the *France Libertés* Association.

Taking the floor in his turn, Kendal Nezan recalled the most

outstanding moments of Danielle Mitterrand's thirty-year commitment in support of the Kurds: her support of the creation of the Paris Kurdish Institute as from 1982, sending observers to the trials of Kurdish activist in Turkey in the 80s; her visit to the refugee camps of Iraqi Kurds in Mardin and Mus in May 1989; her journey's to Moscow and Washington to make Mikhail Gorbachev and George Bush aware of the Kurdish tragedy; her support for the international Conference in Paris in October 1989, then the one organised in on 27 February 1991 at the US Senate, with the participation of eminent Senators (Edward Kennedy, Nancy Pelosi, Paul Simon, Clairborne Pell) who later became the pillars of the "Kurdish lobby" during the Kurdish exodus of April 1991.

Throughout this period, Mrs. Mitterrand played a decisive role in favour of France taking a diplomatic initiative to save the two million displaced Kurds. This led to the adoption of Security Council Resolution 688 authorising the creation of a Kurdish protection zone — a zone that evolved into the present Federated Kurdistan. In May 1991, Mrs Mitterrand visited the Iraqi Kurds, travelling via Iran, to show her concern to provide them with some humanitarian aid, delivered by what was literally an air bridge. Thus, her Foudation, together with the Kurdish Institute, arranged with the French National Printing Press, to produce 300,000 school books in Kurdish and paid the wages of the teachers for the 1991-2 School year.

A year later, in 1992, she visited Kurdistan accompanied by

Bernard Kouchner,, at that time Secretary of State for Humanitarian Activity, to attend the opening session of the recently elected Kurdistan Parliament to make it known and legitimise it. In the course of this visit, while on her way to Halabja, she was targeted by an attack and several of the Peshmergas ensuring her safety, were killed — but she announced that this would not prevent her from returning to Kurdistan.

In 1994, at her request, President Mitterrand invited representatives of the two Kurdish parties engaged in fratricidal fighting, for peace discussions at Rambouillet. The agreement thus achieved enabled a long truce. It was renewed and made permanent in 1997 by the then US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, who, by ensuring that Kurdistan received 13% of the value of the Iraqi oil sales, carried out in the context of the "Oil for Food" programme enabled the inter-Kurdish reconciliation to be stabilised on firm economic bases.

Kendal also recalled Danielle Mitterrand's journey to Erbil in October 2002 for the session of the re-united Parliament and her last visit in October 2009 where, after inaugurating some schools named after her in Erbil and Suleimaniyah she addressed the Kurdistan Parliament, making a speech that was broadcast on television, which was, in effect, her political testament.

The Kurdish Institute's President also briefly recalled that Mrs Mitterrand had also done much to internationalise the case of the Kurdish members of parliament, including Leyla Zana, jailed in February 1994 in Ankara for

crimes of opinion. The Kurdish resistance in Iran also enjoyed her support — particularly during the funerals in Paris of the bodies of the Iranian Kurdish leaders assassinated in Vienna (July 1989) and Berlin (September 1992).

In conclusion Kendal Nezan stressed how much Mrs Mitterrand, both in France and internationally, was identified with the Kurdish cause. She had made aware of this cause public figures like Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama and Lila. To such an extent that, at a dinner organised in June 1994 to celebrate the 50th

anniversary of the Allied landings in Normandy, President Clinton said to her: "*Madame, please talk to me about the Kurds. This is a great opportunity for me to learn from such a knowledgeable person as yourself*". Consequently for one and a half hours, the conversation between the two presidential couples was about the Kurdish question.

A short fifteen-minute documentary illustrated and completed the highlights of her commitment with considerable extracts from her testamentary speech to the Kurdistan parliament.

The general secretary of *France Libertés* recalled the present day actions of his Foundation regarding the Kurdish people. He then handed the Danielle Mitterrand Prize to the Peshmergas, fighters for the freedom of the Kurdish people to a Woman Captain of the Kurdish Special forces. The whole ceremony, broadcast on three Kurdish television channels, ended with a moving elegy for Danielle Mitterrand composed by Sican Perwer, whose Foundation was one of the initiators of this event, with the support of the Kurdistan government.

IRAN: A WAVE OF REPRESSION FOLLOWS THE NUCLEAR AGREEMENT

On 19 November the San Sebastian Film Festival in Spain (*Zinemaldia*) took the unusual measure of making known publicly by a communiqué, its condemnation of a legal decision, expressing the solidarity of those taking part with the person sentenced. This is the Iranian Kurdish film director, Kaiwan Karimi, 30 years of age who had taken part in an earlier film festival with his short film *Zan va shohar karegar* (The adventures of a married couple).. This stand follows the sentencing, on 13 October, of this young filmmaker to six years imprisonment and 223 whip lashes by a judge of the 28th section of the Teheran Revolutionary Court.

"The San Sebastian Festival thus expressed its categorical opposition to the Iranian Revolutionary Court's sentence of the Kurdish director Keywan Karimi " in the words of the communiqué.

Born in Banehm in Iranian Kurdistan, in 1985, Karimi gained a degree in communication from the faculty of Social Science of Teheran University. His docu-

mentaries and fiction films, several times won prizes, and often contain elements of sociological research, like his 18mm documentary, *Broken Borders*, made in 2011, that describes the lives of Kurdish smugglers across the Iraqi-Iranian borders.

It is well known that the political division and the lack of development in Iranian Kurdistan gives a special economic importance to this smuggling, which in 2000 had already been the subject of a film by Bahman Ghobadi "*A time for the exhilaration of horse*". *Broken Borders* was shown at the Sofia Film Festival last March and at the 7th Kurdish film Festival in London in November 2011. The judge, Muhammad Moghis, accused Karimi of having "*insulted shared values*" and of carrying out propaganda for "*illicit relations*" as well as "*contact by kissing*". Karimi, who has succeeded in contacting an Iraqi Kurdish television and press agency, denied the charges against him. "*I made a film about the government, the social situation, the graffiti on the walls and about workers*", he stated. According to Karimi's

lawyer, Amir Raisyan, his client was, in fact, sentenced for a scene in which a married couple kissed one another, which was included in the films synopsis but was not filmed since the actress involved refused. "*One cannot be punished for something that didn't happen*", Raisyan added. However the court also used some scenes in one of his earlier films, a documentary called *Diwar* (Wall) that dealt with urban graffiti as grounds for accusing him of propaganda against the political system.

Karimi has appealed against his sentence and is at the moment on probation. He is pessimistic about the way the court will treat his appeal. Indeed, the context is worrying as his arrest seems to be part of a general wave of repression against intellectuals, artists and journalists. Thus a few days after the *Zinemaldia* communiqué, on 22 November, an Irano-American journalist, Jason Rezaian, working for the Washington Post since 2012, was sentenced to a so far unspecified term of imprisonment for spying, after spending 488 days in jail before trial.

At about the same time as Karimi, the Iranian poets Fatemah Ekhtesari and Mehdi Moussavi were sentenced to 11.5 and 9 years imprisonment respectively as well as 99 whip lashes each. At the beginning of November, a freelance journalist, Isa Saharkhiz, a former Minister of Information under ex-President Khatami, was arrested at home and charged with “insulting the Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and propaganda against the regime”. Ehsan Mazandarani, director of the daily *Farikhhtegan*, was also arrested.

“My sentence is a message to the whole Iranian artistic community that nothing has changed following the nuclear agreement” Karimi stated.

In Iran prisoners often spend a long time behind bars before being sentenced, without know-

ing the verdict. Thus another Kurdish political prisoner, Shahram Ahmadi, arrested in April 2009 at Sanandaj, capital of Kurdistan Province, has spent 3 years in detention awaiting trial. He was unable to see a lawyer before his trial, which took place in October 2012 and was sentenced to death after a 5 minute hearing for “hostility to God” (*moharebeh*). His brother, Bahram, aged 17 at the time was arrested four months after him and sentenced to death together with nine other Iranian Kurds. He was executed on 27 December 2012. All, like most Kurds, are Sunni Moslems whereas the prevailing Iranian religion is Shiite.

As Shahram had appealed, the Supreme Court quashed the original sentence and sent the case to — the 28th section of the Teheran Revolutionary Court, — which sentenced him to death again. His

second sentence was confirmed by the Supreme Court mid-October, without his being able to receive a copy of the verdict so as to know what were the precise charges against him. Accused of being a member of a salafist group, Sharam was, in fact, arrested in the course of a wave of arrests of Sunni Moslems, mostly Kurdish, that took place between 2009 and 2010. Arrested on his way home by Guards of the Revolution, wounded by a bullet and beaten up before being taken to hospital for interrogation, Shaheam Ahmadi says he was regularly tortured to force him to “confess”.

Amnesty International has called for letters to be sent calling for the cancellation of Shahram Ahmadi’s sentence to the Supreme Guide, Ali Khamenei and to the Minister of Justice, Ayatollah Sadegh Larijani, before 8 January.

SOCIAL ISSUES:

THE PLACE OF WOMEN AND THE LAW

On the 16th of this month the women’s commission of the Kobané “canton” of Syrian Kurdistan announced it had voted for some laws banning polygamy, the premature marriage of young girls and “crossed marriages” in which a man secures the hand in marriage by agreeing to give his sister in marriage to his fiancé’s brother. Kobané canton covers the town itself and about a hundred villages around it, and is one of the three autonomous administrative divisions of Syrian Kurdistan or Rojava (which literally means “Western”, i.e. Western Kurdistan) set up by the Syrian Kurds in 2013. The other two cantons are Jeziré, to the East, which corresponds with Syria’s Eastern “duck’s bill” bordering Iraq, with the town of Qamishli (Qamishlo

in Kurdish) on its Turkish border and Hassaké to the south. To the West is the third canton, which corresponds with the region and town of Afrin, which lies North-west of Aleppo, up against the Turkish province of Hatay (the ottoman Sanjak of Alexandretta).

The Kobané canton is the second of Rojava’s cantons to adopt laws protecting women’s rights, as Jeziré had adopted similar laws a year before in November 2014. Apart from banning polygamy, the new laws specify the equality of men and women at work, including equal wages. Moreover, women must be at least 18 years old to marry and cannot be given in marriage against their will. Finally the decree specifies that women have the same right as men to give evidence in court. All these measures clearly declare a

radical opposition to the discriminatory ideology of ISIS and the other terrorist organisations, which as we know do not hesitate to forcibly marry women and use those considered to be “unbelievers” as sexual slaves, and simply murder those too old to be used in this way. The many mass graves of Yezidi women found in Sinjar after its liberation bear witness to this revolting practice. Moreover, the Jihadist organisations apply legal principles to women derived from Islam’s mediaeval past, in particular regarding their shares of any inherited wealth. In contrast, the laws adopted by the Kurds of Jeziré and Kobané also specify the equality of women in inheriting goods.

In view of the inequalities that women face in a Kurdish society still very marked by patriarchal

practices and powers, these legal decisions and order as well as the initiatives of civil society are playing an important role initiating development. Alongside these laws that are gradually being passed in the different Rojava cantons, there are other examples of the way the Kurds are involved in this evolution.

Thus in Turkey, the only party run by two co-Presidents, a man and a woman, Selahettin Demirtaş et Mrs. Figen Yuksekdağ, is the HDP, a party that is not only a political representative of the country's Kurdish community, but also has become for some time the representative of a variety of other minorities (often non-ethnic, like minority sexual orientations) — an orientation that links with progressive values. Not only does the HDP have this co-leadership at the top but, even more importantly, it was the only party, at the last two elections, to systematically present two-person teams, consisting of a man and a woman, in every constituency. It is probable that this practice, like the determination to broaden the themes of political action as compared with the previous pro-Kurdish parties, has contributed to the HDP maintaining its presence in the Ankara parliament by broadening its electoral base.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, action to defend equality of women's rights has, this month, been connected with the UN worldwide campaign following the "International Day for Eliminating Violence to Women" on 25 November.

The UN had arranged to conduct a 16-day campaign, from 25 November to 10 December (Human Rights Day) — "16 days of activity against sexist vio-

lence". In Kurdistan, this campaign began with a conference at which members of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) took part, as well as NGOs.

The Secretary of the High Council for Women's Affairs, Pakshshan Zangana, stated that the process should be carried out every day and not just on one day a year and stressed the situation of the Yezidi women affected by the struggle against the Jihadist ISOS organisation. Pour priority is to provide them with psychological help" she declared. Regarding society in Iraqi Kurdistan in general, she added that, despite the work carried out, statistics showed, unfortunately, a far too high number of forced marriages of young girls, and acts of sexual violence, mentioning that people displaced as a result of the war with ISIS and who are at the moment in camps in Kurdistan were particularly vulnerable to this kind of violence. Indeed, the KRG's Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, who also took part in the conference's opening, stress in his speech, on the fact that, while acts of violence of this kind had diminished, they had not regressed sufficiently for them to be satisfied.

Another conference organised in the context of the cultural festival *Galawêj* that takes place every year in Suleimaniyah, took place on 22 November in that Kurdistan city entitled "Women in the Front line: between victims, representation, political participation and the struggle against terrorism". Run by Nazand Begikhani, a recognised poet and Human Rights defender, as well as a University researcher on gender issues, this conference enabled a debate in which took part, inter alia, the French sociologist Juliette Minces, the feminist writer

Sophie Mousset, the author of a biography and four stage plays about the revolutionary Olympe de Gouges, the British researcher Gill Hague, co-author with Nazand Begikhani, Aisha Gill and Kawther Ibraheem of a report dated 2010 on "honour crimes" in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish diaspora in the United Kingdom (*Honour-based violence and honour-based killings in Iraqi Kurdistan and in the Kurdish diaspora in the UK*) available of Bristol University's web site.

Feminists in Iraqi Kurdistan continue fighting against these crimes, many of which have never yet led to a trial, the matter being "settled" by tribal arrangements. This explains why changes in legislation are not enough, even though indispensable. Thus the Iraqi Kurdish Parliament has, over the last two years, amended, with respect to the KRG's administrative region many Iraqi laws dating from the Saddam Hussein period, covering discrimination against women, particularly some that gave the authors of "honour crimes" the benefit of "attenuating circumstances".

For the first time, the *Gelawêj* Festival awarded a "Gender Equality Prize" and chose to give it to Nazand Begikhani. The latter thanked the Festival for the prize, that she said she considered less as a personal reward but "as recognition of the struggle of Kurdish women against social and political oppression while they are fighting terrorism and the ISIS Jihadists in the Middle East". She added "There is a change in the collective mentality of the Kurds and signes of progress towards freedom, gender equality and social justice within the Kurdish communities. The women of Kurdistan have already achieved a great deal so far, but we still have a long way to go".

A Cizre, les Kurdes prêts à la guerre contre Erdogan

A la veille des élections turques, la région menace de s'embraser

REPORTAGE

CIZRE (TURQUIE) - envoyé spécial

Dans la nuit humide, en haut d'une rue ruisssante de boue, un jeune homme monte la garde. Armé d'un fusil d'assaut, arborant un manteau militaire et un gilet de combat alourdi de chargeurs à trente coups et de grenades, il tient le point de contrôle qui barre l'une des entrées du quartier de Cudi, sur les hauteurs de Cizre, dans l'est de la Turquie.

Sous le drapeau rouge du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), adossé à une casemate aux épais murs de sacs de sable, où une mitrailleuse légère et un lance-roquettes sont entreposés dans des couvertures à fleurs, le jeune milicien inspecte chacune des automobiles qui se présente pour s'assurer de l'identité des occupants. Si, sur les avenues du centre-ville tout proche, les véhicules blindés des forces de sécurité turques patrouillent sans discontinuer, les rues de Cudi appartiennent aux combattants kurdes. A la veille des élections législatives anticipées turques, qui ont lieu dimanche 1^{er} novembre, règne dans cette partie de la ville une atmosphère d'avant-guerre.

Cinq mois après les élections du 7 juin, marquées par la percée du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP, gauche, prokurde) et par l'affaiblissement du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur), au pouvoir depuis treize ans, le retour aux urnes, consécutif de l'échec des tentatives de formation d'un gouvernement de coalition, intervient dans une Turquie au bord du chaos. Avec l'éclatement du processus de paix lancé en 2013 entre Ankara et PKK, et la reprise des hostilités fin juillet, s'est installé

dans les régions kurdes un état de violence qui s'est manifesté à Cizre avec une intensité singulière.

Parsemés d'impacts de balle, éventrés par des trous d'obus et par des roquettes, les murs du quartier de Cudi portent encore les stigmates des combats qui y ont opposé, du 4 au 12 septembre, les forces de sécurité turques, appuyées par l'armée, aux militants kurdes qui s'y étaient retranchés. Au cours de ce siège de neuf jours où la population a été privée de nourriture, d'eau et de d'électricité, seize civils ont trouvé la mort, dans une ville de 145 000 habitants alors coupée du reste du monde.

Des barricades aux fortifications
« Quand l'ennemi a attaqué, nous n'étions pas assez préparés », reconnaît Ahmet, un commandant local chargé d'un des secteurs de Cudi. « Elections ou pas, nous sommes maintenant prêts à mener une bataille de grande ampleur. L'Etat ne reviendra plus dans nos rues pour arrêter nos camarades et tuer nos familles. »

Depuis la fin du siège, les jeunes militants issus des quartiers de Cizre ont été rejoints en masse par des cadres et des combattants aguerris du PKK, qui patrouillent avec eux dans les rues, kalachnikov en bandoulière. A Cudi comme dans d'autres quartiers passés sous le contrôle du PKK, leur armement et leur équipement sont ceux d'une milice urbaine prête à défendre son territoire. Les barricades qu'ils opposaient cet été à la police se sont transformées en fortifications. Aux points stratégiques, deux à trois barrages de sacs de sable, hauts de plus de deux mètres, renforcés par des blocs de béton et équipés de postes de tir, verrouillent les accès.

« Si nous entrons au Parlement, Recep Tayyip Erdogan nous atta-



Des membres du YDG-H, la guérilla urbaine du PKK, le 30 octobre, à Cizre. EMILIAN URBANO/MYOP POUR « LE MONDE »

quera à nouveau, car il n'acceptera jamais de quitter le pouvoir. Si l'AKP gagne des voix, il nous attaquera aussi puisqu'il en sortira

renforcé. Quel que soit le résultat du vote, l'issue la plus probable, c'est la guerre », prévient un combattant répondant au nom de code de « Bager ». Le constat que fait ce jeune commandant de la guérilla, qui affirme avoir combattu au sein des forces kurdes affiliées au PKK affrontant l'Etat islamique dans la Syrie voisine,

avant d'être déployé dans le quartier de Cudi, est largement partagé par les responsables politiques et par les habitants de la ville. A Cizre, où le HDP a obtenu 92 % des voix, le 7 juin, le mouvement kurde espère cependant une participation massive de la population et une augmentation de son score.

« Nous participons aux élections pour montrer notre poids, mais, ici, nous ne reconnaissons plus la République turque. Nous savons qu'au fond l'Etat veut la guerre, et s'il veut la guerre, nous la voulons aussi », explique une responsable locale du HDP. De fait, le mouvement kurde a déjà proclamé une des nouvelles institutions « autonomes » chapeautées par une « assemblée du peuple ». Etablies dans plusieurs quartiers de la ville et tenues par des cadres politiques



du mouvement venus de l'extérieur, elles sont calquées sur celles mises en place dans les régions kurdes de Syrie par le PKK.

Dans le centre-ville, encore épargné par ces préparatifs insurrectionnels, Yakup, qui travaille au lycée de Cizre, a perdu espoir. « Cela fait trente ans que nous, les Kurdes, sommes pris entre le PKK et l'Etat turc. Je crains que cela continue et que ce soit pire qu'auparavant car, maintenant, la guerre est entrée dans les villes, et les civils sont directement impliqués. »

Entre les fantasmes guerriers des plus jeunes, la colère qui croît face à un Etat perçu par beaucoup comme une force d'occupation et les ambitions du mouvement armé, les habitants de Cizre craignent de se trouver emportés dans une mécanique irréversible. ■

ALLAN KAVAL

En Syrie, les rebelles multiplient les fronts



Un insurgé en poste sur une position stratégique dans la province de Homs, dimanche. MAHMOUD TAHA/AFP

Malgré un mois de raids aériens russes, les groupes d'insurgés étendent leur territoire dans le centre du pays et près d'Alep.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT  @Malbrunot
ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À DAMAS

CONFLIT Après un mois de bombardements russes qui n'ont pas permis à l'armée syrienne d'enregistrer d'avancées spectaculaires face aux rebelles anti-Assad, la stratégie de ces derniers apparaît clairement. « Les différents groupes d'insurgés renforcent leur coopération dans le but d'ouvrir le maximum de fronts à la fois face aux loyalistes », reconnaissent aussi bien des experts militaires indépendants que des officiers syriens. « Nous devons affronter de nombreux fronts en même temps, avoue un proche de Bachar el-Assad. Les rebelles ont construit des tunnels, ils fortifient leurs positions et en minent d'autres. Dans ces conditions, ajouter-il, récupérer du terrain s'avère difficile. »

Si les premières frappes russes ont désorganisé les lignes d'approvisionnements, forçant les rebelles à reculer, ceux-ci, équipés de missiles antichars Tow et vraisemblablement aidés par des conseillers militaires saoudiens ou qatariens depuis leur base arrière turque, se sont regroupés pour multiplier les attaques contre les loyalistes et leurs alliés chiïtes du Hezbollah libanais et iraniens, aussi bien dans les régions de Homs et Hama qu'à l'ouest de Lattaquié et au sud d'Alep, la grande ville du nord de la Syrie. « Les insurgés bénéficient également d'images satellitaires », selon un ancien responsable syrien en exil.

Ce n'est pas un hasard si dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie, où les frappes russes sont les plus nombreuses, les djihadistes d'al-Nosra, la branche locale d'al-Qaïda, les salafistes d'Ahrar al-Cham et une poignée de modérés issus de brigades de l'Armée syrienne libre, ont réagi à l'offensive russe par une coopération accrue. « Ils avaient

déjà un avantage en étant mieux organisés qu'ailleurs en Syrie », décrypte pour Le

« Même si leurs émirs se disputent sur la charia, sur le terrain, leurs combattants luttent ensemble car ils ont un ennemi commun : les Russes et leurs alliés »

UN EXPERT

Figaro un expert militaire qui rappelle que sous l'influence de leurs sponsors qatariens, saoudiens et turcs, ces factions se sont regroupées au printemps dans l'Armée de la conquête. Ce rassemblement leur permit alors de conquérir les villes d'Idlib et Jisr al-Choughour, menaçant ainsi la côte méditerranéenne, le bastion du régime.

Aujourd'hui, rappelle l'expert, « ces groupes continuent de se diviser sur des points théologiques. Le plus radical d'entre eux Jound al-Aqsa a récemment dénoncé Ahrar al-Cham, qui se dit prêt, sous la pression du Qatar, à parler aux Occidentaux. Mais même si leurs émirs se disputent sur la charia, sur le terrain, leurs combattants luttent ensemble car ils ont un ennemi commun : les Russes et leurs alliés syriens et chiïtes iraniens ou irakiens. »

Pour casser cette « dynamique » de regroupement, l'armée syrienne se doit de reprendre rapidement une ou deux positions stratégiques dans le nord-ouest du pays. « Reconquérir une ville comme Jisr al-Choughour ou Ariha lui permettrait de s'établir dans les régions rurales de Hama et au nord de Lattaquié, pour y déployer ses troupes et avancer plus au nord », observe le spécialiste militaire.

Mais en lieu et place d'une reconquête,

ce sont au contraire les rebelles qui ont étendu leur bataille près d'Alep. Et là encore, malgré de divergences, les insurgés ont coopéré pour s'emparer la semaine dernière d'une portion de l'autoroute Alep-Hama vers Khanasser, un sérieux revers pour l'armée qui voit sa seule route d'approvisionnement vers Alep coupée.

« Or depuis le début du conflit, le maintien des routes d'approvisionnement a été la priorité numéro un de l'armée syrienne », relève l'expert.

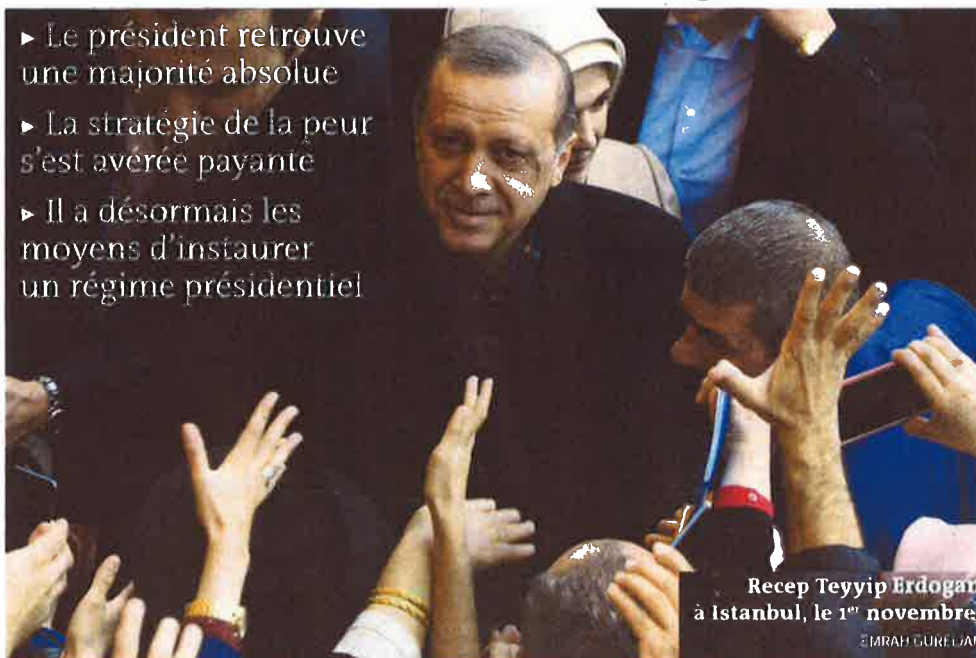
Autour de Khanasser, ce sont les frères ennemis djihadistes Daech et al-Nosra qui ont coopéré. « Daech et al-Nosra avaient chacun des positions de part et d'autre de l'autoroute, note le spécialiste militaire. Ce n'est pas par hasard s'ils se sont retrouvés au même barrage contre l'armée. Ils ont coordonné leurs opérations ». Et dimanche, Daech a encore ouvert un autre front, plus au sud en s'emparant de la ville de Mahin, entre Homs et Palmyre.

Les rebelles exploitent le manque de ressources humaines dont souffrent les loyalistes. « Comme en Irak avec les bombardements de la coalition internationale anti-Daech, sans forces au sol très organisées, les résultats ne suivent pas », analyse un diplomate arabe à Damas. Or malgré l'arrivée de renforts chiïtes irakiens ou iraniens, ces troupes au sol manquent toujours à l'appel. « Les Russes peuvent bombarder cinq fronts, mais l'armée syrienne et ses alliés peuvent-ils soutenir cette offensive ? Non, ils n'ont pas assez d'hommes pour tenir les positions gagnées », anticipe le diplomate. D'où l'objectif de plus en plus clair des Russes : une opération militaire courte qui doit lancer une transition politique. Dans les semaines à venir, chacun s'attend donc à une intensification de leurs bombardements. ■

L'AKP retrouve la majorité absolue au Parlement turc

La stratégie de la tension a payé : déjouant les pronostics, les partisans d'Erdogan remportent une nette victoire aux élections législatives

- ▶ Le président retrouve une majorité absolue
- ▶ La stratégie de la peur s'est avérée payante
- ▶ Il a désormais les moyens d'instaurer un régime présidentiel



Recep Teyyip Erdogan à Istanbul, le 1^{er} novembre.

ISTANBUL - correspondante

Contre toute attente, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur) a remporté les élections législatives de dimanche 1^{er} novembre en Turquie, regagnant la majorité parlementaire perdue lors du précédent scrutin du 7 juin. Les principaux instituts de sondage, prompts à prédire à l'AKP un score médiocre (entre 37 % et 43 %) se sont fourvoyés.

Gratifiée de 49,3 % des suffrages, la formation du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan enverra 316 députés au Parlement (sur 550), assez pour gouverner seule. Trop peu, en revanche, pour modifier la Constitution dans le sens du régime présidentiel fort voulu par le chef de l'Etat.

Ce résultat est un triomphe pour M. Erdogan, dont le parti récupère, en un tournemain, les 3 millions de voix qui lui avaient échappé en juin. « Aujourd'hui est un jour de victoire pour la démocratie », a déclaré le premier ministre sortant et chef de l'AKP, Ahmet Davutoglu, depuis sa ville natale de Konya au centre de l'Anatolie, où il s'est recueilli sur le tombeau du poète soufi Jalal Ud Din Rumi (1207-1273), adepte de la tolérance. « Aujourd'hui, il n'y a pas de perdants, que des gagnants », a-t-il précisé à l'adresse de ses rivaux.

Selon des résultats quasiment définitifs, le Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, social-démocrate) arrive en deuxième position avec 25,4 % des voix, un résultat semblable à celui de juin (25 %). Les deux grands perdants du scrutin sont le Parti de l'action nationaliste (MHP, droite nationaliste) et le parti de la Démocratie des peuples (HDP, gauche prokurde) qui cèdent respectivement 4 et 3 points par rapport à leur score de juin. Doté de 10,4 % des suffrages, le HDP a franchi in extremis le seuil nécessaire pour être représenté au parlement avec 59 députés.

« Election ni équitable ni juste » Son score a été inférieur à celui de juin dans toutes les villes du sud-est à majorité kurde, à l'exception d'une seule ville, Sirnak. Dénonçant « une élection ni équi-

table ni juste », le coprésident du parti prokurde Selahattin Demirtas a rappelé qu'il avait préféré renoncer aux rassemblements électoraux après le double attentat suicide perpétré contre des manifestants pacifiques, dont beaucoup de militants du HDP, à Ankara le 10 octobre, qui a fait 102 morts.

Alors que la campagne électorale était inexistante dans la rue, l'AKP a tiré parti de sa position au pouvoir en multipliant les apparitions à la télévision. Rien qu'en octobre, M. Erdogan a bénéficié de vingt-neuf heures de temps d'antenne sur la chaîne TRT, et de trente heures pour son parti, contre cinq heures pour le CHP, une heure et dix minutes pour le MHP, dix-huit minutes pour le HDP.

Entre le 7 juin et le 1^{er} novembre, le HDP a perdu un million de voix, celles des conservateurs. Les rigoristes religieux et les chefs de clans, qui s'étaient laissés séduire par le discours novateur et pacifiste du HDP en juin, ont décidé, cinq mois plus tard, de revenir vers l'AKP, pour lequel ils avaient toujours voté par le passé.

La reprise des affrontements entre les séparatistes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit en Turquie) et les forces turques n'est sans doute pas étrangère à ce choix. En revendiquant l'assassinat de deux policiers turcs à Ceylanpinar (frontière turco-syrienne), le 22 juillet, le PKK a mis le feu aux poudres. Au moment où le HDP gagnait en légitimité, fort de son bon score (13 %) aux législatives de juin, la rébellion kurde tombait dans le piège tendu par l'AKP, celui du recours à la violence. La rhétorique du tandem au pouvoir – le président Erdogan et son premier ministre, Ahmet Davutoglu –, prompt à présenter le HDP comme une succursale du PKK, a fait le reste.

Discours de menace

Deuxième bon point pour M. Erdogan : la chasse lancée sur les terres des nationalistes du MHP s'est révélée payante. En déclarant « la guerre jusqu'au bout » contre les rebelles kurdes, en bombardant leurs positions en Turquie et dans le nord de l'Irak, le président turc s'est acquis la sympathie de la droite nationaliste, farouchement opposée à toute concession envers la minorité kurde. Son discours de chef à poigne, capable de mener une guerre « synchronisée » contre l'organisation Etat islamique (EI) et

L'AKP enverra 316 députés au Parlement, trop peu pour modifier la Constitution dans le sens d'un régime présidentiel fort

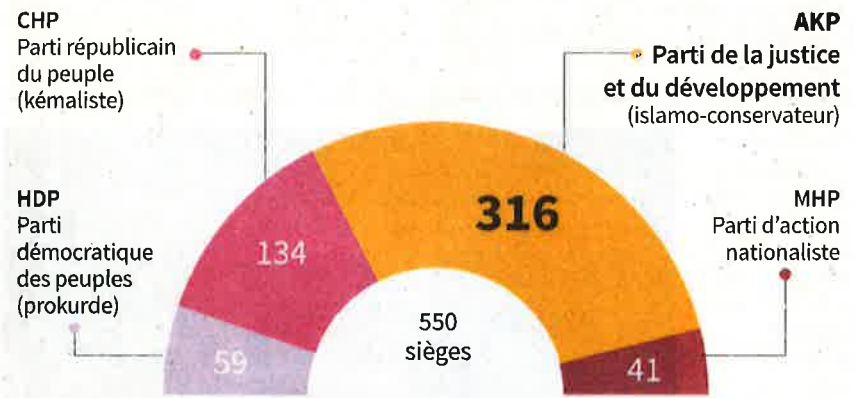
En déclarant « la guerre jusqu'au bout » contre les rebelles kurdes, en les bombardant en Turquie et en Irak, Erdogan s'est acquis la sympathie de la droite nationaliste

contre le PKK, a flatté l'imaginaire de la droite nationaliste.

Enfin, le retour en grâce des islamoc conservateurs prouve que les discours de menace distillés par le président et son premier ministre ont été compris. Après l'attentat de Daglica perpétré le 6 septembre par le PKK contre un convoi de soldats turcs (16 morts), les locaux du quotidien *Hürriyet* ont été attaqués à deux reprises par une foule déchaînée, emmenée par le député de l'AKP Abdurrahim Boynukalin. La foule reprochait au journal d'avoir rapporté que Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait déclaré : « Ça ne se serait pas passé ainsi si vous m'aviez donné 400 députés. »

Entre le 8 et le 9 septembre, des équipées punitives ont eu lieu de nuit dans plusieurs villes de Turquie contre les bureaux du HDP. Dans la foulée, des centai-

RÉSULTATS DES ÉLECTIONS LÉGISLATIVES TURQUES DU 1^{er} NOVEMBRE 2015 EN NOMBRE DE SIÈGES



SOURCE : LE MONDE

nes de commerces tenus par des Kurdes ont été ravagés, parfois même incendiés. Dans le quartier stambouliote de Besiktas, des manifestants scandaient : « Nous ne voulons pas d'opérations militaires [contre les rebelles du PKK], nous voulons des massacres. »

Récemment, lors d'une tournée électorale à Van (Est), le premier ministre, Ahmet Davutoglu, a mis en garde contre « le retour des Renault 12 blanches », le type de voitures utilisées par les escadrons de

la mort à la fin des années 1990 pour enlever et faire disparaître les Kurdes soupçonnés de sympathies envers le PKK. « Les forces du mal savent que si l'AKP faiblit, les bandes terroristes regagneront en puissance, et le processus de règlement du problème kurde va se terminer. Et les crimes non élucidés recommenceront... », a-t-il menacé. Son message a été entendu. ■

MARIE JÉGO

ERDOGAN : LA VICTOIRE, MAIS POUR QUOI FAIRE ?

ÉDITORIAL **M**

Recep Tayyip Erdogan empoche un beau succès personnel. Le président turc voulait continuer à gouverner son pays en autocrate plus ou moins éclairé. Il en a, de nouveau, les moyens. Sa formation islamoc conservatrice, l'AKP, a très nettement remporté les élections législatives du dimanche 1^{er} novembre. Elle obtient la majorité au Parlement et permettra à M. Erdogan de rester le maître d'une Turquie qu'il dirige de façon de plus en plus autoritaire – et, bien souvent, inquiétante. Ce résultat va peser lourd sur l'évolution de la guerre

en Syrie, sur une crise des réfugiés qui s'installe dans la durée et, enfin, sur les relations de ce pays membre de l'OTAN avec ses partenaires européens, au moment précis où ils ont plus que jamais besoin de la Turquie.

Elu président en 2014, M. Erdogan n'était pas satisfait du résultat des dernières élections générales, en juin. Pour la première fois depuis 2002, l'AKP avait perdu la majorité absolue. Elle était condamnée à gouverner en coalition. Le président s'y est refusé. Il a convoqué un nouveau scrutin et, contrairement à la lettre de la Constitution, mené lui-même une campagne conduite d'un bout à l'autre sur un seul registre : la stratégie de la tension.

La guerre avec les autonomistes armés du PKK kurde – organisation considérée comme terroriste par l'UE et les Etats-Unis – a été relancée avec l'intention de séduire une partie de l'électorat de la droite ultranationaliste. Les militants de l'AKP ont vandalisé plusieurs centaines de permanences d'une formation kurde modérée (le HDP, le Parti démocratique du peuple), qui avait réalisé une percée spectaculaire en juin. Plus grave, des rassemblements du HDP ont été la cible de deux attentats, qui ont fait plus d'une centaine de morts, en général attribués à des cellules djihadistes.

Le président a donné le ton en qualifiant ses adversaires de traîtres ou de terroristes.

Sa stratégie a payé. Dans ce climat de peur, les électeurs turcs – y compris parmi les Kurdes – ont voté pour la stabilité. Avec un peu plus de 49 % des voix, l'AKP retrouve la majorité absolue (316 sièges sur 550). Qu'il réussisse ou non à faire changer la Constitution – passer d'un système parlementaire à un régime présidentiel –, M. Erdogan a les moyens de poursuivre une dérive amorcée il y a ou trois ou quatre ans : l'exercice d'un pouvoir de plus en plus personnel. Pour lui, la démocratie se résume aux élections : le vainqueur a le droit de mettre au pas tous les contre-pouvoirs, qu'il s'agisse des élus, de la justice ou de la presse – tous intimidés, malmenés, voire persécutés.

Le patron de l'AKP se retrouve à la tête d'un pays de 75 millions d'habitants qu'il a contribué à polariser chaque jour davantage et dont la moitié de la population lui est farouchement opposée : laïcs contre re-

ligieux, Turcs contre Kurdes, sunnites contre alévites, élites urbanisées contre conservateurs du plateau anatolien. Ce paysage politique fragmenté est encore fragilisé par une situation économique des plus médiocres et par un environnement extérieur dominé par la guerre en Syrie.

Loin d'être le pôle de stabilité qu'elle a pu être, durant les deux premiers mandats de l'AKP, la Turquie d'Erdogan présente le profil d'un pays largement déstabilisé sous l'effet cumulé des choix politiques de son président et du chaos proche-oriental. Obnu-

bilée par la question kurde, sera-t-elle un partenaire sérieux dans la lutte contre l'Etat islamique? Volontiers irascible, et parfois imprévisible, M. Erdogan peut-il contribuer à la recherche d'une issue politique en Syrie? Rien n'est moins sûr.

L'UE est la première concernée. Elle a besoin de la Turquie pour freiner, voire enrayer l'exode des réfugiés de Syrie. Plus de deux millions d'entre eux ont été généreusement accueillis par les Turcs. Les Européens sont prêts à toutes les concessions pour qu'Ankara continue à les héberger et contribue à empêcher une migration sauvage qui s'est encore traduite, ces derniers jours, par des dizaines de noyades.

M. Erdogan est en position de force. Mais jusqu'où faut-il lui céder, s'il s'obstine à diriger la Turquie en autocrate aussi agressif à l'intérieur qu'à l'extérieur? ■



la Croix

mardi 3 novembre 2015

Ankara, partenaire incontournable des Européens

► Bruxelles compte sur la coopération d'Ankara pour endiguer l'afflux de demandeurs d'asile.

► La large victoire du parti de Recep Tayyip Erdogan pourrait compliquer la donne.

BRUXELLES

De notre correspondante

Avec réserve et sobriété, l'Union européenne a réagi aux résultats des élections législatives en Turquie. L'UE « va travailler avec le futur gouvernement (...) afin de continuer à améliorer (leur) coopération dans tous les domaines », ont fait savoir la chef de la diplomatie européenne Federica Mogherini et le commissaire à l'élargissement Johannes Hahn dans un bref communiqué, ajoutant attendre les premières conclusions des observateurs internationaux.

La victoire du parti du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan créerait-elle un certain inconfort à Bruxelles, dont les relations avec Ankara sont aussi cruciales que tendues? « La stabilité en Turquie devrait en sortir renforcée, ce qui est important pour l'Europe, analyse Sinan Ülgen, chercheur au centre de réflexion Carnegie Europe. Mais c'est un feu vert à la politique d'Erdogan, qui pourrait devenir un partenaire plus difficile. La présence massive de réfugiés sur le sol turc ne l'a pas desservi, il n'a donc aucune raison d'assouplir sa position dans les négociations avec Bruxelles. »

« Certains pays européens sont très réservés en raison de la détérioration de l'État de droit en Turquie. »

L'UE entend conclure un « plan d'action » avec la Turquie pour endiguer l'afflux de demandeurs d'asile. Bruxelles veut qu'Ankara renforce la surveillance de ses frontières, ouvre son marché du travail aux Syriens présents sur son territoire et réadmette les demandeurs d'asile déboutés par les Européens. En échange, l'UE devrait débloquer une aide de trois milliards d'euros, mais aussi libéraliser le régime des visas pour les citoyens turcs voyageant dans l'UE et relancer les négociations d'adhésion, ouvertes en 2005.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan a cherché à faire monter les enchères, ces dernières semaines, tandis que de nombreux responsables européens, dont la chancelière allemande Angela Merkel, se sont rendus en Turquie. « Au pouvoir de façon plus confortable, Erdogan pourrait réaliser que la crise migratoire pose à la Turquie et à l'UE des défis similaires et qu'il est temps de la traiter comme une responsabilité internationale commune », veut croire Marc Pierini, ancien ambassadeur de l'UE en Turquie. « Mais l'Europe s'est engagée dans un marchandage douteux avec

Ankara. Il n'est pas certain que cette stratégie soit porteuse. Certains pays européens sont très réservés en raison de la détérioration de l'État de droit dans le pays. »

En privé, des responsables européens reconnaissent récemment qu'un gouvernement de coalition était souhaitable pour freiner les velléités autoritaires du président Erdogan. La semaine dernière, l'UE avait fait part de sa « préoccupation » après la descente de police dans deux chaînes de télévision proches de l'opposition, à Istanbul. Selon l'agence de presse Reuters, un rapport de la Commission européenne, dont la publication aurait été différée pour ne pas contrarier le président turc à la veille des élections législatives, accuse Ankara de mépriser l'État de droit, la liberté d'expression et l'indépendance de la justice.

« Comme tout pays qui négocie son adhésion (à l'UE), la Turquie doit s'assurer qu'elle respecte les droits de l'homme, y compris la liberté d'expression », avait affirmé une porte-parole de la Commission. Mais contester Erdogan « ne mènerait à rien en ce moment », estimait de son côté le chef de l'exécutif européen Jean-Claude Juncker, soulignant qu'il était l'interlocuteur incontournable en Turquie.

CAMILLE LE TALLEC

Ruling party in Turkey regains majority

ISTANBUL

Result assures comeback for Erdogan after he took a hard line against Kurds

BY TIM ARANGO
AND CEYLAN YEGINSU

The Islamist party of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Sunday regained its majority in Parliament in a snap election that represented a stunning electoral comeback, and ensured another period of single-party government in Turkey and the continued political dominance of Mr. Erdogan.

The margin of victory was not enough to secure Mr. Erdogan's long-held ambition of establishing an executive presidency. With his party in firm power, however, the result all but guaranteed that Mr. Erdogan would be able to maintain his position as the country's pre-eminent political figure while pushing the boundaries of the constitutional limits of the presidency, a largely ceremonial position.

With more than 95 percent of the votes counted, according to state broadcaster TRT, the Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P., won 49.4 percent of the popular vote, which would give the party a solid majority of the 316 seats in Parliament.

The result represented a significant victory for Mr. Erdogan, whose party has now won four national elections, beginning in 2002, and a spectacular upset given that most polls had predicted a re-



EMRAH GUREL/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Mr. Erdogan's harder line toward Kurdish militants appeared to be validated.

sult similar to June's national election, which for the first time in more than a decade had denied Mr. Erdogan's party a parliamentary majority. In that election, the A.K.P. received about 41 percent of the vote.

Sunday's victory, at the same time, appeared to validate Mr. Erdogan's electoral strategy of turning more nationalist, and taking a harder line with Kurdish militants in the southeast, where a long-running war has resumed



HUSSEIN MALLA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan meeting in Istanbul on Sunday with supporters of his Justice and Development Party, which won 49.4 percent of the popular vote.

in recent months. Much of the party's gains seemed to come at the expense of the far-right nationalist party, as voters switched to the A.K.P.

"The gamble has seemed to work," said Suat Kiniklioglu, the executive director of the Center for Strategic Communication, a research organization in Ankara, the capital. Mr. Kiniklioglu, a former lawmaker in Mr. Erdogan's party who has become a sharp critic of his policies, said, "It's a huge success for the A.K.P."

Nigar Goksel, the Turkey analyst for the International Crisis Group, said the voting reflected "the yearning for stability and the end to this limbo."

In a one-word tweet, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who led the campaign for the A.K.P., wrote, "Elhamdullillah," or Arabic for "praise be to God."

As Mr. Davutoglu on Sunday departed his hometown, Konya, for Ankara, where he was planning a victory speech, he told a crowd of supporters: "This is the victory of our nation. May God be pleased with you for siding with us at the most difficult times."

The election, a reprise of June's vote, which failed to produce a coalition government after weeks of talks, came after six months of violence and political instability.

The results may return the country to single-party rule, and thus achieve a measure of stability by foreclosing the possibility of a fractious coalition. This would be unlikely, though, to unite what has become a deeply polarized country, with roughly half of the population op-

posed to Mr. Erdogan and his party.

Critics say Mr. Erdogan's divisive rhetoric, by denigrating opponents as terrorists or traitors, helped divide Turkey. And a government crackdown on dissent before the vote, with angry mobs attacking newspaper offices and, just days before the election, a police raid on a media conglomerate opposed to the government, raised concerns in the international community about Turkey's commitment to democracy.

The vote, though it was close, also affirmed the political rise of Turkey's long-oppressed Kurds: Once again, Peoples' Republic Party, or H.D.P., surpassed a 10 percent legal threshold to enter Parliament. But the H.D.P. saw its share of the vote decline, from about 13 percent in June to just a little over 10 percent on Sunday, as some religious Kurds seemed to switch to the A.K.P.

But the celebrations this time were tempered, partly because of the loss of votes and partly by the continuing war between the Turkish state and the militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K. Officials at the H.D.P. said there would be no celebrations, in honor of the more than 100 people, mostly Kurds, who were killed last month in a bombing attack in Ankara.

On Sunday in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish-majority city in Turkey, there were street protests as Kurds angry about the vote losses clashed with the police, who fired tear gas at the crowd, Reuters reported.

In recent months, Turks have felt whipsawed as their country has descended into political turmoil and vio-

lence, resembling the chaotic countries of the Middle East more than the model of Islamic democracy in which many Turks thought their country to be.

The decades-long war with Kurdish militants in the southeast resumed, killing hundreds. A once-booming economy, perhaps Mr. Erdogan's signature accomplishment, faltered, as did the Turkish lira, as investors fretted over the country's future.

In seeking a comeback at the polls, Mr. Erdogan, who as president is supposed to be separate from partisan politics, and Mr. Davutoglu, the official head of the party, pushed a simple message: invoking fears of the 1990s, a decade defined by shaky coalition governments and violence, they said a vote for them was a vote for stability.

Casting his vote Sunday in Uskudar, a conservative district on the Asian side of Istanbul where he owns a home, Mr. Erdogan said, "I hope our nation makes its choice for stability. We must all respect the result of the national will."

For Mr. Erdogan's core constituency of religious conservatives, and apparently many more this time around at polls, the message resonated.

"I will vote for the A.K.P. because in this environment of chaos we need a strong government," Bertan Aydin, a 28-year-old student and taxi driver in Istanbul, said just before voting on Sunday. "Coalition governments don't work. They will only drag us backwards."

Voter turnout was high, more than 85 percent, despite election day coming at the end of a four-day holiday wrapped around Turkey's Republic Day, which raised worries that many Turks would go on vacations, depressing turnout.

While the election was hailed as historic by many analysts, it never held the possibility of a decisive transfer of power, as Mr. Erdogan's term as president does not expire until 2019 and it was a certainty that his party would still win the largest share of votes. Rather, the many opponents of the A.K.P. — roughly 60 percent of the country voted against the party in June — hoped the outcome would result in power sharing among Turkey's political parties and reduced power for Mr. Erdogan and his party.

Instead, Sunday's vote secured the power of Mr. Erdogan and the A.K.P. for many more years, and those that were hoping to see the beginning of the end of an era were left stunned.

The opposition to Mr. Erdogan, who in his early years in power counted on the support of many liberals, found its voice in widespread street protests in 2013. A corruption scandal involving many in his inner circle erupted later that year, and many felt they were witnessing the slow decline of the A.K.P.'s power, a notion validated by the June election.

Now, though, that trajectory has been emphatically interrupted.

"It seems that Erdogan's tactics of war and chaos have worked," said Can Yuksel, an activist who joined protests two years ago. "It's disappointing because this result comes at the expense of freedom, rule of law and democracy.

Opinion

ERDOGAN'S SCARE TACTICS PAY OFF

After fueling turmoil, Turkey's president achieved an electoral victory by promising voters more stability.

Defying predictions, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, the A.K.P., won a conclusive victory in Sunday's national elections in Turkey, freeing it from the need to form a coalition to stay in power. Mr. Erdogan proclaimed it a vote "in favor of stability," and that is what it apparently was — though it was Mr. Erdogan who churned up much of the turmoil that frightened voters back into his camp.

Though the A.K.P. won about half the vote, it did not gain enough seats in Parliament to enable Mr. Erdogan to change the Constitution to create the strong executive presidency he has sought since he assumed the office last year. But the A.K.P. majority will mean a continuation of 12 years of one-party rule, and most probably a continuation of Mr. Erdogan's increasingly authoritarian domination of the Turkish government.

On the eve of the election, the police raided the last television channels critical of Mr. Erdogan, which had belonged to an Islamic movement that had gone from support of Mr. Erdogan to fierce opposition.

In the early years of A.K.P. rule, Mr. Erdogan was hailed in Europe and the United States as the face of moderate Islam. Turkey's economy bloomed, human rights improved as Turkey sought membership in the European Union, and Mr. Erdogan achieved a cease-fire with Kurdish rebels. But much of that has been undermined, and Mr. Erdogan has come under increasing criticism in the West, as he has turned steadily toward authoritarian rule, assisted by his ally and prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu.

The worst outcome of the election would be for Mr. Erdogan to use the results to justify further intimidation of critics as he seeks to make the presidency more powerful. Even if he does not achieve that goal, he will continue wielding power from behind the scenes, and there are fears that the pro-Kurdish coalition and others who campaigned against him will become targets of reprisals.

In a chilling taste of what may be coming, on the day after the election Turkish police officers raided a weekly magazine charged with "insulting the Turkish president." The editor was detained and distribution was halted.

Mr. Erdogan was quick to take aim at his foreign critics. The vote, he said, "should be respected by the whole world, but I have not seen such maturity." It should be respected; voters have put their trust in him to restore stability. The question now is whether he will use his office to ensure the survival of democracy.

Senior cleric in Iraq wades into politics to offset Iran

NAJAF, IRAQ

Shiite grand ayatollah acts to bolster the state, raising fears of theocracy

BY TIM ARANGO

In the struggle to transform Iraq from a dictatorship to a democracy after the American-led invasion in 2003, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the highest spiritual authority for many of the world's Shiite Muslims, stood out as a singular champion of the effort to hold direct elections and ensure that politicians, and not clerics, rule the country.

In doing so, he shaped the relationship between religion and politics here as distinctly different from the Shiite theocracy in Iran, where another ayatollah wields supreme power.

Now, in the face of concerns over the growing power of Iran and its militia proxies amid a sectarian war in Iraq, Ayatollah Sistani has made one of his biggest interventions in Iraqi politics, to try to strengthen the Iraqi state, experts say.

For more than two months he has issued instructions, through a representative during Friday sermons, to Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi to hold corrupt officials accountable, to reform the judiciary and to support the national security forces instead of Iran-backed militias. Ayatollah Sistani's son, meanwhile, has kept up direct phone communication to the prime minister's office, pushing for quicker reforms.

This latest intervention has provoked a new round of questioning by political leaders and diplomats in Baghdad: As Ayatollah Sistani has stepped in, once again, in the name of helping a country plagued by crisis, is he actually creating a fundamental shift toward clerical rule?

"Many people are surprised, very surprised, when they see Sistani so involved in politics," said a senior Shiite leader in Baghdad who spoke on the condition of anonymity because he did not want to be seen as critical of Ayatollah Sistani. Referring to Iran's Supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and its revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, he said, "In reality, in practice, he is doing what Khamenei does, and what Khomeini did."

Aged 85, Ayatollah Sistani is frail, has



EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

Grand Ayatollah Sistani seeks to reform Iraq's judiciary and supports the national security forces instead of Iran-backed militias.

often traveled to London for medical treatment, and is rarely seen in public. Still, he frequently greets visitors in his bare-bones office in a rented building in Najaf that is down a narrow alleyway not far from the Imam Ali Shrine, one of the holiest sites in Shiite Islam.

As the supreme Shiite spiritual leader — whose religious authority surpasses that of Iran's supreme leader — he instructs the pious in how to pray, how to wash and what to eat. Through his website, he recently advocated the use of body armor by fighters battling the Islamic State, prohibited women from using cellphones to contact strange men, and advised that men should not have goatees.

Despite his undeniably powerful influence, his public role in Iraq has often been described as "fatherly": guiding politics from on high, intervening at difficult times, but otherwise staying aloof from the fray of governing.

This approach, known in Najaf as the "quietist" tradition, has distinguished Iraq from Iran, and Najaf from Iran's holy city of Shiite scholarship, Qom. It is part of a historical rivalry between the two ancient cities of Shiite scholarship, one that an official in Najaf described as being "like Oxford and Harvard."

But amid the current crisis gripping Iraq, from the war with the Islamic State to government corruption and the threat Iranian-backed militias and their political leaders pose to Mr. Abadi and the Iraqi state, Ayatollah Sistani has made a new calculation.

"In recent months he felt a great danger on the political and security scene," said Ali Alaq, a Shiite lawmaker in Baghdad. "He felt a patriotic duty to act," he continued, and using an honorific for the ayatollah added: "Sayyid Sistani represents the conscience of the Iraqi people."

So far, though, Ayatollah Sistani's push for reforms, while embraced by Mr. Abadi, has borne little fruit, underscoring the opposition among the prime minister's rivals and the depths of corruption and dysfunction. Mr. Abadi has reduced the salaries of lawmakers and the number of their bodyguards, and

has eliminated several high-level positions, including deputy prime minister and vice president, but there has been no serious effort yet on corruption or reforming the judiciary.

Last year, Ayatollah Sistani issued a widely heeded call for young men to take up arms against the Islamic State. But that fatwa resulted in a constellation of new militias, and the growth of existing ones that are controlled by Iran rather than the Iraqi state. The influence of Iran and its militias in Iraq has grown as they have become essential to the fight against the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Ayatollah Sistani has become increasingly concerned that those militias are a threat to the unity of Iraq, experts say, in part because many of the militia leaders and their affiliated politicians have challenged efforts by the government to reconcile with Iraq's minority Sunnis, a priority for the clerical leader.

Jawad al-Khoei, the secretary general of his family's Khoei Institute, a religious institute and charity in Najaf, said of Ayatollah Sistani: "This time it is very serious. He is an old man now and maybe he considers that this will be the last thing he does in his life."

Analysts say that despite his concerns, Ayatollah Sistani is not opposed to an Iranian role in Iraq.

"He believes Iran's presence is necessary in Iraq but it needs to take wiser policies," said Mehdi Khalaji, a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy who has studied at the seminary in Qom and has written extensively about Ayatollah Sistani.

Mr. Khalaji said that when it comes to Iran, Ayatollah Sistani is primarily worried about tensions between Sunnis and Shiites and Iran's role in worsening sectarian divisions in Iraq.

But even as he moves to diminish Iranian influence in Iraq, he is mimicking the ways of the Iranian system.

One diplomat in Baghdad, referring to the Shiite holy cities from where instructions to politicians are given at Friday sermons, noted that in much the same way as Iranian political leaders look to Qom for guidance, "Every Friday we look to Karbala and Najaf."

Here in Najaf, where Ayatollah Sistani, three other senior ayatollahs and countless clerics collectively represent the Shiite religious establishment, known as the marjaiya, there is a palpable sense of regret for lending crucial support for Iraq's Shiite political class in the years after the 2003 invasion.

The marjaiya's support over the years lent crucial legitimacy to the Shiite religious parties that came to dominate politics and that are now the source of great anger for the masses that began protesting against Iraq's government in August.

"We are all suffering from the past," said Naseer Kashif al-Gita, a cleric in Najaf. "We need to force the politicians to implement things. The role of the

marjaiya is to be the protector of the rights of society.”

Mr. Gita is among the clerics who support Ayatollah Sistani’s intervention in politics, and, like some others here, advocates an even more forceful role.

“If it were up to me, I would have taken more drastic measures,” he said.

The question, then, is whether Ayatollah Sistani’s prominence in politics will

be lasting — and whether there is a growing desire among the public and political leaders for that increased role.

Joost Hiltermann, the program director for the Middle East and North Africa at the International Crisis Group, recently visited Najaf and wrote in *The New York Review of Books*, “Some members of Iraq’s Shia elite are saying the Iranian approach may provide the

answer for the country’s ills, and criticize Sistani for being insufficiently forceful in his interventions.”

Yet, Ayatollah Sistani’s son, Muhamed Ridha Ali, in a brief interview here, suggested that the intervention in politics is not designed to be permanent.

“Maybe after one year he will be silent,” he said.

International *New York Times* TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2015

U.S. alliance with Syrian rebels exists in name only

EIN EISSA, SYRIA

Predominance of Kurds, not Arabs, could limit impact on ISIS battle

BY BEN HUBBARD

Sitting near the earthen wall that separates this deserted town from the Islamic State’s front line, an Arab rebel commander bitterly recalled being chased from his Syrian home town by the jihadists. He detailed what he would need to strike their stronghold in the city of Raqqa, about 30 miles south of here: ammunition, radios, heavy weapons and American airstrikes.

At another position nearby, a swaggering Kurdish commander listed his militia’s victories against the Islamic State before acknowledging that he — like many of his fighters — was not Syrian. He was from Iran and unabashed about being another foreign fighter in Syria’s civil war.

“I came to bring democracy, while ISIS came to kill,” said the commander, Gali Cilo. “That is the difference.”

Both men’s fighting groups are part of the latest effort by the United States to create an alliance within Syria to battle the Islamic State after the high-profile failure of a \$500,000 million program to train and arm an effective force.

American officials announced the new alliance last month as the Syrian Democratic Forces, and emphasized that it would add a vital Arab element to the fight against the Islamic State in Syria as operations against the group in Iraq have picked up. President Obama announced plans last week to deploy dozens of Special Operations troops to Syria to support it.

But a week of interviews and frontline visits across northern Syria with many of the forces involved in the alliance made clear that so far it existed in name only and was overwhelmingly Kurdish, not Arab, in nature.

That demographic fact poses a significant challenge as the effort to claw back



A Kurdish position on the eastern bank of the Euphrates River. The United States has struggled to enlist forces to fight the Islamic State, but its new allies are poorly equipped and disorganized.

territory from the Islamic State widens. Gains by Kurdish forces in northern Syria have alarmed Turkey, a vital American ally that considers Kurdish autonomy a national security threat. And a predominantly Kurdish force would sacrifice less to capture ISIS-held towns in mostly Arab areas like Raqqa, the group’s Syrian capital — and could anger residents by doing so.

“The backbone of these forces are the Kurdish groups because of their experience fighting ISIS and their numbers,” said Redur Xelil, a spokesman for the dominant Kurdish force, the Y.P.G. “But we have to be realistic that the Y.P.G. can’t go by itself into Raqqa or people will say, ‘What are you doing there?’”

A newly appointed spokesman for the alliance briefed reporters in Syria beneath a yellow banner bearing its name in Kurdish, Arabic and Assyrian. But the meeting took place inside a Kurdish Y.P.G. militia facility because the alliance does not have its own bases yet, nor flags to put on its cars, nor a defined

command structure, said the spokesman, Talal Sillu.

The combined force is to be commanded by a six-person military council, Mr. Sillu said. But he acknowledged that only one of its members had been named so far — and that was Mr. Sillu himself.

United States officials have said publicly that American aircraft have recently air-dropped 50 tons of ammunition for the group’s Arab members. But officials acknowledged privately that the Arabs did not have the logistics to move it. So, again, the Y.P.G. was called in to help.

An array of smaller groups have allied with the Kurds, including Arab and Turkmen rebels, Christian militias and Bedouin fighters loyal to a sheikh who considered the late Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi a friend.

While these groups hate the Islamic State, most are small and lack significant military power. Indeed, some have been repeatedly routed by the very ji-

hadists the United States now hopes they will defeat.

Some of the forces have cooperated before, but relations are not always smooth. The Kurdish military might in the area means that Kurds set the agenda, and many clearly look down on their Arab partners.

For their part, Arab rebel fighters interviewed in Syria say they worry about their partners' close ties to the Kurdistan Worker's Party, or P.K.K., which the United States, Turkey and others list as a terrorist organization.

They also distrust the motives of the thousands of Kurdish fighters who have come to Syria from Iraq, Turkey and Iran.

"ISIS brings foreign fighters for an Islamic State, while they bring foreign fighters for a Kurdish project," said one Arab commander with the Raqqa Revolutionaries Brigade who goes by the name Abu Hamza. "But if that is how they think, they'll fail."

The roots of the Syrian Democratic Forces lie in Syria's northeast corner, a long-neglected region where most of Syria's Kurdish minority lives alongside other ethnic groups in impoverished towns scattered among rolling wheat fields dotted with aging oil wells.

While world attention since the Syria conflict began has focused on fighting between the forces of President Bashar al-Assad, Sunni rebels and the Islamic State, the Kurds have taken advantage of the chaos to carve out an autonomous zone.

Over the past year, the Y.P.G. — the Kurdish abbreviation for the People's Protection Units, the dominant Kurdish force in Syria — has closely coordinated with the United States and its allies. The forces have made significant progress in rolling back the Islamic State in a strip of Kurdish territory along the Turkish border between the Euphrates River and the Iraqi border.

Evidence of Y.P.G. dominance is obvious throughout the area. The group runs ubiquitous checkpoints; photos of its "martyrs" adorn billboards; and its fighters hold most of the more than 280 mile-long frontline with the Islamic State. Parts of it had come to resemble and international border, with deep trenches and high berms running for miles, lined with bright lights to prevent jihadist infiltrators.

The whole line is dotted with heavy sandbagged positions to protect against machine gun and mortar attacks by the jihadists.

A senior American military official said the United States encouraged the Y.P.G. to create an umbrella group that would make more sense to an international audience, and Kurdish leaders decided to call it the Syrian Democratic Forces.

But a subgroup of Arab brigades called the Syrian Arab Coalition was "an American invention," the senior official acknowledged.



Members of the Sanadeed Forces, the Arab militia of the Shammar tribe that has joined the American-backed, mainly Kurdish alliance. "We have the Kurds on one side and ISIS on the other, so who should we choose?" the tribe's leader said.

While the Y.P.G. is believed to have about 40,000 fighters in northern Syria, including thousands of P.K.K. fighters from nearby countries, the Syrian Arab Coalition has only about 5,000, the official said. And about 20 percent of those said they would defend their land but would not go on the offensive against the Islamic State.

"The Y.P.G. is a very effective fighting force and it can do a lot," said Barak Barfi, a research fellow at the New American Foundation who recently who recently spent time with Kurdish units in Syria. He called the Arab groups "a fig leaf for the Y.P.G."

The alliance sought to help the Kurds by dampening fear among Arabs of Kurdish domination, and the United States hoped it would play down its close relationship with the Kurds so as not to alarm Turkey, Mr. Barfi said.

But the alliance itself has internal tensions. "There is no deep rooted alliance between these groups; this is a shifting, tactical alliance," Mr. Barfi said.

The motivations of the Kurds' allies varied. Some lived in Kurdish majority areas, so attached themselves to the dominant power. Others had lost their communities to the Islamic State and hoped that Kurdish military might could help them go home.

"What is important for us is to protect our area, and the security of our children, our homes and our women," said Sheikh Hmeidi Daham al-Jarba, whose Arab tribal militia, the Sanadeed Forces, has joined the alliance. "We have the Kurds on one side and ISIS on the other, so who should we choose?"

Seated in the vast reception hall of his five-story palace, Sheikh Hmeidi outlined the history of his Shammar tribe, whose members are spread across the Middle East and live in a collection of poor farming and herding villages in eastern Syria.

The tribesmen formed an militia in 2011 when rebel groups began attacking their area, and it has since pushed the Islamic State from two of their villages,

he said. The sheikh's son, Bandar, also the force's military commander, said they would consider fighting the Islamic State elsewhere but needed support. Many of his fighters had sold land to buy ammunition, he said.

At a frontline position on the road to Raqqa, Abu Hamza of the Raqqa Revolutionaries Brigade explained his group's long path to its alliance with the Kurds.

His group had formed in Raqqa Province in 2011 to fight Mr. Assad's forces, sometimes alongside Islamist rebels including the Nusra Front, the Syrian affiliate of Al Qaeda. For a while, they even fought against the Kurds.

But early last year, the Islamic State kicked his men out of the city of Raqqa, and he and his men fled to a nearby village. The jihadists soon attacked them there, so they sought refuge with the Kurds.

Four years of fighting had worn them down. Scores of their colleagues had been killed, and the group had to blow up two valuable tanks it had captured from the Syrian government so that the Islamic State would not capture them.

Now, Abu Hamza said, they hoped their alliance with the Y.P.G. would let them get back at the jihadists, and perhaps open a new line of support.

"This is the state of our fighters: trying to fight ISIS with simple means," he said, pointing to a fighter in broken boots, tattered fatigues and a dirty sweatshirt that read "Skateboarding ruined by life."

"We need uniforms, we need ammunition, we need everything," Abu Hamza said.

Eric Schmitt contributed reporting from Washington.

Turquie : en quête de sécurité, les conservateurs kurdes se tournent vers l'AKP

par Charlotte OBERTI / 3 nov. 2015
www.france24.com

En Turquie, le mouvement pro-kurde de Selahattin Demirtas, résolument anti-Erdogan, a vu une partie de son électorat filer dans les rangs de l'AKP ennemi lors des législatives de dimanche. Une situation conjoncturelle, selon des experts.

Au-delà de l'effet de surprise créé par la victoire éclatante de l'AKP lors des législatives de dimanche 1er novembre en Turquie, les résultats des urnes provoquent un autre étonnement : le promoteur Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP) n'a pas transformé l'essai de juin dernier.

Dimanche, le mouvement pro-kurde n'a conservé que 59 sièges au Parlement sur les 80 acquis lors du précédent scrutin législatif. Cette formation codirigée par le charismatique et confiant Selahattin Demirtas a dépassé de justesse la barre fatidique des 10 %, seuil minimal de représentation en Turquie.

S'il sauve les meubles, ce rival du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'a pas permis cette fois-ci de contrecarrer les plans du président turc, lequel a obtenu la majorité absolue comme il espérait le faire en convoquant de nouvelles législatives anticipées.

Le parti pro-kurde de Demirtas, à qui les sondages donnaient jusqu'à 14 % d'intentions de vote durant la campagne, a perdu près d'un million d'électeurs en seulement cinq mois. Ceux-là sont venus gonfler les chiffres de l'AKP. Dans toutes les villes du sud-est à majorité kurde, le score du HDP a été inférieur à celui de juin, à l'exception



© Adem Altan, AFP | Le leader prokurde Selahattin Demirtas

d'une seule ville, Sirnak.

PLUS RELIGIEUX QUE NATIONALISTES

Cette hémorragie qui peut surprendre (le Kurde Selahattin Demirtas est en effet considéré comme un anti-Erdogan et les politiques menées par les deux hommes sont opposées) est le fait des conservateurs. "Parmi les Kurdes, il y a une proportion importante de conservateurs qui votent pour l'AKP", indique Ali Kazancigil, politologue et spécialiste de la Turquie. "Lors de différents scrutins passés, environ 30 % des Kurdes ont voté pour le parti présidentiel", ajoute-t-il. Ces Kurdes conservateurs très religieux sont en accord avec le courant de l'islam politique turc dont est issu Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

D'avantage sensibles aux questions religieuses qu'au nationalisme kurde, ces rigoristes et chefs de clans, comme ils sont décrits dans un article du "Monde" daté de lundi 2 novembre, se sont laissés séduire par le discours novateur et pacifiste de Demirtas en juin.

"Lors des précédentes législatives, Demirtas tenait un discours emprunt de connotations religieuses. Il avait donné des gages de fidélité à cet électorat", explique Samim Akgönül, historien, politologue et enseignant-chercheur à l'université de Strasbourg. Dans les meetings du HDP, on voyait même des drapeaux turcs flotter.

Depuis ce scrutin, tout a cependant changé. Le conflit armé qui oppose depuis 1984 les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) aux forces de sécurité turques a violemment repris cet été dans le sud-est à majorité kurde du pays, et enterré le fragile processus de paix engagé il y a trois ans. Le président Erdogan n'a eu depuis de cesse de décrire le HDP comme la "branche politique du PKK", organisation considérée comme terroriste que les conservateurs kurdes ne soutiennent pas.

LA STABILITÉ DE L'AKP

"Erdogan a relancé la guerre", analyse Ali Kazancigil. "Et cette fois-ci, une partie des Kurdes conservateurs a voté pour Erdogan parce qu'ils veulent la stabilité et en ont assez de cette guerre sur leur terre", estime-t-il, affirmant que le parti islamo-conservateur au pouvoir depuis 2002 est vu comme un mouvement très organisé au niveau national comme régional et discipliné.

De son côté, "Demirtas a davantage développé des arguments ethniques et des idées de gauche", ajoute Samim Akgönül. Pour Ali Kazancigil, le quadragénaire kurde a tout simplement été "désavantagé par la conjoncture".

Suite à l'attentat d'Ankara qui a fait 102 morts lors d'un rassemblement pour la paix le 10 octobre, au plus fort de la campagne, le HDP avait annulé ses rassemblements de masse.

Par ailleurs, "certaines villes à majorité kurde, comme Cizre, ont été sous le siège de l'armée pendant plusieurs jours", commente Samim Akgönül, parlant d'intimidations du pouvoir et de l'armée. À Diyarbakir, la "capitale" kurde, des électeurs ont eux aussi voté sous le regard d'une police lourdement armée. ♦

Turquie: les rebelles du PKK annoncent la fin de leur trêve militaire préélectorale

Istanbul, 5 novembre 2015 (AFP)

LES REBELLES DU PARTI des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) ont annoncé jeudi la fin de la suspension de leurs opérations militaires contre la Turquie, décrétée avant les législatives remportées dimanche par le parti du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

"La période de suspension unilatérale (des opérations militaires) est terminée au regard de la politique de guerre et des attaques de l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement, islamo-conservateur)", écrit le PKK dans une déclaration reproduite par l'agence de presse kurde Firat News.

Le 10 octobre dernier, les rebelles avaient annoncé le début d'une "période d'inactivité" avant les législatives, afin de ne pas "empêcher une élection équitable" le 1er novembre. Ils avaient toutefois précisé qu'ils répondraient à toutes les attaques turques.

Depuis dimanche, l'aviation d'Ankara a déjà mené deux séries de frappes aériennes contre des objectifs du PKK, aussi bien dans le sud-est à majorité

kurde de la Turquie que dans leur bastion des montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

Des affrontements violents ont également opposé ces derniers jours les rebelles aux forces de sécurité turques dans plusieurs villes de Turquie, tuant au moins 2 soldats et quatre militants kurdes. L'état-major turc a pour sa part affirmé jeudi que ses frappes aériennes avaient provoqué la mort de 16 militants du PKK.

M. Erdogan a répété mercredi que les opérations militaires turques se poursuivraient "jusqu'à ce que l'organisation terroriste quitte le sol turc et enterre ses armes".

Après plus de deux ans de cessez-le-feu, les combats ont repris fin juillet entre le PKK et l'armée ou la police turques, faisant de nombreuses victimes. Ils ont fait voler en éclat le fragile processus de paix engagé à l'automne 2012 pour mettre un terme à ce conflit, qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

Lors du scrutin de dimanche, l'AKP a regagné le contrôle exclusif du Parlement, qu'il avait perdu en juin, en totalisant 49,4% des suffrages et 317 sièges de députés, sur 550. ●

A Diyarbakir, « le sentiment de vivre sous occupation étrangère »

REPORTAGE

DIYARBAKIR (TURQUIE) -
envoyé spécial

En provenance des bureaux de vote répartis dans les différents quartiers de la ville, la nouvelle s'était répandue de proche en proche depuis la fin de l'après-midi: le Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), lié au mouvement kurde, n'obtiendrait pas aux élections anticipées qui se sont tenues dimanche 1^{er} novembre un résultat équivalent à celui enregistré en juin. La foule clairsemée qui s'était rassemblée en fin de journée dans les environs de son siège de Diyarbakir, la capitale culturelle et le centre politique des Kurdes de Turquie, a suivi dans la confusion l'annonce progressive des résultats électoraux.

Le rassemblement, qui avait débuté sans enthousiasme dans le bruit des tambours, des pétards et des feux d'artifice, s'est achevé dans la fumée des gaz lacrymogènes et les jets des canons à eau de la police antiémeute. Saluant habituellement les victoires électorales, les coups de feu et rafales d'armes automatiques tirés en l'air par certains résonnaient comme l'expression d'une frustration grandissante à mesure que se confirmait l'échec relatif du parti kurde.

Tandis que les premiers mouvements de foule éloignaient les familles, plusieurs dizaines de jeunes militants plus radicaux se sont lancés dans une brève confrontation avec la police qui n'a guère eu d'écho ailleurs en ville.

Au soir du 1^{er} novembre, Diyarbakir est entrée avec le reste des régions à majorité kurde du pays dans une nouvelle phase d'incertitude. Si le Parti démocratique des peuples est parvenu, avec une marge de 0,7 point, à franchir le

Après trois mois marqués par les scènes de guerre, l'issue du vote apparaissait à beaucoup de Kurdes comme secondaire



"Pas de photos ici, c'est une zone terroriste", lance un membre des forces spéciales de la police postées devant un des lycées qui accueillent les bureaux de vote à Diyarbakir. Emilien URBANO/MYOP POUR "LE MONDE"

seuil de 10 % des suffrages exprimés qui conditionne la représentation au Parlement d'Ankara, il accuse un net recul par rapport à la percée historique enregistrée lors des élections législatives du 7 juin. Le HDP avait alors obtenu un score de 13 %, permettant pour la première fois à un parti prokurde d'entrer en tant que tel au Parlement.

« Etat de choc »

A Diyarbakir, où le résultat du HDP est passé de 79,1 % en juin à 72,7 % et où le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islam-conservateur, au pouvoir) a remporté deux sièges, comme dans la plupart des provinces kurdes, le Parti démocratique des peuples a reculé dans ses propres bastions face à une reconquête, par l'AKP, des votes conservateurs kurdes.

Ce revers, que les dernières enquêtes d'opinion n'avaient pas laissé présager, intervient alors que la reprise, cet été, des affrontements entre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), la branche armée du mouvement kurde, et les forces de sécurité turques a plongé le sud-est du pays dans un climat de violence que beaucoup craignent de voir s'aggraver.

A Sur, quartier populaire du centre historique de Diyarbakir où les murs criblés de balles portent encore la trace des combats qui y ont opposé, du 10 au 12 octobre, des militants issus de la jeunesse locale et des milices urbaines du PKK aux forces de sécurité, la journée électorale de dimanche s'est déroulée dans une atmosphère particulièrement tendue. Le déploiement des forces spéciales de la police dans et à proximité de certains bureaux de vote, qualifié de mesure d'intimidation de la part des responsables du HDP, a été mal perçu par une partie de la population. « J'ai le sentiment de vivre sous occupation étrangère, avait alors confié un électeur. C'est la police de l'AKP qui vient nous intimider. »

Si certains électeurs s'en sont accommodés, leur présence à Sur a pu accentuer le climat de tension également palpable dans d'autres quartiers populaires de la ville où des irrégularités et des pressions exercées sur les assesseurs affiliés à l'AKP par des représentants du mouvement kurde ont été rapportées. Après trois mois marqués par les scènes de guerre et la mort brutale de civils imputées aux forces de sécurité dans plusieurs villes kurdes lors

« Aujourd'hui, je n'ai plus d'espoir, je ne fais confiance ni à l'Etat ni au PKK »

HUSEYIN

habitant de Diyarbakir

des affrontements armés qui les ont opposés aux militants du PKK, l'issue du vote apparaissait à beaucoup comme secondaire au regard de la crainte communément partagée d'une intensification du conflit, une fois le scrutin passé.

Pour les électeurs du HDP, la déception le disputait cependant à l'incrédulité à l'annonce des résultats. « Jamais je n'aurais pu imaginer un tel recul, je suis en état de choc », admet Ali, retraité, venu suivre les résultats au siège du parti prokurde. Si les candidats et les responsables du HDP à Diyarbakir se refusent pour l'instant à toute déclaration sur les résultats, Nazmi Gür, parlementaire HDP et cadre dirigeant du parti, joint par téléphone à Ankara, explique le recul de sa for-

mation politique par l'état de violence qui s'est imposé en Turquie depuis le scrutin de juin et n'exclut pas une nouvelle escalade du conflit : « La stratégie radicale du gouvernement a payé, l'AKP a déclaré la guerre après les élections du 7 juin et a affecté ainsi le comportement de l'électorat. A présent, il y a un risque que le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan estime pouvoir utiliser sa majorité pour faire ce qu'il veut. L'objectif de l'AKP est de détruire totalement le mouvement kurde. »

« Il n'y a plus de question kurde »

Pour les électeurs et militants kurdes de l'AKP à Diyarbakir, le recul du HDP sanctionnera à l'avenir son illégitimité en tant qu'interlocuteur du gouvernement : « Si le gouvernement doit prendre des mesures envers les Kurdes, ce sera de manière unilatérale, nous n'avons plus besoin du HDP », déclare, après l'annonce des résultats, Mehmet Ihsan Aytekin, cadre de la section locale du parti majoritaire à Diyarbakir.

« A partir de ce soir, il n'y a plus de question kurde en Turquie », ajoute le responsable. Bien que les résultats obtenus par le HDP à

l'échelle nationale lui garantissent d'être représenté au Parlement, les militants les plus radicaux estiment que le recul électoral du mouvement kurde, attribué à la « terreur » exercée par le pouvoir turc, doit se traduire par une rupture avec les institutions. C'est cependant la crainte d'un avenir incertain et la perspective d'une paix plus menacée que jamais qui domine.

« Je faisais confiance à l'AKP pour instaurer la paix au Kurdistan de Turquie », se remémore Huseyin. « La politique d'Erdogan envers les Kurdes syriens m'a fait changer

d'avis. Aujourd'hui, je n'ai plus d'espoir, je ne fais confiance ni à l'Etat ni au PKK. Nous voulons simplement vivre en paix, mais je crains que nous nous retrouvions encore coincés entre les deux camps », regrette-t-il tandis que, de la fenêtre du salon où s'est réunie sa famille pour suivre la soirée électorale à la télévision, parvient le fracas des échauffourées entre jeunes militants kurdes et policiers. ■

ALLAN KAVAL

Le Monde

DIMANCHE 1^{ER} - LUNDI 2 NOVEMBRE 2015

A Vienne, le sort d'Assad divise les puissances

Les participants au sommet de vendredi se sont entendus sur plusieurs points, sans masquer leurs désaccords

VIENNE - envoyée spéciale

L'issue politique de la guerre qui fait rage en Syrie depuis plus de quatre ans est encore lointaine. Mais vendredi 30 octobre, dans les salons de l'hôtel Impérial à Vienne, en Autriche, un petit espoir est né de voir un processus débiter. La présence inédite de l'Iran pour échanger avec son rival saoudien et quinze autres pays, ainsi que l'Union européenne (UE) et les Nations unies, a été jugée en soi « positive ». « Il y a des points de désaccord, mais nous avons suffisamment avancé pour que nous nous retrouvions dans la même configuration, dans deux semaines », a commenté le ministre français des affaires étrangères, Laurent Fabius.

Les participants se sont entendus à minima sur plusieurs points : le respect de l'unité de la Syrie, l'intégrité de ses institutions, un cadre pour l'instauration d'un cessez-le-feu, la relance de négociations entre le gouvernement et l'opposition et la tenue de nouvelles élections. Sur l'essentiel, en revanche, le sort du président Bachar Al-Assad, les Etats-Unis, la Russie et l'Iran « se sont mis d'accord pour être en désaccord », a concédé le secrétaire d'Etat américain, John Kerry.

Une semaine après la réunion du 23 octobre entre les Etats-Unis, la Russie, l'Arabie saoudite et la Turquie, M. Kerry est revenu à Vienne avec un projet de commu-

niqué détaillé. Parmi les partenaires occidentaux et proche-orientaux de l'opposition syrienne convoqués vendredi matin avant la plénière par M. Fabius, l'accueil a été plus que réservé. « Les commentaires ont été aimables mais fermes pour dire qu'ils n'acceptent pas n'importe quoi des Russes et surtout des Iraniens », indique un diplomate. L'Arabie saoudite, le Qatar et la Turquie ont argué de l'impossibilité d'imposer à l'opposition un accord qui ne prévoirait pas le départ de M. Assad. Seule inflexion depuis le début de l'intervention russe en Syrie, fin septembre : le départ du président syrien n'est plus requis comme un préalable. « Il faudra à un moment ou à un autre qu'il ne soit plus dans cette position », dit-on côté français.

« Echanges virils »

M. Kerry a eu beau rappeler la fermeté de la position américaine envers le président Assad, beaucoup redoutent que Washington cède. « Comme toujours, les Américains sont prêts à tout lâcher. Ils veulent négocier et convaincre les autres que « ça va marcher » », critique un diplomate. La crainte demeure que Washington et Moscou décident seuls. « Les modalités définies à Vienne sont telles que cela ne sera pas possible », assure-t-on. Un accord est illusoire sans l'aval de l'Iran, qui apporte un soutien direct à Damas, et de l'Arabie saoudite, principal soutien des groupes rebelles. Réunis pour la première fois autour d'une même table à Vienne, Riyad et Téhéran

ont eu des « échanges virils, commente un diplomate. Ils n'ont pas mis leur drapeau dans leur poche, mais c'est bien qu'ils se parlent. »

Pendant sept heures, les participants ont échangé jusqu'à arrêter un communiqué, évasif et succinct, sur des points d'accord. Le vice-ministre iranien des affaires étrangères, Hossein Amir Abdollahian, s'est félicité que Téhéran ait réussi à empêcher l'inclusion d'un calendrier de départ pour Bachar Al-Assad. L'Iran a laissé entendre qu'il accepterait une période de transition politique de six mois suivie d'élections dans les dix-huit mois pour décider de son sort. Dans l'autre camp, on se targue d'un « accord obtenu au forceps » pour confier aux Nations unies, et non à M. Assad, le

Aucune percée n'est escomptée avant « des mois », mais un accord n'est pas jugé insurmontable

soin d'organiser les élections. L'ONU se verra également confier la tâche de définir la liste des organisations terroristes.

Les régimes de Damas et l'opposition syrienne devraient rapidement rejoindre les négociations. Tout à leur ambiguïté, les Russes s'y sont dits favorables mais ont

éludé la question des frappes contre l'opposition modérée.

A Vienne, certains n'ont pas manqué de pointer aussi la « co-responsabilité » de Moscou dans les violences du régime envers sa population. Vendredi, des bombardements ont fait au moins 91 morts, dont 57 dans des tirs de roquettes sur un marché de Douma, a annoncé l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH). De son côté, la France s'est dite déterminée, malgré le veto agité par Moscou, à présenter une résolution devant le Conseil de sécurité contre le siège des populations et les bombardements aux barils d'explosifs.

Aucune percée n'est escomptée avant « des mois » mais, un accord n'est pas jugé insurmontable. « Sur la question d'Assad, ça peut bouger si les Russes et les Iraniens sentent que la pression est forte », estime une source occidentale. Or Moscou semble plus enclin à négocier : « Assad a pris fait et cause pour les chiites, ce qui fait que des sunnites ont déclaré le djihad contre la Russie. C'est très dangereux pour Moscou, qui craint aussi des pertes sur le terrain et une guerre coûteuse », pointe une source occidentale. Les parrains régionaux de l'opposition syrienne ont accru leur aide pour contrer l'intervention russe, mais beaucoup regrettent que les Américains ne veuillent pas s'investir davantage. « Ils font dix fois moins de frappes que les Russes, pointe un diplomate. Ça va peut-être changer. » ■

HÉLÈNE SALLON

Turkish leader set to pursue agenda

ISTANBUL

Reversal of previous loss revives Erdogan's plans to consolidate power

BY TIM ARANGO
AND CEYLAN YEGINSU

Speaking to a crowd of supporters in August, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, licking his wounds from a drubbing in the June elections in which his party lost its majority in Parliament, was emphatic that he was still in charge, despite the constitutional limits on the powers of his office.

"There is a president with de facto power in the country, not a symbolic one," he told a crowd of supporters in his hometown, the Black Sea city of Rize. "The president should conduct his duties for the nation directly, but within his authority. Whether one accepts it or not, Turkey's administrative system has changed. Now, what should be done is update this de facto situation in the legal framework of the Constitution."

Now that Mr. Erdogan's Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P., has reversed its losses with a stunning landslide in Sunday's snap election, his ambition to establish a presidential system of government — which analysts had pronounced dead in June — is very much alive.

Mr. Erdogan secured his grip on the Turkish political system for at least four more years, despite polls before the election that had predicted a result similar to June's. And even as worries persisted about the deep polarization of Turkish society and a drift toward authoritarianism, investors cheered the result: The Turkish currency soared on Monday, as did the prices of Turkish stocks.

The margin of victory did not give Mr. Erdogan enough votes to immediately revamp the Turkish Constitution, which was written by military overseers after a coup in 1980, and which many political leaders say needs to be refashioned to enshrine more democratic rights for minorities, such as Kurds. The A.K.P. earned 316 seats among the 550 in Parliament, just shy of the 330 that are required to bring a new Constitution to a referendum.

Even so, that was close enough for many to predict that it was only a matter of time before the A.K.P. could secure additional support to move forward with a new Constitution.

In The Daily Sabah, a pro-government newspaper, Ilnur Cevik, a columnist, wrote on Monday, "The message is loud and clear: The Turkish nation has decided it will continue its march to the future with the Justice and Development Party (A.K. Party) and has given the green light for a civilian Constitution and for the establishment of a presidential system."

In a victory speech on Sunday in Ankara, the capital, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu made clear that with its restored majority in Parliament, the A.K.P. would push for a new Constitution.

Mr. Erdogan has said he envisioned a presidency with powers even greater than that of the president in the American system.

In the pursuit of greater powers, there is the possibility, analysts say, of reviving the peace process with the country's Kurdish minority. Mr. Erdogan had once pushed forward a peace plan with the Kurds to end a long war, and he offered more concessions, such as language and cultural rights, to the Kurds than any other Turkish leader in history. And before June's election, many anticipated that Mr. Erdogan was counting on support from the Kurds to change the Constitution in a bargain that would have given him an executive presidency and the Kurds more rights and autonomy.

"There is a natural trade-off between what the Kurdish party wants and what Erdogan wants," Sinan Ulgen, an expert on Turkey with Carnegie Europe, said in a conference call with reporters on Monday.

But a deal will not come easily, as the resumption of the war with the militants of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., in recent months and a crack-down on the civilian side of the Kurdish movement, through harassment and mass arrests, have destroyed trust between the two sides.

While the Peoples' Democratic Party, or H.D.P., which is Kurdish-dominated, surpassed a 10 percent legal threshold to enter Parliament, it lost roughly one million votes. Party leaders attributed the setback to the government's efforts to tarnish the Peoples' Democratic Party by linking it to terrorism by the militants of the P.K.K.

"This was not a fair election, period," Selahattin Demirtas, the co-leader of the Peoples' Democratic Party, said on Sunday, noting that the party had barely campaigned because of fears about security. "We won close to 11 percent of the vote without a campaign, trying to protect our people from massacres."



UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

Parliamentary elections ensured the dominance of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Questions persist about the quality of Turkey's democratic institutions, such as the news media and the judiciary, which critics and analysts have warned have become increasingly under the control of Mr. Erdogan and his party.

A day after the election, the Turkish police raided a weekly newsmagazine, Nokta, that was recently charged with "insulting the Turkish president" after its cover depicted a mocked-up selfie of Mr. Erdogan. The magazine's editor was detained and distribution of the publication was halted, local news reports said.

Even in the absence of a new Constitution, Mr. Erdogan will continue to wield enormous influence. In September, he added more loyalists to its governing committee, even though by law he is supposed to remain impartial and above partisan politics.

Naz Masraff, the director for Europe at the political risk consultancy Eurasia Group, said in an interview that Mr. Erdogan would "continue to head cabinet meetings as he deems necessary, block various appointments, delay government bills and will eventually push for a formal switch to a presidential system when he deems the timing is right."

"But until then, Turkey will be ruled under a de facto executive presidency," Ms. Masraff said.

Mr. Erdogan's victory not only revitalized his presidential ambitions but may have also restored some shine to his position as a regional Islamist leader.

On Monday, as analysts weighed what the election results mean for Turkey's future, they were introspective, asking why everyone seemed to be so off in their predictions.

"At the end of the day, Erdogan gambled, and it paid off," said Omer Taspinar, a Turkey expert at the Brookings Institution. "People want stability. They have seen 13 years of stability, and compared to the 1990s, the last decade in Turkey is much better."

Are Kurds closer to realizing their dream of an independent state?

Kurds are considered the largest ethnic group in the world without a country. The turmoil in Syria and Iraq creates an opportunity to draw closer to that dream.

By Dominique Soguel
November 3, 2015
<http://www.csmonitor.com>

Erbil, Iraq — Briar Abdullah comes from a proud line of peshmerga fighters. But even in this time of war in northern Iraq between his fellow Kurds and the self-described Islamic State, Mr. Abdullah chose to study law rather than fight.

It was a tough decision, he says, but rooted in the belief that knowledge is the best foundation for an independent Kurdistan.

"I dream of holding a Kurdish passport and being able to travel freely across Greater Kurdistan," says the young man studying in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil. "Iraqi Kurdistan could be the starting point," he says. "The Kurds are ready for independence."

Rebaz Hassan, another young Iraqi Kurd, opted for a radically different kind of education. He trained in Qandil Mountain, the bastion of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, an insurgent movement that has long fought against the Turkish state and has powerful affiliates in Iran and Syria.

The details may differ, but his vision for the future falls within the same spectrum.

"My dream is to have a free Kurdistan" that is multiethnic, says Mr. Hassan, eating at a PKK cultural center. "I want to see the word Kurdistan — not Iraq — on my passport."

Kurds are considered the largest ethnic group in the world without a state. They comprise significant minorities in Iran, Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. Most Kurds — roughly 30 million people worldwide — dream of erasing those mountainous borders and forming what they call a "Greater Kurdistan."

SYMPATHY FOR THEIR CAUSE

They've never had the power or international support necessary to achieve that goal. But the new generation hope that their role as key partners in the US-led war against Islamic State (IS), coupled with the possible collapse of the Syrian and Iraqi states, could herald a change in fortune.

Kurdish gains in Iraq and recently in Syria have resulted in growing territorial control. In Turkey, which has the largest concentration of Kurds, a pro-Kurdish party made it into parliament this summer for the first time in history. Despite the breakdown of a peace process between Turkey and the PKK that has resulted in a resurgence of violence, the pro-Kurdish party passed the threshold for representation



A Kurdish fighter planted a Kurdish flag on an earthen berm 20 miles southwest of Kirkuk, Iraq, in March, part of the war against Islamic State.

in new elections this week. In Iran, Kurdish militants and activists still face execution.

But it was their role in recent dramatic chapters in the war with IS, including a tide-turning victory in the northern Syrian city of Kobane, that won Kurdish fighters accolades from the international community and stoked sympathy for their cause.

Each military victory fuels a sense of destiny. Just months ago, analysts were abuzz with talk of a "Kurdish moment," noting that the international climate had never been more conducive to a Kurdish drive for independence.

But now most warn that internal feuds are getting in the way and could even escalate into internecine Kurdish violence. And, crucially, Turkey, Iran, and the United States oppose Kurdish independence.

"We can [still] talk about a Kurdish moment because the genie is out of the bottle," says Mutlu Civioglu, a Washington analyst. "The Kurdish issue is now a regional, international issue. It needs to be addressed by the international powers sooner or later." So, who are the Kurds?

Despite facing very different realities in four nations, Kurds are bound by a common sense of belonging, Mr. Civioglu says. When Kobane was under siege, Kurds in Iraq and Turkey rushed to join the fight. Those in Iran

— persecuted for being Sunni as well as Kurds by the Shiite regime — also staged demonstrations of support.

KURDISH IDENTITY AND HISTORY RUN DEEP.

"The Kurds predate Christ," says Mesud Serfiraz, a historian and academic researcher at Mardin Artuklu University in the southeastern Turkish city of Mardin, with visible pride. "The ancient Greek general Xenophon and the Greek historian Strabo wrote about Courdoune. Many researchers, myself included, believe this region corresponds to modern Kurdistan."

Kurds converted to Islam early and fought alongside Arabs in the Crusades. Salaheddin Eyubi, a Muslim Kurd known in the West as Saladin, was the first sultan of Egypt and Syria. Kurds were absorbed into the Ottoman and Safavid Empires, or modern-day Turkey and Iran, two dominant regional powers.

Kurdish nationalist movements first flourished as the Ottoman Empire faded, but the key treaties that carved out the present Middle East left Kurds stateless.

In the 20th century, Kurdish demands for autonomy and basic cultural and linguistic rights put them at odds or outright war with the countries they live in. One brief success — the declaration of the Republic of

► Kurdistan in the city of Mahabad in 1946 – was swiftly snuffed out by Iran.

REVOLUTIONARY SONGS

The personal journey of Saeed Gabari, an aging yet sprightly Kurdish singer born in Syria, captures a fraction of that struggle.

As his wife serves tea and nuts in their home on the outskirts of Erbil, Mr. Gabari recounts in vivid detail his glory days traveling as a peshmerga bard on horseback, but glosses over the years spent behind bars, where he was blinded.

The singer/activist experienced torture in the worst jails of the region: Diyarbakir in Turkey, Iraq's Abu Ghraib, Iran's Evin, and others in Syria. Chillingly precise memories linger despite his efforts to forget. Gabari says he was electroshocked 111 times during his detention in Turkey in 1965.

Of the nearly three dark years he spent in Abu Ghraib in the 1980s, he recalls a bright memory of defiance – the day prisoners burned blankets and jumped over the fire to celebrate the Kurdish New Year. It earned 400 people a beating, he says, but the torturers in charge finally gave up in fatigue.

Gabari says his crime was giving voice to Kurdish dreams. "They would say: If peshmerga shoot bullets in the mountains no one hears them, but revolutionary songs grow their ranks."

AUTONOMY IN IRAQ

Gabari now lives in northern Iraq because this is where Kurds have come closest to achieving the elusive dream of independence. Iraqi Kurds asserted autonomy there after helping the US in 2003 topple the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein. The Iraqi leader had massacred Kurds in the genocidal Anfal campaign of the late 1980s, including the March 1988 chemical attack in Halabja that killed thousands of civilians.

"I think the Americans have understood that neither Turks, nor Iranians, nor Arabs are their friends. Their only friends are the Kurd," says the bard, noting that Massoud Barzani, president of the Iraqi Kurdistan region since 2005, was a guest of the White House this year.

Mr. Barzani sees a referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan as the first step toward independence. But other parties see more pressing priorities: an economic crisis that has sent young Kurds fleeing to Europe, oil and budget disputes with Baghdad, and more recently how to solve a succession crisis following the end of Barzani's term in August, which recently spilled into violence.

"The most important challenge we are facing is the war against IS," says Jafar Eminki, deputy parliament speaker. "Declaring independence is not a priority or pressing need today. The political forces are not focused on that."

TERRITORIAL GAINS

But Kamal Kirkuki, a senior official in Barzani's

party and a military commander on the front line against IS, has no doubts: Independence is the end goal and increasingly within reach, whether the world agrees or not.

"If we were fighting [just] to stay in Iraq as a federation, I would not fight IS for one minute. I would not stay in this hell," Mr. Kirkuki says.

The stately commander has spent months fighting on the outskirts of Kirkuk, a diverse and oil-rich city some 51 miles south of Erbil that lies outside the recognized borders of Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurds view it as their "Jerusalem" and took control when the Iraqi Army fled IS advances in 2014.

Kirkuki says his troops have killed more than 1,200 IS fighters. But his greatest source of pride is the liberation of all Kurdish and mixed villages within his sector, as well as 17 Arab hamlets.

Aid workers in Iraq, however, caution that the conquests come with forced displacement and land grabs designed to change demographic realities.

Experts say the territorial gains could shape the contours of a de facto Kurdish state if Iraq and Syria splinter apart.

"What is Iraq?" scoffs the commander. "This country does not control its skies, and it does not control its land or borders. It does not control its oil and water. Iraq failed."

OPPORTUNITY IN SYRIA

For Syrian Kurds, the outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 likewise presented a golden opportunity. They quietly carved out three non-contiguous enclaves in the north of the country as President Bashar al-Assad largely turned a blind eye to their activities. In these areas, Syrian Kurds have tested the concept of democratic autonomy as theorized by jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.

Mohammed Rasho, a representative of the dominant Kurdish faction in Syria who is based in Iraq, says they have an all-inclusive goal. "Our slogan is free Rojava and a Democratic Syria," he says, using the Kurdish name for northern Syria. "There is no 100 percent Kurdish area in Syria. We are islands in an Arab sea."

The Kurds in Syria have rolled out Kurdish education, enforced their version of gender equality, and created decisionmaking structures generally inclusive of Arabs and the other groups in the area. While Kurdish men and women fought heroically in Kobane, rights groups say the Syrian Kurdish militias have recruited child soldiers and destroyed Arab villages.

In both the Iraqi and Syrian contexts, internal rivalries, autocratic tendencies, and fraught relations with Arab neighbors have slowed progress toward independence.

"Regionally, the biggest challenges facing the Kurds is first internal division and fragmentation," says Kawa Hassan, director of the Middle East and North Africa Program at the EastWest

Institute in Brussels. "If the Kurdish house is not in order they cannot achieve independence."

"Second is the opposition from neighboring countries and the United States against Kurdish independence. Third is the lack of economic infrastructure that could be the basis of economic independence."

"Of course things change very quickly in the Middle East," adds Mr. Hassan. "Syria is crumbling. Iraq is crumbling.... The most feasible scenario is federations or Kurdish confederations."

KURDISH CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Territory is not all the Kurds care about. In fact many – including the dominant political factions in Turkey and Syria – are pragmatists willing to find a solution for the Kurdish question that is short of an independent state.

But all Kurdish factions put cultural and linguistic rights at the top of their agenda.

"As Kurds make political gains across Kurdistan, likewise the Kurdish language is experiencing a revival," says Ulku Bingol, editor of HIVA, a publishing house producing books for children in multiple Kurdish dialects out of the southeast Turkish city of Diyarbakir.

The first Kurdish-language newspaper was published in 1898 in Istanbul, but the harsh policies of assimilation ushered in by the Turkish Republic set the stage for a generation that speaks Kurdish poorly if at all. Even some of the staunchest separatists of Diyarbakir – which Turkey's Kurds consider their regional capital – struggle to speak in their mother tongue.

Ibrahim Halil Baran, a separatist Kurdish nationalist who switches from Kurdish to Turkish when sleepy, sums up the stakes. "For us, when a Kurd loses his language, he has become a Turk. Kurdish language is Kurdish identity."

Kurdish linguists are now able to teach at the university level thanks to an opening that began with an amendment to Turkey's Constitution in 1992 and accelerated under the government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. But they fear the language will disappear unless Kurdish education is scaled up.

Dilvan, a Kurdology student, spent years answering to a Turkish name rather than her own at school. She hoped for progress when elections ushered a pro-Kurdish party into parliament.

But amid recent Turkish-PKK and IS violence, Dilvan is too afraid to speak Kurdish in Istanbul, saying it draws angry glares and comments. Instead, she discreetly tries to polish her mother tongue by telling bedtime stories to her youngest sibling.

"Sometimes I lose hope," she says. "It's been a massive struggle with only small results. But my father told me: If you study Kurdish, thousands will learn. This is the most important battle." ♦

ERDOGAN RISING

Turkey's Elections, the Syrian Crisis, and the US

Fresh off his party's stunning election victory, will Erdogan get in the way of U.S. plans, or work with Washington toward a grand bargain on Syria and Iraq?



Henri J. Barkey
November 4, 2015
<http://www.the-american-interest.com>

In a stunning turn of events in Turkey, the Justice and Development Party (AKP) managed to confound its critics and win a convincing victory at the polls. These elections were a gamble by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who maneuvered to block the formation of a coalition government following the inconclusive June elections so as to get another shot at winning a majority. The most important contribution to Erdogan's victory came from an unexpected source: the main Kurdish insurgent group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), with which Turkey has been at war. In an unprecedented strategic blunder, the PKK abandoned its unilateral ceasefire after the June elections. The resulting violence helped the AKP to make its case that it stood for stability, something Turks value more than anything else.

The significant increase in the AKP's share of votes from 41 to 49 percent will undoubtedly make the new Turkish government, and Erdogan in particular, far more self confident in both domestic and international affairs.

While the United States has always shown a tendency to work with the status quo, especially when it comes to an ally such as Turkey, a member of NATO, it now faces three challenges. The first, and least significant, challenge is the anti-American tone of Erdogan, his party, and especially the Erdogan-controlled press, representing approximately 70 percent of all outlets, whether print, television, online, or social media. Insinuating American plots and partisanship in favor of the opposition even forced the U.S. Ambassador to come out forcefully to deny the allegations.

The second challenge is the increasingly authoritarian bent of the government, including the arbitrary confiscation of opposition television channels and newspapers and the prosecution of individuals from all walks of life for criticizing the President. If such campaigns continue, or even escalate, after these elections, it will make for uncomfortable conversations between U.S. and Turkish officials, potentially casting a



shadow on other bilateral issues.

However, the third and most contentious challenge will be Syria. U.S. and Turkish goals in Syria are out of sync. Turkey prioritizes the defeat of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Damascus and the containment, if not reversal, of Syrian Kurdish gains made by the Democratic Union Party (PYD). The latter has emerged as the single-most effective fighting force against the Islamic State (IS). By contrast, the United States is fixated first and foremost on the elimination of IS. The Assad regime has become a secondary issue.

It is over the PYD that the Turks and Americans are likely to have their greatest disagreements. The PYD has established a close relationship with the United States and as a result has succeeded in pushing IS back from some locations it captured in the summer of 2014. In the absence of any other forces on the ground, the U.S.-PYD relationship has deepened. This has alarmed the Turks, who see the PYD as nothing but an extension of the PKK.

In June of this year, the United States finally managed to get permission from Ankara to access to four airbases in southern Turkey for anti-IS operations; Turkish acquiescence came only because Turks were alarmed at the deepening U.S.-PYD relationship, which they worried was a back door to a U.S.-PKK collaboration. This is not an unreasonable fear, despite the fact that the United States considers the PKK a terrorist organization, given that many of the PYD cadres fighting in Syria are in fact Turkish PKK members. Moreover, the Turks also worry that Syrian Kurds, thanks to their cooperation with the United States, will end up with their own autonomous region in

Syria once Assad is gone. This would provide Turkish Kurds with another model after their brethren in northern Iraq, who have already established their own semi-recognized government, the Kurdistan Regional Government.

The bases are critical to U.S. plans for the re-conquest of IS's capital Raqqa with the help of the PYD and a number of smaller local militias. Washington's decision to introduce fifty Special Forces troops into Syria this past week could not have happened without access to those bases, which are now undoubtedly home to U.S. search and rescue teams. Moreover, the United States also plans to bring in A-10 ground attack fighter aircraft that can lay down devastating cover fire in close combat situations.

Will a rejuvenated AKP government and Erdogan interfere with U.S. plans by trying to spoil PYD ambitions? Will a rejuvenated AKP government and Erdogan interfere with U.S. plans by trying to spoil PYD ambitions? Last week the Turkish government claimed that its planes had bombed PYD positions in Syria. This has not been confirmed on the ground and in all likelihood was just a pre-election boast. Nevertheless, even its mere suggestion constitutes a major precedent for future similar actions.

To date, though nominally a member of the anti-IS coalition, Ankara has not made that organization a priority, despite a string of devastating bombings attributed to IS that mainly targeted Turkish Kurds. Ankara and IS have been careful not to provoke each other; IS has a significant infrastructure within Turkey that it does not want to risk, and the Turks have seen the power of IS to kill and create havoc.

It is easy to see how an emboldened Erdogan may want to extract new concessions from Washington; on the other hand, this is also an opportunity for the Turks to come in from the cold and begin to shape a new grand bargain over both Syria and Iraq. We will soon find out. ●

Henri J. Barkey is the director of the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center.

International New York Times, NOVEMBER 4, 2015

Ahmad Chalabi, who urged Iraq war, dies

BY SEWELL CHAN

Ahmad Chalabi, the Iraqi politician who from exile helped persuade the United States to invade Iraq in 2003, and then unsuccessfully tried to attain power as his country was nearly torn apart by sectarian violence, died at his home in

OBITUARY

Baghdad on Tuesday. He was 71.

The cause was heart failure, Iraqi officials said.

Mr. Chalabi is the Iraqi perhaps most associated with President George W. Bush's decision to invade Iraq and topple its longtime dictator, Saddam Hussein. A mathematician with a doctorate from the University of Chicago, Mr. Chalabi, the son of a prominent Shiite family, cultivated close ties with journalists in Washington and London; American lawmakers; the neoconservative advisers who helped shape Mr. Bush's foreign policy; and a wide network of Iraqi exiles, many of whom were paid for intelligence about Hussein's government.

Mr. Chalabi's relationship with the Americans stretched over decades. In 1998, he helped persuade Congress to pass the Iraq Liberation Act, which was signed by President Bill Clinton, and declare it the policy of the United States to replace Hussein's government with a democratic one.

His group, the Iraqi National Congress, would get more than \$100 million from the C.I.A. and other agencies between its founding in 1992 and the start of the war.

He cultivated friendships with a circle of hawkish Republicans: Dick Cheney, Douglas J. Feith, William J. Luti, Richard N. Perle and Paul D. Wolfowitz, who were central in the United States' march to war, Mr. Cheney as vice president and the others as top Pentagon officials.

Mr. Chalabi's contention, broadly shared by United States intelligence agencies, was that Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. Hussein had used chemical weapons against the Kurds and slaughtered Shiites and other Iraqis, and he had refused to fully cooperate with United Nations weapons inspectors.

But most of the case for war was predicated on flawed intelligence, including the testimony of several defectors whose accounts ultimately could not be substantiated.

A report by the Senate Intelligence Committee in 2006 concluded that "false information" from sources affiliated with Mr. Chalabi's Iraqi National Congress "was used to support key Intelligence Community assessments on Iraq and was widely distributed in intelligence products prior to the war." It found that the group "attempted to influence United States policy on Iraq by providing false information through defectors di-

rected at convincing the United States that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and had links to terrorists."

Probably the most notorious defector was Rafid Ahmed Alwan al-Janabi, code-named Curveball, the brother of a Chalabi aide, whose false account of mobile bioweapons laboratories was cited by Secretary of State Colin L. Powell at the United Nations. The Senate report said there was "insufficient basis" to determine whether Curveball provided his information at the behest of the Iraqi National Congress.

Other defectors whose accounts Mr. Chalabi's group promoted included Sabah Khalifa Khodada Alami and Abu Zeinab al-Quraury, who claimed that Islamist terrorists had trained in the mid-1990s at a camp in Iraq called Salman Pak; Khidir Hamza, who said that Hussein had tried to build a nuclear weapon in the early 1990s; and Adnan Ihsan Saeed al-Haideri, who told The New York Times that he had visited at least 20 secret weapons facilities in Iraq.

The Times said in a 2004 editors' note that "accounts of Iraqi defectors were not always weighed against their strong desire to have Saddam Hussein ousted" and that "we, along with the administration, were taken in."

As it became clear that Iraq did not have an active chemical, biological or nuclear weapons program, and as the occupying American forces did not receive the welcome that the Iraqi opposition had predicted, the Bush administration distanced itself from him.

Spurned by the Americans, Mr. Chalabi allied himself with Moktada al-Sadr, the radical Shiite leader and ally of Iran whose Mahdi Army led two bloody uprisings and who remains a significant force in Iraqi politics.

"Chalabi's life work, an Iraq liberated from Saddam Hussein, a modern and democratic Iraq, is spiraling toward disintegration," Dexter Filkins wrote in The Times Magazine in 2006, after interviewing Mr. Chalabi at his home in London, where he was on vacation. "Indeed, for many in the West, Chalabi has become the personification of all that has gone wrong in Iraq: the lies, the arrogance, the occupation as disaster."

But as recently as last year, Mr. Chalabi's name was floated as a candidate for prime minister, and at the time of his death he was the head of the finance committee in Parliament.

On Tuesday, Iraqi leaders issued statements that emphasized Mr. Chalabi's role in deposing Hussein, who was captured by American forces in 2003 and executed by the Iraqis in 2006.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said in a statement, "He dedicated his life to opposing the dictatorial regime, and he played a great role in building a democratic process in Iraq."

Ahmad Abdul Hadi Chalabi was born



in Baghdad on Oct. 30, 1944. His family was part of a tiny, secular Shiite elite that had prospered under the Ottoman Turks and then, after World War I, the Hashemite monarchy installed by the British.

Mr. Chalabi attended an elite Jesuit high school, Baghdad College, where his schoolmates included fellow Shiites like Ayad Allawi, who would later become a relative by marriage and serve as an acting prime minister, and Adel Abdul Mahdi, who would later become a finance minister, a vice president and, now, the oil minister.

In 1958, the same year that army officers overthrew King Faisal II, the Chalabi family went into exile. Mr. Chalabi studied math at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology before receiving his doctorate from the University of Chicago in 1969. During his time overseas, the Baath Party staged a coup, in 1968, and by 1979 Hussein had managed to consolidate power.

The disastrous Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the American-led war that pushed his forces out of Kuwait in 1991 galvanized Iraqi exiles. In 1992, Mr. Chalabi and other exiles founded the Iraqi National Congress in London, an umbrella coalition for groups seeking to depose Hussein. By now, Mr. Chalabi was in regular contact with the Americans, though his actions were often unwelcome. In 1995, while receiving pay from the C.I.A. in the Kurdish city of Erbil, Iraq, Mr. Chalabi began an unauthorized — and unsuccessful — attack on Hussein's forces.

The fiasco led to nothing more than a decision by Turkey to send troops into northern Iraq. The next year, Mr. Chalabi interfered with a C.I.A. plot to topple Hussein. The coup attempt failed and more than 150 opposition fighters were killed.

la Croix

mardi 3 novembre 2015

Erdogan veut reprendre fermement les rênes de la Turquie

- ▶ Avec 49 % des voix, l'AKP, le parti présidentiel, retrouve une majorité confortable au sein de l'Assemblée nationale.
- ▶ La stratégie du « moi ou le chaos » a finalement servi le président Erdogan.
- ▶ Il entend remettre à l'ordre du jour son projet de réforme constitutionnelle pour transformer le système parlementaire turc en régime présidentiel fort.

ISTANBUL

De notre correspondant

Est-ce que la Turquie a gagné, comme le clame la presse proche du pouvoir, ou est-ce « la victoire de la peur », comme le titre à la une le quotidien d'opposition *Cumhuriyet*? Après une campagne électorale violente, marquée notamment par l'attentat le plus meurtrier de l'histoire du pays et de fortes tensions dans le Sud-Est à majorité kurde, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP) du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan entend reprendre fermement les rênes du pays.

Avec moins de 41 % lors du scrutin du 7 juin dernier, l'AKP n'avait pas été en mesure, pour la première fois en treize ans, de décrocher une majorité de députés à la Grande Assemblée nationale. Mais le pari du président Erdogan de retourner aux urnes plutôt que de s'astreindre à former une coalition a été gagnant : le parti présidentiel a remporté cette fois plus de 49 % des voix, soit près de cinq millions de plus qu'il y a à peine cinq mois. Un résultat qui lui permet de faire élire 317 députés, bien au-delà des 276 sièges nécessaires pour obtenir une majorité parlementaire.

L'AKP a amélioré son score dans 84 des 85 circonscriptions électorales du pays. Exception faite du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, kémaliste) qui, s'il n'a pas perdu de voix, semble incapable de progresser au-delà de 25 %, toutes les autres formations politiques ont perdu des électeurs au profit des islamo-conservateurs. C'est surtout le cas du Parti de l'action nationaliste (MHP, ultranationaliste), qui a été littéralement siphonné par le parti du président Erdogan en perdant deux millions de voix par rapport au scrutin législatif du 7 juin.

Le Parti de la démocratie des peuples (HDP, gauche prokurde), dont la percée historique lors du scrutin précédent avec



Des sympathisants de l'AKP fêtent la victoire du parti de Recep Tayyip Erdogan dans les urnes, à Istanbul.

13 % des voix avait causé la chute de l'AKP dans les urnes, parvient aujourd'hui à peine à franchir la barre des 10 % nécessaires pour être représenté au Parlement.

Si le HDP reste le principal parti dans le Sud-Est à majorité kurde, le parti islamo-conservateur y a néanmoins renforcé ses positions, récupérant une partie de l'électorat kurde conservateur et une partie de la petite classe moyenne inquiète de l'instabilité causée par la résurgence du conflit entre rebelles du PKK et forces de l'ordre.

Dans un pays marqué par la violence et après une campagne où le pouvoir n'a pas hésité à s'en prendre directement à ses adversaires, la stratégie du « moi ou le chaos » aura finalement servi au chef de l'État.

Fort d'une majorité parlementaire renforcée, l'AKP est maintenant assuré de pouvoir gouverner seul durant quatre ans. Lors de son discours de victoire, le premier ministre Ahmet Davutoglu a invité les partis siégeant à l'Assemblée à « adopter pour la Turquie une nouvelle Constitution ». Car la victoire de l'AKP remet à l'ordre du jour la réforme obsédant Recep Tayyip Erdogan, dont l'objectif est de transformer le système parlementaire turc en régime présidentiel fort.

Malgré sa victoire écrasante, l'AKP n'a cependant pas atteint la barre des 330 dé-

putés nécessaires pour convoquer un référendum permettant de faire adopter par l'électorat toute modification constitutionnelle. Et il est encore bien loin des 367 députés requis pour adopter ces changements par l'Assemblée sans passer par la case référendaire.

Le parti présidentiel a remporté plus de 49 % des voix, soit près de cinq millions de plus qu'en juin.

Désormais seul en selle mais corseté par les compétences essentiellement symboliques d'une présidence dont il aura du mal à se libérer par voie législative, comment Recep Tayyip Erdogan va-t-il exploiter le triomphe de sa formation politique ? Déjà, depuis quelques semaines, des médias d'opposition ont été placés sous la tutelle de l'État, des bureaux du parti prokurde HDP brûlés, des militants arrêtés dans le cadre d'opérations « antiterroristes ». Avec les résultats du scrutin de dimanche, titrait hier un éditorial du quotidien *Hürriyet*, « le génie est sorti de la bouteille ».

ALEXANDRE BILLETTE

AFP

Deux soldats turcs tués mercredi lors d'affrontements avec les rebelles kurdes (armée)

Ankara, 4 novembre 2015 (AFP)

DEUX SOLDATS TURCS ont été tués mercredi lors d'affrontements avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie, a annoncé le commandement militaire sur son site internet.

Les deux militaires sont morts lors de combats dans la région de Yüksekova, aux confins des frontières irakienne et iranienne, a ajouté l'état-major.

Ces décès sont les premiers enregistrés depuis le triomphe aux élections législatives de dimanche du parti du président islam-conservateur Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui a répété mercredi sa volonté de lutter jusqu'au bout contre le PKK.

"Il n'y aura pas de pause (...) les opérations continueront de manière déterminée contre l'organisation terroriste à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la Turquie", a souligné M. Erdogan.

L'aviation turque a pilonné lundi et mardi les positions du PKK dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie et dans le nord de l'Irak.

Quatre rebelles kurdes ont été tués par les forces de sécurité turques cette semaine dans le sud-est de la Turquie.

La police turque a par ailleurs interpellé 22 personnes lors de raids menés contre la branche jeunesse du PKK à Istanbul et dans la province d'Adana (sud), a rapporté la presse locale mercredi. ●

AFP

Turquie: 3 militants kurdes tués dans des affrontements avec la police dans le sud-est (officiel)

Diyarbakir (Turquie), 3 novembre 2015 (AFP)

TROIS MILITANTS KURDES ont été tués mardi dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie lors d'affrontements avec les forces de l'ordre, deux jours après le triomphe électoral du parti du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a-t-on appris de sources concordantes.

Deux jeunes militants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) sont morts dans la province d'Hakkari, près de la frontière irakienne, lors d'une opération de la police pour démanteler des baricades, a-t-on appris auprès des services de sécurité.

Un autre jeune de 22 ans a été tué dans la ville de Silvan, dont trois quartiers ont été soumis depuis l'aube à un strict couvre-feu, a indiqué le bureau du gouverneur de la province de Diyarbakir dans une déclaration.

L'état-major de l'armée turque a annoncé mardi avoir bombardé la veille des

positions du PKK en Turquie et dans le nord de l'Irak.

Ces opérations interviennent alors que le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islam-conservateur) a largement remporté dimanche les élections législatives avec 49,4% de suffrages et regagné contre tous les pronostics la majorité absolue des sièges au Parlement perdue à peine cinq mois plus tôt.

Pendant toute la campagne, le Premier ministre sortant et chef de l'AKP Ahmet Davutoglu et le président Erdogan ont fait campagne sur une ligne très ferme contre le PKK.

Les combats meurtriers entre le PKK et les forces de sécurité turques ont repris fin juillet dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie, faisant de nombreuses victimes. Ils ont fait voler en éclat le fragile processus de paix engagé à l'automne 2012 pour mettre un terme à ce conflit, qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984. ●

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4 novembre 2015

Turquie. Erdogan veut liquider les insurgés kurdes "jusqu'au dernier"

4 Novembre 2015 www.ouest-france.fr

Erdogan s'est engagé mercredi à poursuivre la lutte contre les insurgés kurdes du PKK jusqu'à ce qu'ils déposent les armes ou que le dernier d'entre eux soit liquidé.

Dans son premier discours depuis la victoire du Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islam-conservateur) aux législatives de dimanche, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a estimé que le temps de la reprise des négociations avec les séparatistes kurdes n'était pas venu: « Il n'y aura pas de pause (...) les opérations continueront de manière déterminée contre l'organisation terroriste à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la Turquie », a déclaré Erdogan lors d'un discours devant des élus locaux.

Deux soldats turcs ont été tués mercredi lors d'affrontements avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie, a annoncé le commandement militaire sur son site internet.

LES KURDES EN LIGNE DE MIRE

L'offensive militaire contre le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) lancée en juillet après l'effondrement du cessez-le-feu décrété par les insurgés deux ans plus tôt n'a pas connu de relâche depuis les élections.

Erdogan s'est engagé à poursuivre la lutte contre les insurgés kurdes du PKK jusqu'à ce qu'ils déposent les armes ou que le dernier d'entre eux soit liquidé.
| AFP



L'aviation turque a ainsi bombardé mardi 16 objectifs liés au Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le nord de l'Irak pour la deuxième journée consécutive, a annoncé le commandement militaire général sur son site internet. Dans le sud-est de la Turquie à majorité kurde, les affrontements ont par ailleurs fait un nouveau mort mercredi, a-t-on appris auprès des services de sécurité.

Un jeune homme de 20 ans a été abattu à Silvan, où les autorités ont prolongé de 24 heures le couvre-feu instauré mardi dans trois secteurs de la ville. Les affrontements entre les forces de sécurité et la branche regroupant les jeunes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan

(PKK) se sont poursuivis toute la journée. Mardi, un homme avait été tué à Silvan et deux à Yüksekova, à 450 km à l'est.

Un changement de la Constitution en objectif

Le président islam-conservateur turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a relancé mercredi son projet très controversé de réforme de la Constitution destiné notamment à renforcer ses pouvoirs: « L'un des plus importants messages des élections du 1er novembre est de régler la question d'une nouvelle Constitution », a déclaré M. Erdogan lors d'un discours dans son palais devant un parterre d'élus locaux. ■

Après les élections, le conflit kurde reprend de plus belle en Turquie

Istanbul, 5 nov 2015 (AFP)
www.leparisien.fr

Le conflit kurde a repris de plus belle jeudi après l'annonce par les rebelles kurdes de la fin de la "suspension unilatérale" de leurs opérations contre les forces de sécurité turques, quatre jours après le triomphe électoral du président Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Après une série de bombardements turcs, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) a fait savoir qu'il avait mis fin à "la période de suspension unilatérale" qu'il avait instaurée trois semaines avant le scrutin législatif.

"Après les élections, l'AKP (Parti de la justice et du développement, islam-conservateur) a démontré qu'il serait un gouvernement de guerre", a justifié le PKK dans une déclaration citée par l'agence de presse kurde Firat News.

Aussi, le PKK a appelé "le peuple kurde, tous les peuples et les forces démocratiques de Turquie à intensifier le combat".

Lors du scrutin de dimanche, l'AKP a regagné le contrôle exclusif du Parlement, qu'il avait perdu en juin, en totalisant 49,4% des suffrages et 317 sièges de députés, sur 550.

Fort de ce triomphe électoral, M. Erdogan, a réaffirmé mercredi son intransigeance envers le PKK. "Nous continuerons notre combat jusqu'à ce que l'organisation terroriste enterre ses armes, que ses membres se rendent et quittent le sol turc", a-t-il déclaré.

Depuis dimanche, l'aviation d'Ankara a mené plusieurs séries de frappes contre des objectifs du PKK, aussi bien dans le sud-est à



majorité kurde de la Turquie que dans leur bastion des montagnes du nord de l'Irak.

Trente-et-un membres du PKK ont été tués par les frappes de l'armée turque dans le seul district de Yüksekova, aux confins des frontières irakienne et iranienne, a annoncé jeudi l'état-major turc sur son site Internet.

Des affrontements violents ont également opposé ces derniers jours les rebelles aux forces de sécurité turques dans plusieurs villes du sud-est de la Turquie.

Un policier a été tué et deux soldats ont été blessés jeudi à Silvan, dans la province de Diyarbakir, ont rapporté des sources de sécurité à l'AFP. Au moins deux soldats et quatre militants kurdes avaient déjà été tués cette semaine dans la région.

- SPIRALE DE LA VIOLENCE -

Le 10 octobre dernier, le PKK avait annoncé le début d'une "période d'inactivité" pendant la campagne pour les législatives,

sauf en cas de "légitime défense", afin de "ne pas empêcher une élection équitable" le 1er novembre.

Les affrontements ont toutefois continué, malgré cette décision.

Après plus de deux ans de cessez-le-feu, les hostilités ont repris fin juillet, faisant voler en éclat le fragile processus de paix engagé à l'automne 2012 pour tenter de mettre un terme à un conflit qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

Après un attentat qui a tué 34 jeunes militants de la cause kurde le 20 juillet à Suruç (sud-est), attribué aux jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI), le PKK avait relancé sa campagne d'attentats contre les policiers et les soldats turcs, accusant les autorités d'Ankara de plus assurer délibérément la protection de la population kurde.

L'armée turque a en représailles repris ses bombardements contre les rebelles.

Ce nouveau cycle de violences a fait de nombreuses victimes. M. Erdogan a affirmé mercredi que le PKK avait tué 248 policiers, militaires et civils depuis l'été et que plus de 2.000 membres du PKK avaient été "neutralisés".

Les rebelles, qui démentent avoir subi de telles pertes, assurent en retour que de nombreux civils ont été victimes de l'armée et de la police.

"Nous avons toujours dit que nous étions prêts à respecter à un cessez-le-feu bilatéral. Mais il n'est pas possible de maintenir une période d'inactivité face aux activités actuelles du gouvernement de l'AKP", a souligné dans son communiqué jeudi le mouvement, considéré comme une organisation terroriste en Turquie et la plupart des pays occidentaux. ■

Kurdes, régime présidentiel : discours de fermeté d'Erdogan en Turquie

5 nov. 2015 - <http://www.rfi.fr>

Lors d'un discours dans son palais, devant un parterre d'élus locaux, le président islam-conservateur turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a réaffirmé sa fermeté à l'égard des rebelles kurdes du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan. Il a également relancé mercredi 4 novembre son projet très controversé de réforme de la Constitution, destinée notamment à renforcer les pouvoirs présidentiels.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan a décidé d'une



vision très personnelle du pouvoir et des affaires publiques puisque, selon lui, les 49,4% des 54 millions d'électeurs qui voté

pour renouveler le Parlement auraient avant tout voulu lui adresser le message selon lequel le pays a besoin d'une nouvelle Constitution - sous-entendu qui instaurerait un régime présidentiel - et même si l'AKP ne dispose pas de la majorité qualifiée permettant d'adopter cette réforme.

La réforme de la Constitution devrait permettre de transférer l'essentiel du pouvoir exécutif du Premier ministre au chef de l'Etat. Pour être votée, une réforme constitutionnelle doit être approuvée par les ➔

⇒ deux tiers des députés. Le porte-parole présidentiel Ibrahim Kalin a suggéré mercredi 4 novembre devant la presse que si la majorité des deux tiers n'était pas obtenue, la question pourrait être tranchée par un référendum.

Dans son discours, le président turc menaçait « ceux qui s'opposeraient à la volonté du peuple en paieront le prix dans quatre ans », sans que l'on comprenne nettement s'il parlait des prochaines législatives ou de la prochaine présidentielle, qui se tiendront toutes deux en 2019. Mais le ton est donné, le président est pressé, explique notre correspondant à Istanbul, Jérôme Bastion. Recep Tayyip Erdogan appelle toutes les parties à participer à la rédaction

de cette nouvelle Constitution, même si l'opposition a promis de lui faire barrage, et ne compte pas transiger. Un sondage révèle pourtant que 57% des Turcs sont également opposés à l'idée de cette présidence forte, qui soulève pas mal d'inquiétudes en raison de la dérive autoritaire.

LUTTE CONTRE LA RÉBELLION KURDE

Autre sujet qui, en revanche, suscite moins d'atemoiements dans l'opinion publique, c'est celui de la lutte contre la rébellion kurde. Le président turc s'est engagé à poursuivre la lutte contre les insurgés kurdes jusqu'à ce qu'ils déposent les armes ou que le dernier d'entre eux soit « liquidé ». « Il n'y aura pas de pause, a-t-il prévenu, et

les opérations continueront de manière déterminée à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur de la Turquie. » Mardi, l'aviation turque avait bombardé seize objectifs liés au PKK dans le nord de l'Irak et dans le sud-est de la Turquie, région à majorité kurde.

Pour Emre Demir, rédacteur en chef du journal turc d'opposition Zaman, ce durcissement de l'attitude présidentielle à l'égard des Kurdes n'est pas surprenant. Selon lui, il peut témoigner de divisions au sein de l'équipe au pouvoir, voire même constituer une manœuvre visant à renforcer la position du gouvernement dans les négociations avec le PKK. ●

L'EXPRESS 11 novembre 2015

Turquie: au moins cinq policiers et un civil tués dans des combats avec le PKK

Par AFP - 11 nov. 2015
www.lexpress.fr

Diyarbakir (Turquie) - Au moins cinq membres des forces de sécurité et un civil ont été tués dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie lors d'affrontements avec les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), notamment à Silvan sous couvre-feu.

Un soldat et un policier sont morts mercredi dans cette ville de 90.000 habitants, où l'armée et les unités spéciales de la police tentent depuis plus d'une semaine de reprendre le contrôle de quartiers occupés par des jeunes proches du PKK, a-t-on appris auprès de l'état-major et des autorités locales.

Au moins quatre autres soldats et un policier ont été blessés, selon les mêmes sources.

Cinq rebelles kurdes ont également été "neutralisés" à Silvan, selon un communiqué du bureau du gouverneur local.

Il a jugé "infondées" et "fausses" des informations de presse affirmant que les forces de sécurité bombardent des zones habitées par des civils et "larguent des explosifs depuis des hélicoptères". Les opérations de "lutte contre le terrorisme vont se poursuivre avec résolution", a-t-il ajouté.

Une députée du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP, prokurde), s'est inquiétée mercredi du sort réservé à la population des trois quartiers sous couvre-feu. "Ils risquent d'être les victimes d'un gigantesque massacre. Les gens craignent pour leur vie. Cette opération doit être immédiatement interrompue", a exigé Feleknas Uca, interrogée par l'agence de presse Dogan.

Sur les réseaux sociaux turcs, le mot-dièse "#un massacre est en cours à Silvan" est



Un véhicule de l'armée dans les rues désertes de Silvan, ville du sud-est de la Turquie, le 10 novembre, après plus d'une semaine de combats entre l'armée turc et les combattants kurdes.

ILYAS AKENGİN / AFP

devenu l'un des plus diffusés.

- CONVOI ATTAQUÉ -

Les rebelles kurdes ont annoncé la semaine dernière la fin de la suspension de leurs opérations militaires décrétée avant les législatives du 1er novembre, remportées haut la main par le parti du président islamoc-conservateur Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Depuis ce scrutin, l'aviation turque a procédé à plusieurs frappes aériennes contre des cibles du PKK, aussi bien sur le territoire turc que dans leurs bastions du nord de l'Irak, et les accrochages se sont multipliés dans de nombreuses villes du sud-est.

Mercredi matin, un véhicule piégé a explosé au passage d'un blindé de la police dans la province de Mardin (sud-est), tuant un employé municipal et blessant un membre des forces de l'ordre, selon l'agence Dogan.

Trois policiers ont par ailleurs été tués mardi soir dans un district de la ville de Silopi, près des frontières avec la Syrie et l'Irak, lorsque leur camion a été pris pour cible par

des tirs de lance-roquettes et de fusils automatiques, ont précisé sous couvert de l'anonymat à l'AFP des responsables locaux des services de sécurité.

Un quatrième policier a été grièvement blessé, ont ajouté les mêmes sources.

Après plus de deux ans de cessez-le-feu, les combats ont repris fin juillet entre les rebelles kurdes et les forces de sécurité turques, faisant voler en éclats le fragile processus de paix engagé à l'automne 2012 pour mettre un terme à ce conflit, qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

M. Erdogan a promis de poursuivre la lutte "jusqu'à ce que l'organisation terroriste enterre ses armes, et que ses membres se rendent et quittent le sol turc".

Signe de sa résolution, le chef de l'Etat, accompagné de son Premier ministre Ahmet Davutoglu, a assisté mercredi à Ankara à une cérémonie religieuse en l'honneur d'un soldat tué lundi dans la province de Hakkari (sud-est). ■



Prime Minister Barzani talks on regional situation at MERI Forum

FRI, 6 NOVEMBER 2015 | KRG Cabinet

Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq (cabinet.gov.krd) - Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani along with Turkish Foreign Minister Feridun Hadi Siniroğlu attended a panel at the the Middle East Research Institute, MERI, Forum which was held in Erbil between 3 and 5 November.

First, Prime Minister Barzani expressed condolences on the death of Dr. Ahmad Chalabi, a prominent Iraqi politician, saying his passing is a major loss for all Iraqis.

He expressed his appreciation to MERI and thanked the Turkish Foreign Minister for his attendance.

He then noted a strategy by the Kurdistan Region towards becoming a focus of stability in the Middle East that builds strong political and economic relations with its neighbours.

Prime Minister Barzani said the Kurdistan Region values its relationship with Turkey as an important neighbouring country that played a vital role in implementing the 1991-2003 no-fly zone. He specifically pointed out the role of the Late Turkish President Turgut Özal in supporting the no-fly zone, established by the US-led allied countries, protecting the Kurdistan Region from the regime of Saddam Hussein. He also remarked on how Turkey helped the Region's people who sought refuge during Iraq's chemical attacks in August 1988.

He noted that since the Justice and Development Party AKP assumed power, a strategic relationship has developed that benefits Iraq in general and the Kurdistan Region in particular.

Regarding the current situation in Iraq, Prime Minister Barzani said that the Kurdistan Region has been waiting for twelve years to see the Iraqi Federal Constitution implemented, and that it cannot wait further.

He stressed that without substantial, serious progress on the implementation of the Federal Constitution, an alternative approach to the future of Iraq will become necessary. He reiterated that no matter what option Kurdistan Region chooses in the future, Baghdad will remain a main partner.

"Whatever decision the Kurdistan Region will make, including independence which is its legitimate right, it will have strategic relationship with Baghdad. This is a fact and the framework of the Region's policy," he added.

Prime Minister Barzani said that the current priority is to protect the Region from the Islamic State terrorist organisation, ISIS, along a one thousand kilometre frontline. He said that since the start of the war, the Region has made major sacrifices, including 1,300 martyrs and 7,000 injured. He expressed his appreciation to all countries that have been supporting the Region, including Turkey, Iran, European Countries, and at the top, the United States; their substantial and continuing assistance, he said, have been vital to effectively confronting ISIS.

Since the people of Kurdistan suffered from decades of oppression and war, Prime Minister Barzani said that after the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003, the Kurdistan Region focused on reconstruction, institutionalisation and development of a solid economy.

"It has been a time for rebuilding government organisations and pursuing major infrastructure development. We never thought we would face a barbaric terrorist group such as ISIS. We assumed it was the Iraqi army's duty to secure borders outside the Kurdistan Region," he said.

He pointed out that the Kurdistan Region goes through a transitional period that calls for patience. He said, establishing democracy, pursuing state building, and promoting the rule of law cannot be simply imported into our Region and adopted, it is a process that takes much time to be genuinely realised.

Regarding internal issues, Prime Minister Barzani said the eighth cabinet was formed as a broad-based government, including all major political parties, to resolve issues by consensus. He stated that sometimes, when an unexpected situation emerges, "it happens that the only options are bad or worse. We selected the bad not worse, although the worse option was available. The recent unrest and complexities, however, do not mean that political parties cannot meet and involve themselves in direct negotiations. All issues must be resolved through dialogue and negotiation".

Prime Minister Barzani stressed that stability is always a top choice.



He said efforts have been doubled to protect peace and stability while facing formidable challenges, like fighting ISIS and accommodating around two million refugee seekers in the midst of severe financial constraints.

Regarding an expected visit of a Kurdistan Regional Government, KRG, delegation to Baghdad and holding a new round of negotiations, Prime Minister Barzani said this does not mean that KRG oil policy has not been successful.

He said, the fall in oil price has caused many difficulties for both Baghdad and Erbil, but that does not mean that the Region's oil industry and economic policy has not been adequately planned and effectively implemented; rather, it has been built very competently. He stated that Baghdad knows the Kurdistan Region has options, but the priority remains that both sides work together to reach agreement on issues, otherwise a new approach has to be found.

Prime Minister Barzani said, "It is normal for Baghdad to know Kurdistan's oil data, including the price of oil and the mechanism of marketing, in a very transparent way. But the Region will never allow control of Kurdistan's oil industry by Baghdad."

He further explained that after an agreement was reached over oil and budget at the end of 2014 the KRG was patient when Baghdad sent less than what was expected during the first two months of 2015. But in the third month when the Region's oil exports increased, Baghdad continued sending less than agreed, it even subtracted further \$50 million without consulting the Region. With bad faith that resulting in distrust, Prime Minister Barzani said the KRG finds it increasingly difficult to continue this situation with Baghdad.

He expressed his appreciation to the Turkish Government that opened the economic gate and oil export route. He also hoped that the KRG will reach agreement with Baghdad that would benefit both the Region and country as a whole.

Responding to a question about the situation in Turkey, particularly about the fight between this country and Kurdistan Workers Party, PKK, Prime Minister Barzani said, "It is a Turkish internal issue that must be addressed inside Turkey."

Comparing the Kurdish situation in Turkey before and after AKP assumed power, he said there had been several achievements for the Kurdish people, particularly the peace process and reducing conflict. He expressed his hope that the current difficult situation would be reconsidered by all sides, and the peace process resumed with problems being resolved through dialogue and negotiations.

Responding to another question about the political situation in the Region, Prime Minister Barzani said that the KRG eighth cabinet was founded on consensus and agreement and based on mutual trust and understanding that over four years the business of government would be conducted in a peaceful manner. But the agreement was broken, a new framework must be defined, and the political coalition revised as necessary. He expressed his hope that all issues would be resolved through negotiations and mutual understanding, reiterating that the political measures taken recently meant to stop development of the unrest.

Regarding Syria, Prime Minister Barzani said the situation must be resolved by a political solution that will be acceptable to all Syrian sides, and that the solution must bring an end to the suffering of all the sections of Syrian people. ♦

Turkey's troubling ISIS game



Roger Cohen

SANLIURFA, TURKEY Above a restaurant specializing in sheep's head soup, with steaming tureens of broth in the window, two young Syrian journalists took up residence in this ancient town in southeastern Turkey. They had fled Raqqa, the stronghold in Syria of the Islamic State, or ISIS, and devoted their time to denouncing the crimes of the barbarous jihadi group. Today, their second-floor apartment is a crime scene, with a red police seal on the door.

On Oct. 30, the Islamic State beheaded Ibrahim Abdel Qader, age 22, and slit the throat of 20-year-old Fares Hammadi. They later posted a video of their handiwork, saying enemies "will never be safe from the blade of the Islamic State." The killers have not been found; a new unease inhabits this bustling town about 30 miles from the Syrian border. "It was shocking to have a first beheading in Turkey," Omer Yilmaz, the owner of the restaurant, told me. "We are used to bullets, but that, no. To slaughter a human like an animal is unthinkable."

The unthinkable is becoming conceivable in a combustible Turkey. Syrian violence has seeped over the border. The Islamic State is now entangled in the age-old conflict of Turks and Kurds. During several days near the Syrian border, often in areas with Kurdish majorities, I found simmering anger

among Kurds and predictions of worsening bloodshed.

The Turkish president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, bolstered by the electoral triumph of his conservative Islamist Justice and Development Party, or A.K.P., has shown a troubling penchant for benign neglect toward the jihadi Islamists — enough for them to establish a Turkish network.

What does Erdogan — in theory a key American ally leading a NATO state — see in the knife-wielding jihadis of the Islamic State? They are useful in confronting Turkey's nemesis, the Kurds, who have taken over wide sections of northern Syria and established self-government in an area they call Rojava. That in turn has raised the specter of a border-straddling Kurdistan, the nightmare of the Turkish republic.

Hence the unpersuasive Turkish balancing act that sees Erdogan offering the United States use of Turkish air bases to fight the Islamic State even as Turkey twice strikes the positions in Syria of Kurdish militias who, as my colleague Tim Arango put it, are the "most important allies within Syria of the American-led coalition fighting the Islamic State." Hence, also, the bungling and inaction that produced, on Oct. 10 in Ankara, the worst terrorist attack in Turkish history.

The Ankara suicide bombing followed another suicide bombing in the border town of Suruc that killed 33 pro-Kurdish activists in July.

One of the Ankara suicide bombers was the older brother of the Suruc suicide bomber. Their father tried without success to alert the government to the danger. Almost three months elapsed between the bombings, both of which principally targeted Kurds, and Erdogan did nothing. After the Ankara attack, his prime minister, Ahmet Davu-

toğlu, said the government had a list of potential suicide bombers but could not detain them because "as a country with rule of law, you can't arrest them until they act." (Not easy to do afterward either.) These words were uttered even as countless Kurdish militants were rounded up in the months between the June and November elections.

The impression has been inescapable that, for the government, having Islamic State militants kill Kurds with impunity was a palatable option with the bonus of creating the climate of instability that secured the Nov. 1 electoral victory for Erdogan.

For Erdogan's A.K.P. government, the terrorist organization par excel-

The jihadis are now embroiled in the age-old conflict of Turks and Kurds.

lence is the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., which has fought an intermittent insurgency against Turkey since the 1980s, is linked to the Kurdish militias in Syria and is designated a terrorist group by the

United States. The president, infused with post-electoral vim, vowed this week to fight P.K.K. members until they would lay down their weapons "and pour concrete over them." The Islamic State, by comparison, is the object of no such ruthless language or action.

I found Gultan Kisanak, the mayor of Diyarbakir, the effective capital of Kurdish aspirations for autonomy within Turkey, watering roses on the terrace outside her office. There was not a cloud in the sky on a mild late-fall day. But her mood was grim. Kisanak is a member of the Kurdish-dominated Peoples' Democratic Party, or H.D.P., which took over 70 percent of the vote in Diyarbakir but saw its national vote share fall to 10.7

percent from 13.1 percent in June as Erdogan's fear tactics worked. "ISIS became such a large force thanks to an open-door policy from Ankara," she told me. "Militants come and go. ISIS has been delegated to fight a proxy war against Kurdish Rojava, and all kinds of support has been given to them."

The government dismisses such suggestions. Did Turkey not, in extremis and under great international pressure, allow arms to reach the Kurdish-held Syrian town of Kobani and so prevent its fall to the Islamic State? Are Turkish air bases not being used by the American-led coalition? Do the Kurds not have in the H.D.P. representation in Parliament, as well as control of many municipalities? What do the Kurds want that they do not already have unless it's territory — and that Turkey will never give.

"For us, ISIS and the P.K.K. have the same aim," Abdurrahman Yetkin, a prominent businessman and Erdogan



Protesting in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir, Turkey, after the Nov. 1 election. Many Kurds are predicting worsening bloodshed.

supporter in Sanliurfa, told me. "Both organizations are being used by external powers to destabilize Turkey."

You hear a lot of such talk from the Erdogan camp these days — talk that implausibly conflates Islamist jihadis and Kurdish militants, as in the official characterization of the Ankara bombing as a "cocktail" involving both. It is this sort of manipulation of the facts that undermines the government's insistence that it's in the Islamic State fight for real.

Certainly it is targeting the Kurds. The P.K.K. made a big mistake by answering Suruc with the killing of two Turkish policemen. Violence could only serve Erdogan, who embarked on a fierce bombing campaign on P.K.K. strongholds in northern Iraq and has shown equal ruthlessness within Turkey. Diyarbakir and other majority

Kurdish towns in the southeast have been under intermittent curfew. Attempts to establish autonomy in certain city districts have been crushed.

Reeling back what he has unleashed after a dozen years in power is going to be hard for Erdogan. Power and money seem to have gone to his head. Turkey has veered into violence and polarization. "Erdogan is scared and he deals with it by making everyone more scared than he is," Soli Ozel, a university lecturer, told me.

The Turkish president needs to get back to the negotiating table with the Kurds, get serious about crushing the Islamic State in Turkey and beyond, ensure a transparent and credible investigation of the brutal killings in Suruc and Ankara (as well as the double murder in Sanliurfa) and stop his assault on a free

press. President Obama should press his ally hard on all these fronts.

Turkey, a heterogeneous nation, cannot be homogenized under the banner of Erdogan's Sunni Islamist nationalism. Intolerance will backfire, as it has in Syria. "They don't want the Kurds even to breathe," Ahmet Turk, the mayor of the beautiful southern town of Mardin, told me. "Kurds do not want violence, but if Erdogan does not stop, things could get much worse."

In Sanliurfa, as night fell, I met Ahmed Abdel Qader, the older brother of the beheaded journalist. He told me, "The guys who did this killing are now threatening me." His dark eyes seemed haunted. Turkey's tide of violence, cynically cultivated, must now be curbed. It won't be easy.

REUTERS

Clashes with Kurdish militants kill 18 in southeast Turkey

November 4, 2015 / By Seyhmus Cakan (Reuters)

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey - Eighteen people were killed in clashes in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast region on Wednesday, a day after the military launched air strikes there, and authorities announced a curfew in two provincial districts.

The violence came days after a parliamentary election won by the AK Party of President Tayyip Erdogan, who on Wednesday pledged to continue operations against the PKK until every last insurgent is "liquidated".

The office of the governor of Diyarbakir declared a curfew in 22 villages in two provincial districts, Hani and Lice, saying there would be an operation against the PKK militants there. The curfew was due to start at 5 p.m. (1400GMT).

Two soldiers and 15 Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants were killed

fighting near the village of Daglica by the Iraqi border, which the military had targeted with air strikes the day before, the General Staff said on its website.

Turkish jets also pounded PKK targets in northern Iraq on Tuesday for a second day, the military also said.

The AK Party won back a parliamentary majority on Sunday in a major victory for Erdogan. Speaking in Ankara, Erdogan used his first major speech since the vote to say operations against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) would continue until its militants buried their arms.

A two-year ceasefire he had championed with the militants collapsed in July.

A 20-year-old man was shot dead in the town of Silvan, where authorities ordered a round-the-clock curfew in three neighborhoods for a second successive day, security officials said. Clashes between security forces and the PKK's urban youth wing continued throughout the day in Silvan.

On Tuesday, one man was killed in Silvan and two others in Yuksekova.

The autonomy-seeking PKK, listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union, took up arms in 1984. More than 40,000 people, mainly Kurdish militants, have died in the prolonged conflict.

Over the years, Erdogan has granted some political and cultural rights to Turkey's estimated 15 million Kurds. But the government abandoned efforts for a negotiated settlement to the insurgency this year ahead of a June vote when the AKP lost its parliamentary majority. ◊

The INDEPENDENT

November 5, 2015

Kurdish militants end month-long Turkey ceasefire after Erdogan vows 'to liquidate them'

The PKK - designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union - declared the ceasefire on 10 October as a move to avoid any violence that might prevent a "fair and just election"

ISTANBUL, Nov 5 (Reuters)
<http://www.independent.co.uk>

Kurdish militants ended a month-old ceasefire in Turkey on Thursday, a day after

President Tayyip Erdogan vowed to "liquidate" them, dashing hopes of any let-up in violence in the wake of a national election.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militant group said the ruling AK Party, which won back its parliamentary majority in Sunday's election, was on a war footing.

"The unilateral halt to hostilities has come to an end with the AKP's war policy and the latest attacks," it said in a statement carried by the Firat news agency, which is close to the militant group.

Erdogan, who oversaw a peace process with the PKK which collapsed in July, vowed on Wednesday to continue battling the PKK

until every last fighter was "liquidated".

Eighteen people were killed in clashes with the military in the mainly Kurdish southeast on Thursday, bringing this week's death toll to almost 40. More than 40,000 people have been killed in the insurgency since it began in 1984.

The PKK - designated a terrorist group by Turkey, the United States and European Union - declared the ceasefire on 10 October as a move to avoid any violence that might prevent a "fair and just election". The government dismissed it as an electoral tactic. ◊

Interview: Peter W. Galbraith

MARC-ANDREA FIORINA DISCUSSES PROBLEMS IN THE MIDDLE EAST WITH THE FORMER DIPLOMAT

Marc-Andrea Fiorina
on Monday 9th November 2015
<http://www.cherwell.org>

PPETER GALBRAITH, a former Politics and Economics student at St Catherine's College, returned to his alma mater on 27th October to deliver a talk on Syria, Iraq and ISIS. Highlights of his career include helping to uncover Saddam's Hussein attempted genocide of the Iraqi Kurds, being the first US Ambassador to Croatia during the Balkan Wars and uncovering election fraud as Deputy UN Special Ambassador to Afghanistan during the 2009 Afghan presidential elections. Galbraith has also been one of the most vocal supporters of an autonomous Iraqi Kurdish state. I caught up with him after his talk to discuss the state of the Kurds in Syria and Iraq, the US-Iran nuclear deal and a potential resolution to the Syrian conflict.

The Syrian Civil War, in which more than 200,000 Syrians have lost their lives, has been dragging on for more than four years with no end in sight. This has led a group of states, headed by Russia, to argue that any possible solution to this conflict has to include finding a compromise and maintaining at the head of Syria its current president, Bashar Al-Assad, the autocrat whose despotic regime sparked the outrage that led to the beginning of the conflict.

As a man with years of experience in hands-on negotiations and disputes in the Iraqi-Syrian region, Galbraith provides a refreshingly pragmatic assessment of the current state of the Syrian conflict. He is obviously aware of what a fair end to the conflict would look like. Yet he seems more interested in actually ending this war, rather than pursuing some far-fetched ideal resolution whose lack of plausible application only delays an actual end to the war, and thus costs more lives. As he says, any deal that involves maintaining Assad in power is "an unjust agreement, but the continuation of the war is even more unjust".

He continues on to explain that "there's no justice in Assad remaining... but what's the alternative? It's fine to say Assad must go...but he isn't going. So the question is, how can you achieve peace, or some kind of settlement that will bring peace, [that] will preserve the multi-confessional, multi-religious, multi-ethnic nature of Syria? It's hard to see how you get there except by having some arrangement that includes Assad. It's



not desirable, but I would argue that it's better than the alternative of an indefinite continuation of the war."

Galbraith's view of an improved Middle East has at its heart an independent Kurdish state. He has always had a special interest in the fate of the Kurdish people, who are a minority in Syria, Turkey, Iraq and Iran and have been at the forefront of the fight against ISIS. He sees in the Syrian conflict an opportunity for the Kurdish people to emancipate themselves and redetermine the arbitrary lines between states drawn by the French and British after the First World War.

Speaking of the Syrian Kurds, Galbraith notes that in his trip to that region in December 2014, he noticed that "they have gone from being rebels in charge of an area to having many more attributes of a government." It is obvious that Galbraith believes that the conflict in Syria and Iraq offers the possibility of stable and peaceful Kurdish states rising from the region's ashes.

Yet he is more sceptical about the possibility of a unified Kurdish state, which would span Syria, Iraq, Turkey and possibly Iran. He explains that at least among the Iraqi Kurds, who currently are the closest to having a sovereign Kurdish state, "there is no desire for it". Because there are more Kurds in Turkey (11-20 million) and Iran (8-10 million) than in Iraq (5-7 million,) a unified Kurdish state would imply having to "share [the Iraqi Kurds'] resources with a much larger population" and probably being "ruled not from Erbil (the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan) but from Diyarbakir, in South-East Turkey". For these reasons, Iraqi Kurds might feel better off on their own.

It is easy to reduce the Kurds to one ethnic group with homogeneous interests, but it must be remembered that each Kurdish minority has its own history of cultural

identity and struggle. This contrast between Kurdish minorities is best illustrated by the continued Turkish financial and political support for a sovereign Iraqi Kurdish state, while the Turkish state is simultaneously in an open conflict with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party), a rebel group that has led the fight for Turkish Kurdish independence for the past thirty years.

As such, Galbraith concludes that "there is not a desire nor a drive for a Greater Kurdistan" in the Iraqi Kurds, which should make one reflect, if a Greater Kurdistan is off the table, on what the future of Kurdish minorities in Syria and Turkey might look like if the ethnic tensions that rock the region subsist or even possibly worsen.

GGalbraith also discussed the US-Iran nuclear deal, and its impact on the Middle Eastern region. Galbraith believes that the deal is "a very good deal from a Western perspective," partly because "the overwhelming prospect for change" that Galbraith witnessed in the Iranian population on a recent trip over there. He observes that "the mullahs [a term used to characterise Shi'ite clerics] seem to have lost control of society," in that the Iranian population seems ready to move on from the stringent religious laws imposed by Iranian religious leaders and embrace more liberal values; "this deal has strengthened those who want change."

Generally, Galbraith sees a "common interest" between the US and Iran on geopolitical matters, be it the preservation of the Iraqi government or the defeat of Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. As such, the deal strengthens one of the more stable states in the Middle East, while preventing their possessing weapons of mass destruction in such a troubled region.

All in all, Galbraith distinguishes himself from what can be found in academic journals or everyday newspapers. He puts pragmatic perspective over armchair-theoretic daydreaming when it comes to the Middle-East. He presents the cold, hard facts and searches for the most efficient solution over the morally ideal, or "just" solution.

You might agree or disagree with such a cynical point of view, but it is important to keep one's thoughts on the Middle East grounded in reality. No matter how desirable a utopian outcome might be, we have to start moving forwards from what is happening there right now.





PHOTOGRAPHY BY FLYER/ICSS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Syrian families and members of a Kurdish militia at a funeral last month in Qamishli, Syria, for fighters killed more than a year ago. The Kurds' control in the area has alarmed Turkish officials.

Syrians seek footing on shaky ground

RMEILAN, SYRIA

Kurdish forces fill void on Turkish border after chasing out Islamic State

BY BEN HUBBARD

After boiling crude oil from the ground near here all day in a metal tank to refine out the diesel, Ali Mohammed braved the fumes to bang the tank's drain open with a shovel. He stepped back as the dregs oozed into the dirt and burst into flames.

As a column of putrid smoke rose into the sky, he pulled a cigarette from his oil-soaked shirt and explained how the Syrian civil war had turned him into a diesel bootlegger.

He had once worn clean scrubs as a nurse in a state-run hospital, but had been fired after rebels took over his village, making all residents suspect, he said. Later, stretched by the war, the government had left the area, leaving its oil up for grabs.

"Before, we saw the wells but we never saw the oil," Mr. Mohammed said.

Now, although its fumes made them sick, the oil helped hundreds of families like his scrape by. "My wife doesn't complain about the smell as long as there's money," he said.

Such scenes dotted the map during a recent 10-day visit in northeastern Syria, along the Turkish border. Everyone here, it seems, has an angle to work, scrambling to fill the void left by the collapse of the Syrian state.

The Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL, saw this crossroads as a prime place to expand its jihadist caliphate. It was far from the major interests of the Syrian government in Damascus and along good river and road networks to allow the quick movement of fighters and contraband.

But as Kurdish fighters pushed the jihadists out, they sought to stamp their vision of a better life onto northern Syria: an autonomous enclave built on the principles — part anarchist, part grassroots socialist — of a Kurdish militant leader whose face now adorns arm bands and murals across the territory.

Others, like Mr. Mohammed, are just trying to get by: the farmers, herders

and smugglers, or those just trying to piece their communities back together after months under the black flag and public punishments of the Islamic State.

The police are gone and militias have flourished, snarling traffic with checkpoints and adorning lampposts with pictures of dead fighters. Shuttered gas stations stand near shacks where fuel is sold in plastic jugs. And abandoned government offices house ad hoc administrations that struggle to keep the lights on.

KURDISH UTOPIA

The Kurdish militia that grew to become the dominant power in this part of Syria over the past year — known as the People's Protection Units — has managed to roll back the Islamic State in many areas, carving out a swath of relative security that the residents call Rojava.

The community leaders here are working to set up a new order based on the philosophies of the separatist leader Abdullah Ocalan, who is serving a life sentence for treason in Turkey.

"Turn your land, your water and your energy into a commune to build a free and democratic life," reads a common billboard featuring Mr. Ocalan's mustachioed face. His supporters call him "president" or "uncle."

Influenced by the American anarchist Murray Bookchin, Mr. Ocalan has called for autonomous rule by local committees unbound by national borders. The project's proponents say they do not seek to break up Syria but are leading a long-term social revolution that will en-

sure gender and minority rights.

"The Syrian people can solve the Syrian crisis and find new ways to run the country," said Hediya Yusif, a co-president of one of the area's three self-declared cantons.

But much about the new administrations remains aspirational. No foreign power has recognized them, and Turkey looks on them with hostility, fearing that they want to declare an independent state along its border. Many of their workers are volunteers or functionaries still paid by the Syrian government.

The new order's complexities are glaring in the strongly Kurdish town of Qamishli, where monuments to fallen militia fighters and billboards in red, green and yellow — the flag colors of the People's Protection Units, or Y.P.G. — dominate roundabouts.

"The homeland is belonging, loyalty and sacrifice," read one sign, showing women farming and holding Kalashnikovs.

One morning, dozens of women waved militia flags on the town's main road, waiting for the bodies of Kurdish fighters to arrive for burial in a sprawling martyrs' cemetery.

Renas Ghanem stood among them with a photograph of her sister, Silan, who had quit high school to join a Kurdish militia in Iraq and returned to fight the Islamic State in Syria, where she was killed.

Nearby, however, loomed a statue of the former Syrian strongman Hafez al-Assad, in an area of continued Syrian government control only a few blocks long, where Syrian police officers in white shirts and black caps direct traffic.

Kurdish leaders do not hide their resentment of the Syrian government for its treatment of Kurds. But allowing the government to control the town's airport keeps it open, they say, and its largely symbolic presence downtown has prevented the government airstrikes that have destroyed rebel areas elsewhere.

"The Y.P.G. could chase the regime out in one hour, but what would come after?" said Ahmed Moussa, a Kurdish journa-

list. "Barrel bombs and airstrikes."

The territory's main link to the outside is two rusty boats that ferry passengers across a river from Iraq and a pontoon bridge for cargo. Trucks leaving Syria on a recent day carried cows and sheep; those entering hauled soft drinks and potato chips.

Despite improved security in some places, unemployment and the threat of renewed fighting have sent many people from this area fleeing by boats to Europe.

"The situation in Rojava can't keep people here," said Shivan Ahmed, a butcher's assistant in the town of Amuda who earns less than \$3 a day.

His wife and 7-month-old son had recently left on a boat that sank near Turkey, he said. They were rescued, but 13 of their relatives, mostly women and children, were still missing.

Still, he said, his neighbors kept leaving.

MARKS OF ISIS

Until this year, the Jihadists of ISIS controlled much of this area, and relics of their rule remain: black signs quoting the Islamic State's caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi; "The Islamic State" and the flag of the caliphate painted in black and white on curbsides and archways; tombs reduced to mounds of rubble.

Their transport hub was Tal Abyad, a border town into Turkey to the north that served as a transit point for foreign jihadists and a crossing for goods, from energy drinks to fertilizer used to make bombs.

Now it is in Kurdish hands. Residents who remained throughout recall the presence of jihadist fighters like an eerie dream.

"They used to come in all the time, and each one would eat two kilos!" said the 70-year-old owner of a kebab restaurant. To please the new rulers, he had hung curtains in a corner to create a separate women's section and put the television on Koranic recitation; other programming was banned.

Executions took place every week or

two near the fountain, he said, where an Islamic State "media point" — still standing — screened jihadist videos. And a cage remained at another roundabout where the jihadists locked up men caught smoking or playing cards.

The restaurant owner did not miss them, he said. But he would not give his name, out of fear of potential sleeper cells. ("They'll put us on the assassination list," he said.)

Nearby, a young woman in a bridal salon with wedding dresses hanging from the walls said business had boomed with so many women marrying foreign fighters.

"They came to dye their hair, to get ready for weddings, to do their makeup, anything," she said.

Still, the jihadists threatened her at first for plucking her eyebrows, a forbidden practice.

"They saw me and said, 'If we see you again with your eyebrows done, we'll close your shop,'" she said. She complied until they left.

"Now I do them as I want," she said, raising her sickle-shaped brows.

The town has a new local council headed by an Arab man and a Kurdish woman that has struggled to restore services since the jihadists looted the generators, water pumps and hospital supplies before withdrawing in June. But funding is short.

"We have no official, stable income," said the Arab man who is a council co-leader, Mansour Salloum.

The jihadists also raided the local Armenian church, defacing its crosses, building prison cells and hanging a noose nearby. The whiteboards in its abandoned school still bear lessons about weapons and explosives.

One Armenian congregant, Rafi Ke-vorkian, had remained in town and paid a minority tax of more than \$100 a year so the jihadists would not confiscate his home, he said.

He still has his receipt.

"I never threw it away," he said, "because you never know what is going to happen next." ●



Refining crude oil into diesel fuel and other products south of al-Jawadiyah, Syria. The collapse of the Syrian state has led some residents to become diesel bootleggers.

Turkey's Silvan under siege as Kurdish fighters assert authority

Kurdish 'popular resistance' clashes with Turkish military after 9 days under curfew

Alex MacDonald / 13 November 2015
www.middleeasteye.net

Several people have been killed as fierce clashes continue between Kurdish fighters and Turkish forces in the southeastern town of Silvan.

The Turkish military has deployed helicopters and tanks against the town, which has been under curfew for nine days, and locals have warned that its 90,000 residents are running low on food, water and electricity.

At least seven people, including two civilians and a policeman, were reportedly killed as members of the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H) - usually referred to as the youth wing of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) - fought with Turkish forces.

YDG-H members have erected barricades and closed off streets, often armed with AK-47s.

Speaking to the pro-PKK Firat News Agency (ANF), one YDG-H fighter set up their conflict in terms of resistance against a Turkish state which still refused to concede rights to the Kurds.

"History has never written about the atrocity suffered by the Kurdish people [at] the hands of the Turkish state," said Ekin Firat, a young woman involved in leading the "popular resistance" in Silvan's Mescit neighbourhood.

"Our goal is not to dig trenches alone, but rather to show that we could triumph over the state's techniques by means of trenches, which form a defence against the attacks targeting our people. These are areas where we protect our people from the state's atrocity.

"These are areas where we produce solutions to problems not settled by the state," she added.

A delegation of deputies from the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) travelled to Silvan to observe the clashes.

Feleknas Uca, Nursel Aydoğan, Ayşe Acar Başaran, Sibel Yığıtalp and Mehmet Ali Aslan visited the town along with representatives of the Diyarbakir Bar Association, but were reportedly not allowed to enter the districts



Military vehicles on a deserted street of Silvan in southeastern Turkey, during a curfew following clashes between Turkish forces and Kurdish militants (AFP)

under curfew.

"The authorities are not allowed to transfer the dead bodies to the morgues," said Aslan, speaking to IMC TV.

"I called 112 for an ambulance, but they responded that they will call me later after speaking with the Silvan Police Department. Then, they told me that the ambulances are not allowed to enter three neighbourhoods due to an ongoing military operation."

"Even Israel allows ambulances to enter Gaza," Aslan added.

Local Diyarbakir authorities have denied claims that by some locals that helicopters were dropping bombs on civilians.

"Claims in some media outlets such as 'civilians are being targeted in the operation, a five-year-old child was killed by bombs, helicopters are throwing bombs with the aim of bringing the people of Silvan on their knees,' are baseless," said the Diyarbakir governor's office.

"The operations against the terrorists will continue with determination," it added.

'KURDS HAVE A RIGHT TO DEFEND THEMSELVES'

Turkey's southeast has been in a state of unrest since a two-year ceasefire between the Turkish state and the PKK ended in July.

Since then, over 150 Turkish police and security officials have been killed in clashes with Kurdish fighters, while the military claimed to have killed well over 1,000 PKK fighters, mostly in northern Iraq, but also in Turkey - though the PKK disputes these figures.

As the security situation deteriorated and an increasing number of Kurdish politicians and activists have found themselves behind bars. Numerous towns and districts in the southeast have begun to declare political autonomy from the state.

Though the HDP has sought to distance itself from the YDG-H, Turkish security officials have often conflated the two, with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on more than

one occasion referring to votes for the HDP as a vote for a "terrorist organisation".

Mahmut Bozarslan, a Kurdish journalist who recently left Silvan, said that the military was trying to re-assert its authority over the area following the declarations of autonomy.

"They do not want to leave the area to the PKK," he told Middle East Eye.

"They are also maybe trying to show that they did not do the operations for the elections - the operations are going on after the elections also," he added, referring to speculation among many Kurds that the anti-PKK operations had been intended to stir up nationalist sentiment before the elections.

It has been commonplace among the Kurdish regions of Turkey to blame the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) for being complicit - either tacitly or directly - in a series of bomb attacks against Kurdish and left-wing activists, including one in the border town of Suruc in July which has often been pinpointed as the end of the ceasefire.

Since then, many Kurdish activists have claimed that the AKP has been seeking revenge for the HDP depriving it of an absolute majority in the Turkish parliament and thus the constitutional ability of Erdoğan to transfer more power to the presidency.

Nazmi Gur, the HDP Vice co-Chair for Foreign Affairs, said that the actions of YDG-H reflected a natural response to the government's incursion in Silvan.

"When you attack somewhere, there will be a need for defence," he told MEE. "The Kurds have a right to defend themselves from any brutal attacks."

He said that the HDP was "strongly against" the killings and escalation on both sides, but said that the government was ultimately responsible for the loss of life.

"It's the AKP and Mr. Erdoğan who broke the ceasefire and who finished the peace process."

He added that the PKK had declared a unilateral ceasefire prior to the second round of elections in November but that "the AKP never recognised this, never ceased their military activities, even on the day of the elections."

'THEY BLAME BOTH SIDES'

As the unrest in the southeast shows little sign of winding down, many residents are growing weary of the constant instability.

"People are getting angry with this situation," said Bozarslan.

"They blame both sides - some people said that if the PKK did not bring this violence within the cities, the state would not react like this."

"On the other hand, some people blame the security officials, they say if they didn't put this pressure on Kurds, the PKK would not have brought the strategy of sieges and barricades to the cities." ♦



Turkish army vehicles spotted rolling into Silvan (MEE / Murat Bayram)

Turquie : à Silvan, la population kurde est « lasse de la violence »

Tandis que les affrontements se poursuivent entre le PKK et les forces de sécurité, le mouvement kurde ne parvient pas à mobiliser

REPORTAGE

SILVAN (TURQUIE) - envoyé spécial

A Silvan, localité située à 80 km de Diyarbakir dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie, les rues du quartier de Mescit se sont transformées en lignes de front. En longeant de près des murs recouverts d'impacts de balle et de slogans révolutionnaires, les combattants du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK, interdit en Turquie) évoluent dans le fracas des grenades, des mitrailleuses, des coups de fusil de précision qui détonent de toutes parts, en provenance des positions des forces de sécurité turques.

Par moments, les déflagrations plus fortes d'obus de mortier ou de projectiles tirés par les chars de l'armée turque déployés sur les collines avoisinantes rompent la cadence des armes plus légères et le vrombissement distant d'un drone de surveillance qui survole le quartier.

Au bout d'une rue fermée par un monticule de terre et de pierres, six combattants attendent autour d'un feu de camp allumé dans une brouette. Un enfant du quartier s'est greffé à leur groupe. Dix ans, le visage dur et les yeux cernés, il vague parmi eux, un lance-roquettes déchargé sur l'épaule.

Dans un rictus forcé, un des combattants âgé de 19 ans, qui se fait appeler « commandant Dino » (« le fou » en kurde), résume la situation des jeunes miliciens locaux et des guérilleros plus expérimentés qui se sont retranchés dans ce secteur de Silvan : « Personne ne nous soutient à l'extérieur, nous sommes seuls et nous sommes cernés, mais jusqu'à ce que nous mourions tous en martyrs, nous ne quitterons pas ces rues. »

« Nous voulons la paix ! »

Dimanche, Mescit et deux autres quartiers populaires, bastions du mouvement kurde dans cette ville de 87 000 habitants, entraient dans leur sixième jour de couvre-feu. Une semaine s'est écoulée depuis les élections du 1^{er} novembre qui ont vu le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, au pouvoir depuis 2002) du président Erdogan remporter une large victoire et le Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), proche du mouvement kurde, accusé un net recul avec seulement 10,7 % des voix à l'échelle nationale.

Comme Cizre, Nusaybin et plusieurs autres villes du Sud-Est investies par le mouvement armé kurde au cours de l'été, Silvan a sombré dans la routine meurtrière d'une guerre urbaine épisodique qui n'épargne pas des populations excédées. Les affrontements, qui ont fait cinq morts déclarés depuis le 2 novembre, se poursuivent sans perspective d'un retour aux négociations. Le 4 novembre, dans son premier discours après les élections, le président islamo-conservateur turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, excluait toute issue autre que le dépôt des armes par les militants kurdes ou leur « liquidation » totale.

A Silvan, la majorité des habitants des quartiers touchés par les affrontements ont fui vers le centre-ville, où magasins et cafés restent ouverts et où la vie suit son cours. Certaines familles se refusent pourtant à partir, survivant malgré les combats et les pénuries de nourriture et d'électricité. « Nous n'avons nulle part où aller. Personne ne peut nous apporter de l'aide. Nos petits sont traumatisés. Il faudrait que les combattants s'en aillent, l'Etat veut vider le quartier

avant de tout raser », se désole une mère de famille devant un ancien lycée religieux où des combattants kurdes ont pris position pour tenter d'atteindre la police. « On veut juste que ça s'arrête ! Nous voulons la paix ! », s'exclame-t-elle dans un sanglot.

Impuissance

A Silvan comme ailleurs, les feux insurrectionnels que le PKK tente d'allumer depuis l'été n'ont pas pris. Pour Yilmaz, habitant de Mescit réfugié dans le centre-ville après avoir été contraint d'aban-

« Jusqu'à ce que nous mourions tous en martyrs, nous ne quitterons pas les rues »

« COMMANDANT DINO »
combattant kurde

donner son commerce, le mouvement kurde a échoué : « Les combattants nous demandent de rester, les gens les soutiennent mais ils ont peur et s'en vont. Le parti nous avait dit que Silvan était prête pour la guerre, que toute la population se soulèverait et soutiendrait les quartiers, mais il ne se passe rien. Dans le centre, personne, même parmi ceux du parti et de la mairie, ne se soucie de ce qui nous arrive, ils sont contents que ça ne se passe pas chez eux. »

Les cadres du parti pro-kurde HDP, qui contrôlent la municipalité et organisaient la société civile locale, paraissent désemparés. Comme dans toutes les régions



Dans le quartier de Mescit, bastion kurde de Silvan (Turquie), le 7 novembre.

EMILIEN URBANO/MYOP
POUR « LE MONDE »

kurdes, leurs rangs ont été décimés par les vagues d'arrestations consécutives à la reprise des hostilités. Après avoir déclaré l'autodétermination de la ville en août, vingt-sept membres de la municipalité et de la branche locale du parti ont été arrêtés, dont la maire, Yüksel Bodakçi. Depuis son bureau où les tirs et les explosions se font entendre, sa remplaçante, Zuhâl Teikiner, admet son impuissance : « Nous sommes paralysés, les gens sont fatigués de la violence, on ne peut pas les mobiliser. »

Samedi, une modeste manifestation demandant le retrait des forces de sécurité a été dispersée au moyen de gaz lacrymogène et de canons à eau avant de se solder par vingt-cinq arrestations. Au dernier étage de la mairie, sur la terrasse attenante au vaste bureau de la nouvelle maire, les cadres encore en liberté du mouvement kurde qui viennent lui rendre visite en sont réduits à écouter de loin le bruit des combats, tandis que, sur un terrain vague voisin, une dizaine d'enfants jouent au football. ■

ALLAN KAVAL

Turquie: la presse d'opposition dans le collimateur d'Erdogan

Alors que le parti islamo-conservateur du président a regagné la majorité absolue au Parlement, la liberté d'informer n'a jamais été aussi menacée en Turquie.

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CORRESPONDANTE À ISTANBUL

MÉDIAS La sentence ne s'est pas fait attendre. Lundi 2 novembre, au lendemain de la victoire surprise de l'AKP, les journalistes de *Nokta* étaient en salle de rédaction, de nouveau prêts à dégainer leur stylo contre Recep Tayyip Erdogan, quand sept inconnus ont fait irruption dans les locaux du magazine. « C'était des policiers en civil. Ils ont fait le tour des bureaux, saisissant un à un les exemplaires de notre dernier numéro. Ensuite, ils ont embarqué le rédacteur en chef, Cevheri Güven, et notre directeur de la publication, Murat Capan », raconte Ertugul Erbas, un des rédacteurs de l'hebdomadaire de gauche connu pour ses positions tranchées contre le président turc. Sur son bureau, une copie A4 de la « une » de *Nokta*, parue le matin de la perquisition. On y reconnaît le visage du chef de l'État, frappé d'un coup de tampon annonçant en lettres rouges « le début de la guerre civile en Turquie ». Pour les autorités, une ligne de trop a été franchie : le jour suivant, mardi 3 novembre, les deux dirigeants du magazine sont aussitôt inculpés pour « tentative de coup d'État » et expédiés dans la prison de Metris. Une semaine plus tard, la rédaction est encore sous le choc. « La moindre critique est désormais considérée comme une menace. C'est un signe de dictature ! Je n'ai plus d'espoir pour la démocratie... », déplore Ismail Evren, un autre reporter de la rédaction.

Les coups de ciseaux, l'équipe de *Nokta* en a déjà fait les frais. En septembre, l'hebdomadaire avait été saisi, et des journalistes gardés à vue plusieurs heures après la publication, en couverture, d'un photomontage montrant Erdogan, tout sourire, prenant un « selfie » lors de funérailles de soldats qui combattaient le PKK. L'offensive gouvernementale faisait partie d'une vague d'intimidations préélectorales contre les voix dissonantes : attaques contre le siège de *Hürriyet*, le plus grand quotidien indépendant du pays, agression d'un de ses journalistes vedettes, poursuites judiciaires contre de nombreux reporters... Et puis, cet assaut policier - quatre jours avant le scrutin - contre deux chaînes de télévision du groupe Koza-Ipek, réputé proche de l'imam Fethullah Gülen, l'ennemi juré du président islamo-conservateur...

Certains, comme Ertugul Erbas, osaient pourtant espérer un semblant de retour à la normale, une fois les élections passées, et la majorité absolue regagnée par le parti au pouvoir depuis 2002. « Malheureusement, ça s'empire de jour en jour. Les accusations qui nous visent manquent de logique. Comment un ma-



gazine qui ne tire qu'à 5 000 exemplaires peut-il mettre un pays en danger ? », lâche-t-il. L'AKP se défend en s'appuyant sur la Constitution et en invoquant l'article 299 du Code pénal qui sanctionne « les insultes au chef d'État ». Contacté par *Le Figaro*, Haroun Armagan, un des porte-parole de l'AKP, en appelle à la « responsabilité des journalistes ». « Nous sommes l'objet d'attaques venant de deux organisations terroristes (la guérilla du PKK et l'État islamique, NDLR). En cette période particulièrement sensible, il n'est pas raisonnable de mettre de l'huile sur le feu (...) En plus, quand un parti gagne près de 50 % des voix, parler de guerre civile n'a aucun sens », dit-il.

« La moindre critique est désormais considérée comme une menace. C'est un signe de dictature ! Je n'ai plus d'espoir pour la démocratie »

ISMAIL EVREN, REPORTER DU MAGAZINE NOKTA

Cette chasse aux voix critiques s'inscrit aussi, rappelle une source gouvernementale, dans une guerre à couteaux tirés entre l'homme fort du pays et son ex-allié l'imam Fethullah Gülen, aujourd'hui exilé aux États-Unis. Depuis le scandale de corruption qui, en 2013, éclaboussa l'entourage du président, le

gouvernement accuse Gülen de vouloir le renverser en cherchant à infiltrer la police, la justice et les médias. Ces derniers jours, une série d'interpellations a frappé ses proches.

Le problème, s'inquiète le journaliste Can Dündar, c'est que « ce climat d'extrême paranoïa laisse libre cours à une offensive tous azimuts contre la presse ». « Hier, c'était *Nokta*. Aujourd'hui, la rumeur dit que le journal *Zaman* pourrait être le prochain sur la liste... Et demain ? Je me prépare au pire », poursuit le rédacteur en chef du quotidien d'opposition *Cumhuriyet* (« République »). Dans son bureau, gardé par des blindés, Can Dündar, 52 ans, parle à la façon d'un rescapé qui attend son tour. Et pour cause : ces jours-ci, il est la double cible du régime et des islamistes. La veille du scrutin, les forces de l'ordre ont renforcé la protection autour de l'immeuble du journal après avoir arrêté à Gaziantep un membre présumé de l'État islamique qui était en possession de l'adresse de *Cumhuriyet*. En fait, depuis la publication, en janvier, des caricatures du *Charlie Hebdo* paru juste après l'attentat parisien, le quotidien de centre-gauche est dans le collimateur des extrémistes. Mais aussi du pouvoir. À l'époque, la police avait perquisitionné l'imprimerie en pleine nuit pour « insulte à la religion ». Les deux éditorialistes - qui avaient reproduit la caricature de Mahomet - avaient, eux, été inculpés.

Le président Erdogan en veut particu-

lièrement à *Cumhuriyet* pour la publication, au mois de mai, d'une enquête sur des livraisons d'armes organisées par les services secrets turcs à des groupes djihadistes en Syrie. « Il va le payer, et je vais le traquer jusqu'au bout », avait alors menacé le chef de l'État en direct sur une chaîne pro-AKP. Pour ce double « crime » aux yeux des autorités - « trahison » et « espionnage » -, Can Dündar risque par deux fois la prison à vie. Sans compter la petite vingtaine d'autres poursuites dont il fait l'objet et qu'il avoue « ne plus compter ». Le visage pla-

« Entre 60 et 70 % des médias sont entre les mains d'Erdogan. Ça laisse peu de place à la liberté d'informer »

CAN DÜNDAR, RÉDACTEUR EN CHEF DE CUMHURİYET

qué contre la fenêtre de son bureau, il ironise : « Vous voyez le bâtiment en face, c'est le tribunal. Et là, à droite, c'est un cimetière. Ça résume bien la situation, non ? » Pour ce journaliste aguerri, le constat est sans appel. « La presse turque, dit-il, n'a jamais connu pire période, même après le coup d'État des années 1980 ! » Aujourd'hui, explique-t-il, les pressions sont aussi nombreuses que vicieuses : « Quand vous n'êtes pas poursuivis, vous êtes attaqués, ou bien virés ». Autre tendance qui l'inquiète : le rachat de la plupart des grands journaux par des hommes d'affaires proches d'Erdogan. « Entre 60 et 70 % des médias sont entre ses mains. Ça laisse peu de place à la liberté d'informer », estime-t-il.

Mais pour le rédacteur en chef de *Cumhuriyet*, le plus désolant reste « ce mélange de peur et d'apathie qui mine aujourd'hui la société turque ». « Quand *Hürriyet* a été attaqué, nous avons organisé un rassemblement sur la place Taksim. Nous n'étions pas plus de 500. À dire vrai, les gens ne se sentent pas concernés par nos problèmes. » Pas question, pour autant, de baisser les bras. « Je refuse de céder à la peur », poursuit l'intrépide journaliste qui dit puiser son énergie dans le soutien apporté par ses confrères, notamment étrangers. « Reporters sans frontières (qui range la Turquie au 149^e rang - sur 180 - dans son classement mondial des pays respectant les médias, NDLR) vient de nous appeler pour nous annoncer qu'on était nominés au prix annuel pour la liberté de la presse. Si nous décrochons le sésame, j'irai à Paris. Enfin, si on me laisse voyager... » Prévue le 17 novembre, la remise du prix coïncide avec une nouvelle convocation devant la justice. ■

En Irak, les forces kurdes annoncent la libération de Sinjar

<http://www.rfi.fr> / 13 nov. 2015

Dans le nord de l'Irak, depuis le 12 novembre, les forces kurdes investissent la ville de Sinjar, contrôlée par le groupe EI. Une ville stratégique puisqu'elle est située entre Raqqa, considérée comme la capitale syrienne de l'Etat islamique, et Mossoul la deuxième ville d'Irak, elle aussi, sous le contrôle de l'organisation terroriste. Ce vendredi, d'après un dirigeant kurde cité par l'AFP, les forces kurdes irakiennes ont « libéré » Sinjar.

Les forces kurdes irakiennes ont repris Sinjar, une ville du nord de l'Irak tenue depuis plus d'un an par le groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI), a annoncé ce vendredi 13 novembre le dirigeant de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani. « Je suis ici pour vous annoncer la libération de Sinjar » à la faveur d'une offensive éclair des forces kurdes lancée jeudi avec l'appui des frappes de la coalition internationale et des combattants de la minorité yézidie, a donc indiqué M. Barzani lors d'une conférence de presse non loin de la ville reconquise.

Pour la population kurde, indique notre correspondante à Erbil, Oriane Verdier, cette offensive est une preuve de la capacité d'entente des forces du Grand Kurdistan. Cette région revendiquée, à cheval entre la Syrie, la Turquie l'Irak et l'Iran.



« Je suis ici pour vous annoncer la libération de Sinjar », a déclaré le dirigeant de la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien, Massoud Barzani
Photo Ari Jalal / Reuters

UN ARGUMENT POUR L'AUTONOMIE

Pour le Kurdistan irakien, c'est un argument de plus pour l'autonomie de la région face au gouvernement national. Le gouverneur de la province de Mossoul a rappelé que cette offensive à Sinjar a été menée sans aucune participation de l'armée irakienne. Hier, le Premier ministre irakien a d'ailleurs appelé Massoud Barzani, le président de la région autonome, pour le féliciter.

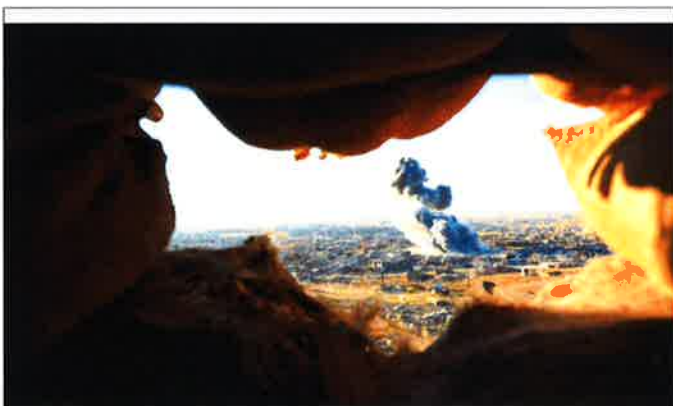
Les forces kurdes sont soutenues par l'aviation américaine. A ce sujet les Peshmergas attendent plus de soutien de la coalition internationale. « Nous avons besoin d'armes lourdes et de haute technologie pour venir à bout de l'Etat islamique en Irak », a affirmé hier Sihad Barzani, commandant peshmerga et frère du président du Kurdistan irakien.

SINJAR, VERROU STRATÉGIQUE ENTRE MOSSOUL ET LES TERRITOIRES SYRIENS

Jusqu'à 7 500 combattants kurdes prennent part à cette opération destinée à reprendre Sinjar et « établir une zone tampon pour protéger (la ville) et ses habitants », a indiqué le Conseil de sécurité de la région autonome du Kurdistan (KRSC). Un officier des renseignements militaires américains, le capitaine Chance McCraw, a estimé à Bagdad que les peshmergas allaient faire face à 300 à 400 jihadistes et de nombreux engins piégés posés à travers la ville.

Ce vendredi 13 novembre, d'après l'AFP, des combattants peshmergas sont entrés à pied, à partir du nord, dans la ville en proie à de vastes destructions. Une des tâches qui attendent les soldats kurdes est le désamorçage des engins piégés, tactique largement utilisée par l'EI pour empêcher ses ennemis d'entrer dans une ville.

Sinjar se trouve sur une route stratégique reliant Mossoul (nord), le fief de l'organisation jihadiste en Irak, aux territoires contrôlés par ce groupe en Syrie. « En prenant Sinjar, nous serons en mesure de couper cette ligne de communication, ce qui, nous croyons, affectera la capacité (de l'EI) à se ré-approvisionner », a déclaré le colonel américain Steve Warren, porte-parole de la coalition ●



Attaque aérienne de la coalition contre les positions du groupe EI autour de Sinjar (Irak), ce 12 novembre 2015.
REUTERS/Ari Jalal



Les peshmergas avancent vers Sinjar, ce 13 novembre 2015.

L'Etat islamique sur la défensive

Revanche Les forces kurdes ont lancé une offensive pour reprendre la ville clé de Sinjar, en Irak. Une attaque similaire se prépare sur Raqqa, en Syrie.

Par
LUC MATHIEU
et **JEAN-PIERRE PERRIN**

C'est la première grande offensive lancée contre l'Etat islamique (EI) depuis que cette organisation a conquis, à l'été 2014, tout le nord de l'Irak. Attendue depuis plusieurs mois et sans cesse reportée – pour cause de mauvais temps ou de rivalités inter-kurdes –, elle a commencé jeudi matin et vise à reprendre Sinjar, une ville située sur un axe stratégique reliant l'Irak et la Syrie. Elle rassemble essentiellement des forces kurdes et quelques brigades yézidiennes, soit environ 7500 hommes, selon le conseil de sécurité de la région autonome du Kurdistan. Elles sont soutenues par l'aviation de la coalition internationale et conseillées par des militaires américains. Jeudi soir, les forces kurdes avaient pris le contrôle de trois villages dans les faubourgs de Sinjar et de plusieurs tronçons de cette route, dont l'important check-point de Oum al-Shababit, à 26 kilomètres de cette ville. «*Nous avançons avec précaution et lentement vers le cœur de cette ville, en raison des pièges, mines, snipers et kamikazes de Daech [l'acronyme arabe de l'Etat islamique, ndr]*», confiait une source kurde, citée par la BBC.

Pourquoi cette offensive est-elle importante ?

D'un point de vue stratégique, la reprise de la province du Sinjar permettrait de couper la route 47 reliant Mossoul, la grande ville du nord de l'Irak, à Raqqa,



Les peshmergas participent à une opération appuyée par les Etats-Unis dans la ville de Sinjar, actuellement aux mains de l'Etat islamique. PHOTO SAFIN HAMED. AFP

en Syrie, les deux QG militaires et politiques de l'EI. Cette voie est utilisée par le groupe terroriste pour faire circuler armes, matériel et renforts entre ces deux pays. Selon des estimations américaines, ce sont quelque 600 jihadistes qui défendaient la ville de Sinjar au moment de l'offensive.

La reprise de cette région a aussi une grande valeur symbolique. La perte du Sinjar a été catastrophique pour les peshmergas (la force armée kurde), contraints non seulement à une fuite humiliante, mais aussi à abandonner à leur terrible sort les populations yézidiennes, une minorité kurdophone qui a toujours refusé de se convertir à l'islam. D'où les massacres de centaines de villageois, considérés comme hérétiques, et le kidnapping d'enfants et de milliers de femmes, violées et vendues ensuite comme captives sexuelles ou esclaves. L'assaut contre le Sinjar avait été alors décrit par l'ONU comme «*une tentative de génocide*». Des dizaines de milliers d'autres Yézidis, ceux qui avaient pu s'échapper, avaient été contraints de se réfugier sur les Monts Sinjar, leur montagne sacrée, où ils avaient demeuré en pleine canicule pendant des semaines sans eau, ni nourriture. Ils avaient été sauvés par une opération lancée par les Kurdes syriens. Cette tragédie avait été l'un des principaux arguments avancés par le

président Barack Obama pour envoyer des avions bombardier l'EI en Irak.

DÉCRYPTAGE

L'actuelle contre-offensive permet enfin aux Kurdes d'apparaître comme les seules forces capables d'affronter sérieusement au sol l'organisation d'Abou Bakr Al-Baghdadi et d'en tirer profit diplomatiquement.

Qu'en est-il du front sud en Irak ?

Cela fait des mois que l'armée irakienne et les milices chiites ne progressent plus. Si elles ont pu reprendre au printemps Tikrit, c'est que l'Etat islamique n'a pas cherché vraiment à défendre cette ville. En revanche, elles n'ont pas été capables de reconquérir les grandes villes de Ramadi et de Fallouja, en dépit du soutien sur le terrain de l'Iran, comme l'indique la mort en décembre 2014 du général des pasdaran (Gardiens de la révolution), Hamid Taghavi, tué en défendant la ville sainte chiite de Samarra. Et de celui de l'armée américaine, qui approvisionne et entraîne l'armée régulière. Une victoire des Kurdes à Sinjar pourrait être l'occasion pour cette armée et ses alliés de reprendre l'offensive afin que l'Etat islamique soit contraint de se battre sur plusieurs fronts.

En quoi consiste

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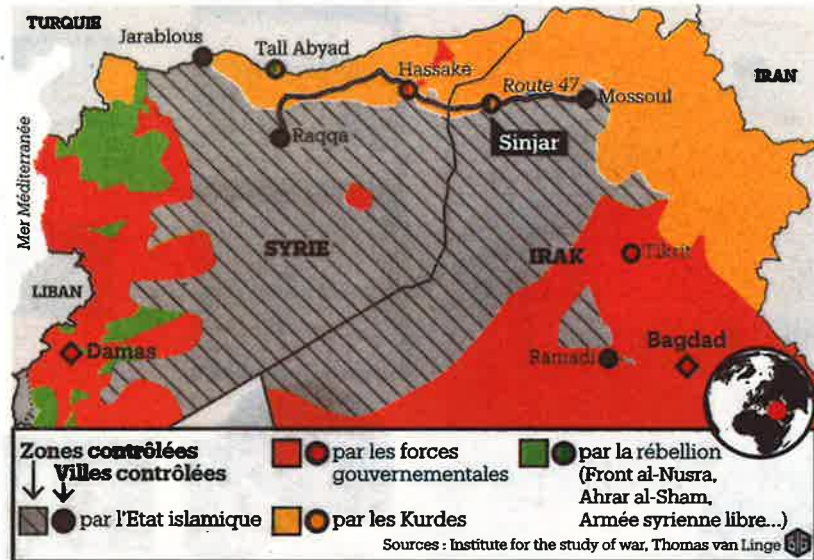
la participation américaine ?

Essentiellement à des frappes aériennes. Quelque 60 à 70 jihadistes ont été tués jeudi par ces bombardements, selon les estimations données par le colonel Steve Warren, le porte-parole de l'armée américaine. L'officier a admis également que des conseillers militaires américains assistent les peshmergas dans le Sinjar, où ils s'emploient notamment à repérer des cibles potentielles pour l'aviation.

Une offensive sur Raqqa, en Syrie, est-elle en préparation ?

Si les Kurdes parviennent à reprendre Sinjar, l'EI perdra sa principale route stratégique entre Mossoul et Raqqa. Régulièrement bombardés par l'aviation américaine, et épisodiquement par l'armée russe, les jihadistes de Raqqa seraient encore un peu plus affaiblis. Ils ont déjà perdu cet été Tall Abyad, à la frontière turco-syrienne, l'un des principaux points de passage pour les combattants étrangers qui rejoignent le «califat». Ils conservent encore celui de Jarablus, plus à l'ouest.

A priori, cet affaiblissement pourrait favoriser le déclenchement d'une offensive contre l'EI à Raqqa. Les Etats-Unis y sont favorables. Ils soutiennent la nouvelle coalition dite des Forces démocratiques syriennes. Elle regroupe les Kurdes des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), plusieurs brigades arabes sunnites de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), des combattants chrétiens syriaques et des membres de l'Armée des tribus de Tall Abyad. Jeudi, des images diffusées sur Internet montraient un convoi de pick-up de la brigade des combattants de Raqqa qui avançait en direction du fief jihadiste. Le chef de ce groupe, Abou Issa, a récemment affirmé que ses hommes s'apprétaient à lancer



l'assaut, déclarant la région «zone de guerre».

Pour autant, les brigades arabes, à qui les Etats-Unis affirment avoir largué 50 tonnes de munitions le mois dernier, n'ont pas les moyens militaires de s'emparer seules de Raqqa. Elles ont besoin de l'appui des Kurdes. Mais ceux-ci sont réticents, malgré les pressions américaines. «Pour l'instant, nous nous occupons de Sinjar. Puis, nous reprendrons les champs pétroliers de al-Hol, ce qui devrait aller vite. Ensuite, Jarablus, à la frontière turque, et seulement après Raqqa», explique une source kurde à Paris. Le peu d'empressement des Kurdes à participer à l'offensive tient au fait que Raqqa n'est pas un territoire qu'ils revendiquent. A l'inverse de Jarablus, jugé prioritaire. S'ils s'en emparaient, ils pourraient espérer faire la jonction avec le canton d'Afrine, encore plus à l'ouest, et établir une région autonome le long de la frontière turque. L'hypothèse est catégoriquement rejetée par Ankara. L'armée turque a bombardé fin octobre

des positions kurdes après que des combattants ont traversé l'Euphrate en direction de Jarablus. Jeudi, le président turc, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a relancé l'idée d'une «zone de sécurité» dans le nord de la Syrie pour accueillir les réfugiés. «Proclamons une zone nettoyée des terroristes, une zone d'exclusion aérienne, réglons cette affaire», a-t-il déclaré. Ce projet est évoqué depuis 2012. S'il venait à se réaliser, il empêcherait de fait l'instauration d'une région autonome kurde en Syrie.

La coalition arabokurde vient en revanche de passer à l'action dans la province d'Hassaké (Nord-Est), entre les frontières turque et irakienne. Appuyée par l'aviation américaine, elle a annoncé mercredi qu'elle s'était emparé de deux villages et qu'elle continuait à progresser vers les villes de Chaddadé et al-Hol. Son avancée est ralentie par les attentats-suicide et les centaines de mines enfouies par les jihadistes, d'après l'agence de presse kurde ARA News. ◆



Turquie: 11 rebelles kurdes et trois soldats tués dans le sud-est

Diyarbakir (Turquie), 13 novembre 2015 (AFP)

AU MOINS 11 REBELLES du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et trois soldats turcs ont été tués dans des combats dans le sud-est à majorité kurde du pays, a-t-on appris auprès des autorités locales vendredi.

Les combattants du PKK ont été tués jeudi par les forces de sécurité turques dans les districts de Silopi et Cizre, dans la province de Simak, frontalière de la Syrie et de l'Irak, a indiqué le gouverneur local dans un communiqué publié vendredi.

Dans la province voisine de Van, frontalière de l'Iran, un soldat turc a été tué et trois autres ont été blessés au cours d'un raid mené vendredi à l'aube contre une cache présumée de combattants du PKK, a indiqué l'armée sur son site.

Deux autres soldats ont péri le même jour dans l'explosion d'une mine au passage d'un convoi militaire dans le district de Lice, dans la province de Diyarbakir, a appris l'AFP auprès des autorités locales.

Dans cette même province, la ville de Silvan, dont trois quartiers sont depuis onze jours sous couvre-feu, les violents affrontements opposant les forces de sécurité turques à la branche jeunesse du PKK se poursuivaient vendredi.

"Les opérations vont se poursuivre jusqu'à ce que chaque rue soit sécurisée", a affirmé vendredi le Premier ministre Ahmet Davutoglu. "De nombreux objectifs ont été atteints, la vie reprendra bientôt son cours habituel", a-t-il ajouté.

Quelque 10.000 habitants sur les 90.000 que compte Silvan ont fui les combats, a rapporté le quotidien Hurriyet dans son édition parue vendredi.

Après plus de deux ans de cessez-le-feu, les combats ont repris fin juillet entre les rebelles kurdes et les forces de sécurité turques, faisant voler en éclats le fragile processus de paix engagé à l'automne 2012 pour mettre un terme à ce conflit, qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

Le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan a promis de poursuivre la lutte "jusqu'à ce que l'organisation terroriste enterre ses armes, et que ses membres se rendent et quittent le sol turc".

Kurds attack ISIS, retaking key road

MOUNT SINJAR, IRAQ

Yazidi forces join assault that cuts militants' link from Syrian base to Iraq

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON AND RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

Kurdish forces aided by thousands of lightly armed Yazidi fighters captured a strategic highway in northern Iraq on Thursday in the early stages of an offensive to reclaim the town of Sinjar from the Islamic State, which seized it last year and murdered, raped and enslaved thousands of Yazidis.

As many as 7,500 Kurdish pesh merga fighters were moving on "three fronts to cordon off Sinjar City, take control of ISIL's strategic supply routes, and establish a significant buffer zone to protect the city and its inhabitants from incoming artillery," the security council of the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq said in a statement, using an acronym for the Islamic State.

Describing the unfolding battle, Kurdish officials said pesh merga forces had taken the village of Gabara, west of Sinjar, and had cut the supply line, Highway 47, the major east-west road that connects Syria to Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, and that serves as a lifeline for the Islamic State, also known as ISIS.

But factional tensions that plagued the planning of the operation continued, and troops with the government pesh

merga units and fighters from the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., fought in separate theaters and made competing claims — all with an eye to establishing control of the area if it is liberated.

"We cut the road between Syria and Iraq three hours ago, at around eight in the morning," said a P.K.K. commander who uses the nom de guerre Moslum Shingal and who spoke by telephone from the mountain. Gaining control of the road could hamper the Islamic State's movement of fighters, fuel and supplies within its self-declared caliphate and force the militants to resort to less efficient smuggling routes.

By midday, the combined forces said they had captured a 35-kilometer, or about 22-mile, stretch of the highway on either side of Sinjar, accomplishing one of the principal aims of the operation. But there were competing claims from the two sides about which group had taken the road first and who held the checkpoints along the controlled portion of the road.

"Up until now we have taken back 35 kilometers of the highway," said Qassim Simo, the head of a pesh merga intelligence unit on Mount Sinjar. "This was all done by pesh merga and Yazidi forces."

P.K.K. leaders, however, countered that they had taken and now controlled the road west of Sinjar, which is still held by the Islamic State, while the pesh merga controlled the eastern part.

Air forces from the United States-led coalition pounded the area overnight in preparation for the offensive. As the campaign got underway, long columns



of pesh merga vehicles, including pickup trucks, sport utility vehicles and a small number of armored vehicles, snaked their way across Mount Sinjar as airstrikes boomed in the distance.

Some of the fighters walked alongside the vehicles, headed for the front in Sinjar. Along the way, a suicide car bomb was blown up by a pesh merga antitank missile before the driver could reach his target.

The battle plan called for the pesh merga, joined by Yazidi forces, to sweep down from Mount Sinjar to attack fighters of the Islamic State on multiple fronts. Kurdish officials said there could be as many as 700 Islamic State fighters in and around Sinjar, including foreign jihadists.

The operation, which comes as the American-led coalition is trying to regain the initiative in the struggle with the Islamic State, holds out the possibility of progress along a new front in northern Iraq. The Obama administration has been under pressure to show that it has a workable strategy for defeating the Islamic State, and it is looking to the successful prosecution of this offensive as a first step.

The aim is to add pressure on Islamic State fighters who are being pressed militarily in northeast Syria and Iraq. They are currently partly encircled in Ramadi, the capital of Anbar Province in Iraq, and were recently evicted from Baiji in northern Iraq, the site of a strategic oil refinery.

Still, the operation faces several important military and political challenges.

Even if the Sinjar campaign succeeds, the Islamic State has a stranglehold on vital areas in the region, including Mosul and large portions of eastern Syria and western Iraq. That includes most of the Sunni Arab heartland of Anbar Province, where a government-led military push has advanced toward Ramadi but has not yet managed to retake it from the militants.

The United States-led coalition has had continuing troubles handling stark divisions between the factions nominally aligned under the anti-Islamic State banner, infighting over who should control the area once it is liberated that threatened to upend the attack even in



Pesh merga fighters observed the campaign from a hilltop on Thursday. Tensions with the Syrian affiliate of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., plagued the planning of the operation.

its late stages.

Before the Islamic State swept across northern Iraq, the area was a political stronghold for the Kurdistan Democratic Party, which is led by Massoud Barzani, president of the Kurdish autonomous region in Iraq, who is overseeing the Sinjar operation from a command post in northwest Iraq.

But many Yazidis — a tiny religious minority that was almost entirely based around Mount Sinjar before the Islamic State's advance — blame the pesh merga and the Kurdistan Democratic Party, commonly known as the K.D.P., for failing to prevent Sinjar's fall and subjecting them to a catalog of horrors by the Islamic State, including the sexual enslavement of thousands of women.

That calamity led to the flight of hundreds of thousands of Yazidis, tens of thousands of whom spent a week or more exposed to a blazing August sun on the barren slopes of Mount Sinjar with little food or water. They were eventually rescued by the Syrian Kurdish militia of the P.K.K., which is considered a terrorist organization by the Turkish government.

As a result, the Yazidis' sympathies now lie strongly with the P.K.K., creating tension over who will control the territory in the event that it is taken from the Islamic State.

"Yazidi support has shifted away from the K.D.P.," said Christine van den Toorn, who directs the Institute for Regional and International Studies at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimaniya. "If Sinjar is to be retaken from ISIS, repopulated and rebuilt, the K.D.P. cannot be the only liberator and ruler."

Some analysts said the standoff between the P.K.K. and the pesh merga, which has dragged on for months, was a significant factor in the drawn-out planning for the offensive.

"The real story here is that this offensive has been delayed because of the unresolved competition between the pesh merga and the P.K.K. for control of the Sinjar area," said Matthew Barber, an expert on the region and a board member of Yazda, an organization helping displaced Yazidis. "Even now the real question is, Who will have control of the area after the new offensive ends?"

While a Yazidi regiment is to participate in part of the pesh merga offensive, other Yazidi fighters have been operating independently, and all are eager to exact revenge on the Islamic State fighters for their actions 15 months ago, when they overran Mount Sinjar.

Tactically, preparations for the Sinjar offensive have been underway for weeks, and the Islamic State appears to have anticipated the assault and has been sending reinforcements, General Waisi said.

With more than a year to dig in, the militants are also believed to have fortified their positions and made plans for a



A column of pesh merga vehicles snaked their way across Mount Sinjar on Thursday. Kurdish officials said there could be as many as 700 Islamic State fighters in and around Sinjar.

counterstrike.

Throughout the conflict, the Islamic State has used improvised explosive devices to create dense minefields. The aim is to slow down attacking forces and channel them into "kill zones" so they can be targeted with sniper fire, mortars or machine-gun fire. Many of the houses in Sinjar are believed to be

rigged with explosives.

Using suicide car bombs, the militants are also said to be poised to mount counterattacks from Tal Afar to the east, from the towns of Blij and Baaj to the south, and from Syria to the west.

"They try to identify a weak point in the defense and then send everything possible to that single point," General Waisi said. "It starts with suicide bombers and then heavy machine guns. We know their tactics, but there will be surprises."

The operation on Thursday was timed to coincide with forecasts of several days of clear weather. That would enable the United States to provide more air power, including A-10 Warthog attack jets based in Turkey.

Still, coping with the Islamic State's improvised explosive devices will not be easy for the pesh merga, who suffered losses of more than two dozen, virtually all from such explosives, in a recent operation near Kirkuk, according to allied officials.

The pesh merga have received 40 mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles, or MRAPs, from the United States, 15 of which have special rollers attached to clear mines. But Kurdish officials say the vehicles are not nearly enough, given the 600-mile front the Kurds share

with the Islamic State. Nor have armored Humvees or armored bulldozers been provided by the Americans.

The pesh merga have received hundreds of Milan antitank missiles from Germany and 1,000 AT4 antitank weapons from the United States, officials say. Kurds say the Milan missiles have proved to be the most useful in defending against suicide vehicle attacks, but pesh merga commanders say they need more of them.

The American-led coalition has also provided the pesh merga with a large number of small arms, including machine guns, rifles, mortar tubes and mortar rounds. As the Sinjar offensive has approached, Kurdish officials say, the coalition has been rushing in new supplies of ammunition as well.

Even if Sinjar is retaken and the highway is held, more military steps will need to be taken if the American-led coalition wants to cut off supplies from Syria to Mosul, said Michael Knights, a military expert at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

"It will slow down the flow of Islamic State traffic to and from Mosul," Mr. Knights said. "That traffic will be forced to move on desert tracks and local roads to the south of Sinjar, which will greatly reduce the flow." ●

REUTERS

Three soldiers, 11 Kurdish militants killed in southeast Turkey

November 13, 2015 - By Seyhmus Cakan(Reuters)

SILVAN, Turkey — Three Turkish soldiers were killed on Friday in the mainly Kurdish southeast of the country, the latest casualties in a tide of violence engulfing the region since the breakdown of a ceasefire between security forces and militants in July.

Two of the soldiers died when their vehicle hit a buried explosive in the town of Lice, the military said in a statement.

A third was killed and three more wounded in clashes in the Ercis district of Van province during a dawn operation by security forces acting on a tip-off that militants were holed up in a house, the military said on its website.

Authorities also said security forces had killed 11 militants of the banned Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) on Thursday in clashes in the towns of Cizre and Silopi, near Turkey's borders with Syria and Iraq.

A round-the-clock curfew remained in force in three districts of the town of Silvan for an 11th day, even after security regained full control of the areas after operations targeted PKK rebels, security sources said.

On Thursday, police fired tear gas in Silvan at a group of lawmakers from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic (HDP), who wanted to enter the districts under police lockdown amid concerns over food shortages.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu dismissed criticism of the operations, saying all "humanitarian measures" were in place and vowing to continue the operation until "every street is safe."

"We are taking precautions to make sure this operation would be completed as soon as possible. Important progress has been made," he told reporters in Ankara. "God willing, there will be a return to normal life."

Residents had completely deserted those parts of Silvan, where apartment blocks were covered in bullet holes. Blood was splattered across the facade of one bullet-riddled building.

Streets had been dug up by members of the PKK's armed youth wing and water supplies were cut, officials said. Security forces were continuing their searches and defused 22 bomb-laden booby traps, they added.

Video footage shot on Thursday in Silvan showed troops armed with automatic rifles, their faces concealed by black scarves, advancing along empty streets and inside damaged school buildings apparently used by militants. Armoured vehicles were deployed on a hill overlooking the town, the video showed.

The PKK took up arms against the Turkish state in 1984, and more than 40,000 people, mostly Kurdish militants, have died in the conflict. The PKK is listed as a terrorist organisation by Turkey, the United States and European Union. ○

Hurriyet DailyNews.com

November 18, 2015

Zana reportedly determined not to repeat oath before parliament

ANKARA - November/18/2015
<http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com>

A leading Kurdish politician will reportedly not repeat an oath she is constitutionally required to take when taking parliamentary office even though the legislature's speaker declared her reworded version to be invalid on Nov. 17.

"While this many young people have been dying, I couldn't have remained silent," Leyla Zana, an Ağrı deputy for the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), was quoted as saying by CNN Türk late on Nov. 17.

Earlier in the day, at the first session of the newly elected parliament at the oath-taking ceremony, Zana, a Nobel Peace Prize nominee who spent a decade in prison for links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) after speaking Kurdish in parliament in 1991, used the phrase "the great nation of Turkey" instead of "the great Turkish nation," prompting the acting speaker, Deniz Baykal, an Antalya deputy for the Republican People's Party (CHP), to demand she recite the oath once more. However, Zana had already left the assembly hall.

"Some things need to change; I venture everything," Zana was quoted as saying by CNN Türk. "Besides, I had used the phrase 'the nation of Turkey' instead of 'the Turkish nation' during a previous oath-taking ceremony as well," she said.

Since there are no clear provisions concern-



Leyla Zana, a prominent lawmaker of the Peoples' Democratic Party, expresses her wish for "peace" before taking her oath at the Parliament that kicks off a new term following the Nov. 1 elections, in Ankara, Turkey, Tuesday, Nov. 17, 2015. AP Photo

ing a similar incident either in the Constitution or in the internal regulations of parliament, the customary rules of the national assembly are set to be applied in the case.

During the next session that Zana attends, the speaker will invite her to the rostrum to take her oath before the assembly, T24 news portal reported. If she chooses not to do so, Zana will be disqualified from participating in legislative activities of parliament whether at the commission level or in plenary sessions in line with relevant provisions of both the Constitution and parliament's internal regu-

lation, T24 also said.

There are also suggestions that her salary will not be paid in such a case, the report said.

At the ceremony, Zana began her oath by saying, "With the hope of an honorable and lasting peace" in Kurdish.

A representative from her office told Reuters that the gesture was to raise awareness of the renewed conflict that has killed hundreds of people in Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast since July.

Speaking to reporters on Nov. 18, HDP co-chair Figen Yüksekdağ gave full backing to Zana. The turning of Zana's oath into a crisis in today's Turkey was very saddening, Yüksekdağ said, arguing the declaration of the oath as invalid for technical reasons was "the actual crisis."

The technical reasons cited for declaring Zana's oath invalid were actually "not valid," she said.

While discussions over making a new constitution were on the agenda, creating a crisis over the current oath text was meant to be "closed to transformation," Yüksekdağ added.

"What Leyla Zana did was not at all a stance that disrupted discipline and the functioning criteria of the parliament and was not aimed at troublemaking. She greeted the people who elected her in their language," she also said.

Zana became a symbol of free speech across the world after serving 10 years in prison for speaking Kurdish while taking her parliamentary oath in 1991. She was ultimately released in 2004 and once again became an MP after the June 2011 elections, although a ban remained in place preventing her from joining the country's then-main Kurdish party, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).■

Dans Sinjar libérée par les Kurdes



Des combattants kurdes sur la route de Sinjar, jeudi 12 novembre. EMILY UNBANG/MYOP

REPORTAGE

SINJAR (IRAK) - envoyé spécial

Longée de magasins abandonnés aux rideaux de fer défoncés et d'immeubles effondrés, parsemée de gravats et de douilles rouillées, jalonnée par les carcasses calcinées de camions et d'automobiles, l'artère qui permet d'accéder à Sinjar depuis les hauteurs situées au nord de la ville témoigne d'une dévastation peu commune. Les membres des forces kurdes qui sont entrés dans la matinée de vendredi 13 novembre dans cette localité désormais perdue par les djihadistes la parcourent de loin en loin, constatant, armes à l'épaule, les destructions causées par les frappes aériennes de la coalition internationale contre l'Etat islamique (EI). Elles se sont considérablement intensifiées aux cours des derniers jours afin que les forces kurdes puissent en prendre possession. Pour la seule journée de jeudi, trente frappes aériennes ont été répertoriées sur la seule ville de Sinjar. « Nous sommes entrés dans ce quartier sans tirer un coup de feu à huit heures du matin, Daech [acronyme arabe de l'Etat islamique] s'est enfui avant qu'on arrive », raconte un combattant kurde irakien qui dit regretter de ne pas avoir pu livrer bataille.

LES BÂTIMENTS TRUFFÉS DE BOMBES

A l'exclusion de quelques rares accrochages rapportés dans d'autres parties de la ville et qui auraient opposé certains groupes de combattants kurdes à une force résiduelle composée de tireurs d'élite et de djihadistes isolés, chargés de mener des attaques suicides contre les nouveaux occupants de la ville, les dernières heures de l'opération de libération de Sinjar se sont déroulées vendredi

sans combat majeur. De nombreux drapeaux kurdes flottent désormais sur les squelettes des bâtiments officiels détruits par les bombardements de la coalition, tandis que se font entendre à intervalles resserrés des rafales d'armes automatiques, tirées en l'air ou pour la forme vers des bâtiments déserts.

Au bord des rues, des bombes artisanales laissées derrière eux par les djihadistes et désamorçées par les démineurs des forces kurdes attendent d'être emportées. Suivant une tactique devenue systématique dans les villes et les villages qu'ils abandonnent, les hommes de l'Etat islamique ont truffé les bâtiments en ruines de Sinjar de ces engins explosifs qui constituent l'une des principales causes de pertes militaires sur le front kurde irakien depuis le début de la guerre contre l'Etat islamique. Elle a coûté la vie, vendredi matin, à cinq des quinze combattants kurdes tués au cours de l'opération d'après une source médicale, les dix autres ayant péri dans les combats sporadiques qui ont accompagné la veille la progression des forces kurdes vers la ville.

Libérée, Sinjar n'est plus que l'ombre d'elle-même. Cette petite ville des confins syro-irakiens comptait 20 000 habitants avant sa conquête par l'Etat islamique en août 2014, lors de l'offensive menée par les djihadistes contre les Kurdes irakiens dans le nord de l'Irak. Les peshmergas (forces armées kurdes irakiennes), alors chargés de la protection de Sinjar et des campagnes environnantes, avaient fui, abandonnant à eux-mêmes les habitants majoritairement issus de la communauté religieuse yézidie.

Kurdes mais non-musulmans, perçus comme hérétiques par les fanatiques de l'Etat islamique, les Yézidis de Sinjar ont fait



l'objet d'exactions d'une ampleur inégalée aux mains des hommes de l'Etat islamique. Outre l'exode massif qui a jeté sur les routes près de 200 000 personnes originaires de la zone, plusieurs massacres de civils ont été perpétrés par les djihadistes, tandis que des milliers de femmes et d'enfants, capturés au moment de la conquête fulgurante des djihadistes, étaient réduits en esclavage.

Des groupes armés yézidis, recrutant parmi les survivants des massacres et ceux ayant refusé de se résoudre à un exil définitif, se sont constitués de manière spontanée avant de se rallier, pour la plupart, aux forces kurdes irakiennes. Qassim Shesho, le chef de la principale faction armée yézidie de Sinjar, nommé par Massoud Barzani, le président du Kurdistan irakien autonome, à la tête du commandement militaire de la région, espère que leur présence aux côtés des peshmergas pourra rassurer une population traumatisée et la convaincre de revenir. « La libération de Sinjar est une première étape. Ce

sont nos terres, elles sont maintenant sécurisées et j'appelle tous les Yézidis à venir s'installer à nouveau dans leurs foyers», déclare-il à proximité de Sinjar, tandis qu'une dizaine de ses hommes, issus pour la plupart de sa proche parentèle, s'affairent à charger sur une camionnette un drapeau kurde enroulé de cent mètres de long et de soixante de large, qu'il entend déployer sur la haute façade du silo à grains de Sinjar.

Les ruines de Sinjar ne paraissent cependant pas près de voir revenir leur population. Objet d'une compétition entre forces kurdes rivales, elles appartiennent maintenant à ceux qui y circulent en armes et y plantent leurs drapeaux. Parallèlement aux peshmergas kurdes irakiens, les forces armées du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), venues de Turquie, ont également pris position dans la ville. Actives dans la région depuis août 2014, elles avaient contribué à évacuer plusieurs milliers de Yézidis encerclés dans la région de Sinjar par les djihadistes vers le Kurdistan syrien grâce à un corridor militaire. Leur présence est cependant décriée par le pouvoir kurde irakien, qui souhaite les voir quitter la zone.

«Le PKK n'a rien à faire à Sinjar, cette zone appartient aux Kurdes d'Irak, nous ne voulons pas de confrontation armée avec eux, mais il faut qu'ils partent maintenant que la

LES RUINES DE LA VILLE APPARTIENNENT MAINTENANT À CEUX QUI Y CIRCULENT EN ARMES ET Y PLANTENT LEURS DRAPEAUX

ville est libérée», déclare ainsi un officier des peshmergas souhaitant s'exprimer anonymement. Pour Zeki Shengali, un haut cadre du PKK originaire de Turquie, où son organisation a repris les hostilités contre Ankara en juin, il n'est pas question de se retirer : «Toutes les déclarations selon lesquelles nous devrions partir sont futiles, le PKK restera à Sinjar tant que la population en aura besoin.» En attendant la perspective improbable d'un accord, les factions kurdes rivales et les unités yézidiennes qui leur sont respectivement affiliées se croisent et s'ignorent dans les rues désertées de la ville, hissant leurs couleurs partout où elles le peuvent, marquant leur territoire dans une atmosphère de paix armée.

SUCCÈS SIGNIFICATIF CONTRE L'EI

La reprise de Sinjar n'en demeure pas moins un succès tactique significatif dans la guerre régionale contre l'Etat islamique. A une cinquantaine de kilomètres de la frontière syrienne, la ville est en effet située sur la route 47, une voie de communication stratégique reliant Rakka, en Syrie, à Mossoul, en Irak, les deux capitales du « califat » décrété par Abou Bark Al-Baghdadi. «Avec la libération de Sinjar, nous allons asphyxier Daech en rendant impossibles les communications entre ses positions côté syrien et côté irakien», indique le général peshmerga Zaim Ali, chargé de superviser les opérations.

«La guerre n'est pas finie pour autant, précise le haut gradé. Il revient maintenant au gouvernement central irakien de prendre ses responsabilités et de préparer sérieusement la reprise de Mossoul.» Si la libération de Sinjar et la coupure d'un axe routier essentiel peuvent contribuer à l'affaiblissement de l'Etat islamique dans toute la région, l'apparente impossibilité de chasser les djihadistes des villes sans les détruire totalement et les difficultés liées aux divisions qui traversent le camp kurde éloignent d'autant la défaite finale. ■

ALLAN KAVAL

L'EXPRESS

17 novembre 2015

Irak: des femmes yézidiennes tuées par Daech parce que trop vieilles?

Par L'EXPRESS.fr, - le 17 nov. 2015

Après la reprise de la ville kurde de Sinjar, aux mains de Daech depuis août 2014, des fosses communes ont été trouvées. L'une d'entre elles contiendrait les restes de dizaines de femmes de la minorité yézidienne abattues car trop vieilles pour être esclaves sexuelles.

Dans l'escalade de l'horreur, le groupe Etat islamique (EI) va toujours plus loin. Après la reprise, par les forces kurdes soutenues par l'aviation américaine, de la ville de Sinjar dans le nord de l'Irak, une fosse commune, qui pourrait contenir les corps de dizaines de femmes yézidiennes tuées par l'EI, a été découverte à la périphérie de la ville. Il pourrait s'agir de femmes considérées comme trop âgées pour servir d'esclaves sexuelles.

DES YÉZIDIS MASSACRÉS

Après la prise de contrôle de la région du Sinjar, en août 2014, Daech avait massacré une partie de la population kurde yézidienne, une minorité dont la religion trouve son origine dans le culte de Mithra. Leur dualisme (combat entre la Lumière et les Ténèbres) leur a



Des femmes Yézidiennes rescapées de l'assaut sur Sinjar, dans le camp de réfugiés de Bajed Kadal (province de Dohuk, en Irak) le 22 août 2014. Reuters/Youssef Boudlal

valu d'être qualifiés d'adorateurs du diable par les musulmans.

L'EI avait par la suite réduit à l'esclavage une partie des survivants et de ceux qui n'avaient pas réussi à s'enfuir. De nombreuses filles et jeunes femmes étaient vendues comme esclaves sexuelles, selon des témoignages recueillis par des ONG ou par l'ONU.

En s'appuyant sur des informations fournies

par de jeunes femmes réduites en esclavage - mais ayant réussi à s'échapper - et ayant assisté à des exécutions, des responsables ont découvert samedi une fosse commune. Selon Miyasir Hajji, membre du conseil municipal de Sinjar, elle contiendrait des dizaines de femmes "âgées entre 40 et 80 ans".

"Apparemment, a-t-il affirmé, les terroristes (de l'EI) voulaient seulement capturer de jeunes femmes". Selon des habitants de la région, il s'agirait, précise l'agence Reuters, de femmes âgées du village de Kocho, que les djihadistes avaient séparés des femmes plus jeunes lors de l'assaut. Avant de les conduire derrière l'Institut technique à l'est de Sinjar. Les survivants disent avoir ensuite entendu des coups de feu. C'est là qu'une des fosses communes a été retrouvée.

Une jeune femme originaire de Kocho, Badr Sleiman Taha, 24 ans, a raconté à l'agence Reuters que sa mère, sa tante et sa grand-mère figuraient parmi les victimes. Elle dit avoir reconnu la canne d'une vieille femme de son village parmi les objets déterrés.

Plusieurs milliers de femmes yézidiennes seraient toujours captives de l'EI.



Les pechmergas kurdes entrent dans la ville dévastée de Sinjar, reprise à Daech vendredi, en Irak, près de la frontière avec la Syrie.

Irak : les Kurdes libèrent Sinjar de l'emprise de Daech

EMILIENNE MALFATO
ENVOYÉE SPÉCIALE À SINJAR

IL FLOTTE dans les rues de Sinjar City un parfum de brûlé et de victoire. De liberté. En quelques heures à peine, le soleil des drapeaux kurdes a quasiment recouvert les inscriptions djihadistes sur les bâtiments. Daech n'est plus ici.

« Putain de Daech, lâche un pechmerga arpentant les rues, kalachnikov au poing. Mais ici, c'est fini ». Moins de 48 heures après le début de l'opération « Free Sinjar », la ville, aux mains du groupe État islamique (EI) depuis août 2014, est tombée vendredi en fin de matinée. L'accès est demeuré restreint quelques heures, les soldats kurdes redoutant des snipers ou des kamikazes cachés dans les maisons.

Puis, peu avant le coucher du soleil, trois bulldozers jaunes ont déblayé le talus qui bloquait l'entrée de la ville et la file de voitures qui attendait depuis ce matin a pu pénétrer dans les rues, dans une atmosphère joyeuse, de franche victoire. Drapeaux kurdes à la main et musique à fond.

Des débris fument encore dans les rues détruites - frappe aérienne ou voiture suicide de l'EI. Camions carbonisés au milieu d'un carrefour, magasins détruits, métal tordu, morceaux d'étoffe... Des coups de feu résonnent parfois. Tirs de joie, assurent les pechmergas. Quatre hommes s'affairent pour récupérer des marchandises dans les décombres d'une boutique. L'éventuelle présence d'engins explosifs semble ici préoccuper les



Kurdes moins qu'ailleurs. Dans la cour d'une maison encore debout, de vieux combattants yazidis sont rassemblés. Certains esquissent des pas de danse en chantant, heureux d'être enfin de retour à Sinjar.

Dans une des rues principales, une trentaine de jeunes hommes, le sourire large et le fusil haut, sont entassés sur un camion militaire. Ils s'apprentent à rejoindre leur front habituel, à Zoumar. Immédiatement après le rapide succès de l'opération qui a mobilisé 7 500 pechmergas, les soldats kurdes rejoignent leurs bases. En sens inverse sur les flancs du mont Sinjar, des camions acheminent des pelleteuses - de quoi déblayer les rues de la ville.

Plus facile que prévu

« Nous avons libéré une zone d'environ 53 km² et repoussé Daech à une trentaine de kilomètres au sud » indique le lieutenant pechmerga, Dilgash Zebari, précisant qu'il « reste des endroits à libérer ». « L'important c'est d'avoir coupé la route

47 qui mène à Raqqa en Syrie. On a encerclé la ville avant d'y pénétrer, mais de toute façon Daech avait fui avant que la ville ne soit bouclée », ajoute-t-il.

« On pensait que ça serait difficile mais en fait, non ». Rasho Shamo habitait un village près de Sinjar jusqu'à ce que l'offensive de Daech l'oblige à se réfugier à pied sur la montagne où il a passé l'année dans une tente de fortune. Membre d'un groupe de combattants yazidis, le moustachu de 60 ans est fier d'avoir participé à la libération de sa ville.

« Honnêtement, on n'a pas beaucoup tiré, confie un pechmerga qui refuse de donner son nom. Quand on est arrivé, beaucoup de djihadistes avaient déjà fui ». Une victoire plus facile que prévu pour les forces kurdes, victoire quasi éclair pour l'opération qui a débuté dans la nuit de mercredi à jeudi avec une campagne de frappe aérienne de la coalition. Un succès qui devrait doper le moral des Kurdes.

« Mais attention, après Sinjar, ce n'est pas fini », nuance un combattant. « Il faut libérer Tall Afar, Mossoul... et ça, ça dépend aussi de l'armée irakienne », soupire-t-il. « On va continuer à se battre jusqu'à ce que Daech soit complètement éliminé ! », s'exclame un autre soldat.

Tout n'est pas joué. La ville reste vulnérable tant que la région alentour est aux mains de l'EI. « On ne peut pas rentrer chez nous tant que Tall Afar et Baaj ne sont pas libérées parce que ce qui s'est passé l'an dernier pourrait recommencer », explique Kami en serrant son gilet rouge autour d'elle pour se protéger du froid mordant. Cette yazidie de 20 ans a fui Sinjar en août dernier et s'est réfugiée sur la montagne avec les autres membres de sa famille. Pour autant, ce soir, un immense sourire illumine son visage rond. A ses côtés, Boho, sa belle-sœur, répète « Sinjar est libre » d'un air incrédule et émerveillé. Elle a les yeux qui brillent. ■

Push in Iraq lifts Kurds, but alarms Baghdad

ISTANBUL

Washington's support and gains against ISIS fuel territorial ambitions

BY TIM ARANGO

It was a full two months after Islamic State militants stormed through Iraq, massacring captured troops and driving to within a few miles of Baghdad, that the United States began taking direct military action in the country.

When the Obama administration finally did intervene and begin airstrikes, it was when the militants were threatening the Kurdish city of Erbil and waging atrocities against the Yazidi minority in Sinjar, near the boundaries of Iraqi Kurdistan. That fact was immediately seized on by Iraqi politicians, who accused the United States of being more concerned about protecting the Kurds than Iraq's Arab majority.

Now, with Kurdish forces backed by American air power driving jihadist fighters out of Sinjar on Friday, the United States-led coalition appears to have a new and important victory against the Islamic State.

But some analysts say it may come with a cost: the further undermining of the Iraqi government's authority, and intensified alarm about the Kurds' desire for independence. Political figures in Baghdad are again sounding alarmed, both about the United States' reliability as an ally and about the unity of country.

The Kurdish capture of Sinjar, with no Iraqi military forces in sight, offers the Iraqi Kurdistan government a chance to consolidate its control over a city that before the Islamic State invasion was nominally under the control of Baghdad.

The president of the Kurdish government, Massoud Barzani, made that intention clear, holding a news conference on Mount Sinjar in which he pointedly referred to Sinjar as a Kurdish city.

The result is likely to further embolden the Kurds as they push toward their long-held goal of statehood, something the United States has opposed, while further alienating an Iraqi government that has become closer to both Iran and Russia.



BRYAN DENTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Kurdish forces drove Friday through a part of Sinjar that had been hit by American airstrikes.

Russia, in particular, has been more active in the region, expanding its military role in the Syrian war next door and establishing closer intelligence ties with the Baghdad, both over the objections of American officials.

As if to drive home their complaint with the United States, a delegation of Iraqi lawmakers visited Moscow on Friday to talk about more Russian military involvement in Iraq — a development that would further challenge both American influence there and the Obama administration's long-term strategy to defeat the Islamic State, also known as ISIS or ISIL.

Ayham Kamel, the director for the Middle East and North Africa at Eurasia Group, a political risk consulting firm, said: "The Sinjar operation will remind the key decision makers in Baghdad that the U.S. has a broader sense of strategic cooperation with the Kurds than with Baghdad."

Mr. Kamel added, "The quick gains here against ISIS are going to undermine the broader picture of the unity of Iraq."

When the Obama administration decided last year to begin military operations against the Islamic State, first in Iraq and then in Syria, its strategy seemed simple on the face of it: Combine American air power with local ground forces to defeat the militants.

The Americans found that Kurdish militias in Iraq and Syria were their most reliable proxies on the ground — as opposed to Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Iraq that have eclipsed the struggling Iraqi security forces.

In Syria, a growing relationship with Kurdish militia fighters helped lead to a military success against the Islamic State in the northern town of Kobani. Now, Kurdish forces have succeeded in Sinjar with the help of heavy American airstrikes and United States Special Forces advisers on the ground.

But the fact remains that Kurds have been willing to fight to protect and expand only territory they see as rightfully theirs, and are unlikely to play an

important role in wresting militants from Sunni Arab strongholds in places like Mosul or Anbar Province in Iraq, or in Raqqa, the group's capital in Syria.

Speaking about the Kurdish victory in Sinjar, Maria Fantappie, the Iraq analyst for the International Crisis Group, said, "The cost of it is the fact that you don't necessarily have the means to restrain the political ambitions of this ally."

The close relationship between the United States and the Kurds in both Iraq and Syria has also complicated Washington's relationship with Turkey.

"I think Sinjar adds momentum not just to the U.S. campaign against ISIS but also U.S.-Kurdish cooperation, which builds on U.S. support for Kurdish forces in Syria," Ranj Alaaldin, an expert on Kurdish affairs and a doctoral researcher at the London School of Economics, wrote in an email. "That will no doubt alarm Baghdad, Turkey, as well as the Iranians and Russians, both of which are competing with the U.S. to bring the Kurds within their orbit of influence."

In Syria, the United States has allied with the Syrian offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K., which has long been at war with the Turkish state. And the P.K.K., which is listed as a terrorist group by the United States, Turkey and other governments, was deeply involved in the battle for Sinjar.

Dhia al-Assadi, an Iraqi Shiite lawmaker, said on Friday that the American-Kurdish alliance in Sinjar provided "more proof to the Iraqi government to not rely on the United States."

He added: "The real support given to the Kurds and the fast victories against ISIS will give another pretext to look at alternatives and establish coalitions with other countries."

For some Iraqi politicians, closer ties with Russia offer an increasingly attractive alternative — or at least an important insurance policy.

"One of the possible fallouts from this operation is that Baghdad may look more closely to Russia," said Ahmed

Ali, an Iraq analyst and senior fellow at the Institute of Regional and International Studies at the American University of Iraq.

Iran, a longstanding ally of the Shiite-dominated Iraqi government whose role has complicated the United States' efforts to influence events in the region, has welcomed a larger Russian role in Iraq.

And the Kremlin appears to be open to it.

After the delegation of Iraqi lawmakers met with Russian officials in Moscow on Friday, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement saying: "The Iraqi representatives emphasized their readiness to further strengthening cooperation between Moscow and Baghdad on counterterrorism matters,

and they noted the possibility for Russia to continue its security assistance to the Iraqi government."

Omar al-Jawshy and Falih Hassan contributed reporting from Baghdad, and Andrew Kramer from Moscow.

International New York Times NOVEMBER 14-15, 2015

Kurds lead victorious push against ISIS



Kurdish pesh merga fighters entering Sinjar, Iraq, on Friday. Gunfire to the north signaled that the city had not been entirely cleared of ISIS fighters, who are thought to have planted bombs.

SINJAR, IRAQ

BY MICHAEL R. GORDON
AND RUKMINI CALLIMACHI

Kurdish and Yazidi fighters retook this city in northern Iraq on Friday, the second day of a major offensive to reclaim a town that has been under the brutal domination of the Islamic State for more than 15 months.

The pesh merga forces of the Kurdish government advanced to the center of the devastated city from the east, passing the rubble of empty houses and abandoned shops with battered metal

storefronts. There they linked up with a Kurdish force that had advanced from the west, including fighters from a separatist group based in Syria known by the Kurdish abbreviation Y.P.G. and from the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K.

Members of the Yazidi religious minority, who were raped, enslaved and killed in large numbers after the Islamic State overran Sinjar in August 2014, took part in the fight.

Amid deafening bursts of celebratory gunfire, a Yazidi militia fighter with a walrus mustache, Edo Qasim Shamo, proclaimed excitedly that the moment of his people's "liberation" was finally at hand. But even as he spoke, ex-

changes of gunfire in the northern part of the city made clear that it had not been entirely cleared of Islamic State fighters or the bombs they had planted.

As Kurdish combat engineers fanned out to clear a road south of the city of improvised explosive devices, the whistle of an incoming Islamic State mortar round could be heard. It fell short.

An amalgam of Kurdish and Yazidi forces joined in the assault, many of them flying separate flags. There were members of the Kurdish group Zeravani Force, led by Maj. Gen. Aziz Waisi, and Yazidi members of the Kurdish-led pesh merga. But fighters from an independent Yazidi militia led by Heydar Shesho

also joined in the fight, as did the Y.P.G.

The attack from the east began on Friday morning when General Waisi's fighters took down a large dirt wall they had erected across Highway 47, which they had seized a day earlier. They put up the barrier to protect against Islamic State car bomb attacks.

By Friday morning the Kurds were determined to advance. A large bulldozer with improvised armor bolted around the driver's cab arrived to remove the barrier of earth.

A stream of Kurdish vehicles then raced toward the city. The columns included several armored personnel carriers and Humvees, as well as sport utility vehicles and light trucks with machine guns bolted on the back.

Many of the vehicles carried orange markings to identify them for American warplanes.

The sky was azure as the attack began, an encouraging sign for the Kurds, who have depended heavily on American airstrikes to give them an edge over the Islamic State. No sound appeared more welcome to the pesh merga than the roar of an A-10 warplane as it circled over the city before diving low on a strafing run.

General Waisi's initial objective was a traffic circle east of the city. As the pesh merga approached it, they passed a mannequin dressed in a uniform, a marker the Kurds used to identify the previous line of advance for their comrades. After reaching the traffic circle, they pressed on. American warplanes have been attacking the Islamic State for weeks before this offensive and on Thursday the Americans carried out at least 30 strikes.

The results were clear. Many houses and buildings were severely damaged and entire blocks had been turned into fields of debris.

According to one Yazidi fighter, several of his fellow fighters were killed when they went to check on their homes in a nearby village. But that did not stop one



A pesh merga soldier raising a Kurdish flag over a main intersection on the east side of Sinjar on Friday. American warplanes hit Islamic State positions there at least 30 times on Thursday.

The Yazidis, a minority whose members were raped and killed after ISIS overran Sinjar, took part in the fight.

group of happy Yazidis from doing the same, driving east on Highway 47 to spy from a safe distance on the homes on the outskirts of Sinjar they hope to return to. After looking longingly from their vehicles for a few moments, they turned around and sped away.

A German filmmaker who was on the front line with the P.K.K. fighters entering from the west said they faced almost no fight from the Islamic State.

"There was no resistance. I mean zero," said the filmmaker, Carsten Stormer.

"We ran down the hill, like in a raid, and the whole time I saw just one dead Daesh fighter," he said, using the Arabic

acronym for the Islamic State. In his section of the fighting, he said, the P.K.K. arrived first, followed by the pesh merga.

Before taking the city, P.K.K. and pesh merga officials said, they intercepted radio traffic from Islamic State fighters suggesting that their forces were fleeing. The officials said they had heard the voice of an Islamic State leader berating his fighters, warning that deserters would be beheaded.

The military leader of the P.K.K., who goes by the nom de guerre Agit Kalari, said his forces had taken back the Sinjar mayor's office, other administrative offices, a major grain silo and the general hospital, as well as several neighborhoods inside the city. "At 6 a.m. we were in Sinjar," he said inside a room fortified with sandbags, on the first line of defense inside the city. "We went in four hours before the pesh merga. After we liberated the city, the pesh merga drove up, inside their Toyota Hiluxes."

International New York Times NOVEMBER 13, 2015

E.U. nears Turkey deal to help stem migrant flow

VALLETTA, MALTA

Bloc offers \$3.2 billion and invites Erdogan to Brussels summit

BY JAMES KANTER

The European Union stepped closer on Thursday to a deal with Turkey that would represent its most ambitious step yet in trying to regulate the flow of migrants to the Continent.

At the end of a two-day summit meeting on Malta, European Union officials said they had agreed to offer Turkey 3 billion euros, or about \$3.2 billion, over the next two years to help the country cope with the more than two million Syrian refugees who have sought refuge in Turkey.

The leaders also agreed to offer President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey an invitation to a summit meeting in Brussels with the bloc's 28 leaders to discuss a range of issues that could include the country's long-stalled bid to join the European Union as well as efforts to help curb migration.

Many of the migrants making their way from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and

other nations to Western Europe come through Turkey. Reaching an accord with Mr. Erdogan and the Turkish government is widely seen as vital to reducing the flow of people through the Balkans and eventually to Germany, Sweden and other rich countries in Europe's north.

With the crisis showing little sign of abating, Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, the body representing European Union leaders, said failure to secure the bloc's external borders could tear apart a flagship policy of allowing free movement of people across most of the Continent.

But dealings with Turkey have been complicated by unease among European leaders about what they see as repressive actions in Turkey under Mr. Erdogan against dissent and freedom of speech, and they have been reluctant to grant him any concessions in his drive to accelerate membership in the bloc.

Turkey haunted by its ghosts

Roger Cohen



DIYARBAKIR, TURKEY “We don’t want Turkey to become Syria or Diyarbakir to become Aleppo.”

Those were the words of Tahir Elci, the president of the Diyarbakir Bar Association when I spoke to him after the recent Turkish election here in this troubled city of strong Kurdish national sentiment. On the night of the vote tires smoldered and the tear-gas-heavy air stung. In the center of the old city, rubble and walls pockmarked with bullet holes attest to the violence as police confront restive Kurds.

Elci was detained last month for a day and a half after saying in a television interview that the Kurdistan Workers Party, or P.K.K., was not a “terrorist organization” but “an armed political organization which has large local support.” An indictment has been brought against him that seeks a prison sentence of more than seven years. The P.K.K. is designated a terrorist organization by Turkey, the European Union and the United States.

“For a few words about the P.K.K., in which I said some of its operations were terrorist but it was not itself a terrorist organization, there is a lynching campaign against me,” Elci told me. “Yet there is no strategy among the Turkish security forces against the Islamic State, no real mobilization. If ISIS were treated like the P.K.K., it would be very different.”

As G-20 leaders prepare to gather in Turkey next week, the fissures in the fabric of a polarized society are more marked than at any time in the dozen years that President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has held power. His initial push, as prime minister, to oversee an era of neo-Ottoman opening both to Turkey’s neighbors and to minorities within the country, has collapsed in violence.

In the place of dialogue with historic enemies of the unitary Turkish state forged in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk has come the increasingly authoritarian assertion of a new brand of Sunni religious nationalism, the replacement for Ataturk’s secular nationalism. Erdogan, the representative of Turkey’s religious conservatives, had sought to portray

Erdogan re-enacts Ataturk as the Kurdish question strains Turkish-American relations.

Ataturk’s fiercely secular state as a “parenthesis”; instead he has come to re-enact many of the characteristics of that state, not least its veneration of one man.

Turkey is not about to become Syria — indeed it has shown remarkable generosity and resilience in absorbing more than two million Syrian refugees — but some of the same actors are present, including

the Kurds and ISIS. So, too, is violence.

The Kurdish question has boiled up again in acute form. Kurdish militias loyal to the imprisoned P.K.K. leader, Abdullah Ocalan, have taken control of a wide area of northern Syria that they call Rojava, defeating Islamic State. Kurdish pesh merga forces are fighting side by side with the United States against ISIS in Iraq. Young Kurds here in the Diyarbakir area have tried to set up autonomous areas within cities, only to be crushed. All Kurds at some level want the state denied them when the Ottoman Empire broke up. They may settle for autonomy but a dream persists.

“I want autonomy, non-assimilation, the ability to use our language in our daily lives, and recognition of Kurdish as an official second language in Kurdish-majority areas,” Elci said.

The emergence of Kurds as America’s Iraqi and Syrian allies against ISIS has complicated the critical Turkish-American relationship. President Obama probably needs Erdogan more than Erdogan needs him, a fact that limits American leverage. Still, renewed Turkish-Kurdish negotiation and real Turkish commitment against ISIS are paramount American interests. The impression with Erdogan has been: better a Sunni Islamist fanatic than a Kurd.

Turkey is at a crossroads. The modern state was born through military prowess and a ferocious act of will. Ataturk forged a Westernized nation state from the many-shaded ruins of the Ottoman Empire. His creation involved an attempt to excise other peoples and identities — be they Kurdish, Armenian, Greek or Alevi — in the name of the new nation.

But Ottoman diversity, the fruit of many centuries, could not be subsumed into Turkish nationhood overnight. Turkey remains haunted by its ghosts.

The reverberations from Turkey’s troubled birth and the years preceding it persist. The 1915 Armenian genocide remains unacknowledged by Turkey even though Germany’s president, in this centennial year, spoke of German complicity. Joachim Gauck said: “We Germans collectively still have to come to terms with the past, namely when it comes to shared responsibility and perhaps even complicity in the genocide of the Armenians.”

It is for Turkey to answer how Germany could be complicit in a crime that did not exist.

Just how sensitive these issues remain was evident in the electoral campaign. Among the slogans of the A.K.P., as Erdogan’s Justice and Development party is known, was: “One Nation. One Flag. One State.” The insistence on oneness reflected a reality of fracture. Settling the Armenian dispute and reaching a negotiated settlement with the Kurds must be central Turkish goals before the centennial in 2023 of Ataturk’s state.

➤ The need for Europe to limit the number of people leaving Turkey for the Continent, however, has given Mr. Erdogan an opening for a deal in which he would help to provide better conditions for refugees in Turkey in return for closer relations with Brussels.

Jean-Claude Juncker, the president of the European Commission, said the €3 billion in funding would not be “money to be given to Turkey, but to help the Syrian refugees in Turkey.”

Mr. Erdogan has repeatedly highlighted the burdens Turkey is bearing by hosting so many people.

The funding, which would include €500 million from a central European Union budget, should help Europe “conclude our negotiations with Turkey at the special summit,” Mr. Juncker said.

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany said summit meetings between the European Union and Turkey should not become a regular event.

Earlier in the day, Sweden defended its decision to reintroduce border controls as European Union leaders also wrapped up an agreement to provide African nations €1.8 billion aimed at speeding the process of sending back to Africa those people who do not qualify for asylum and to discourage others from attempting the risky journey.

The announcement from Sweden that it would reintroduce border controls came late Wednesday after a request this month for similar concessions, already granted to Italy and Greece, that would allow the relocation of migrants to other European countries. Prime Minister Stefan Lofven of Sweden framed the issue as a temporary measure by his country to maintain order. But the new controls represent another setback to a flagship European Union policy of allowing free movement of people across most of the bloc’s internal borders.

Germany has warned that it may not be able to accept some migrants over the long term and said that it will take a stricter approach to admitting relatives of refugees.

On Wednesday, Slovenia began erecting a razor-wire fence along its border with Croatia, and Finland said this week that it was no longer able to provide new arrivals with “as high-quality reception services as before.”

Mr. Tusk, the European Council president, said earlier on Thursday that passport-free travel across the Schengen area could soon be curtailed.

“The recent developments in Germany, in Sweden, in Slovenia and in other countries all show with utmost clarity the huge pressure member states are facing,” he said. “I have no doubt without effective control of our external borders, the Schengen rules will not survive.”

Kurdish capture of Sinjar just a start on beating Islamic State

By Mitchell Prothero / SINJAR, Iraq / November 13, 2015
www.mcclatchydc.com

For the first time in more than a year, Sinjar was free Friday from the Islamic State, whose fighters fled a combined onslaught of American air power and Kurdish ground troops.

But hundreds of the city's former residents who rushed to Sinjar's outskirts in hopes of seeing their homes once again were barred from entry, as the new Kurdish occupiers worried about the hundreds of improvised explosive devices that the Islamic State fighters had left behind.

For reporters allowed in briefly with Kurdish troops, the force of coalition air power was apparent throughout the streets of Sinjar. More than 250 airstrikes had hit Islamic State positions in the city over the last month. Shops, homes and hospitals lay in ruins.

Islamic State forces were nowhere in evidence, and if there ever had been 600 extremist fighters in the town, they had slipped out without mounting much of a defense. By dawn Friday, only a handful of snipers and aspiring suicide bombers remained to greet the official forces of Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government and guerrillas from the Kurdistan Workers Party – the infamous PKK that Turkey considers a terrorist group – when they took control of the city.

It was a rare victory in the battle against the Islamic State in Iraq, and it represented the closing of a circle. It was the capture of Sinjar, and the plight of the thousands of Yazidis who'd fled into the nearby hills to escape the Islamic State, that prompted President Barack Obama to order the start of the American bombing campaign.

Coupled with word from Washington that a U.S. drone strike likely had killed the black-garbed British jihadist who'd beheaded Americans James Foley and Steven Sotloff in grisly videos, it was also a needed boost for Obama's flailing policy of keeping American ground troops out of the anti-Islamic State campaign, which critics have called ill-conceived and ineffective.

Only the flag of the Kurdish Regional Government will fly over Sinjar.

Masoud Barzani, KRG president

"ISIL defeated and on the run," the Kurdistan regional security council said in a tweet, using an acronym for the Islamic State.

Almost as soon as the Kurdish government declared the town secure at 10:20 a.m. local time, hundreds of displaced Yazidis who've been living in refugee camps nearby began pushing to return home. The peshmerga fighters closed the roads to block the human flood, explaining that



The mountains around Sinjar are considered holy to the Yazidis.
Mitchell Prothero McClatchy



Yazidi militia fighters walked through the ruins of Sinjar Friday after Kurdish troops liberated it from the Islamic State.
Mitchell Prothero McClatchy



Kurdish President Masoud Barzani (center) inspects the liberated city of Sinjar. Barzani said that only the Kurdish flag would fly over the city.
Mitchell Prothero McClatchy

it could be months before technicians would be able to neutralize the improvised bombs, mines and unexploded coalition munitions that cover the devastated city and nearby villages.

Other uncomfortable questions also loom in the coming months. Iraqi Kurdistan's president, Masoud Barzani, made a dramatic appearance on the outskirts of the town, where he held a news conference and declared that Sinjar would henceforth be considered a part of the Kurdistan Regional Government's area of control. It was a warning to the PKK that it would not be allowed to rule here and a stunning slap at the Iraqi central government in Baghdad, which until the Islamic State's capture of the town in August 2014 had been the authority here.

"Only the flag of the Kurdish Regional Government will fly over Sinjar," Barzani said through microphones placed on a wall of sandbags, with Sinjar still burning in the distance.

The operation, which had been delayed as Barzani's peshmerga troops and the PKK and its allies bickered over who would take the lead and the credit for the success, had been delayed for weeks as political discussions took precedence over military preparations.

But on Friday there was little evidence of tension between the Kurdish factions on Sinjar's rubble-strewn streets. Flags of all →

⇒ factions flew from destroyed buildings, and fighters often assumed to be bitter rivals mingled happily in the badly damaged city.

"This is my city and it has been returned to us," said one resident who described himself as the unofficial mayor of the town, claiming allegiance to the PKK. "Daash might have come from America, but America and the Kurds have removed it," he added, alluding to the Islamic States' roots as al Qaida in Iraq, the group that formed to combat the U.S. occupation of Iraq in 2003.

Obama and his bombs, the Kurds and their courage, and the Yazidis and their dignity freed Sinjar.

Hajj Mohammed, Yazidi farmer

"Obama and his bombs, the Kurds and their courage, and the Yazidis and their dignity freed Sinjar," said a local Yazidi farmer who identified himself as Hajj Mohammed and who had arrived at the scene carrying a

World War II-era rifle. "We will now destroy Daash from the entire world," he pledged, using a common Arabic term for the Islamic State.

Barzani, too, saw the capture of Sinjar as just a step in the campaign against the Islamic State. "The liberation of Sinjar will have a big impact on liberating Mosul," he said, referring to the northern Iraqi city whose fall to the Islamic State in June 2014 set off the extremists' onslaught across northern and central Iraq.

Ending Islamic State control elsewhere still is an uncertain goal for the future. The group controls the major Sunni Muslim cities of Ramadi and Fallujah in Anbar, Iraq's largest province, as well as Mosul and Tal Afar, just miles from Sinjar but with large Arab Sunni populations, much more challenging objectives than Sinjar.

Kurdish forces got a taste of what might be expected from a campaign to free those places on Thursday, when a push toward Tal Afar was met with mortar fire, snipers and at least five attempted suicide bombers, far stronger defenses than anything attempted to hold Sinjar. ■

Prothero is a McClatchy special correspondent. @mitchprothero



November 13, 2015

President Barzani: only Kurdish flag will fly over Shingal; thanks US



Kurdish Peshmerga fighter in Sinjar

rudaw.net — 13/11/2015

President Barzani speaking to reporters in Shingal. Rudaw photo.

President Barzani speaking to reporters in Shingal. Rudaw photo.

SHINGAL, Kurdistan Region - Vowing that "no other flag will rise in Sinjar (Shingal)," Kurdistan Region President Masoud Barzani declared the town liberated from ISIS Friday, and congratulated Yazidi Kurds on the victory.

"Sinjar is liberated by the Peshmerga. I congratulate the people of Kurdistan, especially the Yazidis," Barzani said in the town

overtaken by the Islamic State in August last year, and which became a symbol of ISIS atrocities.

"We delivered on our pledge to liberate Sinjar," Barzani declared.

In response to a question by Rudaw about the participation of other Kurdish forces such as the Peoples Protection Units (YPG) from Syria in the Shingal operation, Barzani underscored that the Kurdish Yazidi town was liberated only by the Peshmerga

"Aside from the Kurdistan flag, we do not accept any other flag rising over Sinjar," he vowed.

"This was a Peshmerga-led operation," Barzani said, confirming earlier statements by the Pentagon,



President Barzani speaking to reporters in Shingal. Rudaw photo.



Smoke rises from the site of U.S.-led air strikes in the Kurdish Yazidi town of Sinjar. Photo: AP

which said that US advisers on the ground were working with the Peshmerga to direct fire by the US and coalition forces.

"I thank you America and the Kurdish people," the president said.

"Sinjar is very important because it has become a symbol of the injustice against the people of Kurdistan," Barzani reminded the world. ■

Paris dans la poudrière syrienne



TRAGÉDIE Intervention des pompiers devant le bar Le Carillon, rue Alibert, dans le X^e arrondissement, où 15 personnes au moins ont perdu la vie.



CHAOS Dans la banlieue de Damas, le 7 novembre.

Malgré ses limites et ses déconvenues, la politique extérieure de la France suffit-elle à expliquer que le pays devienne la cible de l'hyperterrorisme de Daech ? Décryptage d'une partie diplomatique aux allures de piège.

Par **Christian Makarian**

« Face à la guerre, le pays doit prendre les décisions appropriées ». Par l'emploi de ces mots, prononcés le lendemain des attentats du vendredi 13 novembre, François Hollande a justifié les opérations militaires en cours, mais aussi annoncé une gradation dans l'engagement de la France contre les djihadistes qui commanditent leurs crimes à partir de la Syrie et de l'Irak. Une fermeté destinée à dissiper tout flottement ou toute polémique, particulièrement malvenue dans ces circonstances dramatiques, face à l'ampleur de l'attaque qui a ensanglanté Paris au-delà des scénarios envisagés. François Hollande a immédiatement saisi l'ampleur sans précédent de l'hyperterrorisme déshumanisé,

comme le confirmera le glaçant communiqué de l'Etat islamique (Daech) évoquant, comme un ricanement, « des endroits choisis minutieusement à l'avance au cœur de la capitale française ». Avant de mourir, un des auteurs du massacre du Bataclan a mis en cause le président de la République et la présence des forces françaises en Syrie...

La politique de la France dans le conflit syrien traverse depuis plusieurs mois une phase critique, dans laquelle l'absence de résultats probants contre l'Etat islamique – en dépit des revers

que subit ce dernier, notamment face aux Kurdes (*voir l'encadré ci-dessous*) – sème un doute grandissant. Le moment choisi par les terroristes pour un carnage d'une telle envergure n'est donc pas seulement lié au rythme de la vie de la société française (le match France-Allemagne ; le vendredi, soirée de sortie) à des fins de carnage absolu ; il est aussi le résultat d'un calcul d'opportunité en raison de la situation spécifique dans laquelle se trouve la France à l'égard de la guerre de Syrie. A certains égards, tributaire de la politique ...

DES FRANÇAIS AUX CÔTÉS DES PESHMERGAS

Rendez-vous était pris le vendredi 13 novembre, le jour des attentats, dans un box des environs de Fontainebleau. « Gekko » y retrouvait ses quatre compagnons, tous des anciens de « groupements de commandos ou de forces spéciales », pour récupérer le « matériel » : des gilets pare-balles, des jumelles à vision nocturne, des GPS... Le petit groupe s'envolera cette semaine vers le Kurdistan irakien pour former les peshmergas contre Daech, sur la ligne de front. Une initiative qu'a prise Gekko en juin dernier en réaction « aux massacres, aux viols, aux décapitations ». « Nous ne sommes pas là pour nous venger d'une religion », tient à préciser le gaillard

d'« un peu plus de 25 ans » qui évoque des « valeurs d'humanisme » et qui indique ne pas être payé. « C'est comme un médecin qui fait de l'humanitaire. Il voit qu'il a la compétence et ne veut pas rester dans son salon. » Mais, promet Gekko, « nous serons derrière les peshmergas, pas devant », comme il l'a déjà fait « avec l'armée afghane ». Ce qui n'empêche pas Gekko de laisser une lettre à une personne de confiance avant de partir. Au cas où. Finalement, admet-il, « comme les jeunes Français radicalisés de Daech, nous sommes des gens qui partons, hors d'une structure étatique. Mais c'est pour défendre une cause que l'on croit autrement plus juste ».

En couverture / Attentats

●●● américaine d'engagement limité au Moyen-Orient, la France présente, aux yeux des terroristes de Daech, les caractéristiques d'un maillon faible, qu'il est plus aisé de frapper que d'autres pays. Après une année de bombardements contre Daech strictement limités à l'Irak (ce qui fit, en 2014, l'objet d'une argumentation spécifique), Paris a décidé, en septembre dernier, d'étendre son action à la Syrie (avec des arguments plus fragiles en matière de droit international). On aurait tort de voir dans cette décision subite la cause ●●●

●●● d'une intensification de la guerre terroriste que l'Etat islamique mène à la France ; les attentats du 7 janvier se sont produits bien avant ce contexte. Mais Paris apparaît comme une proie idéale au regard de son enfoncement progressif dans le conflit syrien.

Daech, « califat » dévoreur d'Etats

La Syrie est un piège géant, dans lequel même Vladimir Poutine semble maintenant être tombé. Ce n'est pas un conflit comparable à tous ceux qui ont secoué les pays musulmans du pourtour méditerranéen depuis l'éclosion du printemps arabe, au début de l'année 2011. Dans ce territoire composite, on ne voit pas seulement un régime sanguinaire, et sans aucune retenue, affronter une rébellion hétéroclite qui a pour dénominateur commun de vouloir abattre le tyran. Le cas syrien est bien plus grave et complexe. Ce qui a échappé à tous les acteurs occidentaux, dès l'origine du désastre syrien, le 15 mars 2011, est la dimension très profondément communautaire de cette guerre civile, qui est devenue sous nos regards sceptiques une confrontation mondiale. En Syrie, on voit les fondations des fragiles Etats du Moyen-Orient remonter à la surface et renverser les murs : ce sont des ethnies, des religions, des langues qui s'affirment les unes au détriment des autres, dans une absence d'appartenance collective suffisamment forte pour transcender les différences. L'identité des populations se fonde sur leurs différences spécifiques, plus leur appartenance nationale. La Syrie est une véritable bombe à fragmentation, qui confirme des fractures sanglantes (conflit israélo-palestinien) ou annonce de manière apocalyptique d'autres fissurations meurtrières (chiïtes contre sunnites, Turcs contre Kurdes, etc.). En clair, le Moyen-Orient se désagrège et devient un ensemble communautaire dans lequel les Etats-nations semblent ne plus avoir leur place. Partant, on ne peut pas rapprocher la Syrie de la Libye dans la typologie des interventions militaires des Etats-Unis et de leurs alliés.



QUI-VIVE Patrouille au cœur de la capitale, samedi 14 novembre. L'état d'urgence a été proclamé la veille au soir, immédiatement après les attentats.

Y. HERMAN/REUTERS



AVANCÉE Le Front Al-Nosra hisse ses couleurs à Ariha, le 29 mai.



FRONT Combattants de l'Armée syrienne libre, opposée au régime.

B. KHABIBI/REL

Parallèlement, avec l'apparition de l'hyperterrorisme pratiqué par Daech, qui se présente comme un « califat » dévoreur d'Etats, et à cause de l'implication croissante de la Russie, qui poursuit des intérêts propres, la Syrie a vu une révolte spontanée contre un dictateur « classique » se transformer en guerre hybride, locale puis internationale, prototypique d'un XXI^e siècle dépourvu de directoire mondial.

François Hollande a pour lui d'avoir

été le premier, et le seul, à envisager une action militaire d'envergure contre le régime de Damas. A la fin du mois d'août 2013, tout était prêt pour qu'une opération aérienne française frappe au cœur les forces de Bachar el-Assad, qui venaient de se rendre coupable d'un nouveau crime contre l'humanité par l'emploi d'armes chimiques contre des populations civiles. Ce faisant, il a pris – avec noblesse – un risque extérieur. Barack Obama, qui avait invoqué ●●●

En couverture / Attentats

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le recours aux armes chimiques comme une « ligne rouge » qu'il ne laisserait pas franchir, a décidé, en dernier délai, d'en référer au Congrès, tout en sachant pertinemment qu'il n'obtiendrait pas de ce dernier l'autorisation d'agir en Syrie. Il s'en est suivi une certaine amertume française, Paris ayant gardé l'impression très désagréable d'avoir été abandonné en cours de route par son grand allié (sans lequel aucune action militaire importante ne saurait avoir lieu). Cet épisode a désarçonné la diplomatie française, car agir contre Assad, dès 2013, avait le mérite d'être fortement cohérent.

Depuis, Paris assiste, dépité, aux avancées russes – en Syrie et ailleurs. La cohérence se mue en confusion. Car les diplomates du Kremlin ont observé avec une grande attention la reculade d'Obama. Dans un premier temps, le talentueux ministre des affaires étrangères de Poutine, Sergueï Lavrov, a imaginé dare-dare, une solution « légale »

d'une grande habileté contre les armes chimiques d'Assad, ce qui a permis au tyran de gagner encore du temps. Dans une deuxième séquence, au bout de quelques mois, le président russe s'est senti libéré de toute contrainte pour agir à sa guise en Ukraine – ce qu'il n'a pas manqué de faire. Pour la France, il y a là un enchaînement de cause à effet – regret que Laurent Fabius a souvent formulé.

Paris se trouve présentement coincé entre Washington et Moscou. D'une part, l'insistance avec laquelle la diplomatie française refuse toute participation de Bachar al-Assad au processus de discussion diplomatique portant sur l'issue de la catastrophe syrienne ouvre un différend irréductible avec le Kremlin, qui favorise l'aggravation de la guerre en Syrie et qui profite à Daech : commencer par aborder le sort personnel du tyran, en faire un préalable à toute forme de règlement, revient à bloquer l'ensemble des discussions puisque les Russes ne veulent rien entendre. C'est pourquoi, depuis le mois de septembre 2015, François Hollande et Laurent Fabius ont esquissé une évolution sur ce point précis ; le devenir d'Assad est moins présenté comme un « préalable » que comme un aboutissement rapide (avec un terme possible de six mois pour l'obtention d'un ces-



ÉVACUATION A l'extérieur du Stade de France, le 13 novembre, la police sécurise le périmètre, pendant que les spectateurs quittent le stade.



TERREUR Les pompiers évacuent un blessé du Bataclan, le 13 novembre.



INDICES Investigations des experts de la police scientifique à l'intérieur du café Bonne Bière, rue du Faubourg-du-Temple, le 14 novembre. La veille au soir, cinq personnes ont été tuées devant le bar.

sez-le-feu). Mais aller plus loin heurterait de front la position américaine et, surtout, éloignerait de la table de négociations les représentants de l'opposition syrienne qui n'ont justement en commun que leur détestation d'Assad. Equation en forme d'impasse.

En décidant de bombardier les posi-

tions de Daech sur le sol syrien, la France est passée de leader diplomatique, sur le front de l'opposition à Assad, à la situation de partenaire des Etats-Unis. Ce qui l'expose d'autant plus à la haine des terroristes de Daech. Pour retrouver un élan dans le dossier syrien, Paris, après un temps de •••

En couverture / Attentats

●●● solitude, compte désormais sur une diplomatie assez compliquée.

Dans les négociations de Vienne qui réunissent tous les pays impliqués dans le guêpier syrien, dont l'Iran, il s'agit bien sûr de contrer les Russes, qui ne montrent aucune intention réelle de se débarrasser d'Assad, mais aussi d'aider l'opposition syrienne à se montrer plus crédible qu'elle n'est apparue jusqu'ici. Ce deuxième objectif reste une obsession (et une vaste ambition) française. Il y a schématiquement quatre groupes, en dehors de Daech, qui combattent le régime de Damas. Les nationalistes, regroupés au sein de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), essentiellement issus de l'armée d'Assad qu'ils ont quittée après les atrocités qu'on leur a demandé de perpétrer ; ce sont eux que la France privilégie comme partenaires afin d'éviter l'effondrement complet de l'Etat syrien comme on l'a vu en Irak. Le reste des opposants se divise en différentes factions islamistes : les Frères musulmans, les salafistes, les djihadistes (type Jabat Al-Nora, organisation classée comme terroriste par l'ONU). A cet ensemble, il faut encore ajouter les Kurdes, qui ont leur propre agenda anti-Daech. La stratégie française consiste à favoriser le rapprochement entre l'ASL et les islamistes présentables (à l'exclusion, évidemment, d'Al-Nosra) afin qu'une alternative à Assad se dessine dans le cadre des négociations internationales. Là encore, c'est une manière de renforcer les concurrents de Daech qui incite d'autant les assassins du « califat » à désigner Paris comme cible. Or, jeu pervers, Sergueï Lavrov reçoit, lui aussi, les membres de l'opposition syrienne, auxquelles il diffuse un tout autre message en faisant pression sur eux pour qu'ils admettent le régime de Damas comme incontournable.

Paris doit prendre un tournant dans sa politique extérieure

En désignant les criminels de masse qui ont ravagé Paris, le vendredi 13 novembre, sous le collectif d'« armée des terroristes », François Hollande sait qu'il n'y a rien absolument rien à attendre ni rien de plus à perdre face à Daech. En qualifiant aussi explicitement l'ennemi, le président prévoit



IMPLICATION La Syrie, ce piège dans lequel même Vladimir Poutine pourrait tomber. Ici, avec Bachar el-Assad, à Moscou, le 20 octobre.



DIPLOMATIE L'Américain John Kerry (à g.) et le Russe Sergeï Lavrov (à dr.).

implicitement une lutte intensifiée, qui s'apparente en tout point à une guerre asymétrique déclarée. Une intensification qui suppose à la fois des moyens de rétorsion militairement appropriés à une telle bande de tueurs, mais aussi une clarification diplomatique indispensable. Après son entrevue avec François Hollande, le 15 novembre, Nicolas Sarkozy a enfoncé le clou et réclamé une « inflexion » dans notre positionnement au Moyen-Orient : « Nous avons besoin de tout le monde pour exterminer Daech, et notamment des Russes. »

Sans trahir ses fondamentaux, Paris doit maintenant prendre un tournant dans sa politique extérieure en raison du massacre du 13 novembre. Un tour-

nant inspiré par le principe d'efficacité. C'est le défi qui s'impose à François Hollande dans la dernière partie de son mandat : la France doit à la fois intensifier les coups portés à Daech et orienter sa diplomatie vers l'obligation de résultat, dans un positionnement moins contraignant, ce qui suppose à l'évidence de travailler à un meilleur niveau de dialogue avec la Russie. Le président sera jugé sur sa capacité à sortir du blocage actuel.

Mais une réorientation de la politique étrangère suffira-t-elle à répondre à l'hyperterrorisme ? Comme le résume fort justement le spécialiste de géopolitique François Heisbourg, qui vient de publier un livre où il est fortement question de terrorisme, *Secrètes Histories* (Stock), « nous n'avons pas seulement un problème en Syrie, nous avons aussi un problème en France ». C'est en effet au cœur de la société française et de ses contradictions que réside une part essentielle de ce drame à ré-

pétition. Aucun bombardement aérien de la Syrie, ni aucune opération spéciale pour mettre hors d'état de nuire les infrastructures de Daech, ou même un de ses chefs, ne suffira à éteindre la flamme infernale du terrorisme djihadiste occidental. Aucune manœuvre diplomatique internationale ne répondra au défi crucial de nos sociétés multiculturelles, qui se résume à une question déchirante : pourquoi et comment des jeunes nés sur le sol français, instruits dans la langue et la culture françaises, peuvent-ils se retourner avec autant de haine contre leur pays ? Pour que l'expérience des armes en Syrie et l'odeur de sang du djihad leur offrent l'aventure de leur vie, faut-il que la mort soit déjà au-dedans d'eux. ● C. M.

Le Moyen-Orient se désagrège et devient un ensemble communautaire dans lequel les Etats-nations semblent ne plus avoir leur place



SYRIE Combattants du Front al-Nosra, affilié à Al-Qaeda, dans la province d'Idlib, en mai 2015.

Un fléau qui vient de loin

C'est en Syrie et en Irak, lieux de rivalités géopolitiques tenaces, que s'aguerrissent les djihadistes.

En cinq thèmes-clefs, retour sur ces enjeux régionaux.

Par Vincent Hugué

Par leur ampleur et leur cruauté, les carnages survenus en ce vendredi noir de novembre tendent à éclipser les ressorts géopolitiques d'une crise déclenchée voilà près de cinq ans à plus de 3 000 kilomètres de Paris. Or, la tragédie qui endeuille la France est indissociable des conflits qui ensanglantent le Moyen-Orient.

1. Les racines du mal

En mars 2011, le souffle du « printemps arabe » gagne la Syrie, tyrannie dynastique aux mains des el-Assad depuis quatre décennies. Inspirées par les précédents tunisien et égyptien, des foules juvéniles et pacifiques dénoncent dans la rue le caporalisme du clan alaouite – héritier d'une dissidence de l'islam chiite – au pouvoir. L'aveugle férocité de la répression, notamment à Deraa (sud-ouest), radicalise la contestation. Dès lors, l'ancien pays de Cham sombre dans le cycle infernal de la violence. Avec son lot de cessez-le-feu mort-nés, de plans de paix avortés et de conférences genevoises stériles. Incarnée par l'Armée syrienne libre, qu'encadrent des officiers déserteurs, la composante modérée de la rébellion perd du terrain

au fil des mois. Ecœurés par les querelles de chefs, plus familiers des palaces stambouliotes que des rigueurs de la guérilla, maints combattants rallient les milices islamistes, dont la pugnacité, le « purisme » et les arsenaux, richement garnis, séduisent. Tel est le cas du Front al-Nosra, franchise syrienne d'Al-Qaeda. Les palinodies de l'Occident intensifient cette « djihadisation » de l'insurrection. En août 2013, Barack Obama renonce en extrémisme, et au grand dépit de Paris, aux raids aériens envisagés en représailles à l'usage, par les troupes de Damas, d'armes chimiques. De quoi alimenter la propagande des boutefeux de la guerre sainte, prompts à dénoncer la duplicité des « croisés ». L'irruption de l'Etat islamique (EI), force militaro-terroriste sunnite née dans le brasier irakien, consacre cette dérive maximaliste. Daech – tel est son acronyme en arabe – prétend instaurer un califat au mépris de frontières tenues pour un legs colonial impie. Conquête dès mars 2013, la ville de Raqqa (centre) apparaît comme l'embryon de cette entité. Quant à la prise de Mossoul, dans le nord de l'Irak, elle consacre la vocation transfrontalière du dessein global.

Si Bachar el-Assad ne règne plus que sur moins du quart du territoire syrien, il tient à préserver un simulacre de légitimité. Pour preuve, sa réélection « triomphale » à la présidence, le 3 juin 2014, au terme d'un scrutin ubuesque, auquel n'ont pu participer ni les 250 000 concitoyens tués depuis 2011, ni les millions de déplacés et de réfugiés échoués en Turquie, au Liban, en Jordanie, ou condamnés à s'aventurer sur les chemins minés de l'exode européen.

2. Un front mouvant

Là est le paradoxe : si Daech – ou ceux qui s'en réclament – peut ensanglanter Paris et tétaniser la France, la mouvance djihadiste subit sur le terrain militaire, en Irak comme en Syrie, des revers significatifs. A commencer par la perte de Sinjar, verrou situé à l'ouest de Mossoul repris le 13 novembre par les forces kurdes, avec l'appui de l'aviation américaine. La veille, une coalition arabo-kurde avait délogé Daech d'al-Hol, position stratégique sur l'axe Mossoul-Raqqa. Si elles n'ont pas l'impact escompté, les frappes aériennes opérées par la coalition internationale que conduisent les Etats-Unis fragilisent son ossature, du stock d'armement au site pétrolier annexé. Autres facteurs d'affaiblissement, l'élimination ciblée de cadres et l'engagement résolu de l'Irak et des miliciens chiites libanais du Hezbollah au côté de Damas. De même, la fragmentation de la nébuleuse islamiste radicale contraint Daech à croiser le fer avec des milices brandissant elles aussi l'étendard du Prophète. Cependant, de ●●●

A. ABDULLAH/REUTERS - S. HAMED/AFP - J. PENNEY/REUTERS



IRAK Le 13 novembre, les forces kurdes, appuyées par l'aviation américaine, reprennent Sinjar, à l'ouest de Mossoul.



MALI 2 mars 2013 : des soldats français inspectent le marché central de Gao, détruit neuf jours plus tôt lors d'affrontements avec les islamistes du Mujao.

... l'aveu même d'Obama, l'effort n'a d'autre effet que de « contenir l'avancée » des troupes de l'Irakien Abou Bakr al-Baghdadi, dont la capacité de nuisance, en dehors du périmètre syro-irakien, paraît intacte. Notamment au Yémen, en Libye, dans le Sinaï égyptien et au Liban. Pour preuve, le double attentat-suicide perpétré le 12 novembre dans un bastion du Hezbollah, au sud de Beyrouth.

3. L'impasse diplomatique

Après des heures d'âpres tractations, le sommet du Groupe international de soutien à la Syrie, assemblage hétérogène de 17 pays, a accouché le 14 novembre, à Vienne (Autriche), de la « feuille de route » supposée dessiner les contours d'une transition politique. Objectifs affichés de cet échéancier : l'ouverture, avant le 1^{er} janvier 2016, de négociations entre le régime et son opposition, la conclusion d'un cessez-le-feu, l'installation au cours du prochain semestre d'un gouvernement intérimaire, la rédaction d'une nouvelle constitution et la tenue dans les dix-huit mois d'un scrutin présidentiel digne de ce nom. Scepticisme de rigueur. Car ceux que Washington, Londres ou Paris rangent parmi les « opposants » passent, aux yeux de Moscou et de Téhéran, pour des « terroristes ». Il y a plus ardu : s'entendre sur le sort promis à Bachar el-Assad, hors-jeu pour les uns, acteur incontournable pour les autres. Comment oublier que ce dernier a amplement contribué à enfanter le monstre djihadiste, cet ennemi dont il a tant besoin pour sauver son assise ? Lui qui a

libéré en 2011 une cohorte de détenus islamistes, lui qui s'est abstenu d'entrer en mai 2015 la ruée de Daech sur Palmyre, lui enfin dont la troupe et les sbires ont sur la conscience, ou ce qui en tient lieu, la descente aux enfers de la Syrie. Entre l'Occident et le monde sunnite d'une part, et le tandem irano-russe de l'autre, la ligne de fracture paraît claire. D'autant que les pétromonarchies du Golfe, Arabie saoudite en tête, soupçonnées à juste titre de complaisance active envers les phalanges djihadistes, ont fini par mesurer l'acuité du péril existentiel que fait peser sur elles leur version Daech.

4. L'axe Téhéran-Moscou

Il faut se rendre à l'évidence : l'Iran et la Russie ne lâcheront pas Bachar. Du moins pas avant d'avoir déniché la formule alternative magique de nature à préserver leurs intérêts. Téhéran ne peut se passer de son seul allié arabe, relais vital du soutien fourni au Parti de Dieu libanais, créé en 1982 par la théocratie persane. « Nous connaissons les limites d'el-Assad, confie un diplomate iranien de haut rang. Mais nous soutenons la Syrie parce qu'elle défend le Hezbollah. Point final. » Du côté de Moscou, l'ambition impériale de Vladimir Poutine, qui ne se sent « pas le droit » d'enjoindre à son protégé de lâcher son sceptre, impose au Kremlin de choyer sa tête de pont militaire et politique régionale. D'où l'ambiguïté de l'engagement de l'armée de l'air russe, plus encline à frapper les rebelles réputés « modérés » que les colonnes et les QG de Daech. Dopée

par l'irruption aérienne et terrestre de son parrain, l'armée de Damas, pourtant en piètre état, a enregistré plusieurs succès aux alentours d'Alep. Le vent tournerait-il ? Pas si vite : lors de la même séquence, les forces de Bachar ont perdu les villages investis à grand-peine dans le secteur de Hama (ouest).

5. La France, cible idéale

Paris peut bien, s'agissant du devenir d'Assad, camper sur une ligne intransigeante. Sa fermeté ne lui vaut aucune indulgence chez les stratèges de Daech. A leurs yeux, la patrie de Voltaire collectionne les péchés inexpiables. A commencer par son implication dans le combat anti-djihad en Irak dès septembre 2014, puis en Syrie un an plus tard, mais aussi au Mali comme au Nigeria. Après avoir visé, en territoire syrien, des centres d'entraînement, les Rafale et les Mirage frappent des installations pétrolières et gazières, précieuses sources de revenus. L'envoi « sur zone » du porte-avions Charles-de-Gaulle aura en outre pour effet de doubler l'effectif des chasseurs-bombardiers basés aux Emirats et en Jordanie. L'Histoire retiendra que c'est devant le député Thierry Mariani (les Républicains), figure de proue d'une délégation accourue à Damas pour y louer l'« efficacité » de l'intervention russe, que Bachar el-Assad a signifié en ces termes la compassion que lui inspire le deuil d'une nation : « Les politiques erronées de la France dans la région ont contribué à l'essor du terrorisme. » En clair : Vous n'avez que ce que vous méritez... ● V.H.

REUTERS

How Kurdistan bypassed Baghdad and sold oil on global markets

* **Kurdistan needs cash to fight Islamic State**
* **Says sales to continue unless it gets proper budget**
* **Some 10 countries are now buying Kurdish oil**

November 17, 2015 - By Dmitry Zhdannikov (Reuters)

LONDON, Iraq's semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan has for the first time detailed its secretive oil exports operations and said it plans to sell more, whether Baghdad likes it or not, as it needs money to survive and fight Islamic State.

The region's minister for natural resources, Ashti Hawrami, said that to avoid detection oil was often funneled through Israel, transferred directly between ships off the coast of Malta, and decoy ships used to make it harder for Baghdad to track.

Kurdistan says it had been forced to bypass Baghdad and begin exporting oil directly because the latter refused to respect budgets in 2014 and 2015. The current and former Iraqi central governments have both said the Kurds have failed to respect deals to transfer agreed volumes of oil to Baghdad.

Kurdistan is entitled to 17 percent of Iraq's overall budget, and argued it needed stable revenues to pay its bills, support over a million of refugees fleeing the war in Syria and Iraq finance its Peshmerga army fighting against Islamist militants.

Kurdistan is exporting over 500,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil - or every seventh barrel of OPEC's second largest exporter - and believes that Baghdad has now accepted, at least in part, direct Kurdish exports going to as many as 10 countries.

"Effectively, we have been financially discriminated against for a long time. By early 2014, when we did not receive the budget, we decided we need to start thinking about independent oil sales," Hawrami told Reuters.

With new pipelines completed, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) still needed to find buyers for its oil, effectively one large tanker every two days.

Most customers were scared of touching it with Baghdad threatening to sue any buyer. Large oil companies - including Exxon Mobil and BP - have billions of dollars worth of joint projects with Baghdad.

"The scale was huge. And it was a totally new game for us. Buyers wanted the KRG to lease its own crude cargo ships. We knew nothing about the shipping or sea transportation industry," said Hawrami.

The KRG engaged a veteran oil trader, Murtaza Lakhani, who worked for Glencore in Iraq in the 2000s, to assist finding ships.

"He knew exactly who would and who wouldn't deal with us. He opened the doors to us and identified willing shipping companies to work with us," said Hawrami.

Hawrami says it is premature to disclose the names of traders, shippers and buyers of Kurdish oil. Lakhani also declined to comment on the names of buyers and shippers.

Iraq has filed a lawsuit against Greek shipping company Marine Management Services for its role in Kurdish exports. Market sources have said several trading houses including Trafigura and Vitol have dealt with Kurdish oil. Both Trafigura and Vitol declined to comment on their role in oil sales.

Some buyers took tankers to Ashkelon, Israel, where it was loaded into storage facilities to be resold later to buyers in Europe. Kurdish oil was also sold offshore Malta via ship-to-ship transfers helping disguise the final buyers and thus protect them from threats from Iraqi state firm SOMO.

It was a high stakes game. A ship would dock off Malta waiting for another to arrive to take a cargo to a final destination. Sometimes two ships would be sent - one sailing off empty and another full - to complicate cargo tracking.

"Everyone suddenly became a ship tracking expert. So we had to raise our game too... But one thing was proven correct - when oil is out, it flows," said Hawrami.

The region plans to increase exports to as much as 1 million barrels and wants also to become a significant gas exporter, which would put it firmly on the global energy map.

BUDGET DISPUTE

Disputes over budget have been at the centre of developments of the past two years.

"We simply cannot afford returning to the old arrangements with Baghdad and widening the financial gap again," Hawrami said.

"We would accept a real budget that Baghdad can commit to without conditions, but we don't want to be part of a theoretical budget which isn't worth the paper it is written on," he added.

Hawrami says the 2014 Iraqi state budget required Kurdistan to export 400,000 bpd of oil - which was simply technically non-feasible at the time due to a lack of export routes and pipelines.

Kurdistan received \$500 million in state budget allocations in January 2014 instead of \$1.0 billion-\$1.2 billion foreseen by the state budget and then from February budget transfers were cut further and then stopped by March 2014.

"Baghdad demanded oil we didn't have. Our delegation led by prime minister Nechervan Barzani went to Baghdad to try to find out what was going on. But they were not interested in hearing our arguments and continued with their decision to cut our budget," he said.

"So we had to get our act together and speed up the completion of pipelines. By May 2014 the basic infrastructure was completed and we were ready for independent sales."

By the time the new pipeline from Kurdistan to the Turkish Mediterranean coast, replacing the old Saddam-era link, was ready, the region was effectively broke.

It had limited cash, it was falling behind with salary payments to state employees including the army - just when Islamic State seized large parts of central Iraq and of Kurdistan itself.

The region was hundreds of millions of dollars in arrears to companies such as Genel and DNO, which have been developing fields in Kurdistan.

Gradually, buyers and traders started using their own ships for Kurdish oil but Baghdad filed a court case in the United States threatening to sue anyone who touched it.

A cargo was stuck in the United States for several months before sailing back to Europe and being resold there. Since then no Kurdistan oil has crossed the Atlantic.

Another cargo was stranded in Morocco. SOMO also sent warnings to all major clients in Europe and Asia.

"Looking back, the whole of 2014 was a huge success as we only had two ships in difficulty - one in the U.S. and one in Morocco... We managed to finish the year (2014) with only one month of salaries behind," said Hawrami.

"That was a pretty extraordinary achievement as we had ISIS attacking our soil, over a million of Syrian refugees and displaced Iraqis. All of that burden came and we hadn't seen a cent from Baghdad".

Independent oil sales in 2014 allowed Kurdistan to borrow about \$3 billion including from Turkey and trading houses.

"We had a remarkable change in relations with Turkey. It has been very strategic and they have been incredibly supportive," Hawrami said.

"ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE"

Hopes of better ties emerged at the end of last year after a new government led by Haider al-Abadi came to power in Baghdad instead of Nouri al-Maliki.

"It was a new atmosphere. We hoped it would allow us to put our differences behind us," said Hawrami.

In December 2014, Baghdad and Erbil signed a deal under which Kurdistan would transfer some average 550,000 bpd to Iraqi state oil firm SOMO over the course of 2015 while receiving 17 percent of Iraqi budget or over \$1.1 billion a month.

The deal began to unravel almost immediately. Baghdad said Erbil was not transferring the agreed volumes and sent only \$200 million in January instead of \$1.1 billion. Between January and by June it transferred around \$2 billion in total to Erbil - less than 40 percent of what the Kurds had expected.

"In February 2015, we went again to Baghdad only to discover that they have thrown their budget out of the window and were simply working with cash in hand. We told them that our state salaries constitute some \$750 million - half of this to security and Peshmerga - so how could we live on just a third of our budget?"

"But they told us - cash in hand is all we have because of the collapse in oil prices and inability to fill the deficit in the budget. By March, we came to a conclusion that we had no option but to start independent oil sales again".

Baghdad is firm in asserting it is abiding by the constitution. "The party that did not abide by the text of the agreement is the regional government and not the federal government," said Saad al Hadithi, spokesman for Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi.

"We had hoped the agreement that was made a year ago was the beginning of a new stage of cooperation and coordination, but unfortunately what happened is that the regional government did not export the agreed upon amount to SOMO," Hadithi said.

Hawrami says as of November 2015 the number of countries taking Kurdish barrels has risen to around 10, declining to name them. Reuters has reported Kurdish oil making it to countries such as Israel and Hungary.

Independent sales have been allowing the KRG to generate some \$800 million-\$850 million a month from July to enable it to pay salaries and ongoing costs to oil companies like Genel.

However, the crash in oil prices since 2014 meant the gap in finances was much more difficult to close.

As of November, the country is still three months behind with salary pay-

ments but Hawrami says he is hoping to close the gap by pushing production up in 2016 while also looking to sell some assets and infrastructure to raise liquidity.

As of today, the KRG still owes \$3 billion to its 2014 lenders but Hawrami says he hopes it could be paid back or at least significantly reduced over the course of 2016.

Another task would be a meaningful cut of state spending such as fuel subsidies in 2016 and an attempt to increase non oil revenues. Hawrami says he is seeing early signs that Baghdad is gradually removing its opposition to independent oil sales.

SOMO is still threatening to sue buyers of Kurdistan oil, but appears compliant with Erbil's handling of the Kirkuk oilfield, which is not under the authority of the KRG, but whose exports of 150,000 bpd have been handled for months by the Kurds via Turkish ports.

"If you ask any Kurd, they will always tell you that their main dream is independence," Hawrami said. "But at the government level, the main policy focus has been economic independence. We are aspiring to solve our own problems and we have enough resources to do it." ○



November 16, 2015

Kurdish and Hashd al-Shaabi officials hold meeting in Khurmatu

rudaw.net — Nov 16, 2015

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region — An official at the Khurmatu mayor's office told Rudaw Monday that several high military officials of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Hashd al-Shaabi Shiite militias met in Khurmatu to discuss

escalating violence between the two factions and proposals for de-escalation.

Mohamed Jala of the Khurmatu mayor's office told Rudaw that to avoid further escalation of violence and seek calm in the situation, many PUK high military officials, led by PUK senior member Adnan Hama Mina, met with leaders of the

Hashd al-Shaabi to hold talks on the current tensions in Khurmatu.

"The situation is getting better. Since Sunday at 11 pm, no gunfire has been heard," Jala told Rudaw.

He added that Kurds seeking vengeance on Shiites civilians in the disputed territory should be stopped, and that retaliation would make things worse. "There are

some people who aim to worsen the situation and go to Kurdish districts and homes to create sedition and to burn the Shiites," Jala said.

The ethnically and religiously mixed Khurmatu currently has a Kurdish mayor, and is located in the disputed Diyala province 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of Kirkuk.

Fighting in Khurmatu broke out on Friday when a Shiite militia convoy allegedly refused to stop at a checkpoint manned by Kurdish forces, resulting in a firefight that left three Peshmerga and two Shiite militiamen dead. ■



Rebel groups in northwestern Syria offer to join U.S.-backed Kurd-Arab-Assyrian

Last month, the Syrian Democratic Forces, a U.S.-backed alliance of Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian rebel groups, announced it was launching an offensive to clear Islamic State militants out of Syria's eastern al-Hasakah province.

ALEPPO, Syria, November 17, 2015 By Fred Lambert (UPI)

An array of rebel groups in northwestern Syria's Aleppo and Idlib provinces announced Tuesday they were ready to fight under the banner of a U.S.-backed alliance of Kurds, Arabs and Syriac Christians making gains in the east of the country.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights quoted a statement from rebels in Idlib and Aleppo as saying at least 15 factions were now prepared to fight under the banner of the Syrian Democratic Forces.

The SDF — which comprises a series of units under the Syrian Arab Coalition, The Syriac Military Council, Kurdish forces known as the People's Defense Units, or YPG, and the Women's Defense Units, or YPJ — announced its formation in mid-October.

With support from U.S. airstrikes, the SDF earlier this month launched an offensive to clear Islamic State militants out of eastern Syria's al-Hasakah province and began making gains in areas around the provincial capital.

SOHR quoted the statement from the rebels in Idlib and Aleppo as saying they wished to work under the SDF banner due to "recent developments" in the country, including "victories achieved by SDF in al-Jazira area" — refer-

ring to a former name for lands that now encompass al-Hasakah province. The Syrian military, backed by Russian airstrikes, Lebanese Hezbollah fighters and Iranian troops, has since last month conducted a series of countywide counter-attacks in a bid to regain territories lost earlier in the year, including in Idlib and Aleppo provinces.

The assaults came shortly after Russia intervened in Syria on Sept. 30 and began conducting airstrikes on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad, its regional ally.

An alliance of rebel groups in northwestern Syria — including al-Qaida's Syrian affiliate, the Nusra Front — had by April pushed the Syrian military out of all major urban strongholds in Idlib province, and by August, pro-Assad forces had been pushed west into Latakia province, heartland of Assad's ruling Alawite minority.

Among the rebel groups listed in Tuesday's statement was Ahrar ash-Sham, or the "Free Men of Syria." The group, estimated to comprise 10,000 to 20,000 fighters, is the lead cell in a rebel coalition known as the Islamic Front.

The United States has shown little interest in supporting Ahrar ash-Sham because of its cooperation with Nusra Front.

"They are in a gray zone, but in a civil war if you are not willing to talk to factions in the gray zone, you'll have precious few people to talk to," Robert S. Ford, a former United States ambassador to Syria now at the Middle East Institute, told The New York Times in August.

"I do not advocate giving any material support to Ahrar, much less lethal material assistance, but given their prominence in the northern and central fronts, they will have a big role in any peace talks, so we should find a channel to begin talking to them." ○



November 10, 2015

Davutoglu: Turkey supports US arming Peshmerga, not PKK



rudaw.net 10/11/2015

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Turkey will not allow the United States or other countries to help the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and its affiliated groups, but Ankara does support the idea of arming the Kurdistan region's Peshmerga and helping its leader Masoud Barzani, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmed Davutoglu told CNN.

Davutoglu made the remarks to CNN reporter Christiane Amanpour in an interview reportedly taped on October 6 and to be aired on November 10.

"If the US wants to arm Kurdish fighters on the ground against ISIS, we are ready. But not Kurdish terrorists of the PKK," said Davutoglu, whose party of Justice and Development Party (AKP) won the snap general elections held on Nov 1.

"If they [US] want to arm and help Barzani or Peshmerga groups in Iraq or help them to go to Syria and fight against ISIS, we are ready to help," he added.

The Turkish prime minister criticized the Kurdish fighters of the PKK and accused them of attacking Turkish civilians and properties.

"We cannot and we will not

tolerate any help to PKK-related groups in Syria or Iraq," he told CNN.

Davutoglu also warned European leaders that the Syrian refugee crisis would continue as long as Syria's President Bashar al-Assad stays in power.

"What is a solution? A solution is very clear. When, one day ... millions of Syrian refugees decide to go back to Syria, assuming that there is a peace in Syria, and then this is a solution. If Assad stays in power in Damascus, I don't think any refugee will go back," he said.

According to the United Nations, the majority of the estimated 744,000 refugees who

have arrived in Europe this year are from Syria. The migrants are often using Turkey as a transition to the third county, mostly Germany and Sweden.

Turkey has spend more than \$7.5 billion caring for more than one million Syrian refugees who have escaped the war and sought shelter in Turkey, the Turkish government said last month. ■

Los Angeles Times

November 16, 2015

Mass graves uncovered in town once held by ISIS in Iraq

Nabih Bulos / November 16, 2015
<http://www.latimes.com>

Two mass graves were discovered around the northern Iraqi town of Sinjar on Sunday, officials and witnesses said, two days after an offensive by Iraqi Kurdish forces routed Islamic State fighters from the area.

Local media outlet Rudaw reported Sunday that witnesses had pointed out one of the graves to officials the day before. The wit-

nesses told them the grave, near the Sinjar Technical Institute, contained the remains of 78 women between the ages of 40 and 80 years old.

The gruesome discovery was followed by the finding of another grave Sunday 10 miles west of Sinjar believed to contain the bodies of about 50 men. Both graves have yet to be excavated.

A reporter with Rudaw said Iraqi Kurdish fighters told him there potentially were six



Kurdish Peshmerga show what they say is a mass grave of more than 50 Yazidis killed by ISIL on November 15, 2015 in Sinjar, Iraq. John Moore/Getty Images

more graves in the area.

Iraqi Kurdish officials said the dead were probably Yazidis, members of a religious minority from Sinjar who were the target of a wave of terror by Islamic State fighters. The militants seized the town in August 2014 as they swept across northern Iraq from their bases in Syria.

"Killing these innocent people is one of the crimes ISIS perpetrated against the [Yazidis]," said security official Qasim Simo to Rudaw, using one of the acronyms for Islamic State.

The discovery of the graves followed a U.S.-backed operation last week by Iraqi Kurdish militiamen known as peshmerga who wrested control of the town from Islamic State.

Islamic State took over Sinjar in a bid to consolidate control over the a vital supply corridor linking Mosul, a major Iraqi city 80 miles to the east, to the Syrian city of Raqqa, the group's de facto capital.◆



REUTERS

Clashes between Kurdish militants, security forces in Turkey leave 12 dead

DIYARBAKIR, Turkey — Novembre 18, 2015 — Reuters

TEN MILITANTS from the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) have been killed in clashes with security forces in southeast Turkey, as well as two civilians, authorities said.

Security forces launched operations in the town of Nusaybin on the Syrian border last week, killing 10 PKK fighters, the Mardin governor's office said in a statement on Wednesday. Two civilians were killed and 13 injured.

The statement did not offer any details of how the casualties were caused.

A two-year ceasefire and peace talks between the Turkish state and the PKK lie in tatters after a 31-year war was reignited in July, following the ruling AK Party's loss of its majority in a June election.

Kurdish politicians accuse the AKP of fomenting the unrest to garner support in a re-run election, a charge the party denies. Fighting has gripped parts of the mainly Kurdish southeast.

The AKP regained its parliamentary majority in the Nov. 1 vote.

Authorities placed Nusaybin under a round-the-clock curfew on Nov. 13, and that remains in place as security forces continue to clear trenches and barricades from the streets, the statement said.

Separately, police in the city of Diyarbakir detained Leyla Imret, the mayor of the town of Cizre, which saw heavy fighting in September, her lawyer said. He said he did not know why she had been detained and that there had been no arrest warrant.

The Interior Ministry suspended Imret, elected Cizre's mayor in 2014, in September while the town was under curfew amid fighting between the PKK and police.

The Diyarbakir prosecutor's office said it had launched an investigation of Figen Yuksekdag, co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party, for allegedly "insulting soldiers" last week when she tried to enter Silvan, a district of the city under curfew. ○

INDEPENDENT

November 24, 2015

The ethnic group who 'killed two Russian pilots' in Syria

Turkmen are descended from groups who began moving into modern-day Syria during the 10th century

Laura Pitel Istanbul / November 24, 2015
www.independent.co.uk

The Russian plane downed by Turkey was conducting operations in the Turkmen Mountain region of northern Syria when it was accused of violating Turkish airspace.

The encounter has shone a light on Syria's Turkmen, a distinct ethnic group whose members have lived alongside their Arab and Kurdish neighbours for centuries.

There are no official statistics for the number of Turkmen in Syria, but there are now thought to be around 200,000, their number having been worn down by recent war and decades of persecution.

Most are to be found in Latakia province, which runs along Syria's north west coast up to the boarder with Turkey, and is also the family seat of the Syrian president Bashar al Assad. Smaller numbers live in the province around Aleppo, Syria's second city, and the central city of Homs.

Turkmen, who are mainly Sunni Muslims, are descended from groups who began moving from Central Asia into modern-day Syria during the 10th century. They faced oppression under Syria's Baathist regime, facing restrictions on publishing or writing in their language, an old form of Turkish. When the

Syrian uprising began in 2011, they were among the first to take up arms against government forces.

Their shared ethnic heritage and joint opposition to the Syrian government made the Turkish government a natural ally of Turkmen fighters in Syria. Turkmen brigades have looked to Ankara for training, support and protection.

Turkey also sees them as an alternative fighting force to Syrian Kurds, who have Western backing but are viewed with hostility by Turkey due to its own struggle against Kurdish separatism.

Turkmen brigades, said to number at least 2,000 fighters, are seen as more moderate than some of the Islamist groups battling Syrian government forces. They were earmarked for training as part of an ill-fated US programme to back Western-friendly opposition forces in Syria, though they are also said to fight alongside groups such as the al-Qaeda affiliated al-Nusra Front and the Islamist Ahrar al-Sham.

Turkmen commanders have complained that they have not received enough support from Western nations and Turkey despite their willingness to battle against both the Syrian army and Isis.

In recent days, Turkey has grown increasingly agitated over Russian involvement in an



The Turkish prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, described those coming under attack as "our Turkmen brothers"

offensive against Turkmen areas in north-western Syria. Russian military aircraft have provided cover for Syrian forces working jointly with the Lebanese militia Hezbollah and Iranian units backing them, according to Turkmen groups.

The Turkish prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, described those coming under attack as "our Turkmen brothers" and accused Russia of not pursuing its stated aim of "fighting terror" but instead bombing civilian villages. Turkey's foreign ministry summoned the Russian ambassador to demand that Russia cease its support for the operations immediately. ●

Land of Kurdistan is not place for al-Hashed al-Sha'bi militia, says Barzani

By Amre Sarhan - Nov 18, 2015
http://www.iraqinews.com

(IraqiNews.com) The Kurdish President Massoud Barzani said on Wednesday, that the land of Kurdistan is not a place for the Shiite militia of al-Hashed al-Sha'bi, while added that the region is not in conflict with al-Hashed al-Sha'bi about the importance of war against the ISIS.

A spokesman for the Presidency of Kurdistan said in a statement obtained by IraqiNews.com, "The position of the President of Kurdistan, currently and formerly, is clear, that the the Kurdistan region does not have any disagreements with al-Hashed al-Sha'bi on targeting ISIS as well as the war against it," stressing "The need for coordination and assistance between the Peshmerga and al-Hashed al-Sha'bi to target the ISIS."



He added, "This does not mean that al-Hashed al-Sha'bi can come to occupy Khurmatu, which is the land of Kurdistan, and is protected by the Peshmerga," explaining that "President Barzani asserts that the land of Kurdistan is not a place for al-Hashed al-Sha'bi." ■

REPORT: AMID ISIS WAR, SHIITES TARGET KURDISH PESHMERGA IN IRAQ

by Edwin Mora 20 Nov 2015
www.breitbart.com

The Popular Mobilization Units (Hashd al-Shaabi), a Shiite militia movement in Iraq, has continued to attack Kurdish territory in an attempt to push back Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and take full control of the area, reports BasNews.

Iran-backed Shiite militias are reportedly fighting under the Hashd al-Shaabi flag.

"Clashes between Hashd al-Shaabi and Peshmerga forces took place in Tuz Khurmatu last week with several casualties," reports Bas News, a Kurdish media outlet. "Delegations from the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraqi central government met soon after to find a solution to the dispute and exchange prisoners."

"The clashes resumed soon after the meeting, and Shi'ite militias killed another Kurdish civilian," it adds.

BasNews learned from an unnamed

source that the Popular Mobilization Units had sent reinforcements to the Kurdish area in an effort to drive Kurdish forces out of Tuz Khurmatu, Jalawla, and Saadia.

"By negotiating with Kurdish officials and signing agreements, the source added, Shi'ite militias buy more time to develop their plans against Kurds," reports BasNews.

Shiite militias stationed in Tuz Kurmatu are "unorganized forces with no commitment to any principle or accord," asserted Mustafa Chawrash, the Peshmerga commander on the frontline in Kirkuk, Iraq.

Although they want to avoid being drawn into another front, Kurds will not retreat from the areas under attack by Shiite militias, insisted Chawrash.

The Iraqi Kurdish Peshmerga forces are already fighting the Islamic State (ISIS/ISIL) on the ground with the help of U.S.-led airstrikes.

Chawrash accused the Shiite militias in Tuz Khurmatu of being associated with for-

mer Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

"Hashd al-Shaabi create tensions as they are not pleased by the latest Peshmerga gains against Islamic State in Sinjar," noted the Peshmerga commander.

"Shiite militias must be driven out of Kurdish areas soon, as they have a long history of posing a threat to Kurdish residents," indicated Bestoun Fayaq, head of the Parliamentary Committee for Kurdish Disputed Areas, in an interview with BasNews.

Citing anonymous witnesses, Rudaw reported on Nov. 16 that a 14-year-old boy was killed by a Hashd al-Shaabi sniper in the town of Khurmatu in Iraq's Diyala province, 50 miles south of Kirkuk.

On Thursday, Rudaw reported that Hashd al-Shaabi freed 15 Kurds from the Iraqi Kurdistan region who had been arrested by the Shiite movement.

The liberation of the prisoners came after talks between Hashd al-Shaabi and Peshmerga officials to de-escalate tensions.

Hashd al-Shaabi militiamen are also fighting ISIS in Iraq. In July, they joined Iraqi troops in launching an attack to retake Fallujah from ISIS, prompting the jihadist group to declare a state of emergency inside the city.

Fallujah remains under ISIS control.◆

Genel sees Iraqi Kurdish gas heading to Turkey in 3 years

November 20, 2015, TODAY'S ZAMAN WITH REUTERS / ISTANBUL
www.todayszaman.com

Genel Energy Plc, which operates two natural gas fields in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, anticipates that KRG natural gas will be exported to Turkey within three years.

Genel Energy Board Chairman Tony Hayward

said on Friday that the two fields contain reserves of between 300 and 400 billion cubic meters of natural gas and that the Kurdistan region is slated to begin natural gas exports to the world market via these two fields. Genel Energy also said it plans to establish a joint company with the Iraqi Kurdish government to develop gas fields. Hayward added that the Iraqi Kurdistan region was exporting 600,000-700,000 barrels of crude a day.

Iraq's KRG Minister of Natural Resources Ashti Hawrami also said on Friday the region planned to export 10 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas to Turkey over the next two years, but that this may slip to 2019.

Speaking at an Atlantic Council conference in Istanbul, Hawrami also said the region planned to increase its crude oil export capacity to 1 million barrels per day (bpd) by the end of 2016.

Arbil and Baghdad have been engaged in a dispute for nearly two years over the oil produced in the KRG. After Baghdad suspended budget payments to Arbil, the latter responded by selling its oil directly to buyers, sidestepping the control of the federal government. The two parties are reportedly in talks to work out a revenue-sharing agreement. ●

Syrie: les forces arabo-kurdes ont chassé l'EI de 1400 km²

Belga - 16 novembre 2015 - www.rtbf.be

La coalition arabo-kurde syrienne, appuyée par les États-Unis, a chassé le groupe terroriste Etat islamique (EI) d'une zone équivalente à environ 1400 km² dans le nord-est de la Syrie, a affirmé lundi à la presse son porte-parole.

"Entre le 30 octobre et le 13 novembre, 1362 km² ont été nettoyés de la présence de l'EI, dont Khatouniyé, ainsi que 196 villages et hameaux, par les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS)", a affirmé lors d'une conférence de presse à al-Hol, le porte-parole des FDS, le colonel Talal Ali Sello.

Ces territoires se trouvent au sud de Hassaké, un fief des Unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), principale milice kurde syrienne. Selon le porte-parole, 493 membres de l'EI ont été tués et 112 corps sont aux mains des FDS. Dans les combats, 33 combattants des FDS et 4 civils ont perdu la vie et 53 FDS ont été blessés.



Des combattants des FDS, Forces démocratiques syriennes. - © DELIL SOULEIMAN - AFP

Soutien américain

Outre les YPG, les FDS rassemblent le groupe majoritairement arabe Burkan al-Furat (le volcan de l'Euphrate), des tribus arabes et des chrétiens syriaques. Cette coalition a été créée le 12 octobre avec le soutien des États-Unis. L'offensive au sud de Hassaké (nord-est) a commencé le 30 octobre. Jeudi, les FDS s'étaient emparées du village d'al-Hol sur la route d'approvisionnement en armes et en matériel de l'EI venant d'Irak.



Turquie: un député prokurde fraîchement élu condamné à 6 ans de prison pour "terrorisme"

Istanbul, 20 novembre 2015 (AFP)

LA JUSTICE TURQUE a condamné vendredi à six ans et trois mois de prison, pour appartenance à une "organisation terroriste", un député du principal parti prokurde du pays, élu au début du mois au Parlement, a rapporté la presse locale.

Au terme d'un long procès, un tribunal de Van (est) a jugé Lezgin Botan, membre du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), coupable de faire partie de l'Union des communautés du Kurdistan (KCK), qui regroupe tous les mouvements de la rébellion du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), a précisé l'agence de presse Dogan.

Elu lors du scrutin législatif du 1er novembre, remporté haut la main par le parti du président islam-conservateur Recep Tayyip Erdogan, ce député avait prêté serment mardi.

Un ancien député du même parti et quatre membres d'un syndicat d'enseignants ont été condamnés à la même peine et deux autres accusés acquittés, selon Dogan.

Tous avaient été interpellés en 2011 dans le cadre d'un vaste coup de filet de la police contre les milieux kurdes, qui s'était soldé par l'arrestation dans tout le pays de plusieurs centaines d'élus, avocats, journalistes ou militants proches du PKK, une organisation classée comme "terroriste" par Ankara.

Après un fragile cessez-le-feu de plus de deux ans, le PKK a repris les hostilités l'été dernier contre les forces de sécurité turques, mettant un terme aux pourparlers de paix engagés à l'automne 2012 pour mettre un terme à un conflit qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

Depuis cette date, le gouvernement a multiplié les poursuites contre des médias, journalistes ou avocats accusés de "propagande terroriste" pour leurs liens présumés avec le PKK. ●



23 NOVEMBRE 2015

Turquie: la voiture du chef du parti pro-kurde HDP visée par un tir

23 novembre 2015 www.rfi.fr

Le président du parti d'opposition pro-kurde HDP, Selahattin Demirtas, est sorti indemne d'un tir contre sa voiture, dimanche soir, alors qu'il circulait dans la ville de Diyarbakir, dans le sud-est du pays.

Avec notre correspondant à Istanbul, Jérôme Bastion

L'incident a eu lieu en milieu de soirée quand Selahattin Demirtas rentrait chez lui. C'est en arrivant à son domicile que l'impact du projectile a été découvert sur la vitre arrière du véhicule, exactement à l'endroit

où le coprésident du HDP, le parti pro-kurde, prend place dans sa voiture blindée.

Le fait que le tir n'ait pas été entendu laisse penser qu'il peut provenir d'une arme équipée d'un silencieux, sans doute par un tireur embusqué sur le trajet de la voiture. Le projectile n'a en tous cas pas traversé le verre.

Plusieurs tentatives d'assassinats contre Selahattin Demirtas

Ce n'est pas la première tentative d'assassinat visant Selahattin Demirtas puisqu'une double explosion de colis piégés, à quelques

mètres de la scène où il s'apprêtait à prendre la parole lors d'un meeting à Diyarbakir, 48 heures avant le scrutin législatif du 7 juin dernier, avait déjà été interprétée comme une attaque le visant personnellement.

Le parti kurde de Syrie PYD avait d'ailleurs prévenu, cet été, être en possession d'informations selon lesquelles une équipe de tueurs professionnels venue de Syrie était entrée en Turquie avec l'intention de le tuer.

Par ailleurs le 12 mai dernier, un raid matinal de la police à son domicile avait suscité surprise et émotion. Il avait ensuite été expliqué qu'il s'agissait d'une méprise.

Selahattin Demirtas a réagi sur son compte Twitter, une demi-heure après l'incident : « La mort ne dépend que de Dieu », a-t-il écrit en kurde. ●

AFP

Turquie: après douze jours de combats et de couvre-feu, Silvan panse ses plaies

20 nov 2015 Mahmut BOZARSLAN (AFP)

SILVAN (Turquie) — Lorsque les combats ont éclaté à Silvan au début du mois, Sahin Dönmez a fui avec sa famille, sans se retourner. "Voilà", soupire-t-il au milieu de son salon calciné, "le fruit de quarante années de labeur parti en fumée".

Comme les Dönmez, de nombreux habitants du quartier de Mescit à Silvan, dans le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie, ont tout perdu ou presque lors des récents combats qui y ont opposé jeunes Kurdes et forces de sécurité turques.

Pendant douze jours, les chars de l'armée et les tireurs d'élite de la police antiterroriste ont traqué les combattants de la Jeunesse patriotique révolutionnaire (YDG-H), proches du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans trois quartiers de la ville, soumis par les autorités locales à un strict couvre-feu.

Le bilan est lourd. Au moins 10 personnes tuées, selon le gouvernorat de la province de Diyarbakir: un officier de l'armée, deux policiers, deux civils et cinq combattants kurdes.

Dans les quartiers visés, les dégâts sont considérables. Nedret Yakan, 35 ans, contemple la vitrine édentée de son salon de coiffure, miroirs brisés, meubles fracassés. Son estimation des dégâts ? "Vingt ans de ma vie", dit-elle, "anéanti en quelques jours".

Un peu plus loin, ses voisins fouillent les décombres de leur vie passée. Ils en extirpent un canapé ou un lave-linge miraculé et le chargent sur un camion. Destination "la paix".

Dogan Celik a eu moins de chance. L'immeuble qui abritait le restaurant, l'épicerie et l'appartement dont il était propriétaire a été dévasté par des explosifs posés, selon lui, par les partisans du PKK. "La semaine dernière, j'étais riche. Aujourd'hui, je n'ai plus rien", se lamente-t-il.

Le mur de son salon est éventré, les canapés criblés de balles et recouverts de plâtre. Sur une table basse, des douilles par poignées. "Il n'y a rien à sauver".

Depuis l'été, les armes parlent à nouveau dans le sud-est de la Turquie. Après plus de deux ans d'un fragile cessez-le-feu, la reprise des combats a éteint les espoirs de résolution d'un conflit qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984.

- 'L'ETAT EST LÀ' -

Aux traditionnelles attaques de convois militaires en zones rurales et montagneuses, les rebelles semblent cette fois privilégier le front urbain, dans l'espoir de susciter des soulèvements. Une stratégie peu payante jusqu'à présent, et qui met en danger les civils.

A Silvan, les combattants du YDG-H se sont retranchés chez Sahin Dönmez, accusent ses voisins. La façade constellée d'impacts de projectiles de tous calibres et la lourde porte métallique trouée comme du gruyère témoignent de la violence des combats.



Un Kurde devant sa maison détruite lors d'affrontements avec l'armée turque, le 14 novembre 2015 à Silvan, en Turquie

Sahin exhibe les restes d'un engin incendiaire. "C'est ça qui a déclenché (l'incendie)", dit-il. De quel camp sont venus les tirs ? "On ne sait pas", poursuit l'habitant, "mais ça a commencé à brûler quand la police est entrée dans le quartier".

Derrière le désarroi de la population, largement acquise à la cause rebelle, la colère contre le gouvernement turc n'est jamais loin. Sur les murs des maisons, certains slogans sont vécus comme des provocations. "L'Etat est là", proclame l'un d'eux.

"Ces jeunes qui érigent des barricades sont en colère à cause de la politique violente du gouvernement", a justifié jeudi devant la presse la coprésidente du Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP, prokurde), Figen Yüksekdag. "Il faut reprendre le processus de paix, c'est la seule façon de résoudre le problème".

Comme à Silvan, de nombreuses villes ont été le théâtre de cette nouvelle guérilla urbaine et soumise au couvre-feu. Cizre, Lice, Nusaybin, Diyarbakir...

Dans le quartier de Mescit, la vie a peu à peu repris. Des ouvriers s'activent à rétablir le réseau électrique, les femmes se pressent pour refaire le plein de vivres. Dans les rues, les blindés de la police surveillent le démantèlement des dernières barricades.

"Une nouvelle maison, une nouvelle vie. On va essayer", marmonne Sahin Dönmez. Nedret, elle, a envoyé ses enfants chez des proches à Istanbul. "Si on m'aide à réparer ma boutique, je pourrais reprendre mon travail", dit-elle. "Seule, je n'y arriverai pas, je ne peux pas lui donner vingt autres années de ma vie". ●

AFP

Nouvelle série de frappes aériennes turques contre le PKK en Turquie et en Irak

Ankara, 21 novembre 2015 (AFP)

L'AVIATION TURQUE a mené dans la nuit de vendredi à samedi une nouvelle série de frappes aériennes contre des cibles rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans le sud-est de la Turquie et dans le nord de l'Irak, a annoncé l'état-major.

Cette opération a visé des dépôts logistiques et des abris dans les secteurs de Zap, Avasin-Baysan, Hakurk and Kandil, dans les montagnes du nord de l'Irak où le PKK dispose de nombreuses bases arrière, a précisé le commandement militaire dans une déclaration publiée sur son site internet.

Des cibles rebelles ont également été touchées dans la province turque de

Simak (sud-est), aux confins de la Syrie et de l'Irak.

Selon la presse turque, 22 chasseurs, des F-16 et des F-4, ont participé à ces raids.

Après plus de deux ans de cessez-le-feu, les hostilités ont repris l'été dernier entre les forces de sécurité turques et le PKK dans le sud-est à majorité kurde du pays.

Ces affrontements ont signé la fin des pourparlers de paix engagés fin 2012 entre le gouvernement islamo-conservateur d'Ankara et les rebelles pour tenter de mettre un terme à un conflit qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984

Depuis la fin juillet, de violents combats opposent des jeunes sympathisants de la cause rebelle aux forces de police et à l'armée dans de nombreuses villes du sud-est, soumises par les autorités à un strict couvre-feu, causant des victimes civiles.

Fort de la victoire de son parti aux élections législatives du 1er novembre, le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan a promis la poursuite des opérations militaires "jusqu'à ce que l'organisation terroriste quitte le sol turc et enterre ses armes".

Raids aériens pour « casser la machine » EI

La coopération militaire devient effective entre forces américaines, françaises et russes

L'heure est à l'offensive. Tandis que l'organisation Etat islamique (EI) déroule une série d'attaques extérieures dans le monde, elle affronte une campagne de bombardements massifs en Syrie. Dans ce *surge*, les Etats-Unis, la Russie et la France partagent désormais un même langage : « intensification » de l'action militaire. Si les puissances parties au conflit en Syrie se disputent toujours le leadership politique de la coalition, celle-ci se met enfin en place au niveau militaire, concrètement. Contre l'EI, les opérations commencent à converger.

Premier élément décisif, les attentats du 13 novembre ont convaincu le président américain, Barack Obama, d'accroître l'aide fournie à l'armée française en matière de renseignement. « Il nous a ouvert tous les dossiers d'objectifs », confirme une source de haut niveau à Paris. Les frappes françaises, certes préparées par l'état-major, ont ainsi pu bénéficier d'un sérieux coup d'accélérateur. Les Rafale et Mirage 2000 stationnés aux Emirats arabes unis et en Jordanie sont mobilisés de façon intensive depuis trois jours. Une nouvelle série de frappes sur Rakka a été lancée mardi 17 novembre dans la soirée. Les fiefs de l'EI, Rakka, Deir ez-Zor, et sûrement demain Mossoul en Irak, sont prioritaires.

Le patron du renseignement national américain, James Clapper, a rencontré le ministre de la défense, Jean-Yves Le Drian, lundi 16 novembre à Paris.

Le pétrole ciblé

L'autre changement est la décision prise, de concert avec le Pentagone, de détruire les centres de distribution du pétrole tenus par l'EI, ainsi que leurs convois partant en direction de la Turquie. Deux tiers des ressources financières de l'EI proviennent de Deir ez-Zor, assurent les sources américaines. « Les responsables militaires américains sont arrivés à la conclusion que la campagne aérienne contre les infrastructures pétrolières de Syrie, qui ont apporté des millions de dollars à l'EI ces deux dernières années, avait été trop prudente », souligne *Foreign Policy*, d'où la décision d'une nouvelle opération baptisée « Tidal Wave II », en référence à la campagne qui avait détruit les

champs pétroliers de l'Allemagne nazie en Roumanie durant la deuxième guerre mondiale. Dimanche, des frappes ont détruit 116 camions-citernes stationnés près de la frontière irakienne, à Abou Kamal.

Le troisième tournant concerne la coopération avec la Russie. En mer devant les côtes syriennes, comme dans les airs, la coordination militaire (*deconfliction* en anglais) entre les Occidentaux et les Russes s'impose plus que jamais pour éviter les heurts. Elle va s'accroître, y compris avec les Russes, confirment les sources du *Monde*.

En mer, des discussions sont en cours, pour que les navires de la coalition se partagent les eaux. Les échanges à ce niveau sont qualifiés de « directs » entre militaires, y compris pour ce qui concerne les sous-marins. Ils ont précédé les déclarations de Vladimir

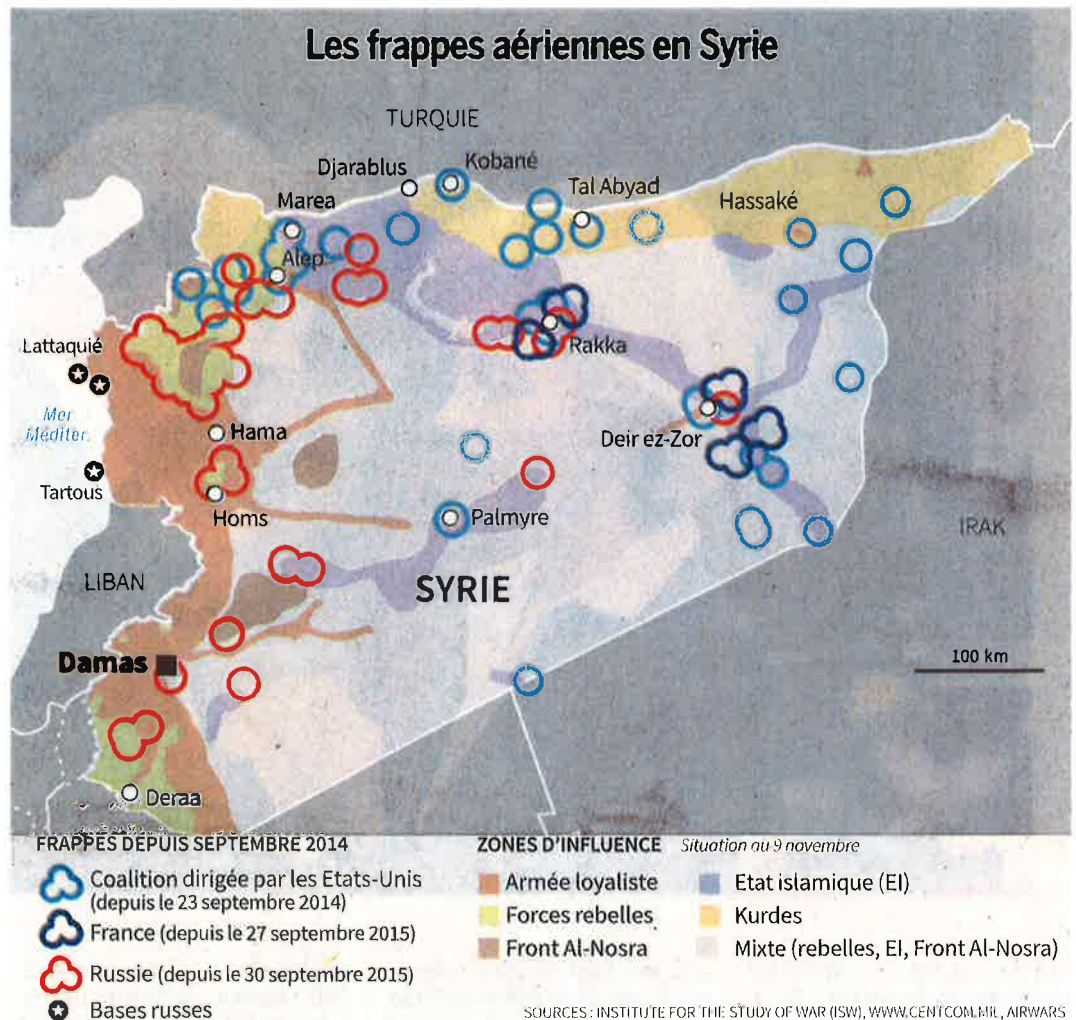
Poutine, qui a annoncé mardi avoir ordonné à ses navires de se coordonner avec les Français. « Il faut établir un contact direct avec les Français et travailler avec eux comme des alliés. » M. Poutine s'est entretenu mardi avec François Hollande qu'il doit rencontrer le 26 novembre.

Le porte-avions français *Charles-de-Gaulle* devait partir de Toulon mercredi 18 novembre pour rejoindre la Méditerranée orientale, avec 24 avions de chasse à son bord qui vont, selon M. Hollande, permettre un « triplement » des capacités d'action françaises devant la Syrie. Le navire pourrait rester plusieurs semaines pour se joindre aux frappes, avant de rejoindre le Golfe. Dans le cadre du *surge*, censé à présent « casser la machine Daech » (acronyme arabe de l'EI), des experts suggèrent que la marine nationale pourrait même tes-

ter ses nouveaux missiles de croisière, avec la frégate *Aquitaine* participant à l'opération.

Dans les airs, l'intensification des opérations est encore plus visible. Les Etats-Unis ont apporté début novembre sur la base turque d'Incirlik de nouveaux avions de supériorité aérienne, des F-15 pouvant appuyer les bombardiers A-10 envoyés frapper côté syrien. De quoi appuyer les forces kurdes – auprès desquelles le Pentagone a en outre inséré des forces spéciales pour les protéger des frappes russes.

Les Russes ont, comme l'a révélé mardi *Le Monde*, lancé pour la deuxième fois des missiles de croisière sur la Syrie, visant l'EI à Rakka, et usé pour la première fois de bombardiers stratégiques à long rayon d'action sur Deir ez-Zor, Alep et Idlib. Le chef d'état-major russe a précisé que son ar-



Les opérations occidentales ont placé l'EI sous pression, mais n'ont pas permis de gain stratégique jusqu'à présent

mée – qui ne frappe pas que l'EI – allait encore renforcer ses moyens en Syrie avec 37 avions. Et ce, après avoir déployé des batteries modernes de guerre électronique et de contrôle du ciel de nature à empêcher toute constitution d'une zone d'exclusion aérienne dans le nord du pays. Ces dernières semaines, les militaires russes ont en outre fourni de nouveaux moteurs et des munitions aux Mig syriens, leur permettant de voler à nouveau après plusieurs mois d'inactivité, ce qui complique encore la situation dans les airs.

Bilan mitigé

Mardi, le premier ministre britannique a aussi redit son intention d'étendre en Syrie les frappes pour l'heure cantonnées à l'Irak. Les Français ont reçu l'aide de drones britanniques d'observation Reaper pour les dernières frappes de Rakka, a révélé *The Times*.

Les opérations occidentales, jusqu'à présent, ont placé l'EI sous pression, mais n'ont pas permis de gain stratégique. « *Cet ennemi n'est en aucune façon vaincu* », a souligné mardi le porte-parole de l'opération américaine « *Inherent Resolve* ». Le bilan des opérations russes depuis le 30 septembre est lui aussi mitigé. Leurs trois objectifs – sécuriser Bachar Al-Assad, empêcher 10 000 combattants djihadistes du Caucase de rentrer chez eux et combattre l'EI – sont partiellement atteints, au prix de pertes civiles massives. Selon une source du renseignement militaire français, « *la phase 1 de leur opération qui visait à stabiliser la situation tactique s'achève, le temps 2 sera de faire avancer l'armée syrienne, qu'ils ont trouvée plus mal en point que prévu* ».

Le *surge* va se poursuivre. Paris n'exclut pas d'envoyer des forces spéciales, comme les Etats-Unis ont admis l'avoir déjà fait. « *Tout est ouvert à ce stade* », assure-t-on à la défense. ■

NATHALIE GUIBERT

La Turquie renforce sa coopération antiterroriste avec les Etats-Unis

Ankara et Washington veulent faire davantage pour mieux sécuriser la frontière turco-syrienne et pourchasser les candidats au djihad

ISTANBUL - correspondante

En visite à Paris mardi 17 novembre, le secrétaire d'Etat américain, John Kerry, a confirmé l'intention des Etats-Unis d'en « *faire plus pour le contrôle des frontières* » entre la Turquie et la Syrie. Mettant en avant les pertes de territoire subies par les djihadistes de l'organisation Etat islamique (EI), M. Kerry a évoqué la nécessité d'une coopération accrue avec Ankara. « *Nous allons débiter une opération avec les Turcs pour sceller les 98 kilomètres restant* », a-t-il confié lors d'un entretien avec la chaîne de télévision américaine CNN.

Faut-il y voir la réalisation du plan caressé par le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan, soit la création d'une zone de sécurité dans le nord de la Syrie ? Ce territoire, une bande de 90 kilomètres de long, sur une profondeur de 40 à 50 kilomètres, située entre Marea et Djarablus, permettrait, selon Ankara, de priver l'EI de ses dernières poches d'accès au territoire turc, tout en créant une aire de protection pour les populations civiles déplacées par le conflit.

La Turquie cherche aussi à porter un coup fatal aux milices kurdes du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD, allié aux rebelles turcs du Parti de libération du Kurdistan ou PKK, en guerre contre Ankara). Les Kurdes syriens ambitionnent de faire la jonction entre les cantons kurdes d'Afrine (au nord d'Alep, à l'ouest) et de Kobané (plus à l'est), ce qui n'a pas l'heur de plaire à Ankara.

Une frontière moins poreuse

Le 10 novembre, l'armée turque a ainsi bombardé à l'artillerie plusieurs villages des environs de Tal Abyad. « *Nous avons prévenu le PYD de ne pas s'aventurer à l'ouest de l'Euphrate, sinon nous les frapperons* », avait mis en garde le pre-

Les Turcs volent d'un très mauvais œil la coopération entre les Américains et les milices kurdes de Syrie

mier ministre turc Ahmet Davutoglu il y a quelques mois.

Les Turcs voient d'un très mauvais œil la coopération entre les militaires américains et les milices kurdes de Syrie (YPG), à la pointe du combat contre l'EI. Le 5 novembre, le colonel Steve Warren, le porte-parole américain pour les opérations anti-EI, avait déclaré que plus une arme ne serait fournie aux YPG. Le 11 novembre, Mark Toner, le porte-parole du département d'Etat, a enfoncé le clou, assurant que son pays ne soutenait aucunement les aspirations autonomistes des Kurdes syriens.

C'est dans cette zone que le président américain Barack Obama avait autorisé l'envoi d'un petit contingent de 50 soldats d'élite, chargés de « *coordonner les troupes locales sur le terrain ainsi que les efforts de la coalition pour lutter contre l'EI* ». Ces « *troupes locales* », également appelées « *Alliance des forces démocratiques de Syrie* », sont composées des milices kurdes mélangées avec quelques groupes de combattants arabes syriens afin de mieux faire passer la pilule auprès des Turcs.

La Turquie est davantage autorisée à faire pression sur Washington depuis qu'elle a rejoint le camp occidental contre l'EI. La frontière turco-syrienne n'est plus aussi poreuse et on ne compte plus les coups de filets de la police contre les sympathisants

de l'EI, à Antalya, Adana, Konya, Gaziantep et même à Istanbul.

Il apparaît désormais que l'élimination de « *Jihadi John* », de son vrai nom Mohammed Emwazi, un Britannique d'origine koweïtienne devenu le propagandiste de l'EI, est le fruit d'une coopération entre les services américains (CIA), turcs (MIT) et britanniques (MI6). L'homme aurait été tué par un drone américain, le 12 novembre à Rakka, la « *capitale* » des hommes en noir. Il était connu pour être apparu, un couteau à la main, sur toutes les vidéos de décapitation des otages de l'EI – celles des journalistes américains Steven Sotloff et James Foley, du travailleur humanitaire américain Abdul-Rahman Kassig, des travailleurs humanitaires britanniques David Haines et Alan Henning, du journaliste japonais Kenji Goto et d'autres.

Sa localisation a pu se faire grâce aux renseignements fournis par les services turcs, remontés jusqu'à lui par le biais d'une militante djihadiste d'origine britannique arrivée à Rakka le 4 novembre via le territoire turc. C'est à travers elle que le MIT a pu localiser Aine Leslie Junior Davis, un acolyte du « *boucher de l'EI* », détendeur, lui aussi, d'un passeport britannique et installé à Rakka depuis 2013.

Aine Leslie Junior Davis a donc été repéré en train de passer la frontière turco-syrienne à Kilis le 7 novembre. Après une halte à Gaziantep, il est arrivé le 10 novembre à Istanbul en autobus. Le 12 novembre à l'aube, il était arrêté dans une somptueuse villa du quartier aisé de Silivri, à l'ouest de l'aéroport Atatürk, à Istanbul. Selon la presse turque, lui et quatre complices avaient reçu des instructions pour mener des attaques meurtrières en Europe et en Turquie « *du type de celles de Paris* ». ■

MARIE JÉGO

Kurds Can't Be Syria's Saviors

Washington's new allies in the fight against the Islamic State are gaining ground. But their Kurdish leaders are getting in the way.

By Hassan Hassan, Bassam Barabandi
November 18, 2015
foreignpolicy.com/

On Oct. 10, a coalition of 13 Kurdish and Arab fighting factions from northeastern Syria formed the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and emerged as the centerpiece of the U.S.-led military effort against the Islamic State, also known as ISIS, in the country. The SDF, in which the Kurds are the dominant force, brings together most of the groups responsible for the Islamic State's most significant setback in over a year — the capture of Tal Abyad in northeastern Syria in June. The taking of that border city deprived the jihadi group of a vital gateway from Turkey and brought some of its worst enemies — Kurdish and Arab tribal fighters — within 50 miles of its stronghold in Raqqa.

The alliance has gained even more relevance with the recent offensive by Iraqi Kurdish forces to retake Mount Sinjar, an area near the Syrian territory where the SDF operates. Just as Kurdish forces are advancing on Sinjar in Iraq, the SDF is mounting an offensive near the Syrian city of Hawl 40 miles away. The decision to launch offensives in both Syria and Iraq is a rare, smart move by the U.S.-led coalition, as it forces the Islamic State to fight simultaneously on two fronts. In the past week, both Sinjar and Hawl have been wrested from the Islamic State.

The Syrian coalition has quickly become indispensable to Washington's war on the Islamic State.

In its current shape, however, the alliance is fraught with mistrust and potentially fatal shortcomings. The group's greatest strength — its experienced and committed Kurdish leader-

In its current shape, however, the alliance is fraught with mistrust and potentially fatal shortcomings.

ship — is threatening to become its greatest weakness.

The U.S. focus on the northern Syrian front against the Islamic State began with a renewed appreciation of the Syrian Kurds' fighting power. According to a senior U.S. official involved in the anti-Islamic State campaign, the battle in Kobani last year marked a turning point in American thinking about how to defeat the jihadi group in Syria. The official said that the Syrian Kurds' unparalleled commitment to battle the Islamic State prompted the international coalition in January to turn some of its attention to this front and work closely with the Kurds to retake Tal Abyad.

However, the move faced tenacious resistance from Turkey, which worried that a central role



for the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) would empower it internationally.

Ankara considers the YPG connected to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), a guerrilla movement that has fought a decades-long war against the Turkish state. U.S. officials spent weeks travelling from Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan, to Ankara to ease tensions and address Ankara's concerns. After the takeover of Tal Abyad, Ankara's concerns deepened: The U.S. partnership with Syria's Kurds increasingly seemed to represent a strategic shift toward what the Turkish government viewed as a hostile force that was steadily gaining territory in northern Syria.

Tensions between Washington and Ankara reached a high point in July, when Turkey pushed for an "ISIS-free zone" dominated by Turkey's allies in Syria that deliberately included territories west of Kobani to the outskirts of Aleppo — an area that Kurds widely regard as part of their historical homeland in northern Syria. The idea represented Turkey's attempt to put an end to the expansion of the Kurdish influence in the north.

Turkey and the United States therefore reached an understanding, accepted by the Syrian Kurdish leadership, that the YPG will not attempt to expand west into Ankara's envisioned "ISIS-free zone." The SDF — which attempts to incorporate both Kurdish and Arab forces fighting the Islamic State in the area, with U.S. assistance — was a consummation of this new understanding.

The Kurdish-led alliance was expected to now focus much of its attention on the northern region of Raqqa, which includes Arab-majority towns and villages that Arab fighters would hold if the Islamic State were expelled. The Kurds, however, prefer to expand their presence in predominantly Kurdish areas rather than fight in areas that would be controlled by Arab fighters. So instead of fighting in Raqqa, as reports first claimed, the new alliance's attention has turned further east, toward the region of Hasakah.

Military gains in this region — from Shaddadi to Hawl to Malikiyah — will help secure the Kurds' strongholds along the Iraqi border. Southern Hasakah could potentially provide the Kurds with lucrative resources, including oil fields currently controlled by the Islamic State. Meanwhile, the SDF's Arab component could also resolve a key dilemma for the Kurds, by

providing it with a friendly force to run Arab-majority areas in the area. That would allow the YPG to use its limited resources to attack the Islamic State in the region or deploy fighters elsewhere in the country.

But there is a very real risk that this strategy will not go as planned. If the SDF hopes to break the stalemate in northeastern Syria, it must address a key shortcoming in the alliance: the Arab tribal fighters' relative weakness compared to their Kurdish allies.

One of the complaints repeatedly heard by Arab fighters within the alliance is that they are poorly armed, as compared to their Kurdish counterparts. They also claim they are deliberately kept weak by the Syrian Kurds, so that they will remain subordinate to the YPG and so that their role is confined to guarding Arab towns.

A senior commander of the Raqqa Revolutionaries' Brigade, one of the SDF factions, told the authors that uneven American support for the YPG enabled the Kurds to dictate terms to the rest of the factions. The main task of the new alliance "is to protect their areas only because the Kurds can't cover all the region," he said. "[The army] has only light weapons so it does not become too powerful.... The American support is what made [the Kurds] above the rest and impose their political goals."

This reality was exemplified last month, when the Pentagon said that U.S. jets airdropped 50 tons of ammunition to Arab rebel forces in northern Raqqa. However, the Arab factions seemingly could not move the ammunition on their own, and it quickly ended up in Kurdish hands.

There are three reasons the subordinate role for Arab tribal fighters undercuts the alliance's potential. First, the imbalance will undermine the military capabilities of the coalition to push against the Islamic State in Arab-dominated areas.

Second, the tribal fighters' status as junior partners in the alliance will increasingly reduce their morale — as happened previously, when many U.S.-trained rebels abandoned the battlefield because they felt the program was aimless and disproportionately focused on counterterrorism. Tribal fighters say that U.S. support for the Kurds indicates it is less committed to tribes in the long term. They fear that nobody would come to their aid if the Islamic State returned to areas from which it had previously been expelled, as happened in Iraq over the years or in the eastern Syrian province of Deir Ezzor last year, when repeated appeals for help went unnoticed by the international community.

"Had it not been for the [international] coalition, ISIS would have reached Qamishli," said a fighter from the Shammar tribe, which leads the Kurdish-Arab alliance's al-Sanadid forces. "And the fact is that when ISIS wants, it ◊"

↳ could reach anywhere.”

Finally, there are widespread fears that as more areas are seized by the Kurdish-led alliance, incidents of ethnic cleansing will increase. Last month, Amnesty International released a report accusing the YPG of committing war crimes, including the forced displacement of Arab civilians and demolition of their houses. “Whenever the YPG enters an area, they displace its Arab residents,” the Shammari fighter said, referring to Arab towns in southern Hasakah. “Fifteen villages were leveled to the ground in Tal Hamees, Tel Brak, and Jazaa.”

Meanwhile, when it comes to the local Arab

communities they seek to control, the Arab and tribal factions are widely viewed as lackeys to the YPG. This view was reinforced after the capture of Tal Abyad, when Free Syrian Army factions were marginalized despite initial promises they would help run the city, in addition to the reported incidents of mass displacement detailed by Amnesty. Tal Abyad was a missed opportunity to change the perception about these forces and enable them to mobilize locals and win their support.

At the same time, there are other U.S.-backed groups in eastern Syria — and there’s at least one alternative that skirts the SDF’s inherent ethnic rivalries. The New Syrian Army, a new

U.S.-backed militia dedicated to the fight against the Islamic State in the eastern region of Deir Ezzor, consists of fighters who were previously expelled from the area by the Islamic State.

The Kurdish-Arab alliance at the heart of the SDF still has huge potential to reverse the gains made by the Islamic State, whose hold over Syrian territory is much more tenuous than in Iraq. But the YPG should not steer its operations to suit its narrow agenda. Establishing a true balance among the forces that constitute the coalition will boost its military potential and help it better secure both Arab and Kurdish areas held by the Islamic State. ●



November 20, 2015

After KRG formally welcomes Jews back to Iraq, will their numbers increase?

The opening of a Jewish representation office in Iraqi Kurdistan gives exiled Iraqi Jews a glimmer of hope of returning to their homeland after fleeing persecution and dispossession.



Author Mustafa Saadoun
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www.al-monitor.com

BAGHDAD, Iraq — Many Iraqi Jews forced from their country or displaced following persecution and dispossession more than six decades ago still dream of returning to their homeland. They retain a nostalgia for their temples and the streets where they grew up. It may be difficult or ultimately impossible for a large number of them to turn this dream into reality, but some have begun to return thanks to a law recently passed in Iraqi Kurdistan. Last month, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) announced the opening of a Jewish representation office at the Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, increasing the number of officially recognized religions to seven. The others are Islam, Christianity, Yazidism, Yarsanism, Alawism and Kaka'ism.

The history of the Jews in Mesopotamia dates back to the sixth century B.C. The Jewish community played an important role in Iraq’s economic and cultural life, but in the 1940s Jews became the victims of organized attacks under the Baathist regime. Many were murdered, and their homes and businesses looted and confiscated. Those who survived fled to Europe, the United States and Israel. The persecution of Jews in Iraq coincided with the rise of the Zionist movement, the expulsion of Arabs from Palestine and the establishment in 1948 of the State of Israel, with which the Jews of Iraq had nothing to do. Most Iraqi Jews lived in Baghdad, where they freely practiced their religion. After the founding of the Iraqi state in 1921, Sassoon Eskell, a Jew, became its first minister of finance. He remained in office for two years and was known for his commitment and professionalism while presiding over the ministry.

Mariwan Naqshbandi, spokesperson for the KRG Ministry of Endowments and Religious Affairs, told Al-Monitor, “The KRG parliament in April 2015 issued the Law of Minorities, which was unanimously approved before being signed by KRG President Massoud Barzani. This law confers to every religious community in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq the right to establish a representation office and practice its rituals freely.” According to Naqshbandi, more than 300 Jewish families live in the Kurdistan region.

“The number of Jews in the Kurdistan region is increasing every day, and this led the KRG to open a representation office for them like with other religions and sects. Jews are now entitled to submit their projects to the KRG and to build temples through their representation office,” he said. “There are large numbers of Jewish families intending to return to live in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. They believe it is a safe place for them, especially after they confirmed their intention not to participate in the political process.”

Saad al-Hadithi, a spokesperson for Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, told Al-Monitor, “The opening of the representation office for Jews in the KRG is a good step, provided this office remains free from the influence of the State of Israel, since Iraq rejects any relations with that country.”

On whether there has been a request to open a representation office for Jews in Baghdad and other areas, Hadithi stated, “I have no knowledge of any such request, but the number of Jews in Baghdad is not so high as to open a representation office for them like other religious communities. The opening of representative offices depends on the size of the population.”

In 1950 the Iraqi government stripped Jews of their citizenship. The same government, headed by Nuri al-Said during the monarchy, also promulgated a 1951 law freezing the assets of all persons deprived of their citizenship.

Araz Shukr, a pseudonym, is an Iraqi Jew living in the Kurdistan region. “Our presence in Iraq is not new. We have been living in this country for thousands of years. We were forced out of Iraq more than half a century ago, and we moved to other countries. We have the right to return to our country,” he told Al-Monitor. “There are Jewish families living in Israel who want to return to Iraq and live in the Kurdistan Region, as they feel that living in Iraq is part of their history and reaffirms their presence in this world. Despite everything available to them in Israel, Iraq is still their homeland.”

Israa Khaled, who conducts research on the Iraqi Jewish community, told Al-Monitor, “The decision of the KRG [to open a Jewish office] should have been implemented immediately after the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in 2003. Although the decision to open a representation office came late, it remains crucial. This decision benefits the Kurdistan Region, which includes the oldest communities in Iraq and the world. Numerous Kurdish Jewish families still reside in Kurdistan at the moment, but hide their religious affiliation for fear of societal oppression.”

Khaled called on the Baghdad government to also take action. She said, “[It should] open a private representation office for the Jews of Baghdad and other provinces since they are Iraqi nationals who unjustly left the country after being subjected to the ugliest acts of violence [and forced] to leave their homeland and migrate. These Iraqis still feel nostalgic for the land where [Jews have] lived for thousands of years.”

She added, “The KRG must fulfill numerous tasks, including protecting Jews, recognizing their religious affiliation, providing them with the opportunity to participate in the political process, restoring their temples and shrines and ensuring their protection when they visit places of worship and practice their religious rituals, like other religions in the Kurdistan region.”

The return of Jews to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is a positive step and could continue. Such, however, is not the case in the near term for other Iraqi areas, where residents do not differentiate between Israelis, Jews and Zionists. The Baathist regime under Hussein had pushed the idea that the Jews were enemies of Iraq, conflating hostility toward Israel with hostility to Jews in general. This could take some time to change. ◆

Mustafa Saadoun is an Iraqi journalist covering human rights and also the founder and director of the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights. He formerly worked as a reporter for the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

Bearing the scars of ISIS siege, Kurdish town in Syria struggles to rebuild

KOBANI, SYRIA

Kurdish town devastated by siege is preview of burden for postwar Syria

BY BEN HUBBARD

From the door of her modest cinder-block home, Faiza Mohammed recalled what her neighborhood once was and mourned what it had become.

Her children's school has bullet holes in the walls and sandbags in the windows. The shops where she once bought groceries are mounds of rubble. The neighbors and relatives who used to live nearby and keep an eye on one another's children have left.

Other than the elderly couple next door, she said, everyone is gone. Her house and theirs are the only two left on the street, islands in a sea of destruction.

"We have people next door, so we are O.K.," said Ms. Mohammed, who was widowed before the Syrian civil war began in 2011. "But at night we lock the door and don't open for anyone, because there is fear in the world."

A fierce battle by Kurdish fighters to repel an invasion by the Islamic State last year rocketed Kobani, an obscure border town in northern Syria, into the world's consciousness.

But by the time the Kurds prevailed in January, backed by hundreds of American airstrikes in what was lauded as a model of international cooperation, the town looked as though an earthquake had struck it. Refugees who came back had trouble even locating their homes.

Kobani, known in Arabic as Ain al-Arab, is trying now to overcome the deep scars of war and rebuild — and there are signs of life.

The challenges the town faces are huge, illustrating the huge toll of driving the Islamic State from the urban areas, but also the costly burden of destruction that many Syrian cities will have to bear when the war ends.

Around town, the crash of tractors tearing down damaged buildings resounds through the streets. Fleets of trucks haul off loads of rubble to dump outside the city in ever-expanding fields of waste.

Shops selling cellphones, cigarettes and grilled chicken have reopened along a few commercial streets after installing new doors and glass. And thousands of displaced residents are returning each month, local officials say. Many



TYLER HICKS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

Nearly a year after coalition airstrikes and Kurdish fighters repelled an invasion by ISIS, the residents of Kobani, Syria, struggle with loss, failed services and widespread destruction.

have reclaimed their damaged homes, covering blown-out windows with plastic and plugging holes in walls with bricks to keep out the wind until real repairs can be made.

"The city has become relatively suitable to live in again," said Idris Nassan, the head of foreign affairs for the area's new autonomous administration.

When the battle ended, 80 percent of buildings were damaged and the infrastructure had collapsed, he said. The town had long before cut any links with the central government in Damascus, so local leaders formed the Kobani Reconstruction Board with members from the Kurdish diaspora to solicit aid and oversee rebuilding.

Its first tasks were to restore water and sewage lines, reopen roads, dispose of unexploded ordnance and lay to rest the bodies of more than 100 people found in the rubble, Mr. Nassan said.

Also destroyed were the city's new hospital, most government offices, a number of schools and bakeries, and two large wedding halls.

Kobani sustained yet another blow in June, when Islamic State fighters dressed as anti-Assad rebels sneaked into town before dawn and went house to house, killing more than 250 people before Kurdish fighters killed them, said Shervan Darwish, a military official here.

But the administration has kept on, working with international organizations to open clinics and regulating generators so residents can buy a few hours of electricity per day.

Its reconstruction efforts are limited, however, by limited funds and the difficulty of obtaining building supplies.

Although the town is near the Turkish border, Turkey has kept its crossings closed to most cargo — a move widely seen as a strike against the area's Kurds.

Many of Kobani's schools are damaged, but a number of them reopened last month, their courtyards filling twice a day with children doing exercises and heading to class. The early grades now use new Kurdish textbooks instead of the Syrian government's Arabic curriculum. It is unclear how regularly the teachers will be paid.

"If there is a salary, of course no one would say no," said Shevin Mho, a teacher.

The sprawling martyrs' graveyard outside town bears testament to the high human toll of the fight against the Islamic State, also known as ISIL or ISIS. Hundreds of graves fill the site, the headstones of unidentified bodies bearing only numbers.

On a rainy afternoon, a bereaved mother walked through the mud, screaming and yanking tufts of gray hair from her head while relatives tried to restrain her.

Nearby, Badea Ali placed blue and red plastic flowers on the grave of her brother, Anwar, a Kurdish policeman who had been killed in a bomb attack. Ms. Ali said she had left Kobani for Iraq early in the war, then fled to Europe by boat last year and ended up in Germany.

It had been painful to watch the battle

for her hometown on the news in a strange country, but like many Kobani natives, the war had taught her to treasure the place, she said.

"I started loving Kobani more than before because now we know its worth," she said.

Her dream is to move back from Germany to open a hair salon, she said — but not yet. "The situation needs to settle down a bit," she said.

The scale of the town's loss haunts many residents.

Every morning, Muslim Mohammed, 56, returns to his damaged home and sits alone outside, drinking tea and thinking. The surrounding apartment buildings are all damaged and empty,

now nesting grounds for birds.

"I don't like to see a lot of people," said Mr. Mohammed, a mechanic. "It is psychologically taxing."

He and his wife had fled to Turkey when the battle began, but three of his sons had joined the main Kurdish militia here.

Ali, 17, was killed in battle, and Mohammed, 29, was shot dead during the Islamic State incursion in June, Mr. Mohammed said. So he sent Ahmed, 15, to Europe by raft, hoping that distance might keep him alive.

"Was I supposed to sacrifice all my sons?" Mr. Mohammed said.

Like many residents, he struggled to comprehend why the jihadists had poured so much into fighting for their

town.

"They didn't leave us anything," he said. "Not our sons, our money, our homes."

Others, however, saw the victory as a large step toward empowerment for Syria's Kurdish minority after decades of governmental neglect.

"It was worth it," said Sherin Ismael, a 26-year-old seamstress. "Now the world knows that there are Kurds."

Her family members, too, are the only residents left on their block, and her 2-year-old nephew, Osman, still cries at night, saying, "ISIS is coming."

Some of their neighbors recently came to inspect their house and see what it would take to move back in.

"Destruction comes quickly," Ms. Ismael said. "But building takes time."

International New York Times NOVEMBER 25, 2015

Jet downing raises tensions over Syria

MOSCOW

Russia says its warplane was in Syrian airspace when hit by Turkish F-16

BY NEIL MACFARQUHAR AND STEVEN ERLANGER

The dangers of uncoordinated warfare over Syria by powerful nations with differing agendas burst into the open on Tuesday when Turkish fighter jets shot down a Russian warplane that Turkey said had strayed into its airspace.

The tensions only deepened when Russia rejected Turkey's claim and Ankara responded by asking for an emergency NATO meeting, eliciting more Russian anger and ridicule. After the meeting, the NATO secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, called for "calm and de-escalation" and said the allies "stand in solidarity with Turkey."

It was thought to be the first time a NATO country has shot down a Russian plane in a half-century. And while few expect a military escalation, with neither Russia nor the security alliance wanting to go to war, the incident highlighted the dangers of Russian and NATO combat aircraft operating in the same theater and has soured chances for a diplomatic breakthrough over Syria.

As President François Hollande of France met with President Obama in Washington to urge a closer and more aggressive alliance with Russia against the Islamic State, Turkey's decision to fire on a Russian warplane attacking tar-

gets in Syria has raised tensions between Moscow and NATO and undercut efforts to convince Russia to drop its support for President Bashar al-Assad of Syria.

Turkey wants Mr. Assad gone and has allowed its border with Syria to be an easy crossing point for Syrian rebels, including those the West regards as ter-

rorists or radical Islamists; Russia wants to prop up Mr. Assad and his regime. While Moscow says it is attacking the Islamic State, for the most part Russian planes and troops have been attacking the Syrian rebels, some of whom are supported by the United States and the West, who most threaten Mr. Assad's rule.

Mr. Hollande and Mr. Obama clearly hoped that the bombing of a Russian passenger jet over Egypt, claimed by the Islamic State, would cause Moscow to make defeating the jihadists more of a priority than propping up Mr. Assad. But the events on Tuesday will make that a tougher sell, for President Vladimir V. Putin is protective of Russia's interests and wants to be seen as an equal player in the conflict, not beholden to Western policies.

Turkey, especially under the increasingly authoritarian rule of its nationalist president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has been fierce in defending its airspace, shooting down Syrian jets that have strayed in the past. Turkey insisted that it issued 10 warnings over a five-minute period to the Russian pilot of the Sukhoi Su-24 to pull away.

But Mr. Putin, clearly angry, responded that the Russian jet had never violated Turkish airspace and was shot down



MAXIM SHIPENKOV/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
President Vladimir V. Putin called the downing of the jet Tuesday "a stab in the back."

over Syria. Speaking in Sochi, he called the incident a "stab in the back from accomplices of terrorism," warning that it would have "serious consequences for Russian-Turkish relations."

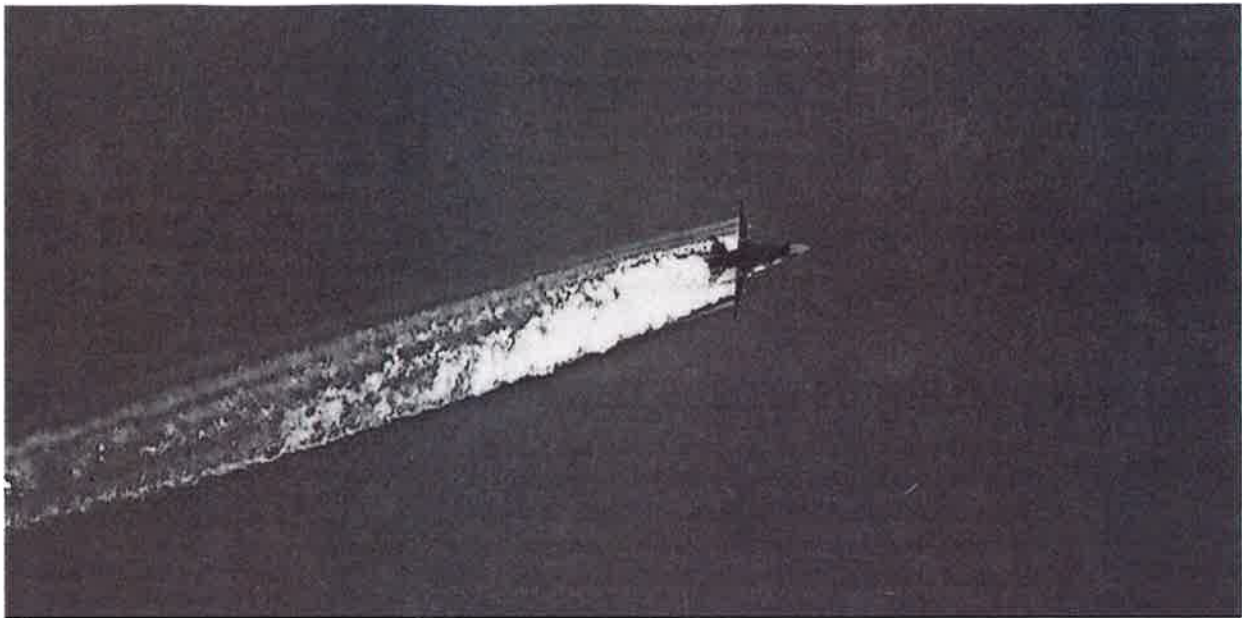
Mr. Putin said that instead of "immediately making the necessary contact with us, the Turkish side turned to their partners in NATO for talks on this incident."

"It's as if we shot down the Turkish plane, and not they, ours," he said. "Do they want to put NATO at the service of Islamic State?"

Tensions between Russia and Turkey had increased lately over Russian bombing of Turkmen tribesmen in northern Syria, whom Turkey regards as under its protection and who are fighting to oust Mr. Assad. Just this week, Turkey summoned the Russian ambassador in Ankara to demand that Moscow stop targeting Turkmen tribesmen in Syria.

"It was stressed that the Russian side's actions were not a fight against terror, but they bombed civilian Turkmen villages and this could lead to serious consequences," the Turkish Foreign Ministry said.

And so it has. The diplomatic dispute may have led directly to Moscow's continuing to target the Turkmen on Tues-



HABERTURK TV CHANNEL/EUROPEAN PRESSPHOTO AGENCY

Video footage taken at the Turkey-Syria border shows an aircraft that Turkey says it shot down after its airspace was violated on Tuesday.

day and Turkey's aggressive response.

What may make matters worse is that those same tribesmen say that they shot and killed both Russian pilots as they floated to earth in their parachutes, having apparently ejected safely from their plane, which was brought down by a Turkish F-16 firing air-to-air missiles. And then the tribesmen reportedly hit a Russian helicopter with a TOW antitank missile as it tried to rescue the airmen.

NATO countries have been concerned about Mr. Erdogan's increasingly dictatorial tendencies for some time, and NATO officials acknowledge that Turkey's agenda in Syria does not always match that of Washington, Britain or France, let alone Russia. And while he has recently allowed American planes to use Incirlik air base for sorties into Syria, Mr. Erdogan's own troops have largely turned their fire on the Syrian Kurds, who Washington regards as its best local ally so far against the Islamic State.

Turkey has been in a struggle for decades with Kurdish separatists in Turkey, labeling them terrorists, and regards the Kurds in Syria and Iraq as sharing the same desire to break away and form a Kurdish state.

While Mr. Hollande is pressing Mr. Obama for tougher action against the Islamic State and plans to travel to Moscow on Thursday to meet Mr. Putin, Washington-Moscow tensions, high over Russia's annexation of Crimea, were highlighted again on Tuesday when Mr. Obama again complained that Russian air strikes against moderate opposition groups in Syria are bolstering the Assad regime instead of trying to destroy the Islamic State.

But the United States and Russia have different interests in Syria, and Mr. Putin has been clear about the need to preserve the existing Syrian government, if not Mr. Assad himself as leader. Mr. Obama, like Mr. Hollande, is committed to the ouster of Mr. Assad and be-

What may make matters worse is that tribesmen say they killed both Russian pilots as they floated to earth.

lieves that the Syrian strongman is complicit with the Islamic State — from which his government buys considerable amounts of oil — as a means of dividing his own opposition.

In a news conference in Washington with Mr. Hollande, Mr. Obama said: "I do think that this points to an ongoing problem with the Russian operations in the sense that they are operating very close to the Turkish border and they are going after moderate opposition that are supported not only by Turkey but by a number of countries."

Turkey has the right to defend its territory, Mr. Obama said, but he urged both sides to talk to make sure they figure out what happened and "discourage any kind of escalation."

Russia's retaliation so far has been largely symbolic. Foreign Minister Sergey V. Lavrov, canceled a Wednesday visit to Turkey and a large Russian tour operator, Natalie Tours, announced that it was suspending sales to Turkey, where Russians last year accounted for 12 percent of all tourists.

The two countries are also significant trade partners.

But "Russia-Turkey relations will drop below zero," Ivan Kononov, director of the Center for Strategic Trends Studies, said on Rossiya 24, a state-run cable news channel.

Washington is not interested in getting deeper into Syria with ground troops or having a conflict with Russia. So cautious are the NATO countries about Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, which calls for mutual self-defense, that



when Mr. Hollande declared "war" on the Islamic State after the Paris attacks, he invoked the European Union's toothless Lisbon Treaty and sidestepped NATO. Mr. Hollande is also, French officials have said, eager not to offend Mr. Putin by making Syria a NATO issue.

Neil MacFarquhar reported from Moscow, and Steven Erlanger from Paris. Ceylan Yeginsu contributed reporting from Istanbul, Ivan Nechepurenko from Moscow and Peter Baker from Washington.



17 novembre 2015

L'Allemagne continuera à entraîner les kurdes pour lutter contre l'EI

17 novembre 2015
//fr.sputniknews.com

Selon le ministère allemand de la Défense, l'Allemagne continuera de mener des missions pour combattre les djihadistes de l'Etat islamique.

L'Allemagne confirme sa participation à la mission de préparation des combattants kurdes dans le nord de l'Irak, a déclaré la ministre allemande de la Défense Ursula von der

Leyen à Bruxelles.

"La partie française (lors des négociations bilatérales mardi, ndr) était satisfaite d'entendre que notre participation dans le nord de l'Irak, où nous sommes responsables de livraisons d'armements aux peshmergas et de la préparation des combattants peshmergas, ainsi que des Yazidis et d'autres groupes ethniques, que nous confirmons notre participation", a indiqué Mme Leyen.



De même, elle a rassuré la France sur le fait que l'Allemagne continuera "dans tous les cas" de soutenir "la lutte contre l'EI dans le nord de l'Irak, où elle est menée avec succès par des forces des peshmergas". ●



November 22, 2015

MP: Special budget for Shiite militia in Iraq, but not for Peshmerga

By Rudaw - 22/11/2015



ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – Iraq's draft budget for next year allocates a special budget for the Shiite Hashd al-Shaabi militia but nothing extra for Kurdish Peshmerga forces, a Kurdish lawmaker in the Iraqi parliament told Rudaw on Sunday.

Shakhawan Abdullah, head of the Iraq's parliamentary security and defense committee, disclosed that at least 2 trillion Iraqi Dinars will be given to the Hashd al-Shabi in 2016.

According to Abdullah, the Kurdish Peshmerga forces will only

receive an unknown amount of financial support that will be given to all ground troops in Iraq.

Abdullah has criticized Kurdish representatives in Iraq's parliamentary financial committee for not paying enough attention to this issue. He said he has submitted a request for the Peshmerga to also receive at least the same 2 trillion Iraqi Dinars.

He said that would ensure the monthly payments for at least 100 to 150 Peshmerga.

For the past several years the central government in Iraq has withheld salaries and operating expenses for the Peshmerga – part of disagreements between Baghdad and Erbil over oil and other issues.

The Peshmerga have been on the frontlines of the fight with the Islamic State group (ISIS). ■



November 27, 2015

More than 90 percent of Kurdistan's food is imported

By Rawa Abdulla / 27/11/2015
<http://rudaw.net>

ERBIL, Kurdistan Region—More than 90 percent of food consumed in the Kurdistan region is imported, according to data compiled by the region's ministry of agriculture.

"The population has grown and our production has not," said Anwar Omar, general manager at the ministry.

The need for food products will be even higher in 2020 when the population climbs to 6 million people from its current 5.4 million, Omar added.

"On average, most countries



The Kurdistan region imports almost all of its food.

allocate 10 percent of their annual budgets for development of agricultural goods, but we have less than 2 percent in Kurdistan which indeed is catastrophic," Omar said

The KRG offers subsidies to farmers estimated at \$250 million a year. The government invested \$677 million between 2006-2013 and is projected to invest an esti-

ated \$1.2 billion by 2020.

Omar said the economic crisis in the country has prevented his ministry from addressing the major issues of the region's agricultural infrastructure.

The region has a surplus in wheat, potato, eggs and onions, which can also be exported to other areas in Iraq, according to ministry data. Its production of chicken, cucumber and tomatoes can also largely supply the domestic market.

Ministry data shows agriculture contributes to 10 percent of the total GDP in the region, with 9 percent of the population relying on farming for its livelihood.

"According to our own research, with 3.3 trillion dinars (\$ 2.7 billion) over a 5-year period, Kurdistan can reach self-sufficiency in most agricultural areas," said Omar, who recently presented his ministry's plan to the government. ■

Ne pas sous-estimer l'idéologie génocidaire de Daech

Kendal NEZAN
20 novembre 2015
Le Monde.fr

Les attentats de Paris, intervenant après le crash d'un avion de ligne russe au-dessus du Sinaï et le carnage de Beyrouth revendiqués par Daech nous rappellent cruellement que loin de s'affaiblir et de se cantonner à « Syraq », le potentiel de destruction de cette organisation terroriste devient planétaire. Cette menace est infiniment plus grave que celle d'Al-Qaïda en son temps car, à la différence de cette dernière, dépourvue de base logistique permanente et formée de quelques centaines d'individus, Daech est un quasi Etat disposant de ressources humaines et matérielles incomparables. Il contrôle un territoire plus vaste que celui du Royaume Uni, peuplé de huit millions d'habitants. Il entretient une armée de 30 000 à 50 000 hommes encadrés par un gros contingent d'officiers expérimentés de l'ex-armée de Saddam Hussein, disposant en abondance d'armes modernes laissées par l'armée irakienne lors de sa débâcle en juin 2014, notamment à Mossoul. Il assure à ses administrés des services de base : écoles, universités, hôpitaux, transports publics. Il a mis en place des ministères civils et chacune de ses provinces est dirigée par un émir faisant fonction de gouverneur. Il prélève des taxes, contrôle les prix. Ses tribunaux appliquent la charia comme en Arabie Saoudite mais avec plus de zèle dans les amputations pour vol ou décapitation pour meurtre ou apostasie. Outre la police ordinaire chargée de la sécurité, une police religieuse comprenant une brigade féminine spécialisée, al Khansa, veille au respect des préceptes religieux. Ses employés civils et les combattants reçoivent un salaire mensuel d'au moins 400 dollars. Les veuves perçoivent des pensions.

Ce système est financé par la vente « clandestine » du pétrole à la Turquie mais aussi au gouvernement syrien par des taxes et surtout par de généreux subsides provenant notamment de riches donateurs arabes des pétromonarchies du Golfe. Il y a peu encore le gouvernement de Bagdad, au nom de la « continuité de l'Etat » versait régulièrement les salaires des fonctionnaires irakiens servant dans les territoires sous le contrôle de l'Etat islamique alors qu'il refuse de verser au Kurdistan sa dotation financière. Aussi choquant que cela puisse paraître, l'Etat islamique semble bénéficier du consente-



Des femmes combattantes kurdes près de la ville syrienne d'al Houll dans la province d'Hasaka, 14 novembre 2015. REUTERS/Rodi Said
RODI SAID / REUTERS

ment d'une bonne partie de ses administrés arabes sunnites qui le préfèrent aux pouvoirs chiites de Bagdad et de Damas !

1,5 MILLION DE DÉPLACÉS

Ceux qui n'étaient pas d'accord sont partis au Kurdistan (1,5 millions de déplacés arabes) ou en Turquie, au Liban et en Jordanie. Bien des États de la région, voire même certains décideurs américains auraient fini par s'accommoder de l'existence de ce Sunnistan salafiste n'eût été son idéologie djihadiste expansionniste et accessoirement millénariste. En effet, contrairement au salafisme institutionnalisé et embourgeoisé en vigueur en Arabie Saoudite, son avatar mésopotamien se veut encore plus pur, plus radical, plus fidèle aux « pieux ancêtres (salaf) », c'est-à-dire au Prophète et à ses premiers disciples, y compris dans leur façon de se vêtir, d'appliquer la « Loi divine (charia) » et de faire la guerre aux infidèles. L'Etat islamique se proclame calife. Appliquant la Loi divine (charia), le calife se doit de la propager en étendant constamment son territoire. Il ne reconnaît pas les frontières et ne peut le cas échéant conclure des trêves ou des traités qu'à titre provisoire.

Tout musulman où qu'il soit doit allégeance au calife, ceux qui s'y refusent tout comme ceux qui soutiennent ou paient des impôts à

un gouvernement non musulman, ceux qui participent à des élections pour élire des dirigeants appliquant des lois établies par des hommes prétendant se substituer à la Loi divine sont des apostats et à ce titre doivent être décapités. Au premier rang de ces apostats viennent les quelques 200 millions de chiites coupables d'innovation doctrinale (le culte des imams) ce qui constitue un blasphème car le texte du Coran est d'origine divine et de ce fait la perfection même. C'est au nom de cette interprétation littéraliste du Coran que la vénération des tombes et mausolées des saints est considérée comme une pratique païenne inadmissible car la dévotion est due à Allah et à lui seul.

Dès leurs débuts au XVIIIe siècle les wahabistes avaient saccagé le mausolée d'Ali à Najaf, haut lieu saint des chiites. Leurs fils spirituels profanent les tombes à Tombouctou, à Mossoul et détruisent avec ardeur les joyaux « païens » du patrimoine de l'humanité à Ninive et à Palmyre. Les djihadistes du Daech sont donc animés d'une idéologie génocidaire qu'on aurait tort de sous-estimer. Elle est génocidaire d'abord vis-à-vis des chiites considérés globalement comme des apostats donc à éliminer en priorité. Les musulmans sunnites refusant de faire allégeance au calife, au premier rang les Kurdes qui les combattent sont des ennemis à éliminer. Les « païens » comme

➔ les yézidis et les Druzes doivent soit se convertir à l'islam soit disparaître. Chrétiens et juifs doivent se soumettre et payer un impôt spécial (jizya) sinon massacrés ou réduits en esclavage. Tout cela fait évidemment beaucoup de monde surtout s'il faut les décapiter un à un selon le rituel salafiste.

UNE GUERRE DANS DES CONDITIONS DÉFAVORABLES

D'où le recours à la terreur et au massacre en masse par des kamikazes se faisant exploser au milieu des foules chiïtes, les mitraillages des yézidis ou des Parisiens au Bataclan et aux terrasses des cafés. Cette terreur est justifiée comme un moyen d'une victoire rapide abrégant les souffrances d'un long conflit. Cette idéologie, inoculée à des milliers de djihadistes venant de pays occidentaux issus généralement de segments mal intégrés des communautés musulmanes, menace la paix et la stabilité de nos démocraties. On a cru pouvoir faire l'économie d'une guerre en laissant pourrir la situation en Syrie. Et on finit par se retrouver avec un afflux massif et déstabilisateur de réfugiés, des actes de guerre, de carnages et de malheurs au cœur de l'Europe qui pourrait bien nous obliger à

faire cette guerre dans des conditions bien moins favorables.

Une chose est sûre : on ne pourra pas éradiquer Daech avec des seules frappes aériennes. Cette stratégie prônée par M. Obama a montré ses limites. Une coalition rassemblant théoriquement 65 États parmi les plus puissants du monde minée par les intérêts contradictoires de ses membres et par l'absence de leadership s'est montrée incapable de vaincre, encore moins d'éradiquer Daech, fournissant à celui-ci un formidable argument de propagande, une aura d'invincibilité. Faute de troupes au sol, 70 % des missions aériennes ne donnent lieu à aucune frappe. Les seuls combattants engagés sur le terrain contre Daech sont les Kurdes qui tant en Irak qu'en Syrie ont chassé les djihadistes de leurs territoires.

Les Alliés devraient leur accorder une assistance militaire et financière massive mais ils s'en abstiennent pour ne pas déplaire à la Turquie, alliée de fait de Daech et en guerre contre les Kurdes et Bagdad qui craint qu'un Kurdistan fort ne soit tenté par l'indépendance. Par ailleurs, nul n'a le courage d'exiger de l'Arabie Saoudite et de ses alliés du Golfe de cesser de financer le

salafisme et les mouvements djihadistes à travers le monde. Le Président Obama a raison de comparer Daech à un cancer dont les métastases se répandent désormais dans nos pays. Mais la thérapie qu'il propose relève d'avantage de l'homéopathie que d'une chirurgie radicale ou d'une chimio agressive.

En attendant une guérison hypothétique, d'ici une génération nous dit-on, le coût humain et les dégâts dans les esprits risquent d'être de plus en plus dévastateurs. L'Europe qui, en raison de sa proximité géographique, de ses liens historiques et culturels et de ses populations, est la première visée par cette catastrophe annoncée devrait se mobiliser sérieusement pour se donner les moyens politiques, financiers et militaires d'imposer un règlement politique en Syrie et mettre Daech hors d'état de nuire. Son éradication espérée ne pourrait se concevoir qu'au terme d'une bataille des idées, aujourd'hui délaissée, qui pourrait bien prendre une ou deux générations. ■

Kendal Nezan est président de l'Institut kurde de Paris



25 novembre 2015

Valls: la coalition contre Daesh doit s'appuyer sur les Kurdes et non le Hezbollah

Par A.-F. L. avec AFP / 25 nov. 2015
<http://www.bfmtv.com>

Manuel Valls a défendu mercredi un soutien aux combattants kurdes contre Daesh, sujet de divergence chronique avec la Turquie, tout en excluant tout soutien au Hezbollah comme le réclame François Fillon.

PAS D'ENGAGEMENT AU SOL DE L'ARMÉE FRANÇAISE

Le Premier ministre a également de nouveau écarté un engagement au sol de l'armée française, jugeant que les opérations terrestres ne devaient "être conduites que par les forces insurgées locales, y compris kurdes, renforcées le cas échéant par des armées sunnites de la région".

Le "front mondial" contre Daesh doit apporter tout son soutien à ceux qui se battent contre les troupes de l'Etat islamique, c'est-à-dire notamment les Kurdes, combattants valeureux que nous soutenons, et les groupes de l'opposition syrienne modérée", a défendu Manuel Valls devant l'Assemblée nationale, dans son discours défendant la prolongation des frappes françaises contre Daesh en Syrie.



Manuel Valls - Premier ministre à l'assemblée - AFP

"Soutenir cette opposition, lui procurer les équipements dont elle a besoin, lui permettre d'entretenir ses forces combattantes, unifier les milices locales, c'est faciliter la bataille au sol", a plaidé le Premier ministre. Manuel Valls a en revanche promis de continuer à se battre "contre toutes les organisations terroristes", appelant la droite à "être claire et sans ambiguïté" vis-à-vis d'Al Qaïda ou du Hezbollah libanais, tous deux ennemis de Daesh.

LA COALITION DOIT APPUYER LES OPÉRATIONS TERRESTRES

L'ancien Premier ministre François Fillon

(Les Républicains) a prôné mercredi une "coalition mondiale" qui soutiendrait "les seules forces au sol qui combattent réellement l'Etat islamique", citant Kurdes mais aussi le Hezbollah et l'armée régulière syrienne. "Notre action aérienne doit appuyer les opérations terrestres", a souligné Manuel Valls devant l'Assemblée. "Et celles-ci ne peuvent être conduites que par les forces insurgées locales, y compris kurdes, renforcées le cas échéant par des armées sunnites de la région", a-t-il ajouté.

"Il serait totalement déraisonnable et improductif d'engager nous-mêmes des troupes au sol. Avec qui? Dans quelles conditions? Avec quels pays occidentaux? Tirons les leçons de ce qui s'est passé dans cette région et appuyons en revanche les troupes kurdes et sunnites qui s'engagent sur le terrain", a plaidé Manuel Valls.

Les parlementaires devraient voter mercredi à une écrasante majorité la prolongation des frappes aériennes en Syrie, décidées début septembre par François Hollande et intensifiées depuis les attentats de Paris, même si la droite cherchera à critiquer la diplomatie présidentielle. ♦

Gérard Chaliand «Il n'y a rien à négocier avec les islamistes»



SOPHIE MOUSSET

Faut-il bombarder Daech avec le risque de nouveaux attentats ? Pour le spécialiste du terrorisme, il est grand temps de se défendre et de ne pas culpabiliser.

Depuis le Kurdistan irakien, Gérard Chaliand, spécialiste des questions stratégiques et du terrorisme a répondu à nos questions. Professeur invité à Harvard, il a aussi coordonné *Histoire du terrorisme, de l'Antiquité à Daech* paru en septembre chez Fayard.

Beyrouth, l'avion russe, Paris: l'EI est-il en train de faire du terrorisme une sorte de politique étrangère ?

Le lien entre l'avion russe et les attentats de Paris est évident. L'EI n'est pas qu'un mouvement terroriste, c'est une organisation qui pratique plusieurs sortes d'actions: le terrorisme, l'action psychologique avec une horreur théâtralisée, mais aussi la guérilla, quand c'est utile, ou une guerre coercitive. Pour définir Daech, il faut parler de guerre révolutionnaire. A la différence de la guérilla, la guerre révolutionnaire vise à s'emparer du pouvoir. Ainsi, Daech veut exercer un contrôle administratif sur une population: battre monnaie, s'occuper de la voirie, de la santé, de la distribution d'électricité.

N'est-ce pas plutôt une guerre contre-révolutionnaire ?

Disons plutôt des réactionnaires avec une idéologie rétrograde mais mobilisatrice. Le déclin, d'une part du marxisme-léninisme, d'autre part du nationalisme, fait pour certains de l'islamisme une option.

Dans certaines banlieues européennes, des jeunes marginalisés, mal dans leur peau, n'ont plus que cette offre. La région qui m'inquiète particulièrement est l'Afrique. Face à la conjonction entre croissance démographique et crise économique, l'islamisme jihadiste risque de faire figure de solution pour certains jeunes.

Sommes-nous face à du nihilisme ?

Je trouve que ce terme est un peu pratique pour se débarrasser de questions qui nous dérangent. Ceux qui rejoignent les rangs de Daech croient à quelque chose. Ils sont dans la réaction, certes, mais ils ne sont pas nihilistes. Certes, il n'y a rien de constructif et tangible, ils ne parlent ni de travail ni de développement économi-

que. Ils se considèrent un peu comme des seigneurs.

Quelle est la particularité du terrorisme islamiste ?

Dans l'écrasante majorité des cas, que ce soit dans les guérillas ou dans les actes terroristes, l'autre souhaite négocier quelque chose et une négociation a lieu. Avec les islamistes, il n'y a rien à négocier. S'ils poursuivent un but, c'est l'écrasement de l'autre. Utopiquement, il cherche une victoire complète, inatteignable.

Comment contrecarrer cette volonté hégémonique ?

On ne va pas en finir facilement. Il faut déjà contenir militairement Daech, puis se doter d'un arsenal juridique permettant de ne pas laisser travailler à l'intérieur ceux qui cherchent à nous nuire. Il est grand temps de se défendre et de ne pas se culpabiliser. Par ailleurs, le terrorisme est essentiellement psychologique, cela se passe dans les esprits et dans les volontés, donc il ne faut pas rendre service à l'adversaire. Montrer d'atroces images en boucle, c'est faire la publicité de l'adversaire, et cela nous déstabilise encore davantage. Quand on est vraiment en guerre, ce qui n'est pas le cas, contrairement à ce qu'on déclare, il y a quelque chose qui s'appelle «la censure de guerre». Bien sûr, il faut informer, mais arrêtons de vendre de l'angoisse en continu.

Les bombardements à Raqqa sont-ils suffisants contre Daech ? Ne faut-il pas combattre au sol ?

Les bombardements sur Raqqa, épice centre proclamé de la présence de l'Etat islamique en Syrie, sont une excellente initiative. Je regrette simplement qu'on ne l'ait pas fait plus tôt. C'est une réplique d'autant plus utile qu'on se souvient que leur victoire dans la ville kurde de Mossoul, en juin 2014, avait créé un appel d'air pour des milliers d'apprentis jihadistes. Ce serait idéal de combattre l'EI au sol, mais les conditions ne le permettent pas. Seuls les Américains pourraient le faire de façon efficace. Après leurs échecs en Irak, en Libye et en Afghanistan, ce mode d'ac-

tion n'est plus au programme. Il est désormais impossible de mobiliser l'opinion publique sur ce type d'intervention qui coûte très cher en vies humaines et en moyens. De plus, Barack Obama est à un an de la fin de son mandat. Il n'y a que l'intervention russe qui pousse un peu les Américains sur le terrain.

Pourquoi ne peut-on pas agir indépendamment des Américains ? D'autres alliances sont-elles possibles ?

Les Français sont déjà présents sur de nombreux terrains: Mali, Niger, Centrafrique ou Irak pour la formation. Le budget militaire ne cesse de baisser depuis 1982, et nous ne disposons que de 15 000 hommes opérationnels alors que les zones d'intervention sont très étirées.

Les Britanniques, très performants il y a une dizaine d'années, se sont épuisés à soutenir les Américains, tant en Afghanistan qu'en Irak. Leurs forces militaires sont aujourd'hui très affaiblies.

Il y a, certes, un rapprochement avec les Russes. Mais ils n'iront pas au sol, ils vont continuer à bombarder à distance.

Finalement, seuls les Kurdes combattent Daech au sol...

En effet, c'est grâce à eux que la ville de Kobané n'est pas tombée. Ils sont aidés par les Etats-Unis et paradoxalement aussi par la Russie. Les Kurdes de Syrie sont remarquablement organisés, et ont remporté une importante victoire naguère, à Tall Abyad, position stratégique qui affaiblit l'Etat islamique. Ils sont aussi actifs à Haskaké et participeront, selon toute vraisemblance, à l'assaut sur Raqqa avec des brigades arabes. Il s'agit de la force militaire majeure dont les pays anti-islamistes disposent comme allié. Par ailleurs, les Kurdes d'Irak, les peshmergas, ont très activement participé au refoulement de Daech de la région du Sinjar. L'EI est aujourd'hui militairement en recul. Quand aux Russes, ils frappent les autres mouvements islamistes également (Jabhat al-Nosra, lié à Al-Qaeda et Ahrar al-Sham encore plus extrême). Bien sûr, l'aire où les Kurdes peuvent intervenir est limitée par le fait que les populations sont arabes. C'est parmi ces derniers qu'on peut éventuellement trouver des adversaires au Daech.

Que pensez-vous de la stratégie turque, qui semble pour le moins ambiguë ?

Erdogan est un islamiste militant qui a cessé d'être «modéré» depuis longtemps. ●●●

●●● Pour remporter les dernières élections, il a joué avec succès sur l'ultranationalisme, voire le chauvinisme d'une importante partie de l'électorat turc et a ciblé le PKK ainsi que les Kurdes modérés (du HDP de Demirtas). Lors du siège de Kobané, il a fait ce qu'il a pu pour avantager Daech, et lorsque ce mouvement a menacé le Kurdistan d'Irak, il n'a pas levé le petit doigt. Ce sont les Amé-

ricains qui sont intervenus pour stopper, avec leurs bombardements, l'avancée de Daech. Pour l'Union européenne, la Turquie est un allié plus qu'ambigu. Membre de l'Otan, elle a longtemps interdit aux Américains de se servir de la base située sur son territoire et n'y a consenti que très récemment afin de se démarquer de Daech. Elle appartient à une alliance objective avec

les Saoudiens, les Qataris et les émanations d'Al-Qaeda, les Frères musulmans, pour la défense d'un islam sunnite radical. Et tous sont des alliés ambigus qui financent ceux qui nous frappent aujourd'hui. ◀

Recueilli par CATHERINE CALVET et ANASTASIA VÉCRIN

Le Monde 25 NOVEMBRE 2015

Les Kurdes syriens, alliés encombrants

Paris et Washington débattent d'une aide renforcée aux milices YPG, affiliées au PKK turc

ERBIL (IRAK) - correspondance

Derrière l'excellence affichée de leur coopération contre les djihadistes de l'organisation Etat islamique (EI), il est un sujet délicat dans la discussion entre la France et les Etats-Unis : sur qui s'appuyer, au sol, pour faire reculer l'EI ? Plus précisément : faut-il, en Syrie, soutenir davantage les combattants kurdes des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG) contre la volonté de la Turquie, alliée dans l'OTAN ? Sur cet aspect, majeur pour progresser au plan opérationnel, les points de vue des deux partenaires de la campagne de frappes en Syrie divergent.

Les ministres de la défense, Jean-Yves Le Drian et Ashton Carter devaient s'entretenir durant deux heures, mardi 24 novembre, à Washington. La coopération militaire bilatérale s'est accélérée depuis que le Pentagone a ouvert ses « dossiers d'objectifs » pour cibler l'EI en Syrie. L'« intensification » des frappes annoncée par M. Hollande le 14 novembre a été servie lundi par les premiers raids de l'aéronavale depuis le porte-avions *Charles-de-Gaulle*, sur la Syrie (à Rakka) et l'Irak (Mossoul et Ramadi). Le navire doit rester une semaine en Méditerranée orientale avant de partir pour le Golfe, où Paris s'était engagé à ce que son navire relève un homologue américain.

Mais il est entendu que les frappes aériennes ne suffiront pas à « détruire » l'EI comme le veulent les présidents Obama et Hollande et l'enjeu est de préparer les prochaines étapes de la campagne militaire. Paris considère nécessaire de s'appuyer au sol sur les YPG, qui ont pris position au nord de Rakka. Ces forces à dominante kurde sont une émanation du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) turc, organisation con-

sidérée l'ennemi juré d'Ankara et classée comme terroriste par les Etats-Unis et l'UE. Mais les YPG sont devenus ces derniers mois le principal partenaire de la coalition internationale contre l'EI en Syrie. « Les Kurdes ont obtenu des résultats en Irak, on peut en déduire des conclusions sur la Syrie », estimait-on lundi à l'Elysée.

La milice kurde syrienne a bénéficié des livraisons américaines et françaises d'armes. Mais à Washington, une ligne plus précautionneuse s'exprime aujourd'hui. Début novembre, le porte-parole du Pentagone assurait : « Nous ne fournissons pas d'armes ou de munitions aux YPG. » Il précisait que « les livraisons faites jusqu'à présent concernaient la coalition de l'opposition syrienne arabe », les alliés arabes du mouvement kurde syrien, et que les réapprovisionnements continueraient à leur être destinés. Une façon de maintenir l'aide américaine sans apparaître comme des soutiens exclusifs des YPG.

Les YPG constituent la branche armée de l'administration autonome autoproclamée des Kurdes de Syrie : trois enclaves non contiguës, Afrin, Kobané et la Djezireh, situées long de la frontière avec la Turquie, qui constituent le « Rojava » ou Kurdistan occidental dans la phraséologie nationaliste kurde. Allié au régime d'Hafez Al-Assad jusqu'à la fin des années 1990, le PKK a pu fonder une bran-

che politique en Syrie, le PYD. Ce dernier a réactivé sa relation avec le régime au début de la révolution en 2011. Damas lui a abandonné les régions kurdes de Syrie courant 2012, laissant à l'organisation la possibilité d'en proclamer unilatéralement l'autonomie.

Partenaires privilégiés

Commandés par des cadres militaires du PKK d'origine syrienne, les YPG, et leur branche féminine

Des groupes rebelles à dominante arabe ont rallié les YPG sans partager leurs objectifs stratégiques

très médiatisée, le YPJ, accueillent également dans leurs rangs quelques dizaines de volontaires étrangers indépendants, attirés par le projet révolutionnaire du « Rojava » ou la volonté de protéger les minorités chrétiennes de la région. Leurs combattants ne peuvent être considérés comme une force d'opposition à Bachar Al-Assad. Le régime syrien reste présent au cœur de zones qu'ils dominent à Kamechliyé ou Hassaké. Lors de la bataille d'Hassaké, à l'été 2015, les YPG ont suppléé aux carences de l'armée syrienne qui reculait devant l'EI.

Mais ces forces kurdes ont acquis le rang de partenaires privilégiés depuis le siège de Kobané en octobre 2014. L'assistance militaire directe des Etats-Unis s'est traduite par des livraisons d'armes et par d'intenses frappes aériennes qui ont permis de libérer la ville du siège de l'EI début 2015. Dans la foulée, la coopération entre les YPG au sol et l'aviation coalisée s'est systématisée dans tout le nord-est syrien. Les YPG ont ainsi pu avancer dans les zones arabes de la Djezireh, puis prendre Tal Abyad en juin, sur la frontière entre la Syrie et la Turquie.

Certains groupes rebelles à dominante arabe ont rallié les YPG sans partager pour autant leurs objectifs stratégiques. Résultant de ces alliances disparates, la création des « Forces démocratiques syriennes » qui intègrent l'ensemble des

forces arabes et chrétiennes alliées aux YPG, a été proclamée le 11 octobre. La coordination entre les rebelles modérés de l'Armée syrienne libre et ces forces, appuyées par les frappes aériennes américaines, est jugée payante.

Selon une source de la défense française, « il n'y a personne d'autre ! » Le groupe, assure ce haut responsable, cumule actuellement les atouts d'être « à trente kilomètres de Rakka, de disposer de forces conséquentes, et d'être prêt à mener l'offensive ». Les avancées des YPG ont cependant leurs limites. Leur dominante kurde reste indiscutable. Ils ont en outre été accusés de recruter des enfants soldats et de se livrer à des destructions de villages arabes et des déplacements forcés de population. Des actes pouvant compromettre la capacité des YPG à avancer vers Rakka et tenir des zones de peuplement arabe du fait de la défiance des populations locales. ●

ALLAN KAVAL ET NATHALIE GUIBERT (À PARIS)

NOW.

23 November 2015



Wladimir van Wilgenburg
23 nov. 2015

<https://now.mmedia.me>

Tensions between Kurds and Shiites could spark civil war

TUZ KHURMATO — The streets of the mixed Turkmen-Kurdish town of Tuz Khurmato are mostly quiet three days after Iranian intervention and negotiations between Kurdish and Shiite leaders stopped the conflict that erupted between them on 12 November.

Nevertheless, tensions continue via social media after a Kurdish civilian in Europe calling himself Abu Chicho Azraeli published a video insulting Shiite paramilitary forces in response to their videos.

Following the released of the video, civilians recorded yet another video showing a Kurdish flag being walked on in Karbala, one of holiest cities in Shia Islam. In reaction, Kurds burned an Iraqi flag in the main market of Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan region, last Friday.

Moreover, more videos were published of Kurdish civilians burning Iraqi flags and insulting former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki in the last two days.

These videos could spark new conflicts on the fault lines between Shiite and Kurdish forces in the areas disputed between Baghdad and the Kurdish administration in Erbil.

Over 20 people had already been killed in clashes when a gunfight broke out between Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Shiite Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) forces at a Kurdish checkpoint on 12 November.

Three days later the town of Tuz Khurmato looks almost empty, the streets of which are patrolled by Kurdish security forces. "Could we see PMU?" we asked Kurdish civilians. "Don't go there — there are snipers and they will shoot you," said Sofi, a 20-year-old Kurdish civilian.

Gunfire erupted sporadically from Shiite snipers while most shops had been reduced to ashes — either burned by Shiite Turkmen civilians or Kurds.

"There was fighting between the Shiites and Kurds," said Aso, 21, a Kurdish civilian standing in a shop next to the burned remains of a Turkmen shop. "You see the crisis here, and the Popular Mobilization forces have snipers and attack the people. Most of the territory is under their control because of the snipers, even Kurdish districts."

This is not the first time there have been pro-

blems between Shiite paramilitary groups and Kurdish Peshmerga forces. On 9 May, Shiite militants kidnapped the presidential guards of Iraqi President Fuad Masum, a Kurd. After this, tensions also rose between Shiites and Kurds in Tuz Khurmato.

"This is nothing new," said Colonel Najeb Hassan Afgha, of from the 16th brigade of the Ministry of Peshmerga. "There were some problems a long time ago. There is a problem between Kurdish and Turkmen people. A couple of days ago, a Shiite militia fired on a Kurdish checkpoint. After that, one Shiite militia fighter was killed, and eight were captured by Peshmerga forces."

Following the attack, PMU forces sent reinforcements from outside Tuz Khurmato and attacked Kurdish civilians, and burning and looting Kurdish shops and houses in revenge. They even attacked the hospital, killing doctor Abdulkhalig Abdulkarim.

In response, the Kurds sent Peshmerga forces from the frontlines against the Islamic State and anti-terror forces from Sulaymaniyah to the city to prevent escalation.

"They came down to the factories and captured the workers and kidnapped 63 Kurdish people, and they took them to Amerli," Afgha said.

"After that, clashes erupted between Kurdish civilians and Shiite militias. The Shiite militias started burning and robbing shops, houses and trucks, but Kurds did the same."

Afgha suspects that criminal elements among the Kurds and Turkmen tried to take advantage of the conflict situation to loot and smuggle. "An Arab family came from Baghdad and their car was stolen by an unknown group," he said.

As a consequence, my driver asked me to remove my press pass, fearing possible attempts by criminals to rob or kidnap us in the city. Some Kurdish civilians say the Shiite militias hate the Peshmerga forces so much that they compare them to ISIS militants.

"They call the Kurdish forces daeshmerga. They are religious extremists and burned down the Kurdish shops," Sofi told me. "People are running away and most of them send their families away. The people are very concerned and the situation is horrible."

On Wednesday, PMU militias released 15 Kurdish hostages a week after the clashes took place. Moreover, Kurdish security forces disarmed Kurdish civilians who were trying to fight.

"Why they fight against civilians? They are extremist and sectarian forces that want to control Tuz Khurmato," Sofi said.

"There are troublemakers," said Kurdish civilian Cumma, 34. "The Kurds and Turkmen and Arabs live together and are good people, but the Shiite militias come from Baghdad and make problems."

"In the beginning there was a fight between Shiit Turkmen and Arabs, and now between Kurds and Turkmen," he said. "The Turkmen in Tuz Khurmato are very nice people, I think the people from outside come and make problems and destroy everything."

The tensions have disrupted the road between the Kurdish-controlled territory towards Baghdad.

"People don't go to Baghdad anymore. The



An Arab member of the Kurdish security police Asayish is used to patrol the city of Tuz Khurmato (Wladimir van Wilgenburg, 16 November 2015)

Shiite militia captured his brother," Cumma said, pointing at a Kurdish civilian who refused to be interviewed, fearing for the safety of his brother. "No one knows where he is now. His brother just wants to know if he is alive or not."

"We all knew this was going to happen," Cumma added. "Once they finish ISIS, the Kurds will be next, they told us. Their plan is to capture Tuz today, and then they will go to Kirkuk and beyond. Our leaders say there is an agreement and settle things down, but I don't trust them. We are afraid."

According to Cumma, the problem is that there are different Shiite groups who do not work together. "Those from [Iraqi PM] Abadi are okay, but those from [former PM] Maliki are very extremist and violent," he said.

Kemal Kerkuki, the commander of the front-line in the town of Dibiz, says the PMU must leave these areas.

"They are not like Peshmerga forces — they are mixed and they don't listen to anyone, including Iraqi PM Abadi," he said. "They don't follow the law, and don't believe in democracy."

"They don't allow Sunnis to go back to Tikrit, and now they come to our city to kill us," said 25-year-old Kurdish civilian Zulficar. "Where were they when ISIS took Mosul? Why they don't liberate the Shia village of Al Bashir."

Abu Qasim, a spokesperson for a PMU group linked to Haider al-Abadi in Kirkuk, said mistakes had been made on both sides but that the leadership had solved the problems and that Kurds and Shiite fighters would together liberate the ISIS-occupied Shiite Turkmen village of Al-Bashir in Kirkuk Governorate.

"It is not the time or place to fight because we have a common enemy who targets humanity," he told me.

"In the resistance factions there are hardliners and moderates," he said of the political factions within the Shiite paramilitary forces. "But if the leadership tells them, they will not enter the conflict. It is in no one's interest to have more conflict."

"We need time to calm down the tensions, because people died. In Iraq it's difficult since Iraqis are impulsive," he said. "The tribal people like to fight because they grew up with weapons."

"ISIS kills Kurds, and ISIS kills Turkmen. →

This is nothing new," said Colonel Najeb Hassan Afgha, of from the 16th brigade of the Ministry of Peshmerga. "There were some problems a long time ago. There is a problem between Kurdish and Turkmen people. A couple of days ago, a Shiite militia fired on a Kurdish checkpoint. After that, one Shiite militia fighter was killed, and eight were captured by Peshmerga forces."

→ At the same time, Turkmen ISIS kill Shiite Turkmen, and Arab ISIS also kill Shiite Arabs," he said. "Therefore, Turkmen, Kurds and Arabs are not each other's enemies — ISIS's ideology is our enemy."

But while many Kurdish leaders and Shiite politicians see ISIS as a common enemy, experts expect more clashes.

"Iranian-backed Shia militias have sporadically raised their anti-Kurdish messaging since 2013," said Philip Smyth, a University of Maryland researcher who tracks Iranian-backed Shiite militias.

"[There is] much more anti-Barzani [Kurdish president] and propaganda attempting to cast the Kurds as agents of Israel, ISIS, and the United States," he added.

And it's unlikely that the Obama administration could do much to stop these tensions in the future, Smyth says.

"I don't believe the US can do all that much to stop feuding between the Shia militias and Kurdish elements. Both groups want to expand their influence."

Wladimir van Wilgenburg is a political analyst and freelance journalist specializing in Kurdish politics, based in Erbil. He tweets @vvanwilgenburg



November 23, 2015

Why do some Turks approve of Islamic State terrorism?

Turkish football fans' disruption of moments of silence for victims of Islamic State attacks in Paris and in Turkey show support for IS and stem from the domestic and foreign policies of Recep Tayyip Erdogan.



Author Kadri Gursel
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Translator Sibel Utku Bila
www.al-monitor.com

On Nov. 17 at a friendly soccer match between Turkey and Greece, a group of Turkish spectators interrupted a minute of silence honoring the victims of the Nov. 13 Islamic State (IS) attacks in Paris, whistling, chanting slogans and shouting "Allahu Akbar." There are three important reasons why this incident, at Istanbul's Basaksehir Stadium, cannot be dismissed as an ordinary act of hooliganism.

First, the protest illustrates that a segment of Turkish society clearly approves of IS terrorism. Second, it reflects an alarming sense of estrangement from the victims and the communities to which they belong. This lack of empathy could well stem from the callousness of excluding "the other" (and possibly lead to one's own sense of exclusion being transformed into radical hostility expressed in violent action). Third, the whistles and chants, which continued during the Greek national anthem, demonstrate how Turkey's political culture has changed since President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in 2002.

For 13 years, large segments of Turkish society have been under the strong influence of a multifaceted project promoting Islamic conservatism, which the AKP has pushed systematically through its political leadership, the police and judiciary, the education system, the media, social networks and local administrations. The drive has markedly intensified since 2011, a milestone year during which the AKP won general elections with 50% of the vote, weeded out Kemalists in the military and embarked on a regional policy aimed at toppling the Bashar al-Assad regime in neighboring Syria.

The AKP government, which has evolved into the "Erdogan regime," has sought through social engineering campaigns to permanently reshape Turkey and consolidate its power. Islamist radicalization has been one of the by-products of this political culture, which can generally be described as Islamist, pro-Sunni and Ottomanist. The whistles and chants of "Allahu Akbar" during the moment of silence in the Basaksehir district, an AKP stronghold, were the very reflection of this radicalization.

According to Cumhuriyet, members of the AKP's youth branch, attending free of charge, had set off the disruption, which then spread among others in the stands. In other words, the daily's reporting traced the source of the disturbance to the government. The following day, Nov. 18, Erdogan criticized the incident, but the manner in which he did so pointed to the same source, albeit in a different way.

Remarkably, Erdogan focused on the booing of the Greek national anthem and ignored the disrespect for the minute of silence. In a live television interview, he said, "There was a minute of silence, after which the national anthems were played. And then those irresponsible people, probably a few hundred of them, started to boo. This is incomprehensible. We are not a nation incapable of tolerating even the national anthem of another country. That's not in the genes of this nation. How would we feel if someone else did the same to us? One is supposed to listen through it quietly, and that's it."

Should one view Erdogan's failure to condemn the disrespect shown for the Paris victims as an incidental omission? If so, then what about his failure to condemn the booing during the minute of silence held at an earli-

er international game to honor the Turkish citizens killed in the Oct. 10 suicide bombings in Ankara attributed to IS? Just a coincidence? Yes, within a month's time, Turkish football fans twice disrupted moments of silence held for victims of IS terror attacks. The first incident had occurred on Oct. 13, during a 2016 Euro qualifier between Turkey and Iceland in Konya, in central Turkey. A large group of spectators hurled boos and whistles during the minute of silence honoring the 102 people slain in Ankara three days earlier. Erdogan's lack of condemnation for this disruption is not the only thing the two stadium incidents have in common.

Given that the minute of silence in Istanbul was intended to honor Westerners, one could argue that mounting anti-Western sentiment in Turkey, the result of the regime's social engineering, had played a part. This, however, would be an incomplete theory, because it fails to explain the incident in Konya, where the minute of silence was meant to honor Turkish citizens — mostly Kurds and Alevis — not Westerners. Rather, both incidents that Erdogan has declined to denounce constitute a reluctance to condemn IS and its terrorism. One can argue the episodes were separate expressions of hostility stemming from the identities of the victims in Paris and Ankara, but the minimal prerequisite for such reckless expression is the absence of any disapproval of IS. No doubt, the sympathy for IS and hostility toward the West and Alevis evident in Turkey today nurture each other, creating a cause-and-effect relationship.

Pollsters are yet to conduct a credible survey assessing how much sympathy IS continues to enjoy among Turks now that 134 of their compatriots — 102 in Ankara and 32 in a suicide attack in Suruc on July 20 — have been killed in attacks attributed to the group. An earlier survey, however, might provide an idea of its extent. The Marshall Fund's Turkish Perception Survey, consisting of face-to-face interviews of 1,018 respondents in 16 provinces on July 4-13, found that 6.6% of Turks believe IS is not a terrorist organization, and another 15.6% said IS does not constitute a threat to Turkey. These figures are troubling figures for a majority Sunni country of 75 million people.

Furthermore, Turkish nationals have emerged as the perpetrators in all the bombings attributed to IS in the country thus far, indicating that people are being recruited from among the local populace. Hence, the link is established between the suicide bombings and the show of sympathy for IS in the bleachers. Yet, Erdogan insists the West is the source of the problem.

In the Nov. 18 interview, he blamed the West for the flow of international jihadists to Syria via Turkey, stating, "We don't claim there are no Daesh [IS] militants in Turkey today. Foreign fighters have gone to Syria from France, Britain and Germany ... They couldn't have crossed from Turkey to Syria if we had received certain information [from the said countries]. What can we do if we don't get information? Are we supposed to stop tourist entries and exits? They would then start screaming that Turkey has banned freedom of travel."

True, "Daesh militants" are present in Turkey, as Erdogan says, but most of them are apparently Turkish nationals. The country's IS problem today is a combined outcome of the government's domestic politics and its Syria policy, which have enabled IS to organize and recruit fighters in Turkey. ♦

Kadri Gursel is a columnist for Al-Monitor's Turkey Pulse. He wrote a column for the Turkish daily Milliyet between 2007 and July 2015. He focuses primarily on Turkish foreign policy, international affairs and Turkey's Kurdish question, as well as Turkey's evolving political Islam. On Twitter: @KadriGursel

Barzani: Kurds and Kurdistan owe gratitude to Daniel Mitterrand and her memory will remain immortal

Tuesday, 24 November 2015 - <http://english.shafaaq.com>

Shafaq News / The President of Kurdistan, Massoud Barzani confirmed that the Kurds and Kurdistan owe gratitude to Mrs. Danielle Mitterrand, pointing out that her memory will remain immortal.

This came during Barzani's presence in the memorial ceremony, which was held yesterday in Erbil, on the anniversary of the death of the Kurdish people friend, Danielle Mitterrand, wife of the late former French President, Francois Mitterrand, which was held under the supervision of the provincial government by Schwann Brewer Foundation for Culture and Arts.

Barzani opened an exhibition at the beginning a Photography ceremony that displayed pictures of historical stages of the life of Mitterrand, then delivered a speech in which he referred to the role of Mitterrand and France in supporting the people of Kurdistan, declaring that the Kurds and Kurdistan owe gratitude for this lady and her memory will remain immortal.



Barzani also noted that the relations between Kurdistan and France are historical and Kurds looked to France as a friend and a supporter, noting that during the aggression of "ISIS" on Kurdistan, the French President visited Erbil and this was a great support for the people of Kurdistan, noting that the recent terrorist attacks in France were because of those positions.

Barzani renewed his condolences on the occasion of casualties in those terrorist operation, declaring that it showed that the terrorists are the enemies of everyone and the free world must unite against terrorism.

Barzani pointed out that the survival of the terrorists is temporary and have no future.

Nechirvan Barzani delivered a speech in the ceremony as well as the French Consul in Erbil and the son of Ms. Gilbert Mitterrand in the anniversary ceremony in addition to a number of other speeches, as a documentary film was presented about Mrs. Mitterrand's life and their positions in support of the people of Kurdistan ■



BREITBART

NOVEMBER 28, 2015

REPORT: 50 U.S. SOLDIERS IN KOBANE, SYRIA TO TRAIN KURDS

At least 50 U.S. soldiers arrived in Kobane, Syria, on Thursday to train Kurdish People's Protection Unit soldiers against the Islamic State

by Mary Chastain 28 Nov 201520
<http://www.breitbart.com>

Activist Mustapha Abdi told AFP the soldiers "had arrived 'in recent hours,' in what is the first official deployment of US ground troops in Syria." The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) confirmed the troops will train and "plan offensives" in Jarablus and Raqqa, which is the de facto capital of the terrorist group's caliphate.

From the AFP:

Rami Abdel Rahman, the director of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, a British-based monitor, said "more than 50 American instructors have arrived in northern and northeastern Syria".

He said they had arrived in two groups over the past two days, coming from

Turkey and from the autonomous Kurdish region of neighbouring Iraq.

He said about 30 were in Kobane itself, with the rest in Hasakeh province in eastern Syria.

"We have said before that we will be putting a small number of troops on the ground in Syria to coordinate with our partners there in a non-combat role. We will not be providing the specifics of their whereabouts or travel plans beyond that," stated the U.S. Central Command.

In October, President Barack Obama announced the U.S. planned to deploy 50 troops to Syria, mainly to "isolate" Raqqa.

Kobane is important to ISIS since it allows them an easy route to transport jihadists. But the city is also valued by the Kurds.

"Kobane symbolises the Kurdish resistance, not only in Syria but in other parts of the Middle East," explained Sirwan Kajjo, a Syrian-Kurdish analyst. "Its loss would translate into a defeat for the entire Kurdish nation. The city has gained strategic importance now, partly because it is the first Syrian town to stand against ISIL for such a long time. Other Syrian towns and cities fell into ISIL hands without any resistance."

Armenians, fleeing persecution from the Ottoman Empire, populated the city in 1915. The Kurds from Anatolia followed on their footsteps. The end of the Ottoman Empire split the city between Turkey and Syria in 1921.

"The area of Suruc province is also called 'the Armenian cemetery' because of the thousands of Armenians who died there during the deportations," said Cengiz Aktar, a Turkish political analyst. "It was a terrible place when the Armenians arrived back then, and the area has a tragic history. It is being repeated now."

But others believe the devotion to Kobane has nothing to do with history. Mostafa Minawai, director of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Initiative at Cornell University, claimed the city "lies at the heart of a Kurdish dream" and "more connected with future ambitions." ●

Why It's Time for a Free Kurdistan

It's spread across several de facto 'states,' but Kurdish nationalism has become a reality as the rest of the Middle East crumbles.

Written by Aliza Marcus and Andrew Apostolou NOV. 27, 2015
<http://www.thedailybeast.com>

It's time to stop debating whether or not the Kurds deserve an independent state. There are around 40 million Kurds across Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria—the largest ethnic group without self-determination. Kurds have long sought independence, but the states in which they live have always opposed it. The U.S. and its Western allies oppose Kurdish independence because of fears it could destabilize the already volatile Middle East.

The arguments against Kurdish independence are obsolete. It's not a question of whether the world should allow Kurds to have independent states. It's a matter of the international community catching up with what the Kurds have already done. In Iraq and Syria, Kurdish groups have established their own states—albeit de facto—without waiting for anyone's permission. These are not fully fledged independent countries with diplomatic missions at the United Nations and international recognition. They don't need to be. Kurds have shown they can manage without that. In Turkey, where close to half of all Kurds live, they are demanding self-rule but are up against a state that is unwilling to negotiate political rights.

The question now is whether the U.S. and others can accept Kurdish self-rule. That question is more urgent given the importance of the Kurds in Iraq and Syria for the fight against the so-called Islamic State widely known as ISIS. As importantly, can the Kurds learn to accept their own divisions and not constantly meddle in each other's affairs?

In Iraq, the Kurds have governed themselves since 1991, when a U.S.-led no-fly zone was established in the country's north to protect the Kurds from Saddam Hussein's forces. The Kurds set up the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), their own parliament, used a different version of the Iraqi dinar than the rest of the country, and even issued their own postal stamps. Iraqi Kurdistan managed to survive isolation, international boycotts, and a civil war that divided the area between the two main Kurdish parties. After the U.S. and its allies toppled Saddam's regime in 2003, Iraqi Kurdistan's status as a federal region was formalized by the Iraqi state.

Since then, the Iraqi Kurds have run their own affairs with little regard to Baghdad and little concern about not being an independent state. Massoud Barzani, the president of Kurdistan (his term officially ended in August but he hasn't stepped down), did announce in the summer of 2014 that he planned a referendum on independence when it looked like the Iraqi state

was going to collapse. He postponed the vote indefinitely a few months later when it became clear that defending Kurdistan against ISIS was the priority.

In fact, the KRG doesn't need to formally declare independence. It already acts as if were. The Iraqi Kurds have taken advantage of their control over oil reserves to sign deals with foreign oil companies. Last year, after Baghdad failed to pay them their share of oil exports, the Iraqi Kurds began selling oil abroad on their own—despite Iraqi and U.S. opposition and lawsuits that unsuccessfully sought to stop this. They also have their own, more liberal border rules. While Baghdad requires that most foreigners obtain visas in advance, Iraqi Kurdistan's two international airports provide visas on the spot. Foreign embassies are in Baghdad, but more and more countries recognize that they need a consulate in the Kurdish capital Erbil. Among them are the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, and Turkey. The feel in Erbil is of total separation from the rest of Iraq—which suits people just fine.

Kurds are also building their own state in Syria's northeast, an area that borders Turkey and Iraqi Kurdistan. The collapse of Syria as a state gave the Syrian Kurds an opening that they grabbed. Kurds associated with the Democratic Union Party, known as PYD and an affiliate of the PKK (the Kurdish Workers Party that is fighting Turkey), and now control most of Syrian Kurdistan (known as "Rojava" meaning western Kurdistan). The Syrian Kurdish military forces, known as the YPG, in effect lead the U.S. campaign against ISIS in Syria. In a little over a year, the YPG has pushed ISIS off most of the Syrian-Turkish border, depriving the jihadists of vital supply lines (see maps here). Although they have taken heavy losses—their fighters have no helmets, body armor, or even basic field dressings—the YPG is now around 30 miles from the ISIS capital, Raqqa.

The Syrian Kurdish administration says it doesn't want independence. They have declared a series of so-called self-administered cantons that for all practical purposes are as independent as can be in wartime. They've introduced new textbooks and set up rudimentary judicial systems and are working on economic development. They've received positive attention for their fighters' focus on defeating ISIS and their commitment to women's rights—they have outlawed polygamy and deploy women on the frontline. They take pleasure in the widespread belief among the jihadists that being killed by a Kurdish woman is a ticket to hell.

The U.S. and its Western allies have long opposed an independent Kurdistan. That's because they have always seen the Kurdish issue



through the prism of the states in which the Kurds live, in particular Turkey. For decades, the Turkish government sought to forcibly assimilate the Kurds, denying their existence as a separate ethnic group with their own language. Turkey long feared that any gains by Kurds in other countries would boost Kurdish demands inside.

The Iraqi-, Turkish-, and Syrian-based Kurdish parties all refuse to stop interfering in each other's affairs. Barzani, head of the Kurdish Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq, has sought to exert his influence in Rojava. He has demanded that his Syrian Kurdish allies be allowed to deploy their own militias separately from the YPG. The YPG refuses, saying that having two different military forces is a recipe for civil war. That's something Barzani should know well, given that his KDP forces fought with their rivals, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, from 1994 to 1998.

The YPG and PKK have done the same in return, insisting that they be allowed to deploy in Iraqi Kurdistan. Their forces helped to save Yezidis in August 2014 from the ISIS assault on Iraq's Sinjar area. The YPG and PKK returned in November 2015—against the KRG's reported wishes—when Barzani commanded a force of Iraqi Kurds, backed by the U.S., to successfully recapture Sinjar. The PKK's involvement was important, but Barzani's administration claims political authority over Sinjar and refuses to accept YPG and PKK demands for a separate governing structure for the Yezidis.

For the moment, there seems to be no chance of autonomy or independence in Iran, where around 7 million Kurds live. The Islamic Republic of Iran represses Kurdish activism and executes Kurdish political prisoners. The Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK), a PKK-affiliated group, engages in very occasional fighting with Iranian forces. The PKK, on behalf of PJAK, offered a ceasefire in 2011, which the Iranian government rejected. Since then, numerous Iranian Kurds have joined the fight against ISIS, whether in Iraq or Syria. As one Iranian Kurd fighting in Kobane in Syrian Kurdistan told the BBC, "When we've freed Kobane, we'll be off to Iran. It's their turn next."

Given how Kurds have been treated in the countries in which they live, it's no surprise that they have demanded the right to govern themselves and are willing to fight. So it's time that the international community caught up with Kurdish desires and helped Kurds build stable, democratic institutions, instead of taking the side of those who want to rule over the Kurds. ○

Aliza Marcus is the author of Blood and Belief: The P.K.K. and the Kurdish Fight for Independence.

Andrew Apostolou is a Kurdistan expert based in Washington, D.C.

AFP

Turquie: le chef du PKK appelle l'UE et les USA à aider à faire la paix

Berlin, 29 novembre 2015 (AFP)

LE CHEF des rebelles kurdes, Cemil Bayik, a exhorté l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis à lancer une initiative de paix pour mettre fin à la "guerre civile" en cours selon lui en Turquie du fait de la ligne politique adoptée par Ankara.

"Nous ne voulons plus nous battre, nous voulons des solutions politiques et pour cela nous avons besoin d'un facilitateur pour faire la paix, une tierce partie", a déclaré le dirigeant du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) à l'édition dominicale du quotidien allemand Bild.

"C'est la raison pour laquelle nous demandons aux Etats-Unis ou à l'Allemagne, en tant que membre de l'UE, d'endosser ce rôle", a-t-il ajouté, interrogé depuis son quartier-général des monts Kandil, dans l'extrême nord du Kurdistan irakien.

Le PKK figure actuellement sur la liste des organisations terroristes des Etats-Unis et de l'UE. Mais aux yeux de M. Bayik cette situation doit changer compte tenu du rôle joué par les Kurdes dans la lutte contre l'organisation jihadiste Etat Islamique en Irak et en Syrie.

"L'heure est venue de retirer entièrement le PKK de la liste des organisations terroristes", a estimé son chef, considéré comme un modéré du mouvement.

Il s'est inquiété de la tournure prise par le conflit avec les forces armées turques.

"Des chars, de l'artillerie et des hélicoptères sont déployés dans le sud de la Turquie contre la population civile kurde, il s'agit de la pire situation qu'on ait connue depuis des décennies", a déclaré le dirigeant du PKK.

"Le gouvernement turc dit que cette guerre durera jusqu'à ce que tous les combattants kurdes soient tués ou se rendent, c'est la raison pour laquelle je dis



qu'en effet, nous les Kurdes, sommes à nouveau en guerre civile avec la Turquie", a-t-il ajouté.

En 2012, l'ouverture de discussions entre Ankara et Abdullah Öcalan a nourri l'espoir d'une fin du conflit kurde, qui a fait plus de 40.000 morts depuis 1984. Mais le 20 juillet dernier, un attentat suicide attribué au groupe Etat islamique (EI), qui a tué 32 militants prokurdes à Suruç, à la frontière syrienne, a sonné le glas du cessez-le-feu.

Une branche du PKK y a répondu en revendiquant l'assassinat de deux policiers, une "action punitive" contre la Turquie accusée de soutenir les jihadistes. En retour, Ankara a lancé une offensive contre le PKK et depuis, le sud-est à majorité kurde de la Turquie a replongé dans la violence. ●

Kurds should be at Saudi-held Syria opposition meet - leader

REUTERS

BEIRUT, November 27, 2015 - By Sylvia Westall(Reuters)

SYRIAN KURDS need political and military representation at a Syrian opposition conference organised by Saudi Arabia next month because they are a main partner fighting Islamic State and important to Syria's future, a Syrian Kurdish leader said.

Saudi Arabia says it is in contact with opposition groups about a potential meeting in the kingdom to unify their position ahead of upcoming peace talks. Some groups fighting against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad are wary of the Kurds, whom they see as collaborating with Damascus, a charge they deny.

Saleh Muslim, co-chair of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), said no official invitations for the conference had been received yet but that the PYD expected to be represented via the National Coordination Body, a broader internal opposition group.

What was more important was representation of armed factions, Muslim said. This meant the Democratic Forces of Syria, a new U.S.-backed coalition force involving the Kurdish YPG militia and Arab fighters, must be allowed to attend.

"They are the main partner against Daesh (Islamic State). Those forces are taking the areas liberated from the regime and from Daesh, so this group should be a part of it," he told Reuters by telephone, describing the new armed alliance as "a project for the future of Syria".

"If there is Free Syrian Army (invited), this group should also be represented. The representation of the autonomous (Kurdish) area also should be there because they are a main factor in this conflict," he said.

Saudi Arabia has not yet set a date for the conference, which is seen as an opportunity to bring together groups whose lack of unity has been a long-standing problem in seeking a peaceful solution to the nearly five-year conflict.

The YPG militia has seized swathes of Syria from Islamic State with the help of U.S.-led strikes. The Syrian Kurds have declared an autonomous administration across parts of northern Syria along the Turkish border, rankling Ankara, which has fought a decades-long insurgency against Kurdish PKK separatists.

Muslim accused Turkey of shooting down a Russian jet earlier this week in order to further disrupt the Syrian war, where he said armed groups backed by Turkey had lost some ground.

"Turkey wanted to turn the tables because they don't want the Syrian conflict to go towards a peace process and a political solution. I think there was planning for such a thing," he said, echoing Russian comments about Turkey.

Turkey has said the Russian jet violated its airspace and that its air force had responded correctly.

"It's a new escalation in the Syrian conflict," Muslim said, pointing out that Russia had already retaliated by bombarding a rebel-held border crossing on Wednesday which he said insurgents had been using to ferry in supplies from Turkey.

"We are worried but it is becoming clearer and clearer what is going on," he said, saying that Turkey had been supporting groups that cooperated with hardline Islamists in Syria.

"There is Daesh, there is an al Qaeda-related organisation, Nusra Front, which works with groups like Ahrar al-Sham and the others. Many of those are supported by Turkey - this is the problem. Everything has been made very clear in front of our eyes," he said.

Turkey has denied supporting hardline groups in Syria.

Muslim said Russia had been bombarding insurgents in Syria which included Chechen and Asian fighters Moscow sees as a threat to its national security.

"Russia is dealing with them because they see them as a threat for Russia in the future if they come back. They are talking about 5,000 people that are there," he said, referring to foreign fighters.

He added that the PYD had however not increased its contacts with Moscow since Russia started bombing Syria two months ago.

"It is just ordinary contact... we have a representative in Moscow who relays information from them. But there is nothing new," he said, adding that Moscow had not offered increased support for the Kurds either. ○

Le général peshmerga Aziz Weysi demande plus d'aide pour défaire Daech

Pierre Barbance
22 Novembre, 2015 -
Humanite.fr

Commandant des zaravani, les unités d'élite des Kurdes d'Irak, l'officier supérieur s'est rendu au Sinjar pour inspecter les lignes de défense. Il insiste également sur l'importance du barrage de Mossoul, tenu par ses hommes et cibles des camions piégés de Daech.

Sinjar (Irak), envoyé spécial. Le général Aziz Weysi, commandant des zaravani, cette task force des peshmergas du Kurdistan d'Irak, est venu superviser les lignes de défense construites au sud de la ville de Sinjar. Depuis plusieurs jours les pelleteuses et les bulldozers sont entrés en action pour édifier une protection efficace contre ce qui est une des armes les plus dangereuses de daech: les camions piégés. D'immenses fossés sont creusés et les mitrailleuses Giatt 20 mm, sont pointés vers ces villages où les djihadistes se sont enterrés après avoir déserté Sinjar de façon réfléchie, évitant une défaite et de nombreuses pertes. Il est évident

qu'ils n'ont rien abdiqué, que leurs capacités de nuisances sont encore très importantes. Tout peut arriver, sur ce front comme d'autres. Un officier peshmerga, qui a été blessés à plusieurs reprises ces derniers mois, nous confie d'ailleurs que « les djihadistes sont très bien formés et se battent jusqu'à la mort ». Il se souvient d'un combat où ils ont vu un djihadistes tenté de se rendre et abattu dans le dos.

C'est ce qu'explique le général Weysi qui se dit « triste de ce qui s'est passé en France » mais « nous, peshmergas, sommes prêts à venger les Français. » Il confirme d'abord mettre « en oeuvre tous les efforts possibles pour protéger la ville, nettoyer celle-ci de tous les engins explosifs laissés par les terroristes et enfin faire en sorte que les autorités locales puissent retrouver leur place et fassent fonctionner les services nécessaires au retour de la population. Il faut redonner confiance aux habitants » Il lance d'ailleurs un appel à l'aide internationale pour la reconstruction de Sinjar.

« Le Sinjar est un endroit stratégique pour Daech. C'était le



point de passage entre Raqqa et Mossoul. En reprenant Sinjar, nous avons dérangé leurs lignes d'approvisionnement et leurs déplacements », se félicite le général Aziz Weysi. En revanche, à l'est de Mossoul, les attaques se multiplient. « Les terroristes profitent de la nuit noire et du brouillard pour harceler nos hommes. Il y a quelques jours, ils ont envoyé six camions piégés à l'est du barrage de Mossoul. Les combats se multiplient. Un bombardement de l'aviation en a tués quatorze et une cinquantaine a péri autour du

barrage. » Ce barrage est particulièrement important. Construit sur le Tigre, à une quarantaine de kilomètres au nord-ouest de Mossoul, le barrage retient 12 milliards de mètres cubes d'eau. Il est indispensable à la consommation d'un million d'habitants mais aussi à l'irrigation des cultures de la province de Ninive. La question du contrôle du fleuve Tigre est donc cruciale dans la région. Le général Weysi en est persuadé: « Si nous recevons plus d'aide, nous ferons encore mieux pour défaire Daech. ■



28 NOVEMBRE 2015

Irak: découverte d'un sixième charnier de victimes du groupe EI

28 nov. 2015 - www.rfi.fr
Avec notre correspondante à Erbil, Oriane Verdier

Dans le nord de l'Irak, l'armée kurde continue de nettoyer la ville de Sinjar libérée de l'organisation Etat islamique (EI) il y a deux semaines. Les peshmergas ont annoncé avoir découvert une fosse commune à 10 kilomètres de la ville. Elle contiendrait les restes de plus de 120 personnes.

Cette fosse commune n'a pas encore été exhumée, mais selon des témoins de l'exécution, le groupe Etat islamique y aurait enterré 123 Yézidis, la communauté majoritaire dans la région.

C'est le sixième charnier retrouvé aux alentours de la ville, le quinzième dans toute la région, selon le chef de sécurité de Sinjar qui rappelle que plusieurs milliers de femmes et enfants yézidis sont toujours portés disparus.

Les membres de cette communauté sont considérés comme des hérétiques par l'organisation Etat islamique. En août 2014, le groupe terroriste a pris le contrôle de Sinjar et mené une tentative de génocide selon les Nations unies.

Beaucoup de Yézidis sont aujourd'hui réfugiés dans les montagnes alentour en attendant de pouvoir rentrer chez eux. Il y a un an de cela, Sinjar accueillait plus de 88



Un Yézidi dans les rues de Sinjar, le 16 novembre 2015.

000 personnes.

Mais aujourd'hui, la ville de Sinjar est détruite, les maisons brûlées et les peshmergas continuent de découvrir des mines. Un élément habituel de la stratégie de défense de l'Etat islamique. ●

Qui se bat contre l'EI en Irak et en Syrie ?

Paris (AFP) 23 nov. 2015
<http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com>

Au premier jour des missions à partir du porte-avions Charles de Gaulle, et au début d'une intense semaine diplomatique, le point sur les principales forces combattant les jihadistes de l'Etat islamique en Syrie et en Irak:

- ARMÉES SYRIENNE, IRAKIENNE ET MILICES SUPPLÉMENTAIRES:

. **SYRIE:** l'armée compte 178.000 hommes en 2015 selon l'International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), quasiment moitié moins qu'en 2011 en raison des morts et des défections. Elle s'appuie sur des milices (150.000 à 200.000 membres), la principale étant les Forces de défense nationale (90.000).

. **IRAK:** l'armée compte 177.600 hommes (IISS). Après l'invasion de 2003, les Américains ont dissous l'armée (alors 450.000 hommes) et reconstitué une nouvelle force qui s'est effondrée en juin 2014 face à la grande offensive de l'EI. Washington et ses alliés ont alors entrepris de la former et le gouvernement de la restructurer. Depuis septembre, elle bénéficie de F-16 américains (36 commandés). Elle s'appuie sur des milices chiïtes, ou à majorité chiïte comme les "Hachd al-Chaabi" (Unités de mobilisation populaire), et des tribus sunnites.

- FORCES KURDES ET MILICES REBELLES:

. Les Kurdes défendent leurs zones, soutenus par les raids de la coalition internationale menée par les Etats-Unis, grâce aux Unités de



Avion et drapeau français sur le Charles-de-Gaulle, le 18 novembre 2015 / AFP

protection du peuple kurde (YPG) dans le nord et le nord-est de la Syrie et aux peshmergas dans le nord de l'Irak.

. En Syrie, après l'échec d'un plan pour former des rebelles, Washington parraine depuis le 12 octobre une coalition arabo-kurde, les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS) rassemblant les YPG kurdes, des milices arabes, des tribus et des chrétiens syriaques. Parallèlement, le Front al-Nosra, affilié à Al-Qaïda, est un groupe jihadiste rival de l'EI qui s'est parfois allié à des groupes rebelles, comme les islamistes d'Ahrar al-Cham.

- FORCES ÉTRANGÈRES:

. Une COALITION INTERNATIONALE menée par les Etats-Unis frappe depuis septembre 2014 en Irak, à la demande de Bagdad, et en Syrie où elle a jusqu'ici refusé toute collaboration avec le régime de Bachar al-Assad.

Rassemblant une soixantaine de pays dont le

Royaume-Uni, la France, les voisins arabes de la Syrie et la Turquie, elle a exclu toute intervention au sol mais envoyé des soldats former les troupes irakiennes.

Moins d'une douzaine de ses membres effectuent les raids (plus de 8.200 depuis un an, assurés à plus de 80% par les Etats-Unis).

Cinq pays (Etats-Unis, France, Canada, Australie, Jordanie) interviennent en Irak et en Syrie, les autres seulement en Irak (Danemark, Pays-Bas, Grande-Bretagne) ou seulement en Syrie (Turquie, Arabie saoudite, Bahreïn, Emirats arabes unis). Ces trois monarchies du Golfe sont moins actives depuis leur engagement en mars au Yémen contre la rébellion chiïte soutenue par l'Iran.

Washington, dont le porte-avions Harry Truman est attendu en Méditerranée, a envoyé 3.500 soldats en Irak et va déployer en Syrie une cinquantaine de soldats des forces spéciales. Ils ne participent pas aux combats au sol sauf pour des opérations ponctuelles.

Le Canada a annoncé, sans calendrier, vouloir cesser ses frappes mais renforcer ses forces spéciales au Kurdistan irakien (69 hommes actuellement).

La France intensifie ses frappes contre l'EI en Syrie après les attentats du 13 novembre à Paris revendiqués par le groupe jihadiste. Elle mobilise 3.500 militaires, déployant en Méditerranée orientale son porte-avions Charles-de-Gaulle. Avec 26 chasseurs embarqués s'ajoutant aux 12 appareils stationnés aux Emirats arabes unis (6 Rafale) et en Jordanie (6 Mirage 2000), il triple les capacités d'action françaises.

La Turquie a lancé ses premiers raids avec la coalition le 28 août, autorisant les Etats-Unis à utiliser sa base d'Incirlik.

. **RUSSIE:** allié de Damas, Moscou a lancé ses raids le 30 septembre en Syrie, après avoir renforcé sa présence militaire durant l'été et construit une base aérienne près de Lattaquié (nord-ouest).

Sa flotte en mer Caspienne tire également des missiles de croisière. Moscou, qui plaide pour une "large coalition antiterroriste", aurait envoyé selon la presse russe jusqu'à 2.000 soldats.

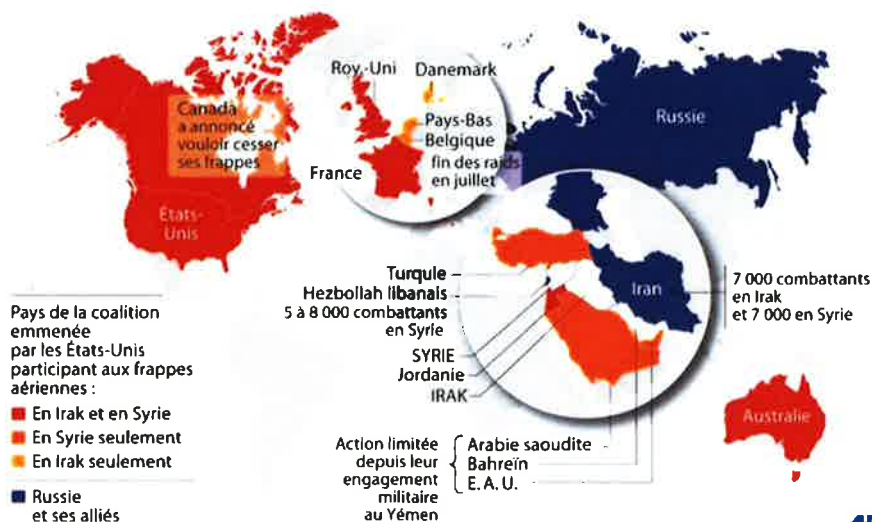
Accusé initialement par les Américains et leurs alliés de viser les autres groupes armés hostiles au régime plutôt que l'EI, Moscou a ostensiblement visé ces jihadistes après les attentats du 13 novembre à Paris mais continue de viser des groupes rebelles.

Une coordination des renseignements s'effectue depuis septembre entre Russie, Iran, Syrie et Irak.

. **IRAN:** la puissance chiïte soutient les régimes de Damas et Bagdad et a engagé son corps d'élite, les Gardiens de la révolution, en Syrie, avec quelque 7.000 hommes, et en Irak.

. **LIBAN:** la milice chiïte du Hezbollah a engagé 5.000 à 8.000 combattants en Syrie. Selon son chef Hassan Nasrallah, elle combat partout aux côtés de l'armée syrienne. ♦

Les pays frappant le groupe EI en Syrie et en Irak



La Turquie sabote la coalition contre Daech

L'aviation turque a abattu mardi un avion militaire russe près de sa frontière avec la Syrie.

- **POUTINE DÉNONCE « UN COUP DANS LE DOS »**
- **LA FRONTIÈRE AÉRIENNE TURCO-SYRIENNE UNE « LIGNE ROUGE » POUR ANKARA**
- **LES AVIONS FRANÇAIS « PROTÉGÉS » PAR DES ACCORDS AVEC LES PAYS DU MIDDLE EAST**
- **HOLLANDE ET OBAMA PRONENT LA DÉSÉSCALADE**
- **UN TIR QUI PLOMBE LES EFFORTS DE PARIS**
- **LA TURQUIE A CESSÉ D'ÊTRE NOTRE ALLIÉE**

la Turquie défie les forces russes

Ankara a abattu un avion militaire russe près de la frontière syrienne, l'accusant d'avoir violé son espace aérien.

C'EST UN INCIDENT sans précédent, de nature à envenimer les relations - déjà très tendues - entre Ankara et Moscou. Mardi matin, l'armée turque a abattu un Su-24 de l'armée russe, en assurant qu'il avait violé son espace aérien près de la frontière avec la Syrie. Prenant l'affaire très au sérieux, la Turquie a dans la foulée décidé de saisir l'Otan, dont elle est membre, ainsi que l'ONU sur instruction du premier ministre Davutoglu. Une réunion extraordinaire de l'Organisation du traité de l'Atlantique-Nord devait se tenir, mardi à 17 heures à Bruxelles (voir ci-dessous). « L'Otan suit la situation de très près », a indiqué un responsable de l'Alliance à l'AFP. C'est la première fois que les forces armées d'un pays de l'Otan abattent un avion russe ou soviétique depuis 1950. De son côté, le Kremlin qualifie l'incident de « très sérieux ». Mais la Russie campe sur ses positions : l'avion, selon le ministère de la Défense, est resté dans l'espace aérien syrien.

Tandis que la tension monte entre les deux pays, les chaînes de télévision turques repassaient en boucle mardi les

images de la chute de l'appareil russe en feu qui s'est écrasé à la frontière dans les montagnes syriennes, en face de la province de Hatay. Sur une photo diffusée sur les réseaux sociaux, on voit un des deux pilotes, qui s'est échappé de l'avion à temps, accroché à un parachute. Un groupe rebelle syrien a, pour sa part, transmis une vidéo à l'agence de presse Reuters où l'on voit un homme à terre, immobile et portant la trace de graves blessures. « Un pilote russe » dit une voix émanant du groupe d'hommes rassemblés autour du corps présenté comme la dépouille d'un des deux pilotes. « Dieu est grand », peut-on encore entendre. L'état-major des forces russes a confirmé dans la soirée qu'un des deux pilotes avait trouvé la mort dans l'opération lancée pour secourir l'équipage de l'appareil.

Tensions récurrentes

Selon l'armée turque, qui a dévoilé aux médias le suivi radar du chasseur bombardier russe, et le Pentagone par la suite, l'appareil aurait été averti dix fois en cinq minutes avant d'être descendu par

deux F-16. « En accord avec les règles d'engagement, les autorités turques ont mis en garde de manière répétée un avion non identifié qui se trouvait à 15 kilomètres ou moins de la frontière », confie une source officielle turque. « L'appareil n'a pas tenu compte de ces avertissements en volant au-dessus de la Turquie », précise-t-elle, en rappelant qu'Ankara avait, par le passé, prévenu de sa riposte possible en cas de violation de son espace aérien. Avant d'ajouter : « Ce n'est pas une action envers un pays particulier : nos F-16 ont pris les mesures nécessaires pour défendre la souveraineté territoriale de la Turquie. »

Ce n'est pas la première fois, en effet, que Moscou est accusé de violer l'espace turc. Depuis le début de l'intervention militaire russe aux côtés du président Bachar el-Assad fin septembre, les incidents à la frontière se multiplient entre Ankara et Moscou. Le 3 octobre, une escalade avait été évitée de justesse : des chasseurs turcs avaient intercepté un avion militaire russe engagé en Syrie qui avait violé leur espace aérien, en le for-



çant à faire demi-tour. Moscou s'était alors justifié en évoquant de « mauvaises conditions météorologiques ». Le secrétaire général de l'Otan, Jens Stoltenberg, avait pour sa part appelé « la Russie à pleinement respecter l'espace aérien de l'Otan et à éviter une escalade des tensions avec l'Alliance ». Le 16 octobre, l'armée turque a également abattu un drone de fabrication russe qui avait pénétré dans le ciel turc. La tension entre les deux pays s'était encore renforcée ces derniers jours, après une série de bombardements russes qui, d'après Ankara, ont visé des



villages de la minorité turcophone de Syrie. Vendredi, l'ambassadeur russe avait même été convoqué par les autorités turques. Une mise en garde, avait prévenu

Ankara, contre les « sérieuses conséquences » de cette opération. ■
D. M. (ISTANBUL)

Poutine dénonce « un coup dans le dos »

PIERRE AVRIL pavril@lefigaro.fr
CORRESPONDANT À MOSCOU

C'EST UN Vladimir Poutine des mauvais jours, arborant une mine sombre, qui a commenté la destruction par les forces armées turques du Sukhoï 24 de l'armée russe. Il s'agit « d'un coup dans le dos porté par les complices du terrorisme », a dénoncé le chef du Kremlin aux côtés du roi de Jordanie Abdallah II, qui lui a présenté ses condoléances. « Nous n'admettrons jamais que se commettent de tels crimes », qui auront des « conséquences sérieuses » entre les deux pays, a ajouté le président russe depuis sa résidence de Sochi.

Moscou dément formellement que son chasseur ait franchi la frontière turque, expliquant qu'il volait un kilomètre plus au sud en territoire syrien. Autre circonstance aggravante aux yeux du Kremlin, le fait qu'Ankara « se tourne vers l'Otan pour discuter de cet incident ». Dans la foulée, le chef de la diplomatie russe, Sergueï Lavrov, a annulé une rencontre prévue mercredi avec son homologue turc, à Istanbul.

Il s'agit du premier obstacle de taille officiellement rencontré par l'armée russe depuis le début de son intervention en Syrie, le 30 septembre. À Moscou, la contre-attaque médiatique s'est rapidement organisée, sans grande surprise sur le fond. L'attaque contre le Sukhoï s'apparente à une « tentative », coordonnée par les

États-Unis, « de discréditer les récents succès militaires russes » en Syrie, a dénoncé le vice-président de la commission de la défense du Sénat, Franz Klintsevitch. Le vice-président de la Chambre des députés, Nikolaï Levitchev, a proposé de suspendre les liaisons aériennes entre les deux pays, la côte turque étant une destination très prisée des touristes russes. L'agence fédérale du tourisme a recommandé la suspension des ventes de voyages clés en main.

« Si la Russie choisit l'escalade, la mission antiterroriste qu'elle promeut sera mise en doute »

LEONID ISSAEV, SPÉCIALISTE DES PAYS ARABES À LA HAUTE ÉCOLE D'ÉCONOMIE

Néanmoins, les experts cités par la télévision publique interprétaient différemment les faits : les uns affirmaient que le SU-24 frappait sans équivoque des objectifs de Daech à l'intérieur du territoire syrien, les autres expliquaient que le chasseur s'est trouvé engagé dans un de ces combats mené par l'armée syrienne contre des rebelles turkmènes soutenus par Ankara. En vérité, l'état-major russe pouvait facilement prévoir cette éventualité. En visite à Moscou, le 15 octobre dernier, le vice-ministre turc des Affaires étrangères avait déjà dénombré treize incidents survenus

entre avions turcs et russes près de la frontière syrienne. À la même époque, une délégation militaire russe présente à Ankara avait exposé des mesures susceptibles de prévenir la répétition de tels accrochages.

Bien qu'elle ait semble-t-il entraîné la mort des pilotes, l'attaque turque ne devrait pas inaugurer un cycle incontrôlé de représailles, en particulier militaires. « Aucun des deux n'a intérêt à s'engager sur la voie de la confrontation », estime Leonid Issaev, spécialiste des pays arabes à la Haute école d'économie. Tout en critiquant Ankara, Vladimir Poutine a rappelé que son voisin de la mer Noire était vu comme un « pays ami », de même que son président, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, reçu chaleureusement fin septembre par le chef du Kremlin, lors de l'inauguration de la grande mosquée de Moscou.

Les deux partenaires sont engagés dans des projets énergétiques communs, dont la construction d'un gazoduc baptisé Turkish Stream, aujourd'hui gelé à cause des dissensions politiques, mais considéré comme stratégique par Gazprom. En dépit de leur opposition virulente sur le sort de Bachar el-Assad et dans une moindre mesure sur la question kurde, le Kremlin ne désespère pas de voir Ankara collaborer à une « coalition antiterroriste ». « Si la Russie choisit l'escalade, la mission antiterroriste qu'elle promeut sera mise en doute », ajoute Leonid Issaev. Officiellement, la lutte contre Daech reste la priorité de Vladimir Poutine. ■

La frontière aérienne turco-syrienne : une « ligne rouge » pour Ankara



DÉCRYPTAGE
Delphine Minoul
CORRESPONDANTE À ISTANBUL

LONGTEMPS soupçonnée de laxisme à sa frontière, notamment sur le passage des rebelles islamistes anti-Assad, la Turquie a récemment fait de ce long ruban de quelque 900 kilomètres une « ligne rouge » à ne pas franchir. Pas plus tard que ce week-end, une semaine tout juste après la tenue, à Antalya, d'un G20 placé sous le signe de la lutte contre le terrorisme, l'armée de l'air turque a lancé une opération conjointe avec l'aviation américaine pour libérer, avec l'appui de combattants locaux, notamment turkmènes, deux villages syriens frontaliers de la Turquie occupés par Daech. L'opération, présentée comme un succès, s'est déroulée au moment où les forces de sécurité turques démultiplient sur leur propre territoire les rafles antidjihadistes ainsi que les interpellations et déportations d'étrangers soupçonnés d'extrémisme.

Ce mardi, un autre front s'est officiellement ouvert à la frontière : celui d'une guerre larvée entre Ankara et Moscou. Le régime islamo-conservateur turc, qui a rompu avec le président Bachar al-Assad dès le début de l'insurrection de 2011 - et qui accueille aujourd'hui plus de 2,2 millions de réfugiés syriens -, ne manque pas de dénoncer la prise de position des Russes depuis le début de leur intervention militaire, fin septembre auprès de l'armée de Bachar el-Assad. Elle leur reproche notamment d'utiliser leur offensive anti-État islamique comme prétexte pour décimer la rébellion anti-Damas dans son intégralité - et de viser les populations civiles. Pls, elle les accuse de bombar-

der aveuglement, dans la foulée, les petits villages turkmènes en territoire syrien - dont certains sont récemment retombés aux mains de l'armée pro-Bachar, appuyée par l'aviation syrienne. « *L'incessant bombardement aérien russe (...) a fait un grand nombre de victimes* », s'alarmait il y a quelques jours Ankara dans un courrier adressé au Conseil de sécurité de l'ONU.

À ce que la Turquie dénonce comme des « violations des droits de l'homme » s'ajoute également la violation répétée de son espace aérien. Ces dernières semaines, Ankara n'a cessé de mettre en garde Moscou contre le survol, par ses jets, de son territoire. En vain. « *Les Russes cherchent à tester la Turquie en procédant à de telles violations* », estime le politologue Mehmet Yegin. Selon lui, « *la destruction de l'avion russe de ce mardi est un message clair adressé à Moscou : ne vous avisez pas à recommencer* ».

Mais à l'heure où les conséquences de l'incident demeurent incertaines, certains observateurs dénoncent la politique de « deux poids, deux mesures » d'Ankara dans son sursaut protectionniste à sa frontière. Officiellement, la Turquie parle de « souveraineté territoriale ». Mais l'enchaînement des événements de ces dernières semaines a

également été l'occasion, pour le président Recep Tayyip Erdogan, de replacer à l'ordre du jour son projet de « zone sécurisée » au nord de la Syrie. Cette portion de territoire de 90 kilomètres de long, située entre Mara et Jaraboulos, permettrait, selon Ankara, de repousser l'EI loin de sa frontière, tout en créant une enclave pour les populations déplacées. Or ce projet, que le président Obama considère irréalisable, laisse également craindre qu'il s'agisse avant tout de vouloir porter un coup fatal aux milices kurdes - alliées des Américains - du Parti de l'union démocratique (PYD, branche syrienne du PKK, en guerre contre Ankara), qui ambitionnent de faire la jonction entre les différents cantons kurdes du Nord syrien.

Autre point d'interrogation : l'accent mis ostensiblement sur la minorité turkmène. « *Une tendance à privilégier les Turkmènes face aux autres groupes d'opposition (syriens) circule dans les médias turcs* », observe l'écrivain Akif Emre dans les colonnes du journal *Yeni Safak*. Sa crainte : qu'Ankara ne cherche à manipuler l'opinion publique en jouant la carte ethnique. ■



Recep Tayyip Erdogan, président turc.
UMIT BEKTAS/REUTERS

LES TURKMÈNES SOUS L'AILE D'ANKARA

Les Turkmènes de Syrie, autrefois appelés Turcomans, sont une minorité turcophone installée depuis des siècles dans la région. Le développement du conflit syrien en affrontement régional a conduit au

renforcement de leurs liens ancestraux avec la Turquie. Avec l'appui d'Ankara, les Turkmènes se sont organisés depuis l'été dernier en milices armées. Ces milices combattent l'État islamique, qui tient quelques positions dans le nord-ouest de la Syrie, mais aussi et surtout les milices kurdes de l'YPG, que la Turquie voit avec irritation se tailler un territoire de plus en plus vaste le long

de sa frontière sud. Grâce à un soutien aérien turc et américain, les milices turkmènes se sont emparées ces derniers jours de deux villages au nord d'Alep, Harjaleh et Dalha, auparavant tenus par l'État islamique. L'objectif d'Ankara pourrait être d'établir grâce à ces rebelles turkmènes une « zone de sécurité » sur sa frontière - dont la Turquie réclame depuis longtemps la création -

qui pourrait abriter des victimes des bombardements du régime syrien et de son allié russe, mais aussi empêcher l'extension vers l'ouest du Rojava, le territoire créé par les Kurdes syriens au nord-est de la Syrie.

Tension with Russia built up before Turkey's downing of jet

ANKARA, TURKEY

Irritation with Moscow went beyond campaign in Syria, analysts say

BY KEITH BRADSHER

Turkey and Russia promised on Wednesday not to go to war over the downing of a Russian fighter jet, leaving Turkey's still-nervous NATO allies and just about everyone else wondering why the country decided to risk such a serious confrontation.

The reply from the Turkish government so far has been consistent: Don't say we didn't warn you.

Though minor airspace violations are fairly common and usually tolerated, Turkey had repeatedly called in Russia's ambassador to complain about aircraft intrusions and about bombing raids in Syria near the border. President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Tuesday evening — and a Pentagon spokesman later confirmed — that before a Turkish F-16 shot down the Russian Su-24 jet, Turkish forces had warned the Russian plane 10 times in five minutes to steer away.

"I personally was expecting something like this, because in the past months there have been so many incidents like that," Ismail Demir, Turkey's undersecretary of national defense, said in an interview. "Our engagement rules were very clear, and any sovereign nation has a right to defend its airspace."

While that may be true, analysts said Mr. Erdogan had several more nuanced reasons to allow Turkish pilots to open fire. These include his frustration with Russia over a range of issues even beyond Syria, the Gordian knot of figuring out what to do with Syria itself, and Turkey's strong ethnic ties to the Turkmen



ÖZAN KOSE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Recep Tayyip Erdogan has condemned Russian strikes in ethnic Turkmen areas of Syria.



Turks protested at the Russian Consulate in Istanbul on Tuesday. Russia said on Wednesday that it planned to deploy its most modern air-defense system to its air base outside Latakia, Syria.

villages that Russia has been bombing lately in the area of the crash.

Turkey has been quietly seething ever since Russia began military operations against Syrian rebels two months ago, wrecking Ankara's policy of ousting the government of President Bashar al-Assad. The Turks were forced to downgrade their ambitions from the ouster of Mr. Assad to simply maintaining a seat at the negotiating table when the time comes, said Soner Cagaptay, a Turkish analyst at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, a nonpartisan research group.

"That would require Turkey-backed rebels to be present in Syria, and I think Turkey was alarmed that Russia's bombing of positions held by Turkey-backed rebels in northern Syria was hurting their positions and therefore Turkey's future stakes in Syria," Mr. Cagaptay said. "So this is also an aggressive Turkey posture in the Syrian civil war to prevent the defeat of Turkey-backed rebels so they can hold on to territory and have a say in the future of Syria."

But the fate of the particular rebels the Russians were bombing in the mountainous Bayirbucak area where the plane was shot down is more than just a policy matter to the Turks. Mr. Erdogan particularly emphasized the ethnic tie in a speech Tuesday evening, saying, "We strongly condemn attacks focusing on areas inhabited by Bayirbucak Turkmen — we have our relatives, our kin there."

Turkey's prime minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, said as much on Wednesday while

dismissing Russia's explanation that it was fighting a common enemy, the Islamic State. "No one," he said, "can legitimize attacks on Turkmens in Syria using the pretext of fighting the Islamic State."

The bombing was creating political problems for Mr. Erdogan, Mr. Cagaptay said.

"In the days leading up to the incident, many newspapers, especially the pro-government publications, were running headlines highlighting the suffering of the Turkmens, who are closely related to Anatolian Turks," he said. "I think the government felt that, in terms of domestic politics, it had to do something to ease some of this pressure that had resulted from the Russian bombardment against Turkmens in northern Syria."

Russia's bombing of Turkmen villages was to be the principal issue Turkey raised with Russia's foreign minister, Sergey V. Lavrov, in talks that had been set for Wednesday but were canceled after the shooting down of the plane.

Mr. Erdogan's emphasis on helping the Turkmens has another important political dimension in Turkey. Mr. Erdogan's political party emphasized Turkish ethnic identity and Sunni Muslim faith in the campaign leading up to critical elections on Nov. 1, as it competed with one rival party heavily composed of

Turkey's Kurdish minority and another committed to preserving Turkey's status as a secular society and state.

Mr. Erdogan managed an important victory in that election, preserving his chances of winning legislative approval

to change the Constitution and turn the country's parliamentary system into a presidential one.

Complicating matters further, Turkey and Syria have a longstanding border dispute in exactly the area where the Russian plane, a Sukhoi Su-24, was shot down, and Russia has sometimes voiced support for Syria's claim. It is a narrow strip of territory, the Hatay Province of Turkey, that runs south along the Mediterranean Sea, deep into Syria.

The province is a melting pot of ethnic Turks and Arabs. It is also a religious mélange, with many Muslims but also a large Christian population, as Hatay includes the biblical city of Antioch. And the province has an acrimonious history.

The League of Nations granted Hatay Province to France after World War I as part of France's legal mandate over Syria. Ethnic Turks led the province's secession from Syria and declaration of an independent republic in 1938, and that republic then joined Turkey the next year — much as Texas seceded from Mexico a century earlier, became a republic and soon joined the United States.

Syria has periodically questioned the loss of Hatay over the years.

"If you look at Syrian maps, that province, that chunk of territory, is shown as belonging to Syria," said Altay Atli, an international relations specialist at Bogazici University.

When Hatay seceded from the French mandate of Syria, Hatay's borders did not encompass all of the ethnic Turks in the area; many Turkmens remained just across the border in what is now northernmost Syria. For decades, it was difficult for families divided on either side of the border by the secession of

Hatay to even visit one another. Tensions finally began to ease during the years immediately before the Arab Spring, but they have resumed in the last few years as Turkey has led calls for the removal of Mr. Assad.

The fact that Russia has over the years expressed sympathy for Syria's claim to Hatay makes the province even more delicate for Turkey, and Tuesday's episode with the Russian jet even more important, said James F. Jeffrey, a former American ambassador to Turkey who is now a fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

He questioned whether the Russian jet had strayed into Hatay Province's airspace accidentally or whether Russia might have been deliberately allowing incursions by its jets during military activities in Syria because of Hatay's tangled history.

"Turkey was tired of Russia's intimidating Turkey," he said.

The Russian and Ottoman Empires battled for centuries for control over the area from the Balkans to the Black Sea, and vestiges of that bloody rivalry keep arising. One of those is reflected in Turkey's deep concern about Russia's annexation of Crimea from Ukraine, said Murat Yesiltas, the director of security studies at the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research, a large research group in Ankara.

Turkey now faces across the Black Sea a much wider arc of territory occupied by Russian forces. Many in Turkey are further upset by Russia's treatment of the Crimean Tatars, who speak a Turkic language and have opposed the Russian annexation. Most of the Crimean Tatars' leaders have been

forced into exile by Russia, and this week Tatars have been blocking repair crews from restringing crucial power lines to Crimea that were mysteriously blown up over the weekend, producing a nearly total blackout on the peninsula.

"Turkey wants to protect the territorial integrity of Ukraine," Mr. Yesiltas said. Turkey has already provided economic assistance to Ukraine, but it has been reluctant to confront Moscow more publicly because Russia is one of Turkey's biggest export markets and supplies three-fifths of Turkey's natural gas.

With President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia saying "We will never tolerate such crimes like the one committed today," in reference to the jet's downing, and warning of "serious consequences," the biggest question perhaps is what comes next.

Russia on Wednesday announced plans to deploy its most modern air-defense system, the S-400 mobile anti-aircraft missile, to its air base outside Latakia, Syria. But while most experts — and Mr. Erdogan himself, in remarks on Wednesday — play down concerns of a wider confrontation, many worry that the biggest losers from Tuesday's episode could be the Turkmens.

Several experts warned that Mr. Putin may step up his country's attacks on the Turkmens in retaliation.

"They're the real target," said Mr. Jeffrey, the former American ambassador. "He can just plaster them."

Ceylan Yeginsu contributed reporting from Istanbul.

LE FIGARO

30 novembre 2015

Un célèbre avocat kurde tué dans la rue durant un point presse à Diyarbakir

Ce samedi, Tahir Elçi, 49 ans, venait d'achever une mini-conférence de presse en plein cœur de Diyarbakir avec ces mots : « *Nous ne voulons pas de combats, d'armes à feu, d'opérations dans ce lieu historique.* »

Triste ironie du destin : c'est en prêchant la paix et la reconstruction que le bâtonnier du barreau de cette ville à majorité kurde du sud-est de la Turquie est mort d'une balle dans la nuque. Ce jour-là, il avait sciemment choisi de rassembler les médias au pied d'un vieux minaret afin de les sensibiliser aux dégâts infligés aux monuments locaux lors des combats qui avaient récemment repris entre jeunes rebelles kurdes du PKK et forces spéciales turques. Soudain, des échanges de tir ont éclaté, tuant un policier et blessant au moins deux journalistes. Mortellement touché, Tahir Elçi est également tombé. Tandis que la confusion persiste sur l'origine du tir, la société civile kurde pleure

cette figure emblématique, connue pour son franc-parler. Tahir Elçi était dans le viseur des autorités — et poursuivi en justice — pour avoir récemment déclaré que le PKK n'était, selon lui, « *pas une organisation*

terroriste ». Mais il savait aussi se montrer critique à l'égard des jeunes rebelles kurdes masqués qui, selon lui, perturbaient le quotidien des habitants de Diyarbakir en creusant des tranchées au centre des villes kurdes.

D. M.



Des manifestants brandissent des affiches à l'effigie de l'avocat kurde Tahir Elçi, où l'on peut lire « Ils l'ont tué », lors d'un rassemblement à Istanbul après son assassinat à Diyarbakir (sud-est de la Turquie) le 28 novembre 2015 © OZAN KOSE / AFP

Thousands protest arrest of Turkish journalists

ISTANBUL

President filed charges after report of weapon deliveries to Syrian rebels

BY CEYLAN YEGINSU

Thousands gathered across Istanbul on Friday to protest the arrest of two prominent journalists on charges of espionage over a report alleging that the country's intelligence services had sent arms shipments to Islamist rebels in Syria.

A court in Istanbul on Thursday ordered the arrest of Can Dündar, the editor in chief of the opposition newspaper Cumhuriyet, and of Erdem Gül, the newspaper's Ankara bureau chief, on charges of divulging state secrets and being members of an armed terrorist organization. If found guilty, they would face life imprisonment.

Demonstrations against the arrests were held in several parts of Istanbul, with the main rally held on Friday outside the newspaper's headquarters, where protesters chanted "shoulder to shoulder against fascism" and held up banners that denounced a "black day for the press."

The arrests were the latest blow to press freedom in Turkey, after a wave of crackdowns on opposition news media that gained momentum after the Justice and Development Party regained its parliamentary majority in elections this month. The result allowed President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to further secure his grip on power.

Mr. Erdogan personally filed the criminal complaint against Cumhuriyet in June after he delivered an angry speech accusing the newspaper of engaging in acts of espionage and vowing that the author of the article would "pay a heavy price."

Mr. Dündar and Mr. Gül are also accused of being members of an organization linked to the Muslim cleric Fethullah Gülen, who has been living in Pennsylvania since 1999 and whom Mr. Erdogan accuses of trying to topple the government.

Cumhuriyet published an article in May that was accompanied by video showing the local authorities seizing crates on the back of a truck. The report said the crates contained weapons linked to the National Intelligence Organization, the Turkish security service, that were bound for Islamist rebels in Syria.



Protesters showing copies of the Cumhuriyet newspaper Friday in Istanbul. The newspaper's editor and a bureau chief face possible life sentences for charges including divulging state secrets.

The report emerged at a delicate time, coming a week before the crucial parliamentary election that was seen as a referendum on Mr. Erdogan and his plans to alter the Turkish Constitution to concentrate more powers in an executive presidency.

At the time, Turkey was also facing increased criticism for aiding Islamist militants in Syria — an allegation the government vehemently denies. Turkish officials insisted that the footage published by Cumhuriyet showed humanitarian aid that was bound for the Turkmen population in Syria, which has strong ethnic ties with Turkey.

But recently, Mr. Erdogan has backtracked somewhat on that claim, asking what difference it would make if the

"We are accused of spying and the president has said that our actions are treason. We are not traitors, spies or heroes; we are journalists."

truck had been carrying weapons instead of aid.

Before testifying to prosecutors on Thursday, Mr. Dündar rejected the charges against him, saying that his newspaper and its staff members were merely doing their jobs as journalists:

"We are accused of spying and the president has said that our actions are treason," Mr. Dündar said, speaking

outside the Istanbul court on Thursday. "We are not traitors, spies or heroes; we are journalists."

The court ruling came just weeks after the European Union delivered a scathing report about Turkey's attempts to join the bloc, criticizing Mr. Erdogan for "serious backsliding" on press freedom.

In recent months, opposition news outlets have been shut down; criminal charges have been brought against journalists for insulting the president; and publications have been raided and their content seized.

Mohammed Rasool, a freelance journalist for Vice News who has been accused of assisting a terrorist organization, has been in pretrial detention in a maximum-security prison since August as the Turkish authorities decide whether to press charges against him.

Turkey ranks 149th out of 180 countries on the Reporters Without Borders news media freedom index. On Tuesday, the organization awarded Cumhuriyet its 2015 Press Freedom Prize for courageous journalism.

Before the court hearing on Thursday, the secretary general of Reporters Without Borders, Christophe Deloire, said in a statement, "If these two journalists are imprisoned, it will be additional evidence that the Turkish authorities are ready to use methods worthy of a bygone age in order to suppress independent journalism in Turkey?"

International
New York Times
NOVEMBER 30, 2015

Turkey's woes deepen as Russian ties sour

ESKISEHIR, TURKEY

Moscow's bans on travel and trade add to worries on slowing global exports

BY KEITH BRADSHER

A new high-speed rail line, completed last year, now links Eskisehir with Istanbul to the west and Ankara to the east. A narrow, serpentine river meanders through downtown, spanned by graceful blue bridges at almost every block, drawing tourists. Factories make cakes and cookies, refrigerators, large Ford freight trucks, and aircraft parts.

Yet despite the prosperous appearance, a chill has already settled over Eskisehir's economy, and Turkey's, as exports to China and the Middle East falter. And with Russia halting most tourism to Turkey and threatening to stop food imports from the country after Turkish F-16 fighter jets shot down a Russian combat jet along the Syrian border last Tuesday, the risk of further economic troubles is clear.

With unemployment already surging, "our economy has slowed down," said Yilmaz Buyukersen, the mayor of Eskisehir.

Russia is Turkey's second-largest market for exports, after Germany. Eskisehir itself has a large sugar refinery, using sugar beets from nearby fields as its raw material; the city exports about \$30 million worth of cookies, cakes, crackers and other foods to Russia, according to the local chamber of commerce.

Turkey had been stepping up food exports to Russia in recent months as political frictions between Russia and the West led to a reduction in Russian food imports from the European Union.

Russia was also one of Turkey's biggest sources of tourists until the past year, when the combination of the fall of the ruble and Western sanctions on Russia for its support of Ukrainian insurgents brought a decline that worried economists here even before the Russian jet was shot down. "The trade deficit is out of hand, exports cannot meet the import bill, so tourism revenues are a major item in our balance sheet," said Erinc Yeldan, the dean of the economics faculty at Bilkent University near Ankara.

On Saturday, Moscow issued a decree saying that some imports from Turkey would be banned, without saying which, and that Turkish companies and individuals could face limits on their busi-



Trucks on a road along the Georgian-Russian border. Russia has increased controls of Turkish imports passing through Georgia after a Russian combat jet was shot down by Turkey last week.

ness activities. The decree also bans charter flights to Turkey, ends visa-free travel between Russia and Turkey and tightens oversight of Turkish airlines.

Still, Cengiz Kamil Firat, the deputy director general of general and bilateral economic affairs at Turkey's Foreign Ministry, said the country's economy was in better shape than it might seem.

Russia's decision to discourage tourism, for example, comes at the start of a quiet season for visitors. Turkey is

mainly a summer destination and would not expect another big influx until June. "Things will probably de-escalate well before that," Mr. Firat said.

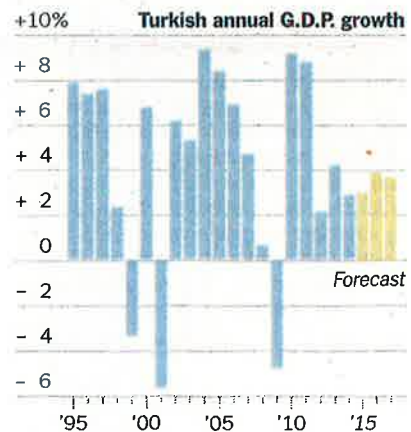
Russia's main export to Turkey, however, is natural gas: It accounts for 60 percent of Turkey's natural gas needs, and Russia has not tried to limit that arrangement, which supplies Moscow with valuable foreign revenues at a time of Western sanctions. President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia has not yet interfered with Turkey's biggest category of exports to his country, manufactured goods.

Economic difficulties in Turkey are nonetheless a potential worry for the West. The European Union and the United States have been seeking more help from Turkey in stemming the number of Europeans who use Turkey to travel to and from areas in Syria and Iraq controlled by the Islamic State.

A further concern lies in the potential political radicalization of Turkey itself if the economy worsens. A survey released by the Pew Research Center on Nov. 17, based on polling last spring, found that 8 percent of Turks had a favorable opinion

Slowing down

Weakening exports were causing Turkey's economic growth to decelerate even before its recent confrontation with Russia over the shooting down of a Russian military jet.



Note: Forecasts predate recent confrontation with Russia.

Source: World Bank

of the Islamic State, although 73 percent had an unfavorable opinion.

A prominent lawyer and human rights activist for Turkey's restive Kurdish minority, Tahir Elci, was shot in the head and killed during a gun battle on Saturday that also claimed the lives of two police officers. Prime Minister Ahmet

Eskisehir's economic troubles, and Turkey's, are broader than coping with migrants or an interruption in tourism.

Davutoglu of Turkey warned that if Mr. Elci had been the target in the mysterious shooting, then the event was an attack on the nation's peace and harmony.

Many in Eskisehir say that an influx of undocumented immigrants from Syria is making the economy worse, even though Eskisehir is 400 miles from the Syrian border. "That's a major problem," Mayor Buyukersen said. "The number of Syrian refugees is increasing day by day, and they are adding to our unemployment problem."

Unemployed workers wait all day in hopes of meeting employers in front of Eskisehir's central mosque, a smaller version of Istanbul's famed Hagia Sophia. Osman Boyaci, 50, who has two children, said that he and his fellow workers would normally expect to earn \$20 for a day's labor on a construction site but were losing work to truckloads of Syrian immigrants who would accept \$6 a day.

Mr. Firat at the Foreign Ministry said that the influx of Syrian refugees had caused resentment in some places but had also made cheap labor available that might help some businesses stay competitive.

Eskisehir's economic difficulties, and Turkey's, are broader than coping with migrants or an interruption in tourism.

Many emerging markets, Turkey among them, are facing difficulties with the slowdown in global trade. Turkey has long depended on exporting manufactured goods to Europe and the Middle East, two regions where demand is weak right now.

That is partly because of geopolitics and partly because Chinese industries with overcapacity at home have been exporting at low prices to Turkey's long-time markets in the Middle East, Europe and Africa.

Wars in Syria and Iraq have devastated demand for Turkish manufacturing while sending more than two million refugees to Turkey.

Iraq has traditionally been Turkey's second-largest export market, after Germany, but years of war have depressed sales there. Syria, another big market, has collapsed into civil war, and shipping goods by truck south through Syria or Iraq to Turkey's longtime markets in the gulf region has become risky and difficult.

"They're not closed," said Savas M. Ozaydemir, a leading Eskisehir industrialist with holdings in roofing tile manufacturing, wiring manufacture and real estate. "There's a lot of smuggling."

People in Syria "have to live," he said. "But of course, it might be 30 percent of what it was."

Sending trucks around Iraq and Syria by way of Iran is much longer and costlier — and Iran has imposed a hefty fee on Turkish trucks, ostensibly because



Workers at Cekicler Marble in Eskisehir, Turkey. Affected by a slowdown in construction in China, the company has closed three of its nine marble quarries and laid off a third of its work force.

they may fill up on subsidized diesel while in Iran. But Turkey's strong support for democracy in Syria and for the removal of President Bashar al-Assad, an Iranian ally there, has not helped.

One of the few democracies in the Middle East, Turkey has also upset the military government in Cairo by criticizing it. That has resulted in an Egyptian decision to bar many of the Turkish trucks that used to arrive on ferries at Port Said, Egypt, to carry cargo to markets on the Arabian peninsula, further constraining Egyptian exports.

Turkey has also depended on exporting construction materials to China, but a real estate downturn there has crippled housing starts and the need for Turkish imports.

China has been the world's largest market by far for marble in recent years, installed on an enormous scale in hotels, apartment buildings, office towers and even swimming pool decks, despite the use of inexpensive finishes that can leave the marble almost as slippery as glass.

Turkey has 40 percent of the world's commercial marble reserves and has been by far the dominant supplier to China, where the domestic marble tends to be heavily cracked and often an unattractive yellow. But the value and tonnage of China's marble imports have plunged nearly a third just in the past year, paralleling a steep drop in housing starts there.

For Cekicler Marble in Eskisehir, that has meant closing three of the company's nine quarries and laying off a third of 450 workers. The company has also designed for sale to China an automated production line that costs \$550,000 and helps turn 25-ton blocks of Turkish marble into slim tiles. But after expecting to sell 10 a year, the company actually sold one last year and none this year.

"We did not want to sell blocks, just finished products," said Yavuz Cekic, the company's marketing director. "But we couldn't compete with other companies that just opened quarries and shipped the blocks."

There have been a few bright spots

for Turkish industry, and they are predicted to keep the country's economic growth rate around 3 percent over the next several years — weaker than the 5 percent growth that Turkey became accustomed to during the past decade, but still stronger than many countries.

One area of strength is construction at home. Fearing further political instability in the Arab world, families across the Middle East have been buying apartments in Turkey. Together with low interest rates, that has touched off a building boom in Ankara and Istanbul. Here in Eskisehir, the new high-speed rail service and Mayor Buyukersen's re-zoning of an old downtown factory district for high-rise apartment towers have produced a series of new building projects.

But for now, many business owners are worried. "I've been in Eskisehir for 15 years," said Sinan Atinar, the owner of a sliced meat sandwich shop on a downtown city square. "I've never seen it as slow as this."

Another strength of the Turkish economy lies in products combining design skills and engineering. One example is the Arzum Okka single-cup Turkish coffee brewer, for which overseas sales already exceed sales in Turkey itself a year after it was introduced.

Arzum, one of Turkey's best-known household appliance manufacturers, did the engineering for the brewers in Turkey and still oversees the marketing from Turkey. But in China, Arzum found lots of local manufacturers that sell effective yet inexpensive water heating elements and other components, said T. Murat Kolbasi, the company's chairman.

So even though the Turkish government has raised taxes in recent years on imports from China of small household appliances, including coffee brewers, Arzum still ended up deciding to manufacture its best-selling Turkish coffee brewers in southeastern China.



25 NOVEMBRE 2015

Journaux russes et turcs analysent la crise entre Moscou et Ankara

25 novembre-2015 www.rfi.fr

Dans la presse turque, avec notre correspondant à Istanbul, Jérôme Bastion

L'aviation turque a abattu mardi 24 novembre un chasseur russe qui selon Ankara avait violé son espace aérien. Moscou dément fermement et dénonce un « coup de poignard dans le dos ». L'un des deux pilotes russes a été tué, l'autre aurait été récupéré par l'armée syrienne, selon l'ambassadeur russe en France. Les relations entre Ankara et Moscou se sont donc brutalement crispées mercredi, d'autant que l'OTAN a apporté son soutien à la Turquie, membre de l'Alliance atlantique. En Turquie et en Russie bien sûr, cet incident est analysé par la presse.

Si la presse pro-gouvernementale turque, adopte un ton généralement triomphaliste dans le registre « il ne fallait pas nous chercher », « on leur a bien montré », « ils ont eu ce qu'ils méritaient », le sentiment général est à l'inquiétude pour l'avenir, y compris dans le camp islamiste où le journal Milli Gazete note par exemple que « pas à pas la Turquie s'enfoncé dans l'inconnu ». Dans le camp des analystes critiques de la politique du gouvernement, le sentiment est plus négatif : Hürriyet fait par exemple remarquer que c'est la plus grave crise entre Turquie et Russie, et Cumhuriyet estime que la Turquie est cette fois au seuil de la guerre.

L'acte de guerre le plus grave entre la Russie et l'Otan

« C'est la plus grave faute de toute l'histoire de la diplomatie turque », note ce commentateur, à



Selon l'état-major russe, le Su-24 a été abattu par l'armée turque au dessus du territoire syrien sans sommation, tandis qu'Ankara affirme que l'avion russe survolait son territoire et avait été averti « dix fois en l'espace de cinq minutes ».
REUTERS/Reuters TV/Haberturk TVATTENTION EDITORS

qui il n'a pas échappé que s'attaquer à la Russie n'est peut-être pas à la portée de son pays, et que l'on risque d'en revenir à la confrontation ouverte de la fin du XIXe et du début du XXe siècles. Et puis surtout plusieurs stratégies prévoient ou redoutent une probable intensification des actions de la Russie contre les groupes alliés d'Ankara, les Turkmènes en premier lieu bien sûr en guise de rétorsion, et un soutien plus appuyé à ceux qu'Ankara considère comme ses ennemis, à savoir les Kurdes. Avec au final une Turquie de plus en plus isolée dans ce conflit comme sur le plan international, car l'Histoire retiendra qu'Ankara a signé hier l'acte de guerre le plus grave entre la Russie et l'OTAN depuis la création de l'Alliance atlantique en 1949.

Dans la presse russe avec notre correspondante à Moscou, Muriel Pomponne

La tonalité n'est pas à l'escalade, y compris sur les télévisions, qui reprennent surtout les réactions internationales favorables à la Russie. Dans la presse, le journal officiel Rossiskaia Gazeta souligne que si la Russie avait voulu, elle aurait pu anéantir les radars turcs. Mais la Russie a

fait confiance à la Turquie. Le quotidien Vedomosti estime que l'incident vient redessiner les lignes rouges entre Russie et Occident, entre sunnites et chiites, qui rendent difficile la création d'une grande coalition anti terroriste, alors que pendant quelques jours, on a pu y croire.

Le journal économique Kommersant souligne qu'il s'agit des premières pertes russes officielles, depuis le début des frappes, et aussi du premier conflit sérieux entre la Russie et l'Otan depuis la fin de l'Union soviétique. La commission des Affaires technico-militaires a demandé aux ministères concernés de lui transmettre les dossiers en cours ; plusieurs secteurs de la coopération russo turc pourraient bien pâtir de cet événement. « 44 milliards de dollars menacés », titre pour sa part le journal RBK qui estime qu'il en est fini du projet de gazoduc Turkish Stream, fini également le projet de vente d'une centrale nucléaire à la Turquie. Le tourisme va également être sérieusement touché. Le ministère des Affaires étrangères déconseille désormais la destination Turquie. ●



29 novembre 2015

Avion russe abattu: Poutine accuse la Turquie de protéger le trafic de pétrole de Daesh

20minutes.fr / 29 nov. 2015

LES RELATIONS entre Moscou et Ankara sont glaciales depuis qu'un bombardier russe a été abattu le 24 novembre...

Les relations entre Moscou et Ankara ne vont pas aller en s'améliorant. Le président russe Vladimir Poutine a estimé ce lundi que la Turquie avait décidé d'abattre un bombardier russe

pour protéger le trafic de pétrole de l'organisation terroriste Etat islamique.

« Nous avons toutes les raisons de penser que la décision d'abattre notre avion a été dictée par la volonté de protéger ces chemins d'acheminement de pétrole vers le territoire turc », a déclaré Vladimir Poutine lors d'une conférence de presse, en marge de la COP21 au Bourget.

Poutine a refusé de rencon-

trer Erdogan au Bourget

Le président russe a refusé de rencontrer son homologue turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan en marge de cette conférence, malgré l'insistance du président turc.

Le 24 novembre dernier, un avion russe a été abattu par l'armée turque à la frontière turco-syrienne. Ankara affirme qu'il était entré dans son espace aérien et qu'il avait été averti « dix fois en cinq minutes » avant que



l'armée n'ouvre le feu. La Russie assure de son côté que son appareil survolait le territoire syrien et qu'il n'a jamais été mis en garde avant d'être touché. ■

Des soldats américains en Syrie pour aider les Kurdes contre l'EI

Leur mission consiste à « planifier » des offensives contre Jarablus et Raqa, des villes du nord syrien aux mains du groupe de l'EI

Rouba EL HUSSEINI
AFP / 26 novembre 2015
<http://www.lorientlejour.com>

Des soldats des forces spéciales américaines sont arrivés à Kobané en Syrie pour entraîner et assister les combattants kurdes luttant contre le groupe État islamique (EI), le premier déploiement officiel du genre dans ce pays en guerre. Une source des unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG), principale milice kurde syrienne, un activiste à Kobané, Mustapha Abdi, et l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'homme (OSDH) ont annoncé jeudi l'arrivée de quelques dizaines de militaires qui, selon Washington, auront un rôle non combattant de conseillers. Leur mission consiste à "planifier" des offensives contre Jarablus et Raqa, des villes du Nord syrien aux mains du groupe djihadiste responsable d'atrocités en Syrie et de spectaculaires attentats meurtriers, a indiqué à l'AFP la source des YPG.

Le directeur de l'OSDH, Rami Abdel Rahmane, a confirmé que les plus de 50 instructeurs américains entraîneraient les Kurdes en vue d'une offensive contre Raqa, capitale de facto de l'EI en Syrie. Selon l'activiste Mustapha Abdi, ils sont entrés à Kobané "ces dernières heures", mais l'OSDH a affirmé qu'ils étaient arrivés "ces deux derniers jours", en deux groupes, depuis la Turquie et le Kurdistan irakien. Une trentaine d'entre eux sont "actuellement à Kobané (nord) et les autres dans la province de Hassaké", plus à l'est,



Des militaires américains sont arrivés dans la ville de Kobané, dans le nord de la Syrie, pour entraîner et assister des combattants kurdes dans leur lutte contre l'EI. Photo d'archives AFP/PATRICK BAZ.

selon l'OSDH. "Ils doivent se regrouper à Kobané pour entraîner les Forces démocratiques de Syrie (FDS) composées de factions arabes et kurdes et de chrétiens syriaques.

"ISOLER" RAQA

Fin octobre, le président américain Barack Obama avait donné son feu vert au déploiement en Syrie d'au maximum 50 soldats des forces spéciales dans un rôle de conseiller, le premier déploiement du genre depuis le début de l'effort de guerre international contre l'EI il y a plus d'un an. Leur rôle est "d'organiser" les forces locales anti-EI, selon Brett McGurk, envoyé spécial de M. Obama pour la coalition anti-EI. Il s'agit à terme "d'isoler" Raqa. Selon lui, le but de la coalition est "d'étouffer, d'étrangler le cœur" de l'EI en Syrie et en Irak par des offensives coordonnées au sol. Outre une

offensive vers Raqa, il s'agit aussi de couper tout accès de l'EI à la frontière syrienne, de couper l'axe Raqa-Mossoul (Irak) et de reprendre Ramadi en Irak.

En mai, les États-Unis avaient officiellement annoncé leur première opération commando au sol contre l'EI en Syrie, au cours de laquelle leurs forces spéciales avaient tué des dizaines de djihadistes, dont un haut responsable, à Al-Omar (centre). En Irak voisin, des centaines de conseillers américains assistent depuis plusieurs mois les troupes irakiennes face à l'EI et certains d'entre eux ont aidé début novembre les combattants kurdes à prendre la ville de Sinjar (nord) aux djihadistes, coupant ainsi une voie de communication importante pour l'EI entre l'Irak et la Syrie.

COALITION ÉLARGIE

Après les attentats de Paris (130

morts le 13 novembre) et contre un avion de ligne russe qui s'est écrasé en Égypte (224 morts le 31 octobre), revendiqués par l'EI, Raqa est devenue la principale cible des raids aériens russes et français. La France et la Russie ont établi une coopération inédite contre l'EI et le président français François Hollande cherche maintenant à établir une coalition plus large pour tenter de détruire ce groupe. Mais les efforts français risquent d'être perturbés par la crise entre Ankara et Moscou, née du fait que l'armée turque a abattu mardi un avion de combat russe qui s'est écrasé en Syrie. Jeudi, l'armée russe a annoncé avoir "détruit" des groupes rebelles qui se trouvaient dans la zone du crash dans le Nord-Ouest syrien, peu après une opération qui a permis le sauvetage d'un des deux pilotes. L'autre pilote a été tué depuis le sol par les rebelles.

L'Allemagne a proposé à la France de déployer une frégate ainsi que des avions de reconnaissance et de ravitaillement pour participer à la lutte contre les djihadistes. Et le Premier ministre britannique a appelé le Parlement à soutenir des frappes britanniques contre l'EI en Syrie. "C'est à Raqa que certaines des principales menaces contre ce pays sont planifiées et orchestrées", a mis en garde David Cameron, affirmant que sept attentats déjoués par les services britanniques ces 12 derniers mois étaient "liés ou inspirés" par l'EI.



Irak: six morts dans un attentat suicide

Kirkouk (Irak), 28 novembre 2015 (AFP)

SIX PERSONNES ont été tuées samedi lors d'un attentat suicide dans la ville irakienne de Touz Khourmatou (nord-est), théâtre d'affrontements mortels entre des forces kurdes et des chiites irakiens ce mois-ci, ont rapporté des responsables.

Le kamikaze a fait exploser un véhicule piégé au niveau d'un check-point, blessant également 16 personnes selon Challal Abdoul Baban, le responsable de la région, et un officier de police.

L'attaque n'a pas été revendiquée dans l'immédiat, mais les attentats suicide

sont une méthode fréquemment employée par les extrémistes sunnites en Irak, notamment par le groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI) qui a pris le contrôle de larges pans de territoire l'an dernier.

Cette attaque survient après des affrontements meurtriers en début de mois entre des chiites irakiens et des membres des forces kurdes à Touz Khourmatou, qui avaient commencé comme une altercation avant de dégénérer.

Ces violences illustrent les profondes divisions qui séparent les groupes de combattants opposés à l'EI en Irak, entravant notamment les efforts de lutte contre les jihadistes. ●

AFP

Syrie: Islamistes et Kurdes s'affrontent dans le nord du pays

Beyrouth, 30 novembre 2015 (AFP)

AU MOINS 23 COMBATTANTS ont péri en Syrie dans des affrontements entre groupes islamistes et une alliance arabo-kurde appuyée par les Américains, a affirmé lundi l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH).

Selon l'ONG, 15 combattants du Front Al-Nosra, branche syrienne d'Al-Qaïda, ont été tués dimanche dans des affrontements qui ont débuté la semaine dernière dans le nord d'Alep, ancienne capitale économique de Syrie.

Les combats ont également fait au moins huit morts du côté des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), une coalition formée principalement par les Unités de protection du peuple kurde (YPG) et des combattants arabes de l'Armée de la Révolution (Jaich al-Thouwar).

Le journaliste kurde Arin Shekhmos a affirmé à l'AFP que les combats ont commencé il y a quatre jours quand le Front Al-Nosra et ses alliés ont attaqué une position de l'Armée de la Révolution.

Des accrochages sporadiques avec les FDS ont eu lieu près de la localité frontalière de Azaz dans le nord de la province d'Alep, suivis par des tirs de roquettes d'Al-Nosra et d'islamistes contre un quartier kurde dans la ville d'Alep. Cette minorité représente 10% de la population de cette agglomération.

En outre, selon l'OSDH, le Front Al-Nosra a décapité dimanche deux hommes accusés de travailler avec l'Armée de la Révolution.

En toile de fond de ces combats figure l'opposition entre la Turquie voisine et les forces kurdes. Ces dernières accusent Ankara de soutenir mil-

itairement et financièrement les islamistes. De son côté, la Turquie a averti à plusieurs reprises qu'elle ne permettra pas l'établissement d'une région kurde autonome à sa frontière.

Il existe par ailleurs une tension récurrente entre les forces kurdes et les éléments les plus radicaux de la rébellion syrienne. La minorité kurde n'a jamais rejoint la rébellion contre Bachar al-Assad bien qu'elle fut opprimée par ce dernier.

Elle s'est fixée comme objectif de constituer sa propre zone autonome et n'a pas permis aux forces rebelles de mener des opérations sur son "territoire" après le retrait des forces du régime en 2012.

Les YPG, la plus importante force armée kurde en Syrie, a cependant joué un rôle de premier plan dans la lutte contre les jihadistes du groupe Etat islamique (EI) dans le nord de la Syrie.

Cette milice kurde a annoncé récemment la création des FDS, une alliance avec des groupes arabes regroupant des chrétiens et tribus arabes sunnites.

Elle a obtenu l'appui de la coalition militaire conduite par les États-Unis et a réussi à reprendre aux jihadistes près de 200 villages dans la province de Hassaké, dans le nord-est de la Syrie. ●



Cérémonie inédite des juifs kurdes d'Irak pour commémorer un pogrom

AFP

Erbil (Irak), 30 novembre 2015 (AFP)

UNE CÉRÉMONIE COMMÉMORANT un pogrom sanglant contre les juifs d'Irak il y a plus de 70 ans s'est tenue pour la première fois lundi dans la région autonome du Kurdistan irakien (nord), en présence de Kurdes d'origine juive et d'officiels.

A cette occasion, le gouvernement du Kurdistan a officialisé l'arrivée d'un représentant de la communauté juive au sein du ministère des Affaires religieuses dans une région majoritairement musulmane.

La loi sur la protection des minorités, votée en mai, "stipule que même s'il n'y a qu'un fidèle de quelque religion que ce soit, ses droits seront protégés", a déclaré Sherzad Omar Mamsani, le représentant juif au ministère des Affaires religieuses.

Selon lui, la cérémonie organisée lundi à Erbil, la capitale du Kurdistan, pour commémorer le pogrom de Bagdad des 1er et 2 juin 1941, connu sous le nom de "Farhoud", ainsi que les persécutions contre les juifs d'Irak, est la première jamais organisée à ce jour.

Plus de 100 personnes ont été tuées lors du pogrom de Farhoud, lorsque des foules attaquèrent et pillèrent les maisons de la communauté juive de Bagdad. Des dizaines de milliers de juifs irakiens quittèrent ensuite le pays au cours des années qui suivirent par peur des violences.

La communauté comptait 135.000 personnes au début des années 1940, selon le musée de l'Holocauste à Washington.

Selon M. Mamsani, environ 400 familles s'identifiant comme juives vivent encore au Kurdistan irakien. Elles sont toujours officiellement enregistrées comme musulmanes.

Le nombre total de familles "d'origine juive" converties à l'islam serait de plusieurs milliers, a-t-il ajouté.

Zach Huff, un chercheur américain basé en Israël et spécialiste de la question kurde, a émis l'espoir que la commémoration officielle de lundi marque une renaissance de la communauté et de la culture juive au Kurdistan irakien.



Sherzad Omar Mamsani, le représentant juif au ministère régional kurde, regarde les photos affichées lors d'une commémoration d'un pogrom des Juifs d'Irak datant de juin 1941, à Erbil, la capitale de la région autonome kurde du nord de l'Irak, le 30 novembre 2015. (Crédit : AFP / SAFIN HAMED)

"Il y a environ 200.000 Kurdes (juifs) vivant en Israël", a-t-il expliqué à l'AFP, "et ils ont envie de se reconnecter à leurs racines au Kurdistan, même s'ils font partie de la deuxième ou troisième génération (vivant en Israël)", a-t-il souligné.

"Je pense qu'il va y avoir davantage d'échanges commerciaux, de tourisme et de relations entre les Kurdes juifs (d'Israël) et les habitants du Kurdistan", a-t-il ajouté.

Il n'existe pas de synagogue en activité dans cette région autonome mais le représentant juif au ministère des Affaires religieuses a émis l'espoir que les choses changent rapidement. ●

More Yazidi Mass Graves Discovered Near Sinjar by Iraqi Officials



Kurdish peshmerga security forces show what they say is a mass grave of Yazidis killed by the Islamic State on Nov. 15, 2015, in Sinjar, Iraq.

By Lucy Westcott 11/30/2015
<http://europe.newsweek.com>

A number of mass graves containing the remains of members of the Yazidi religion have been found near Sinjar, in northern Iraq, the site of recent airstrikes by a U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State militant group (ISIS).

Iraqi officials announced the discovery last week of a mass grave containing more than 110 bodies, the BBC reported. The grave, found about 6 miles west of Sinjar, was booby-trapped with improvised explosive devices in preparation for the Kurdish liberation of the area, Al Jazeera reported.

On Sunday, Iraqi officials said they found a further three mass graves in Sinjar, which contained between 80 and 100 bodies between them. Iraqi officials have found at least

seven Yazidi mass graves so far. Two weeks ago, another mass grave was found containing the bodies of between 40 and 80 Yazidi women; it was believed ISIS fighters deemed the women too old to be sold as sex slaves or raped.

ISIS took control of Sinjar in August 2014 and conducted a massacre of Yazidis. ISIS killed Yazidi men and captured hundreds of Yazidi women and girls and sold them into sex slavery. Yazidis who remained fled to the top of Mount Sinjar and were forced to convert to Islam or be killed. A U.S.-led coalition began airstrikes against ISIS in the area shortly thereafter.

The United Nations said ISIS “may have committed genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity” in its attacks against Yazidis and other religious and ethnic minorities.

Earlier this month, Kurdish peshmerga forces, with the backing of U.S. airstrikes, drove ISIS out of Sinjar. ■

Turkey, Russia No Longer BFFs; Sanction Imposed

Kenneth Rapoza , Nov 30, 2015
www.forbes.com

Welp, there goes the Turkish Stream pipeline, Gazprom . The Russian government has sanctioned Turkey over the downing of a Sukhoi SU-24 fighter jet that briefly crossed into Turkish airspace last week. The plane was gunned down. The pilot was killed.

The Russian government released a note this weekend that demanded commercial airlines suspend all flights between the two countries, effective Jan. 1. The note also asked Russian travel agents to refrain from selling tour packages to Turkey, one of the destinations of choice for Russians looking to escape the cold. There is also a ban on Russian businesses hiring any new Turkish nationals and import restrictions on certain Turkish goods.

The Kremlin announcement came just hours after Turkey’s leader Recep Erdogan said he wished the incident had never happened. Two Russian fighter jets were close to the

border and warned to vacate. One did. The other was in Turkish airspace for 17 seconds before being fired upon, the Turkish ambassador to the United Nations said in a note last week to the Security Council.

Erdogan said he wanted to meet with Putin in Paris during the U.N. climate summit on Monday.

“Both countries cannot afford to give up on each other,” Erdogan said.

Turkey has always been a reliable ally for Russia, and a reliable bridge between Moscow and Brussels. But Russia’s recent bombing campaign of the Islamic State in Syria may have ruffled some feathers. In the world of religious sects, Islam takes the cake for violence against their own. Turkey is no fan of the Kurds, the country’s largest minority group. The Kurds are no fan of the Islamic State. Many Kurds are not Muslim and are often the targets of violence in the so-called “caliphate” state they’ve carved out for themselves in parts of Iraq and Syria. These allegiances may irk some, off the



A protester sets fire to a poster depicting Russian President Vladimir Putin and reading ‘Putin, killer!’ during a demonstration against Russia on November 27, 2015, in the Fatih district in Istanbul. (Photo by Cagdas Erdogan/AFP/Getty Images)

record. Russia is bombing ISIS, but ISIS are enemies of the Kurds, who are fighting them in Iraq. For this reason, Putin called Turkey supporters of terrorism when his Air Force lost a jet over Syria last week. ●

Russia v Turkey

Over the borderline

Turkey shoots down a Russian jet, and Syria grows yet more complicated

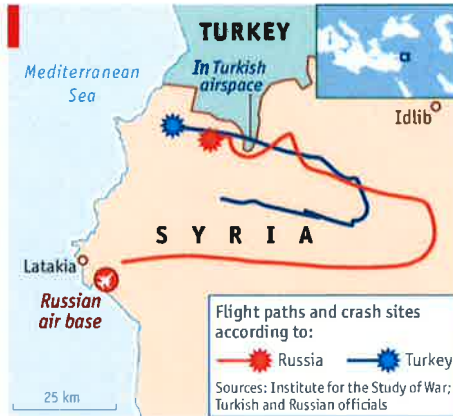
Nov 28th 2015

<http://www.economist.com>

WHEN Russia began bombing in Syria in September, it hoped the mission would be short and telegenic. It is quickly getting longer and uglier. Last month Islamic State (IS) affiliates downed a Russian airliner over Egypt. Then, on November 24th, Turkish jets shot down a Russian fighter-bomber near the Syrian border, the first hostilities between Russia and a NATO member since the end of the cold war.

Turkey said the Russian Su-24 had violated its airspace and was warned ten times before Turkish F-16s fired on it. Russia says its aircraft stayed over Syria. One pilot survived, but the other was killed, as was a Russian soldier involved in a rescue mission. A livid Vladimir Putin called the downing a "stab in the back" by "accomplices of terrorists", accusing the Turkish government of protecting IS and allowing its oil trade to flourish across the Turkish border.

For Turkey, the clash follows months of frustration over Russia's intervention. Both countries are fighting IS, but their priorities are often opposed. Turkey wants to overthrow Syria's president, Bashar al-Assad, and to prevent Syrian Kurdish militias from gaining territory. Russia wants to protect Mr Assad, its longtime client, and is friendly with the Kurds. "Turkey's strategy collapsed with Russia's involvement," says Nihat Ali Ozcan of the Economic Policy Research Foundation, a think-tank.



Turkish anger was compounded by Russian air strikes against villages inhabited by Turkomans (Syrians of Turkic origin), which, Russia says, harbour Islamist terrorists. Turkey's foreign ministry summoned Russia's ambassador last week, and raised the issue with the UN Security Council. An estimated 1,500 Turkomans have fled Syria for Turkey. The Russian fighter-bomber was operating in a Turkoman region, but the decision to shoot it down was ultimately driven by border-security concerns, not sympathy for the Turkomans, according to Mehmet Yegin, a Turkish security expert.

In public, Turkey's NATO allies backed it. In private, many wondered whether Turkey could have been less provocative. Western leaders, including Barack Obama, sought to defuse tensions. On November 25th Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said his country had "no intention of escalating this incident".

Mr Putin's anger aside, Russia has little interest in escalation either. "We're not planning to fight with Turkey," said the foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov. But Russia may strike back asymmetrically, says Fyodor Lukyanov, chairman of Russia's Council on Foreign and Defence Policy, a think-tank. For example, joint energy projects, including the proposed Turkish Stream pipeline, could be put on hold. Turkey imports 20% of its energy from Russia; it may find those contracts at risk. The number of Russian tourists who visit Turkey, currently 3.5m a year, is likely to decline: Mr Lavrov advised them not to visit because of an alleged risk of terrorism, and Russia's state tourism agency has banned tour operators from offering package trips.

Most troubling are the implications in Syria. François Hollande, France's president, visited Moscow on November 26th to drum up support for an anti-IS alliance (see article). But NATO's solidarity with Turkey has rankled Russia, which could intensify bombing of Syrian rebels with ties to Turkey, or give more support to Kurdish forces. Russia has announced it will arm its air base outside Latakia with its most sophisticated air-defence missile, the S-400. In Mr Erdogan, Mr Putin has encountered a fellow illiberal strongman given to macho posturing. Both are known for letting national pride drive their decisions; neither will back down easily. ■

KRG gas 'enough for needs of Turkey and Europe'

SULAYMANIYAH - November/29/2015
<http://www.hurriyetaidailynews.com>

The natural gas resources of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq are enough to meet the needs of both Turkey and Europe, the head of the KRG's

Parliamentary Committee for Industry and Energy said on Nov. 29.

Gas reserves in Arbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah were estimated to stand at more than 5.7 trillion cubic feet, but will reach up to nearly 8 trillion cubic feet if the disputed areas between the KRG and the central Iraqi government in Baghdad, including Kirkuk, joins forces with the regional government.

KRG Parliamentary Committee for Industry and Energy head Cevdet Circo said Turkey and the KRG held a strategic agreement with regards to the delivery of gas in 2017.

"Kurdish gas will reach Europe via Turkey. The Kurdish region can fill the gap created by Russia's gas cut-off to Europe," Circo said, as reported by Anadolu Agency.

Additionally, Sulaymaniyah Energy Committee head Galip Muhammed said Sulaymaniyah was the richest province in the



region in terms of gas reserves, holding 5 trillion cubic feet of natural gas alone.

"Sulaymaniyah has almost 80 percent of the natural gas reserves of the KRG," he said.

Muhammed also claimed Sulaymaniyah's gas was the best quality in the region, though it has not been evaluated yet. ■

E.U. offers aid to Turkey to help ease migrant flow

BRUSSELS

With Merkel at forefront, plan includes \$3.2 billion and other inducements

BY JAMES KANTER AND ANDREW HIGGINS

Under heavy pressure from Germany to get a grip on Europe's migrant crisis after months of dithering, European Union leaders met in Brussels on Sunday with Turkey's prime minister to complete a deal that Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany hopes will slow the chaotic flood of asylum seekers into the 28-nation bloc.

The meeting, the seventh gathering of European leaders since the spring regarding the highly divisive question of migration, took place days after Turkey shot down a Russian warplane and added a new element of uncertainty to a crisis that has overwhelmed Europe's slow decision-making process.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, according to diplomats, will be promised 3 billion euros, or \$3.2 billion, in European aid and other inducements in exchange for Turkish action to stop migrants, most of them from the Middle East and Afghanistan, from reaching Greece and other countries on Europe's outer fringe. Mr. Davutoglu was standing in for Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, at the Brussels meeting.

Speaking to reporters in Brussels before the meeting, Ms. Merkel said Europe had many reasons to work closely with Turkey but that the essential part of the negotiations was the need to "replace illegal migration with legal migration." Her statement reflected



THERRY CHARLIER/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu of Turkey at the gathering in Brussels on Sunday.

ted a hope that the unruly flow of asylum-seekers — a mix of refugees fleeing war and economic migrants seeking a better life — can be brought under control before it reaches Europe.

Europe wants Turkey's help in identifying genuine refugees, notably Syrians, who would be allowed entry in an orderly fashion, and in halting people fleeing poverty who do not have an obvious right to protection under international law.

Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council, the body representing European leaders, set out Europe's objective in blunt terms: "Our main goal is to stem the flow of migrants to Europe," he said, describing Turkey as a "key partner" on issues including counter-terrorism and the civil war in Syria.

But he said that Europe needed to do more to secure its external borders and it could not "outsource this obligation to any third country," like Turkey. Failing to protect the Continent's outer borders, he warned, would mean that one of Europe's most important achievements, the 26-nation visa-free zone known as Schengen, "will become history."

Later, as the meeting got underway, Mr. Tusk told the summit that 1.5 million migrants had entered the European Union this year.

It is unclear how secure any agreement reached with Turkey would be. Leaders first endorsed a so-called action plan with Turkey more than a month ago, but it was delayed by haggling over details.

The Europeans still have not agreed on how to raise the €3 billion earmarked for Turkey, and putting the agreement into effect will ultimately depend on the Turkish president, Mr. Erdogan.

There were warnings that the deal might not diminish the flow of migrants any time soon.

Gerald Knaus, chairman of the European Stability Initiative, a research organization in Berlin, said that Germany and other countries would need to resettle "sizable numbers" of Syrian refugees from Turkey to relieve the pressure there. Turkey would also need to take back all migrants who reach Greek islands to try to end the use of that migration route, he added. Without that commitment, and others, "we will see more refugees crossing, more drowning, more recriminations between the European Union and Turkey and an even worse relationship two months from now," Mr. Knaus said.

Europe's negotiations with Turkey have been dogged by concerns among human rights activists and some European politicians that the country has taken an authoritarian turn under Mr. Erdogan and that it regularly violates rights of his critics, journalists and members of the Kurdish minority.

"We have seen a systematic regress of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms in Turkey," Marietje Schaake, a Dutch member of the European Parlia-

ment, said in a statement on Saturday. "It must be crystal clear that cooperation requires respect for basic rights."

Yet in a series of major concessions, the European Union was offering cash to Turkey to improve the conditions for more than two million Syrians who have taken refuge in the country, in return for help in preventing asylum-seekers from leaving Turkey.

Ms. Merkel on Sunday defended the outreach to Turkey, noting that, despite sheltering so many refugees, it "had received little international support for that and therefore rightly expects that the European Union and the member states attempt to lighten Turkey's burden."

Europe was also offering Turkey the chance to resume regular summit meetings, which would be held twice a year, according to a draft copy of the final statement. In addition, Turkey looked set to win a promise to speed up negotiations on visa-free travel for its citizens to the European Union, as well as a resumption of formal negotiations on full membership in the bloc.

In return, Turkey and the Europeans would "with immediate effect, step up their active cooperation on migrants who are not in need of international protection, preventing travel to Turkey and the E.U.," the draft statement said.

Before the summit meeting, a group of countries including Germany discussed expanding the number of refugees who could be resettled from camps outside the bloc to give more migrants a legal path to the Continent. Such an offer could sweeten the deal for Turkey, but any agreement among European countries on expanding resettlement would most likely require further talks in the coming weeks.

Talks on closer relations between Europe and Turkey have frequently stalled in the past. Formal negotiations on Turkish membership in the bloc started a decade ago, but there has been resistance from France and Germany, as well as vehement opposition from Cyprus, a member of the union that has been divided since Turkey invaded the north of the island in 1974.

Europe, however, needs some form of agreement. Its efforts to control the number of people arriving at the union's external borders have been largely ineffective, and hardly any migrants have been relocated from front-line states like Greece and Italy.

The leaders are meeting in the shadow of the terrorist attacks in France, which have amplified concerns over how migration is affecting cornerstones of the European Union project, including allowing the Schengen agreement.

Laura Fauss contributed reporting from Berlin.

Erdogan more isolated than ever on Syria

The Turkish president is on the defensive after Turkey's shooting down of a Russian warplane; the Syrian war enters a more dangerous phase.

Week in Review / November 29, 2015
<http://www.al-monitor.com>

The most notable consequence so far of Turkey's shooting down a Russian fighter jet Nov. 24 has been a possible opening for a deepening of Russia's cooperation with the US-led coalition against the Islamic State and a free fall in Turkish-Russian relations.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Francois Hollande agreed Nov. 26 to share information about targets in Syria and to strike "only terrorists." Putin added that Russia is "ready to cooperate" with the US-led anti-IS coalition.

Credit for the inspired diplomacy of turning crisis into opportunity goes to Hollande and US President Barack Obama, who apparently have decided that the overall objective of ending the war in Syria should not be held hostage to Turkey's aggressive response to the Russian warplane's alleged violation of Turkish airspace.

In another sign of Turkey's increasing isolation on Syria, The Wall Street Journal's above-the-fold feature on Nov. 28 was a report on how the United States has been pressing Turkey to seal its side of the Turkish-Syrian border. The article quotes a senior Obama administration official as saying "enough is enough. ... This is an international threat, and it's all coming out of Syria and it's coming through Turkish territory."

Metin Gurcan explains the context of the battle that led to the confrontation between Russian and Turkish aircraft. Gurcan writes that Syrian military forces backed by Iranian Shiite militias and Russian air power have been battling Turkmens, the Army of Conquest and Jabhat al-Nusra forces in the predominantly Turkmen Bayirbucak region since Nov. 19, which is only 9 miles from the Turkish border. Syria and its allies are seeking to clean this mountainous and densely forested area from opposition fighters as a precursor of further Syrian regime and Russian moves toward Idlib and Aleppo and "to expel Chechen Caucasian fighters from Bayirbucak" in advance of a possible cease-fire.

Semih Idiz reports that Ankara had protested Russian and Syrian attacks on Syrian Turkmen forces in this region, and quotes Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu as saying Nov. 22, two days before the incident, "We are prepared to take all the necessary diplomatic and other measures in order to protect our brothers there, and wherever they may be, against any threat, and to preserve their human rights."

Idiz explains how Turkey's actions have served to undermine its case in support of its Turkmen allies in Syria: "Once Turkey's national 'feel good' moment of having shown its resolve and military capability by the downing of the Russian jet fighter is over, attention will shift to the diplomatic field to see what political fallout there is in the aftermath of this incident. ... NATO went through the motions of calling for an emergency meeting to discuss the issue, as it has to by its charter, but few expect it to opt for an escalation of the crisis. Given that there is little sympathy in the West for radical Islamic groups following the Paris attack, and that France is acting with Russia to bomb IS targets in Raqqa, it is likely that Moscow will have the upper hand at the Security Council. This means that Turkey is unlikely to gain much sympathy from its allies for the Turkmens, or other radical Sunni groups in the region fighting the Syrian regime. Turkey ultimately remains at odds with its allies over the question of fighting the Assad regime, which US Secretary of State John Kerry has said is not part of their military mission in Syria, where they are to fight IS and to aid groups committed to fight this group. Without the active support of its allies, though, there is little that Turkey can do in the end to respond to Russia and the Assad regime in northern Syria in order to secure the Sunni-dominated political configuration in the region that it wishes to see."

The incident has drawn increased scrutiny to Turkey's approach to Syria's

Kurds, which is in direct contrast with both US policy and Russian initiatives in Syria. Erdogan said Oct. 14 that there is "no difference" between the Patriotic Union Party of Syria (PYD), the leading Syrian Kurdish group there and IS. The US has singled out the People's Protection Units (YPG), the armed wing of the PYD, as among its most effective Syrian partners, so US and Turkish policy will eventually face a day of reckoning, as the differences are to date irreconcilable.

Cengiz Candar writes that "the souring of relations between Ankara and Moscow might also cast a shadow on the cooperation between Turkey and the United States to evict IS from the 98-kilometer (61-mile) border that is still under the control of IS in northern Syria. Turkey enlisted the Americans by opening up its Incirlik Air Base in exchange for a tacit pledge to prevent YPG forces from moving 'west of the Euphrates.' If Russia were to provide overt support to the YPG in its quest to remove IS from the border region, such a political move could further complicate not only US-Russian relations but also the cooperation between Washington and Ankara. After all, Turkey is a member of NATO, but for Washington, under an Obama administration serving its last year in office and increasingly reluctant to engage in any sort of direct military involvement in Syria, it might be difficult to push 'the unruly teenager of the Transatlantic Alliance' to invoke Article 5."

Zulfikar Dogan describes how Erdogan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) has successfully divided and weakened the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) by equating the HDP with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Orhan Cengiz reports that a shadowy Islamist paramilitary force, termed "Allah's lions" (Esedullah), has been operating in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast regions against the PKK. The security situation in these areas is the worst it has been in a decade. "What has emerged so far from news reports, witness accounts and images in the media," Cengiz writes, "suggests that a group within the police — religiously motivated, heavy-handed and hostile to Kurds — is increasingly taking the forefront in security operations in the southeast. The locals tend to believe these policemen share the same mindset as IS fighters and see them as an IS-linked paramilitary force. Regardless of whether this perception has any factual basis or stems from psychological fears only, one thing is certain: It serves no good for Turkey's Kurdish problem, already mired in conflict, tensions and mistrust."

Erdogan has shown signs of seeking to de-escalate the crisis, which has proved a fiasco, despite the nationalist chest thumping, as Pinar Tremblay reports, and the platitudes about self-defense from NATO allies. Erdogan has appealed, so far without success, for a meeting with Putin, perhaps during the climate talks that start in Paris on Nov. 30. Such a meeting, in the company of other world leaders, could yet be another step forward for a political settlement in Syria and a more coordinated military campaign against IS.

SYRIAN WAR ENTERS NEW, MORE DANGEROUS PHASE

Turkey's shooting down of the Russian jet signals that the Syrian war has entered a new, more dangerous phase. No more is Syria just a "proxy war" between Syrian parties backed by Iran on the one side, and Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Turkey on the other. The battlefield now includes American, Russian and Iranian "boots on the ground." Russia has two military bases and provides air cover for all of Syria. Turkey prudently suspended its air operations over Syria. The stakes have far exceeded both Erdogan's personal vendetta against Assad and his desire to thwart the Syrian Kurds. Turkey's reckless action put NATO on the hook for a type of escalation that would have repercussions beyond Syria. The credit goes to Obama, Hollande and Putin for weathering the storm.

The incident draws attention to Turkey's grudging and half-hearted contribution to the war in Syria. If Russian planes were indeed targeting groups affiliated with Jabhat al-Nusra, should Ankara not grant them a few minutes of airspace? The point here is not to get into the back-and-forth about the specifics of whether the Russian and Turkish planes followed appropriate procedures to change the flight path of the Russian plane. The point, more broadly, is that Turkey's actions in the war against IS may be of a lesser nature than those of Russia and Iran, not to mention Assad's forces, who are actually engaging IS and Jabhat al-Nusra fighters. There are also the questions of the flow of foreign fighters and illicit trade along the Turkish-Syrian border, which are the subject of several UN Security Council resolutions.

Another dimension of the new phase of the Syria war regards the role of Syrian troops in the battle against IS and Jabhat al-Nusra. Both Hollande and French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius referred to the use of Syrian government troops to combat IS, although only in the context of a political transition without Assad. The reality is that Syrian troops, backed by Iran, Hezbollah and Russia, are the most effective Arab force battling these terrorist groups, as Arab coalition forces are almost nonexistent, as Bruce Riedel wrote last week, and many of the opposition forces are now

► penetrated by Jabhat al-Nusra, as the United Nations and other organizations have pointed out. It might be a fair question to ask that if Syrian military forces, backed by Iran and Hezbollah, retake Aleppo, will the citizens of Aleppo be clamoring for the return of sectarian forces backed by the Arab Gulf states, or welcome the new forces in hopes of calm?

If the Vienna process gets traction in the coming months, the next frontier will be whether those who have backed opposition and Salafi forces in Syria, especially Saudi Arabia, will keep their focus on whether Assad

should go, as part of a negotiation over a transition, or continue to carry the fight against the so-called Iranian axis to break Iran's relationship with Syria. This trend is worth watching, especially if the Russian-Iranian-Syrian-Hezbollah alignment continues to take the fight to terrorists on the ground, and both Syrians and the international community, eager to end the scourge of IS and other terrorist groups once and for all, grow tired of the sectarian agendas that have caused so much misery for the Syrian people. ♦



November 30, 2015

Turkey gambles on the Turkmens

The Turkmen card Turkey is playing in Syria is likely to backfire and endanger the Turkmens.



Author Fehim Taştekin
November 30, 2015
www.al-monitor.com

The Syrian army's gradual expansion of its operational area with Russian support and the United States' beefing up of the Kurdish-Arab-Syriac coalition (aka the Syrian Democratic Forces) are further restricting Turkey's options in Syria.

Turkey has had problems supporting Salafi jihadists because of international reactions that shifted its calculations about Turkmens since the summer.

In response to the plans by the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) to move westward and expel the Islamic State from Jarablus, Turkey has declared the Euphrates River a red line for the Kurds. Once it is cleared of IS, Turkey is planning to use the Turkmens to control both these areas and the Azez-Aleppo line, which is being considered for a buffer zone. Such plans naturally upped the value of the Turkmen card. Turkey, unable to prevent the Russian bombing against the groups supported by the West and the Gulf, has pushed back with the Turkmens.

But the Russians ignored the Turkish moves and expanded their operations to Turkmen Mountain.

Once it assumes the control of Turkmen Mountain with Russian air support, the Syrian army will score several significant points:

It will be easier for the Syrian army to enter Idlib and Jisr al-Shughur, which are now being controlled by the Army of Conquest, with its key components of Jabhat al-Nusra and Ahrar al-Sham supported by Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Logistics lines to opposition forces in the region will be severed. Smuggling routes from Yayladag-Hatay in Turkey have served as the main supply routes for the opposition at Bayirbucak for the past four years.

The opposition's hope of reaching the Mediterranean will remain a dream.

Attacks on Latakia, where the Russians have deployed, will end when Turkmen Mountain is lost.

Once it takes control of Turkmen Mountain, the Syrian army will point its guns at the protected zone envisaged by Turkey.

Nearby Jabal Akrad (Kurdish Mountain) is as important as Turkmen Mountain. Jabal Akrad is currently controlled by Jabhat al-Nusra, Ahrar al-Sham and Ansar al-Sham, which frequently launch joint operations with the Turkmens.

Although the technical reason for shooting down the Russian plane was an airspace violation, the real reason is the risk of losing the logistical corridor — the area now controlled by the opposition groups — and the increasing possibility of losing control of the entire liberated zone.

Over the past few weeks the Syrian army has recaptured Qatil Maaf, Firinlik, Acisu and Kizildag north of Turkmen Mountain and Gimam, Sawanli, Zuwaik, Deir Khan and Toros to its south. Kizildag changed hands several times. If the regime can capture Kizildag, it will be easy for it to control 17 Turkmen villages in the area.

Turkey attaches strategic importance to dominating this area and is counting on Turkmens to confront IS in rural Aleppo. The Turkmens' capture of Harcele and Delha was the result of this plan.

But many wonder how strong Ankara's Turkmen card is and how effective it will be. A little background may help in understanding the situation:

When the Syrian uprising began in 2011, the Syrian Turkmens began organizing in the civilian and military spheres with Turkey's support. Until then, Turkmens, who generally lived in villages and worked in agriculture,

were not a politicized and organized community. Turkmens in the villages of Homs, Latakia, Damascus, Raqqa, Hama, Idlib and Daraa did not have an urban base, in contrast to the Kurds, who controlled Qamishli. It was the Turkmens who had settled in Turkey and pioneered post-2011 efforts to create a political movement with a diaspora flavor. The first organization that emerged in 2011 was the Syrian Turkmen Movement, which tried to get the Turkmens to take to the streets to protest the regime. Next, 180 Turkmens living in Turkey established the Union of Syria Turkmens. These two organizations united in November 2011 under the Syrian Turkmen Mass (STK) to boost their representation capacity. But they eventually split and the Democratic Turkmen Movement of Syria (SDTH) was set up in March 2012.

The SDTH has been more active in Aleppo, while the STK focuses on Bayirbucak. STK activities are run from offices in Turkish border provinces. Their activities in Latakia are being directed from Yayladag, Raqqa from Akcakale and Aleppo from Gaziantep. Under the strong influence of Turkey, the Syrian National Council allotted 16 seats to Turkmens while the Syrian National Coalition offered them three seats.

In addition to the two main Turkmen groups, some influential Turkmens living in Turkey formed the Syrian Turkmens Platform. The platform working under the tutelage of the Turkish Foreign Ministry pioneered the creation of the Syrian Turkmen Assembly that sought to unify the Turkmens.

On Dec. 15, 2012, the then-speaker of Turkey's parliament, Cemil Cicek, and then-Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu attended the unification meeting in Istanbul. The Turkmen Assembly was officially established in a March 2013 meeting attended by then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Davutoglu. In the second session of the assembly, held in Ankara May 9-10, 2014, a 42-person legislative assembly and 13-person executive council were elected from among some 350 delegates. The Turkish parliament recognized the Turkmen Assembly as the legitimate representative of Turkmens.

As for the military activities of the Turkmens, many armed units were set up after 2012. Turkmen units participated in the Anfal operation on March 21, 2014, by jihadist groups to capture the Armenian towns of Kasab and Samra.

In operations on Aug. 4-19, 2013, Alevi villages were raided and some 200 civilians were killed. IS and Jabhat al-Nusra also joined Turkmens in these attacks. Meanwhile, there was regular rocket fire from Turkmen Mountain toward Latakia.

Turkmens who were suspected of being the "legacy of the Ottomans" when Syria was first created threw themselves into the ring of fire by participating in the armed resistance under the guidance of Turkey.

Apart from some who came to Turkey to study and then to settle down, Turkmens never had strong political ties with Turkey. The Turkish government was more concerned with the Turkmens of Kirkuk and Mosul in Iraq than with the Syrian Turkmens. But after abandoning Iraqi Turkmens to IS, Turkey decided that Syrian Turkmens could be useful and set up close ties with the Turkmens concentrated in the Baba Amr neighborhood of Homs, considered the capital of the revolution.

Should the Syrian army impose its control on the region, Syrian Turkmens will face the danger of being identified as Turkey's "fifth column," with all that label implies. Moreover, Turkey's game plan of placing Turkmens as a barrier to the Kurdish YPG is also planting the seeds of enmity between the Kurds and Turkmens. ♦

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A Alep, les frappes très ciblées de l'aviation russe

Pour les rebelles modérés syriens, Moscou cherche avant tout à empêcher l'émergence d'une alternative à Assad

REPORTAGE

GAZIANTEP (TURQUIE) -
envoyé spécial

Les bombes larguées le matin ont pulvérisé la boulangerie. Celles expédiées le soir ont soufflé les bureaux d'une unité rebelle et les locaux d'une future université. Mardi 17 novembre, en deux raids contre Atareb, une bourgade agricole de la province d'Alep, la chasse russe a résumé ses buts de guerre en Syrie. A ceux qui persistent à tenir tête à son protégé, Bachar Al-Assad, Moscou a rappelé que cette audace se paie au prix fort.

Son intervention militaire, lancée à la fin septembre, au nom de la lutte contre l'organisation Etat islamique (EI), s'apparente toujours plus à une opération punitive, à la mode Assad. Le gouvernorat d'Alep, l'un des hauts lieux de la rébellion, qui s'est libéré presque entièrement dans le courant de l'année 2012 et qui résiste toujours à la reconquête ordonnée par Vladimir Poutine, s'avère logiquement l'une des régions les plus châtées.

Les statistiques de l'Institut syrien pour la justice, une ONG aleppine exilée dans une ruelle commerçante de Gaziantep, dans le sud de la Turquie, sont éloquentes. Cette organisation réputée pour son sérieux, qui compte un vaste réseau d'informateurs, a calculé qu'en octobre, dans le seul gouvernorat d'Alep, les Sukhoï russes ont mené 110 attaques contre des zones d'habitation, soit presque autant que contre des sites militaires (128). Selon l'ONG, 16 usines, 6 hôpitaux, 3 écoles et 3 mosquées ont aussi été pris pour cible. Bilan des morts pendant ce mois : 180 civils et 20 combattants.

Le fournil d'Atareb était le seul de la région ouest d'Alep encore en service. Ses trois lignes de production approvisionnaient la ville et 13 villages des environs, soit environ 150 000 personnes. Elles sont parties en fumée dans le bombardement du 17 novembre avec cent tonnes de farine, stockées dans un



Véhicules en feu à Azaz, au nord-ouest d'Alep, après un bombardement des forces aériennes russes, le 25 novembre. IHH/ANADOLU AGENCY

dépôt mitoyen. «L'endroit avait déjà été touché à deux reprises par des bombardements du régime», raconte Ahmed Obaid, un militant révolutionnaire joint à Atareb par WhatsApp, une application de téléphonie par Internet, très prisée dans les zones «libérées», où les réseaux cellulaires sont souvent coupés. «A chaque fois, les habitants avaient pu réparer les dommages causés. Mais là, on ne peut rien faire. Les tirs russes, c'est une tout autre histoire.»

L'autre site frappé à Atareb était un immeuble désaffecté. Une partie avait été réquisitionnée par le Tajammu Thuwar Atareb («Rassemblement des révolutionnaires d'Atareb»), un petit groupe armé. Cette brigade était censée participer au programme du Pentagone, destiné à former des rebelles syriens à la lutte contre l'EI. Dans le cadre de ce projet qui a tourné au fiasco durant l'été, les combattants du Tajammu Thuwar Atareb avaient hérité d'une petite flotte de pick-up Toyota flambant neufs. Hasard ou calcul, les roquettes russes ont explosé à côté de ces véhicules, dont il ne reste plus qu'un amas de ferraille carbonisée.

Offensive des loyalistes

La déflagration a endommagé

l'ensemble du bâtiment dont la rénovation venait d'être décidée. Le gouvernement de l'opposition syrienne, basé à Gaziantep, avait l'intention d'y aménager une faculté de science et une autre d'agriculture. Cette «université libre» aurait pu accueillir des centaines de jeunes de la région, privés de la possibilité d'étudier à

La disparition de figures de la scène révolutionnaire d'Alep ouvre un espace pour les extrémistes

l'université d'Alep, située dans la partie de la ville toujours sous le contrôle de l'armée régulière.

«Le message envoyé par ces deux raids est limpide, vitupère Hussein Bakri, chargé des collectivités locales au sein du gouvernement de l'opposition, installé à Gaziantep. L'objectif de Moscou est de détruire l'opposition et sa base sociale, de façon à ce que les Syriens n'aient plus le choix qu'entre le régime et Daech [acronyme arabe de l'EI]. Poutine fait le pari que, dans

une situation pareille, nous finirons par nous incliner à nouveau devant Bachar Al-Assad.»

Ce n'est pas le cas au sud d'Alep. Face à l'offensive des forces loyalistes, un patchwork de soldats syriens, de gardiens de la révolution iraniens et de miliciens du Hezbollah, d'Irak et même d'Afghanistan, les insurgés n'ont pas flanché. Ils ont même repris quelques villages à leurs adversaires, éloignant la perspective d'une chute de la partie orientale d'Alep, aux mains de l'opposition depuis juillet 2012. Mais cette résistance, qui se déroule simultanément au nord d'Alep, face aux miliciens de l'EI, bizarrement épargné par les frappes russes, a un coût très élevé. L'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), la branche modérée de l'insurrection, a déjà perdu seize commandants dans ces combats. Des cadres de terrain, souvent charismatiques, comme Sadek Al-Sadek, surnommé le «sniper d'Alep» en raison son habileté au fusil, ou Hussein Aziza, le protecteur de Salaheddin, un quartier d'Alep où il luttait contre l'infiltration salafiste.

La disparition de ces figures de la scène révolutionnaire aleppine, à un moment de très grande tension, ouvre un espace pour les extrémistes. Preuve en est le récent kidnapping par le Front Al-Nosra, la branche syrienne d'Al-Qaïda, d'Abou Majed Karman, un militant du soulèvement anti-Assad, très célèbre à Alep. «L'offensive russe fait le jeu d'Al-Nosra qui se perçoit en guerre contre le monde entier», dit le journaliste Alaa Al-Jaber. Depuis 2011, ce trentenaire affable dirigeait le bureau d'Alep d'une chaîne de télévision syrienne, pro-oppositioñ, Halap Today TV. Pendant quatre ans, il a résisté aux obus, aux roquettes et aux barils de TNT du régime. Mais la semaine dernière, des hommes en armes l'ont battu et jeté deux jours en prison, parce que sa couverture de l'actualité n'était pas assez islamique à leur goût. Le soir même de sa libération, Alaa Al-Jaber jetait des habits dans un sac à dos et allait se réfugier en Turquie. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

La Turquie, bombe à retardement de l'Europe



CHRONIQUE

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En donnant l'ordre à sa chasse, le 24 novembre, quelques jours après la réunion du G20 à Antalya, d'abattre un bombardier russe Sukhoï 24 à la frontière avec la Syrie, Recep Erdogan a fait franchir à la Turquie une nouvelle et dangereuse étape dans sa radicalisation et son isolement. Certes, Vladimir Poutine joue avec le feu en multipliant les vols d'intimidation dans le ciel de la Turquie et de l'Europe. Pour autant, la riposte démesurée d'Ankara ruine tout espoir d'une grande coalition contre l'État islamique et crée un risque d'escalade entre la Russie et l'Otan, dont aucun membre n'a détruit d'avion russe depuis 1953.

Ce grave incident militaire s'inscrit dans la continuité de la dérive nationaliste et religieuse de Recep Erdogan, qui est devenu, depuis le mouvement de révolte de la place Taksim en 2003, le fossoyeur du modèle turc dont il fut le promoteur dans les années 2000. L'expérience de conciliation de l'islam avec le développement économique et la démocratie porté par l'AKP en 2002 a fait long feu.

S'il s'oppose féroce à lui à propos du maintien au pouvoir de Bachar al-Assad, Recep Erdogan s'est coulé dans le renouveau de l'autocratie imaginé par Vladimir Poutine. La majorité absolue obtenue par l'AKP le 1^{er} novembre a lavé l'affront de la perte des élections du 7 juin. Ce renversement de l'opinion turque

résulte de l'incapacité de l'opposition à saisir sa chance en formant un gouvernement, mais surtout de l'organisation méthodique du chaos par Erdogan qui a forcé les Turcs - y compris les Kurdes - à revenir vers l'AKP au nom de la stabilité. Tous les moyens ont été utilisés : corruption massive, raids sur les médias d'opposition, renaissance du conflit avec le PKK, champ libre laissé aux terroristes à Suruç puis à Ankara où s'est déroulé le 10 octobre le pire attentat de l'histoire de la Turquie moderne. En bref, la Turquie vote encore mais elle n'est plus une démocratie.

L'économie turque, pour sa part, est promise à une crise majeure. La croissance a chuté de 9 % en 2010 et 2011 à 2,2 %. L'inflation atteint 8 % et le chômage 9,5 % de la population active. Le déficit courant s'élève à 5 % du PIB et l'État comme les entreprises s'endettent en devises et à court terme. Or la livre s'est effondrée de plus de 20 % depuis le début de l'année 2015 en raison de l'instabilité du pays. Le modèle de développement repose donc sur une bulle de la construction et de l'immobilier financé par la dette extérieure qui est insoutenable et ne peut s'achever que par un krach, à l'image de l'Espagne des années 2000.

La Turquie est ainsi en train de basculer dans le chaos. La relance de la guerre civile avec les Kurdes sera longue à s'éteindre. Le soutien aveugle aux Frères musulmans l'a coupée de toutes les puissances régionales : Égypte, Arabie saoudite, Iran et Israël. Son double jeu vis-à-vis de l'État islamique, dont elle est le principal partenaire pour le trafic de pétrole, d'objets d'art et d'armes ainsi que la base arrière pour le transit des djihadistes étrangers comme des terroristes retournant frapper

l'Europe, la marginalise dans la coalition. Enfin, Erdogan instrumentalise les 2,2 millions de réfugiés syriens pour exercer un chantage sur l'Europe, les poussant massivement à l'exil pour monnayer sa pseudo-aide au prix fort (plus de 3 milliards d'euros).

Les contradictions qui minent la Turquie ne peuvent qu'exploser. Contradiction entre la volonté de croître à tout prix et l'inévitable fuite des capitaux hors d'un pays où l'État de droit n'existe plus. Contradiction entre le désir de stabilité politique et la dynamique de guerre civile portée par l'AKP. Contradiction entre le durcissement d'une autocratie islamiste et la prétention à intégrer l'Union européenne. Contradiction entre l'appartenance à l'Otan et le rôle de base arrière de l'État islamique.

La Turquie joue un rôle décisif pour la stabilité de l'Europe comme du Moyen-Orient et constitue une puissance émergente avec un formidable potentiel lié à sa démographie, à son niveau d'éducation, au dynamisme de ses entrepreneurs, à une économie de production et non pas de consommation ou de redistribution. Recep Erdogan est en passe de ruiner ses atouts et menace de la transformer en une grande Syrie, faisant de son pays non plus un allié mais un risque majeur pour l'Europe et pour l'Otan. Voilà pourquoi l'Europe doit changer radicalement de stratégie à son égard, en suspendant le processus d'adhésion à l'Union, en déployant un contrôle strict de la mer Égée, en refusant de céder au chantage pour négocier un partenariat subordonnant l'accès au grand marché et à l'espace Schengen à un engagement effectif dans la guerre contre l'État islamique et à l'arrêt du trafic de réfugiés.

Migrants: accord entre Bruxelles et Ankara

La Turquie s'engage à endiguer le flux de réfugiés en échange de contreparties politiques et financières.

JEAN-JACQUES MÉVEL [@jjmevel](#)
CORRESPONDANT À BRUXELLES

DIPLOMATIE Les Européens ont donné dimanche un feu vert sans conviction à une aide de 3 milliards d'euros en faveur de la Turquie, qui devra en retour freiner l'arrivée des réfugiés en Grèce. C'est un succès pour les efforts conjugués d'Angela Merkel et de Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Pour les autres, le sommet n'a pas dissipé deux inquiétudes : l'ampleur des concessions faites à Ankara et l'ambition affichée de Berlin de « réinstaller » davantage de Syriens à travers l'UE, grâce à un nouveau système volontaire.

La Turquie, boudée par les Européens depuis des années, a eu son quart d'heure triomphal. « C'est un jour historique pour notre processus d'accession (à l'UE). Nous

allons forger la destinée du continent », a assuré, tout sourire, le premier ministre Ahmet Davutoglu. Ses interlocuteurs insistent sur le respect des « engagements pris », à savoir une décurie mesurable des passages illégaux à travers la mer Égée. À ce stade, « il n'y a lieu ni d'accélérer, ni de ralentir », la procédure d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'UE, prévient François Hollande.

Parallèlement, Angela Merkel fait en même temps monter la pression sur ses partenaires européens. L'Allemagne, submergée par plus de 800 000 arrivées depuis le début de l'année, veut « remplacer l'immigration illégale par une immigration légale », en provenance directe de Turquie. Des scénarios cités dans la presse allemande évoquent de 300 000 à 500 000 de ces « réinstallations » au-delà

des 160 000 agrées en septembre. En marge du sommet, la chancelière a discuté son projet - sans avancer de chiffres - avec le Benelux, l'Autriche, la Suède, la Finlande, mais pas la France. Jean-Claude Juncker juge « indispensable » de soulager la Turquie d'une partie de son fardeau.

« Une démission collective »

L'application du « plan d'action » noué avec la Turquie dépend maintenant de Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Dimanche, son premier ministre était à la manœuvre et il n'a fourni ni calendrier, ni chiffres, ni garantie. Les Européens attendent du concret dans les jours à venir : une offensive contre les passeurs qui prospèrent sur la côte turque. Ils tablent ensuite sur une chute des arrivées en Grèce, la Turquie

s'étant engagée à « fixer » tout ou partie des 2 millions de Syriens déjà réfugiés chez elle. Ceux-là devraient obtenir permis travail et scolarisation de leurs enfants.

C'est le but affiché de l'aide de 3 milliards, à titre initial. « De l'argent destiné aux réfugiés et non pas à la Turquie, assure au Figaro Federica Mogherini, chef de la diplomatie de l'UE. Comme au Liban ou en Jordanie, il faut soutenir ceux qui aident. »

La Turquie a négocié dur face à une Europe en position de faiblesse, déstabilisée par l'exode des réfugiés, préoccupée par

l'avenir de l'espace Schengen et pour finir inquiète d'infiltrations terroristes. Certains s'inquiètent de trop de concessions, pour un bénéfice incertain. « S'en remettre ainsi à la Turquie est une démission collective, dit en privé un dirigeant européen. Nous sommes piégés, certes. Mais il est naïf de croire qu'il suffira de payer pour retrouver le contrôle de la frontière » externe de l'UE.

Le sommet a raboté deux concessions politiques majeures, arrachées dans la dernière ligne droite par le président Erdogan. D'abord la promesse d'une

exemption de visa UE pour les 75 millions de Turcs, dès octobre 2016 : Ankara devra d'abord réadmettre systématiquement les clandestins qui continueraient de passer. Ensuite l'ouverture de nouveaux « chapitres » dans les négociations d'adhésion de la Turquie à l'UE : après deux ans d'immobilisme, les Vingt-Huit s'engagent à en ouvrir un en décembre, mais le contrat signé s'arrête-là, même si la Commission Juncker doit travailler à d'autres avancées. ■

Le Monde

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INTERNATIONAL | CHRONIQUE

PAR CHRISTOPHE AYAD

L'Europe et le piège turc

L'Union européenne doit aujourd'hui faire face à deux problèmes majeurs : la menace d'infiltrations et d'attaques djihadistes, comme Paris en a vécu le 13 novembre, et la gestion, ainsi que l'intégration, d'un afflux sans précédent de réfugiés essentiellement venus d'un Moyen-Orient déchiré par les conflits.

Un pays se trouve au croisement de ces deux crises, qui se mêlent l'une l'autre et nourrissent à terme les courants populistes qui militent pour un démantèlement du fragile et complexe édifice européen : il s'agit de la Turquie, cette puissance qui n'est ni européenne ni asiatique (ou les deux à la fois), ni une dictature ni une démocratie, ni vraiment laïque ni complètement islamiste, ni riche ni en développement, et dont le principal carburant du moment est un nationalisme déchaîné.

Depuis les attentats de Paris, nombre d'éditorialistes ont glosé sur le rôle trouble joué par l'Arabie saoudite dans la diffusion d'une idéologie sectaire et intolérante qui fait le lit du salafisme djihadiste, dont se revendique l'organisation Etat islamique (EI). Rien de tout cela n'est faux, mais réformer l'Arabie saoudite – ce qu'elle a d'ailleurs entrepris de faire par elle-même, non sans errements – prendra des décennies. En ces temps d'urgence, si les Européens veulent reprendre leur destin en main, il va leur falloir, avant tout, décider d'une ligne de conduite sur le cas turc. L'UE tient d'ailleurs dimanche 29 novembre un sommet extraordinaire avec Ankara, à Bruxelles.

**TANT QUE LA TURQUIE
NE COOPÉRERA PAS,
RIEN NE SERA
POSSIBLE EN SYRIE :
NI LA LUTTE CONTRE
L'EI NI LA GESTION
DES RÉFUGIÉS**

Enchaînement fatal

Or, tant que la Turquie ne coopérera pas résolument, rien ne sera possible en Syrie : ni la lutte contre l'EI, ni une gestion raisonnée de la question des réfugiés. De par sa position géographique et ses 900 kilomètres de frontières partagés avec la Syrie, la Turquie occupe une position stratégique dans la guerre civile syrienne. Elle en a tout à la fois subi les retombées – en accueillant 1,7 million de réfugiés et en voyant émerger une entité kurde qui se moque des frontières – et attisé les braises, en laissant passer armes, pétrole et combattants (dont les djihadistes) de part et d'autre de la frontière.

Quelques mois après le début du soulèvement syrien, au printemps 2011, le dirigeant turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan avait pris fait et cause contre son ancien ami et protégé syrien Bachar Al-Assad, avec lequel il entretenait une relation d'amitié personnelle. Ce retournement trouve sa source dans un mélange de dépit violent – Bachar s'est tourné vers l'Iran et a ignoré les conseils de réforme prodigués par Erdogan – et de calcul politique : la chute inéluctable du dirigeant alaouite ouvrirait la porte à

un pouvoir sunnite islamiste, dont Erdogan se voyait déjà comme le « grand frère », tout comme dans le reste du monde arabe promis au règne radieux des Frères musulmans.

Ce n'est pas par amour de la démocratie qu'Erdogan a soutenu les insurgés syriens, mais plutôt par solidarité confessionnelle et par volonté d'hégémonie néo-ottomane sur le Proche-Orient. A-t-on oublié que, au moment de la

**ERDOGAN UTILISE
LES MOUVEMENTS
DJIHADISTES
ET LES FORCES
ISLAMISTES À SON
PROFIT EN SYRIE**

révolution libyenne, il avait joué la carte Kadhafi, allant jusqu'à transmettre des informations sur les frappes à venir de l'OTAN à son allié libyen à travers les officiers turcs postés au cœur des structures de l'Alliance ?

Le pari d'Erdogan d'une chute rapide du régime syrien a échoué, tout comme celui de devenir le sultan d'un Proche-Orient dirigé par les Frères musulmans, après le coup d'Etat de l'armée en Egypte et la chute d'Ennahdha en Tunisie. Pour se venger du retournement turc, Bachar Al-Assad a laissé la bride sur le cou aux miliciens du PYD, le parti kurde syrien jumeau du PKK turc, ennemi juré d'Ankara. L'enchaînement fatal s'est poursuivi. Erdogan a réagi en mettant fin au processus de paix avec le PKK et en se lançant dans une répression intérieure qui rappelle les pires années de la guerre civile. A la faveur de campagnes électorales débridées, le président Erdogan a déchaîné les démons d'un ultranationalisme turc.

Dans cette guerre par procuration, Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'a pas craint d'utiliser les mouvements djihadistes et les forces islamistes

à son profit en Syrie. Faut-il en faire, comme le clame Vladimir Poutine depuis que l'un de ses avions a été abattu au-dessus de la frontière syrienne par des chasseurs turcs, un « complice des terroristes » ? C'est aller vite en besogne, mais le président russe a su, comme à son habitude, appuyer là où cela fait mal, afin de rallier les Européens, et en particulier la France, à ses vues, en Syrie mais aussi en Crimée, où un conflit larvé l'oppose à la Turquie.

En fait, la Turquie vit, elle aussi, sous la menace de l'EI, mais elle évite d'affronter le mouvement djihadiste trop ouvertement alors que trois attentats suicides – ayant visé essentiellement le public kurde – ont déjà ensanglanté le pays ces six derniers mois.

Afin de convaincre la Turquie de lutter efficacement contre l'EI et de retenir les réfugiés syriens, pour l'instant complaisamment envoyés vers le voisin (et ennemi) grec, les Européens vont devoir déterminer quel prix ils sont prêts à payer. Les 3 milliards de dollars réclamés par M. Erdogan sur deux ans ne suffiront assurément pas. Le véritable prix correspond aux buts de guerre turcs en Syrie : la garantie de contenir, au besoin par la force, l'expansion kurde et/ou la tête de Bachar Al-Assad. C'est beaucoup, trop, et, surtout, c'est aux antipodes du virage annoncé par François Hollande après les attentats du 13 novembre.

Le président français a choisi de donner la priorité à la lutte contre l'EI sur le départ de Bachar, et son ministre de la défense a la tentation de s'appuyer sur les Kurdes de Syrie pour combattre les djihadistes au sol. Leurs partenaires européens se sentent, pour le moment, plus menacés par la crise des réfugiés que par les attentats, même s'ils se fourvoient en se croyant épargnés. Vladimir Poutine et Recep Tayyip Erdogan, que tout oppose en ce moment, doivent opposer de concert le spectacle offert par les Européens, démunis, désunis et pris au piège. ■

20 reported killed in clashes between U.S.-backed Kurd rebels, rival insurgents in Aleppo

By **BASSEM MROUE** / (AP)
Nov. 30, 2015 japantimes.co.jp

BEIRUT — Fighting between U.S.-backed Syrian rebels and rival militants has killed more than 20 people in northern Syria over the past two days, opposition activists said on Monday.

The fighting between the so-called Democratic Forces of Syria, which is led by Kurds, and Islamic militants has flared in recent days in the northern province of Aleppo. Most of the fighting has taken place in the border area, where Turkey is examining the possibility of creating a safe zone to protect civilians and moderate rebels fighting Syrian President Bashar Assad's forces.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said the fighting is concentrated near the town of Azaz, close to the border with Turkey. Azaz has been repeatedly hit by Russian airstrikes in recent days.

The Observatory, which tracks Syria's civil war based on reports from activists inside the country, said 15 militants and eight DFS fighters have been killed since Sunday.

Bahaa al-Halaby, an opposition activist based in Aleppo, said on Monday that 20 civilians were killed in the fighting but did not have figures for fighters killed. He said the fighting began when DFS launched an offensive and captured several villages before being pushed back by militants.

"I think the aim of this attack is to thwart attempts to set up a safe zone," al-Halaby said

via Skype.

The DFS is led by the Kurdish People's Protection Units, which has been battling the Islamic State group across northern and eastern Syria with the aid of U.S.-led airstrikes. Turkey views the Kurdish forces, known by the acronym YPG, as an extension of the Kurdish PKK, which has waged a decades-long insurgency against Ankara.

The YPG sees the plans for a safe zone as an effort by Turkey to use allied Syrian rebel factions to block its advance along the border.

After Turkey shot down a Russian warplane over northern Syria last Tuesday, Russia has hit the highway linking the town of Azaz with the Bab al-Salameh border crossing with Turkey twice, killing seven and wounding ten people.

Russia began an air campaign in Syria on Sept. 30 that Moscow says is intended to weaken the Islamic State group and other "terrorists" in Syria, but Western officials and Syrian rebels say most of the strikes have focused on central and northern Syria, where IS does not have a strong presence.

Russia has been one of the strongest supporters of President Bashar Assad since the start of the uprising in 2011.

The Observatory said on Monday that two months of Russian airstrikes have killed 1,502 people including 485 civilians. The group said that 419 IS fighters and 598 gunmen with other militant groups, including al-Qaida's affiliate in Syria, the Nusra Front, were killed in the air campaign.



Also on Monday, the Observatory reported that IS fighters shot dead 18 soldiers and pro-government gunmen in a public square in the historic town of Palmyra. It said the 18 fighters had been captured in previous battles with the extremist group.

IS fighters have captured and killed hundreds of government forces and state employees since the extremist group declared a caliphate in the areas under its control in Syria and Iraq.

In July, IS released a video showing the killing of around 20 government soldiers in Palmyra's renowned Roman era amphitheater.

Syria's conflict has killed more than 250,000 and wounded at least a million since the uprising began over four years ago.



188 Iranian Soldiers Killed Since Russian Intervention in Syria

Nov. 30, 2015
<http://www.kurdishglobe.net>

Hassan Karimpour, a senior adviser to Iran's Quds Force, announced that a total of 188 members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards have been

killed in Syria since the beginning of Russia's military intervention in Syria in October 2015.

According to Karimpour, this number shows what a significant role Iran and Russia play in Syria against the U.S. and the coalition forces as well as the Islamic State (ISIS).



An Iranian source, on the other hand, had claimed last month that the number of casualties among the Iranian Revolutionary Guards and the Afghan and Pakistani mili-

tants under Tehran's command in Syria has reached 400 people who have lost their lives while defending Bashar Assad's regime. ●

Turkish opposition says police bullet may have killed Kurdish lawyer



People hold portraits of Diyarbakir Bar Association President Tahir Elci as they march during his funeral in the Kurdish-dominated southeastern city of Diyarbakir, Turkey, November 29, 2015.

By Daren Butler - reuters
Nov 30, 2015 www.dailystar.com.lb

ISTANBUL |

A prominent Kurdish lawyer gunned down in southeastern Turkey appeared to have been shot by a policeman who was firing on suspects fleeing the scene of an attack on fellow officers, a deputy from Turkey's pro-Kurdish opposition said on Monday.

Diyarbakir city chief prosecutor Ramazan Solmaz said prosecutors and police forensic teams working at the site of Elci's killing were forced to flee on Monday when militants opened fire and threw explosives at an armored police vehicle.

Saturday's killing of Tahir Elci, a lawyer and human rights activist, and Monday's brief incident underlined tensions in the mostly Kurdish region that have grown since a ceasefire with Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) militants collapsed in July.

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has said Elci may have been caught in the crossfire between police and the militants.

Meral Danis Bestas, a deputy for the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), sent an email to the interior minister after viewing a video of the incident which took place in a narrow street during a shootout between police and militants.

In the video, plain-clothes police standing near Elci are seen firing automatic pistols at gunmen fleeing the scene of the attack in Diyarbakir, the region's largest city.

ATTACK ON POLICE

"The footage shows a figure running in the direction of Tahir Elci and the police opening fire in the direction of that person," Bestas wrote. "A plain-clothes policeman dressed in brown is shown opening fire in the direction of



Still images obtained from a video by the Turkish DHA news agency show the moments before Tahir Elci was killed. In the first image Tahir Elci is seen (right, behind a cameraman).



The second image shows two Turkish police officers in plainclothes shooting at unidentified targets.

Tahir Elci and then he looks as if to see whether the cameras are filming him."

"The autopsy report and the camera foot-

age point to Elci dying as a result of a police bullet," Bestas said.

Shortly before Elci's killing, two police officers were shot dead after they stopped a "suspicious vehicle" in a nearby street in what Solmaz, the chief prosecutor, said was an attack by PKK militants.

President Tayyip Erdogan, who founded the governing AK Party, has vowed to destroy Kurdish militant fighters since a ceasefire collapsed in July, reigniting a conflict in which some 40,000 people have died since it began in 1984.

The HDP, which is represented in parliament and has called for an end to the violence, said Elci had complained of death threats.

"Tahir Elci...was the target of some deep structures which are known to have carried out unsolved killings and which today give open support to the AKP government," it said.

Unsolved political killings were frequent at the height of the conflict between the state and the PKK in the 1990s.

Elci was facing trial for saying the banned PKK was not a terrorist organization, as it is described by Turkey, the European Union and United States. But he had also condemned PKK violence.

The autopsy showed one bullet had penetrated the back of Elci's neck. The driver of the taxi in which the suspects arrived at the scene was detained and an arrest warrant was issued for one identified suspect, the prosecutor said. ■

French Foreign Minister: We Can Rely On Peshmerga in Fight Against Jihadists

Diyar Aziz / 28 nov. 2015
http://www.basnews.com

ERBIL - French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has told Kurdistan Region President Massoud Barzani that France can rely on the Kurdish Peshmerga forces in the fight against Islamic State (IS).

Fabius also thanked Barzani on behalf of the people of France for the condolences

expressed after the Paris attacks. He thanked the Kurdistan Region for its "valued support" at this time.

Fabius said that France will never be cowed by terrorists, and will continue to fight them at home and abroad.

"Terrorism is a threat to all humanity and we all need to combine our efforts in order to serve the common beliefs and values in the world," said Fabius.

"I am sure that we can rely on the Kurdistan



Laurent Fabius meeting President during his visit to Erbil

Region's participation in this mission," he concluded. ●

Kurdistan

Dans les ruines de Sinjar libérée

Les combattants kurdes viennent de reconquérir la capitale des Yazidis, peuple martyrisé par l'Etat islamique. La prise de la ville irakienne a coupé la route qui liait Mossoul à Raqqa en Syrie. Mais les peshmergas ne comptent pas partir à l'assaut des zones arabes occupées par Daech

✦ DE NOTRE ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL, CHRISTOPHE BOLTANSKI
☐ ÉMILIEN URBANO/MYOP



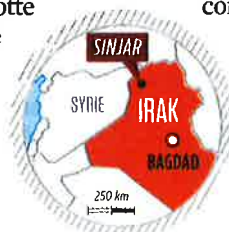
La ville apparaît au détour d'une route de montagne. Accolée aux contreforts rocheux piqués de petits chênes verts, elle s'étale en étoile à travers la plaine semi-désertique de la Mésopotamie. De la ligne de crête, on distingue une masse urbaine, des artères rectilignes, un silo à grains, deux ou trois hangars. A mi-pente, depuis une aire de pique-nique étonnamment intacte, avec ses tables de béton disposées de part et d'autre de la chaussée en lacet, les destructions apparaissent. Etages empilés comme des millefeuilles, murs éventrés, éboulis qui se succèdent par rues entières. Sinjar n'est plus qu'un tas de ruines d'où s'élèvent, çà et là, des volutes de fumée. Des décombres sur lesquels flotte depuis le 13 novembre le drapeau du Kurdistan, frappé d'un soleil éclatant.

Dans cette contrée perdue, aux limites de l'Irak, les combattants kurdes viennent d'infliger une importante défaite à l'organisation Etat islamique. Avec l'appui décisif des avions de la coalition

internationale, ils ont libéré, à l'issue de deux jours d'offensive, cette sous-préfecture considérée par les Yazidis, petit peuple martyr aujourd'hui dispersé dans des camps de toile à travers l'Asie mineure, comme leur capitale. Coïncidence ? Au moment même où l'organisation terroriste revendiquait les attentats de Paris, ses hommes évacuaient cette position clé conquise quinze mois plus tôt presque sans coup férir, située au milieu de son « califat », à proximité de la frontière syrienne.

Dans l'air flotte une odeur de poudre et de brûlé. Pas de cadavres visibles, à part le corps d'un djihadiste laissé sur une butte, près de l'entrée principale. Plus un seul habitant. Les Arabes sunnites, implantés en pays kurde à l'époque de Saddam Hussein et qui composaient la majorité de la population, ont pris la fuite.

Les rares civils, arrivés dans le sillage des vainqueurs, s'empressent de repartir au volant de leurs camionnettes encombrées de meubles, de matelas, de tapis, d'antennes paraboliques, d'appareils divers, de tout ce qu'ils ont pu trouver dans les quelques maisons encore debout. Des habitations désignées ➤➔





Les peshmergas du Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) du président Massoud Barzani (en photo à droite sur le camion), revendiquent le sauvetage des Yazidis, à l'instar du PKK.

➤ involontairement au pillage par leurs propriétaires, qui, pour ne pas être confondus avec leurs voisins yazidis, avaient tracé à la peinture noire un « s », comme « sunnite », sur leurs portes métalliques.

Vêtus de treillis disparates achetés au hasard des marchés, des soldats défendent l'accès d'un bâtiment officiel pelé à vif comme une orange. Ce sont des peshmergas, littéralement « ceux qui affrontent la mort », affiliés au PDK, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan du président Massoud Barzani. Sous un chapiteau dressé dans la cour, le nouveau maire, Mahma Khalil al-Shangali, en pantalon bouffant et veste sable, reçoit des visiteurs en uniforme. Cet ex-député yazidi au Parlement de Bagdad conjure ses coreligionnaires de ne pas regagner leurs foyers : « *La ville est détruite à 70%. Elle n'a été déminée qu'à moitié. Il n'y a pas d'eau, pas d'électricité.* » Il appelle encore moins au retour des anciens administrés arabes : « *Ils ont combattu dans les rangs de Daech, ils ont tué nos gens, violé nos filles. Ce sont des assassins.* » En attendant, il tente de maintenir un semblant d'ordre dans une cité sillonnée par des milices rivales, qui marquent leur emprise avec leurs couleurs respectives. Etendard du PDK contre fanion du PKK, le Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan, la vieille guérilla marxiste-léniniste qui, plus au nord, affronte depuis trente ans l'Etat turc. Soleil jaune contre étoile rouge. Barrages contre patrouilles. Guerre de tissus, de sigles, d'influence. Chacun revendiquant le sauvetage des Yazidis, ou de ce qu'il en reste.

« *Quand Daech a attaqué, le 3 août 2014, les peshmergas avaient déguerpi sans prévenir. Nous avons été les seuls à protéger les 150 000 Yazidis qui avaient trouvé refuge dans la montagne. Nous avons ouvert un corridor pour les évacuer vers la Syrie. Sans nous, ça aurait été un désastre* », raconte un rebelle du PKK, originaire de Turquie et âgé de 41 ans, Mamo Mardini. Un pseudonyme, comme toujours au sein du groupe armé. « *Nous avons été aussi les premiers à pénétrer dans Sinjar, poursuit-il devant un inévitable portrait de son leader Abdullah Ocalan. Le PDK veut nous voler notre victoire, mais on restera ici, quoi qu'il arrive.* » Haussement d'épaules d'un officier peshmerga, interrogé à l'autre bout de l'agglomération : « *Ils sont rentrés une heure après nous juste pour planter leur drapeau.* »

Au cœur de l'été 2014, un carnage s'est déroulé autour du djebel Sinjar, ce massif sacré qui domine toute la région et sert depuis des siècles d'abri à des fidèles considérés, selon les préjugés islamistes, comme des « adorateurs du diable ». A une dizaine de kilomètres au sud-est de la ville, derrière une villa en béton cru, des ossements humains affleurent autour d'un monticule de terre. Des morceaux de tibias, de radius, de crânes, des cheveux de femme enracinés dans le sol. Plus loin, d'autres fragments blanchis par le soleil. Et, partout, des lambeaux de vêtements, des étoffes colorées, des chemises faites dans un tissu qui ressemble à du jute, des coques de téléphones portables, ainsi que des dizaines de douilles de cuivre.

Le charnier a été découvert six jours plus tôt par des peshmergas au cours d'une patrouille de reconnaissance. La nouvelle ligne de front se trouve à moins d'un kilomètre de là. Une bordure dessinée par un long remblai de terre qui brille sous la lumière et d'où proviennent, à intervalles réguliers, des bruits sourds de mortier. « *C'est la pluie qui a dû faire remonter ces squelettes. Si on creuse, on va en trouver d'autres, mais on préfère confier ce travail à des enquêteurs* », dit le capitaine Shevan Hadji de la « brigade de Sinjar », composée presque exclusivement de Yazidis. Il s'agissait, selon lui, de personnes plutôt âgées. Pour preuve, il montre un dentier, des mâchoires édentées.

Le matin même, il a rencontré une femme venue de Dohouq se recueillir sur les lieux. « *Elle a pleuré. Elle a dit que son mari était enterré là. Les gens de Daech avaient rassemblé toute une tribu, les Haskan. Elle en faisait partie. Mais ils l'ont sortie du groupe avec deux autres filles et les ont enfermées ensemble dans cette maison.* » Tous les autres prisonniers auraient été exécutés. Un témoignage invérifiable. L'officier ignore le nom de cette jeune femme. Il ne sait pas non plus comment la contacter ni de quelle manière elle a échappé à ses ravisseurs. Combien de Yazidis ont ainsi été abattus puis ensevelis à la va-vite ? Les autorités kurdes affirment avoir déjà trouvé trois autres fosses communes dans les environs de Sinjar et parlent de milliers de victimes.

Comme à chaque fois qu'ils quittent une localité, les djihadistes ont également semé derrière eux leurs engins de mort. Le major Hussein ne porte aucune armure, pas même un casque. ➤

►► « Contre 15 kilos de TNT, à quoi ça servirait ? » déclare-t-il, laconique. Le militaire kurde s'avance prudemment au milieu des gravats, à la lisière nord de la ville. « *Marchez dans mes pas !* » ordonne-t-il, le regard à l'affût. Un peu plus loin, il a découvert, dissimulées dans la broussaille, deux lattes de plastique entourées de ruban adhésif. Un détonateur relié par un cordon à un fût d'explosif qu'il a arraché d'un coup, comme une mauvaise herbe. L'un de ses adjoints sort un bidon d'une maison en ruine. Encore une charge d'où dépassent deux fils, qu'il coupe avec son cutter, sans marquer, là non plus, la moindre hésitation.

Si l'armée kurde a pu reprendre Sinjar à l'Etat islamique, elle le doit à ses équipes de déminage. Au cours des derniers mois, une grande partie de ses pertes ont été causées par ces bombes de moins en moins artisanales. « *Chaque jour, l'ennemi perfectionne ses pièges. Il a toujours un temps d'avance sur nous* », soupire le major Hussein. Il désigne du doigt un câble qui court jusqu'à une bâtisse inachevée au-dessus de la rue. « *Quand les nôtres sont entrés dans cet édifice, ça a explosé. Sept ont été tués.* » Les djihadistes actionnaient le système de mise à feu depuis des tunnels creusés à 2 mètres de profondeur afin d'échapper à la surveillance aérienne.

Les artificiers extraient plusieurs barils d'explosifs d'une galerie. Tout autour, le sol est jonché de petites bouteilles en plastique remplies d'urine. « *Comme ça, ils n'avaient pas à sortir de leur trou. Ils vivaient comme des rats !* » s'exclame un soldat. Ils réunissent leur prise du jour dans un ravin, allument une mèche, se précipitent dans leur véhicule blindé, ferment les portes étanches. Leur souffle résonne dans l'habitable. Ils attendent, se regardent sans rien dire. Après plusieurs minutes, les démineurs retournent dans le vallon, reviennent en courant. La déflagration fait trembler tout le quartier. « *Parfois, l'amorce ne fonctionne pas* », lâche l'un d'eux.

« *Les EEI [engins explosifs improvisés, NDLR] constituent l'une des principales armes de Daech. Rien qu'aujourd'hui nous en avons neutralisé 345* », se félicite le soir même leur supérieur, le général Mahmoud Hassan, assis devant un feu de bois, sur les hauteurs de Sinjar. D'après lui, toute la ville était piégée. « *Maisons comprises. Mais on verra ça plus tard. Notre mission consiste à ouvrir la voie à nos troupes* », indique cet officier du génie qui a servi dans l'armée irakienne, du temps de Saddam, avant de rejoindre les siens en 2003. Cette fois, son unité ne déplore aucune perte. « *Au début, nous avons eu beaucoup de morts, confie le major Hussein. Cela faisait vingt ans que nous n'avions pas combattu. Depuis, nous avons*



La brigade Liwa du général Mahmoud Hassan, composée d'artificiers démineurs, désactive les bombes laissées par l'Etat Islamique. La ville est totalement piégée : en une journée, ils ont neutralisé 345 engins explosifs.



Un stock de bombes artisanales fabriquées par les djihadistes et récupérées sur place par les peshmergas.

appris. Ce n'est qu'une question d'expérience. » Etrange guerre qui mêle les moyens les plus archaïques aux techniques les plus modernes. Face à un adversaire invisible, les peshmergas creusent des tranchées, dressent des chicanes, élèvent des barrières de terre, sur plusieurs lignes parallèles. A 15 kilomètres à l'ouest de Sinjar, une dizaine de bulldozers s'activent, le long de la nationale 47, qui relie Mossoul à Raqqa, les deux « capitales » du califat, désormais raccordées uniquement par des petites routes peu praticables durant l'hiver et au prix d'un long détour. « *C'est un coup très dur infligé à Daech, assure le général Fathi Avdo, qui commande cette partie du front. Nous avons coupé sa principale voie d'approvisionnement.* »

Si ses soldats s'abritent derrière des remblais et des sacs de sable, c'est d'abord par crainte des attaques à la voiture piégée. Le jour de l'offensive, deux camions bourrés de TNT ont foncé sur ses positions. « *Nos tanks les ont détruits l'un après l'autre.* » Ses trois vieux chars T-55 soviétiques gardent leur canon pointé vers Gerazer, un village yazidi à 6 kilomètres, toujours tenu par les djihadistes. Plus loin, le servent d'une batterie de missiles Milan scrute l'horizon à la jumelle. Mais, avant tout, ce fortin tiré au cordeau compte sur les avions de la coalition pour écraser l'ennemi. « *Nous envoyons les données GPS au centre d'opération à Erbil. Ils sont là en vingt à trente minutes.* » D'où viennent les appareils ? « *Je ne sais pas, dit-il. L'important pour moi, c'est qu'ils lâchent leurs bombes.* »

Les Kurdes contrôlent dorénavant l'ensemble des territoires qu'ils disputaient à Bagdad au-delà des limites de leur région autonome. Le maire Mahma Khalil al-Shangali le proclame, à l'unisson du président Barzani : Sinjar, qui était jusqu'ici rattachée administrativement à la province de Mossoul, fait désormais « *partie intégrante du Kurdistan* ». Forts de leurs succès, les peshmergas semblent en revanche peu enclins à repartir au combat dans des zones exclusivement arabes. « *A Mossoul, Tal Afar ou Ba'aj [les trois grandes villes les plus proches encore aux mains de l'Etat islamique], ce n'est pas à nous d'agir, mais à l'armée irakienne* », martèle le général Simeh Bossali. Une armée qui, de l'aveu d'un autre gradé, « *n'existe plus* ». Ils ne paraissent pas non plus pressés de chasser les djihadistes des villages yazidis environnants. « *Ça prendra du temps, prévient le général Fathi Avdo. Même si on libérait ces localités, elles sont minées et partiellement détruites. Leurs habitants ne pourraient pas y revenir.* »

Les Yazidis l'ont compris. Ils sont encore près de 10 000 à vivre sous des bâches en haut du mont Sinjar, presque entièrement laissés à eux-mêmes. Au cours des quinze mois écoulés, ils ont tout affronté : un siège interminable, la canicule, la soif, la faim, puis un



Le 13 novembre, un combattant yazîdi du Parti des Travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) dans Sinjar. La ville a été reprise aux djihadistes de Daech, qui la contrôlaient depuis le 3 août 2014.

froid glacial, la pluie, la neige et la crainte permanente d'un assaut des djihadistes. « On a toujours peur », avoue Dilnaz, 16 ans, devant l'unique poste de secours, un mobile home tenu par une infirmière, mais dépourvu de médecin. La jeune fille souffre depuis un mois de diarrhée à cause de l'eau qu'elle rapporte à dos d'âne d'un puits situé à 3 kilomètres de son campement.

« Nous allons passer un nouvel hiver ici », prédit Khero Mourad, assis devant sa tente, enveloppé dans sa grosse veste noire, un keffieh rouge et blanc noué sur la tête. Le 3 août 2014, malgré ses 73 ans, ce paysan a marché pendant des heures pour échapper aux tueurs de Daech. « J'ai vu des gens mourir autour de moi car le chemin était très pentu, et nous n'avions pas d'eau. » Les jours suivants, il s'est battu avec son vieux fusil pour empêcher les assaillants d'atteindre le sommet. « On a même donné une arme à cet enfant », dit-il en montrant son petit-fils, âgé de 11 ans. « Seule cette montagne peut nous protéger, renchérit Elias Youssef, 50 ans. Elle est devenue comme notre mère. » Huit membres de sa famille ont été kidnappés par les djihadistes. Sa belle-sœur et ses trois nièces ont été libérées à l'issue d'un « troc » négocié par le gouvernement kurde, mais il demeure sans nouvelles de son père, de son frère et de ses deux neveux. « On ignore s'ils ont été tués ou non. »

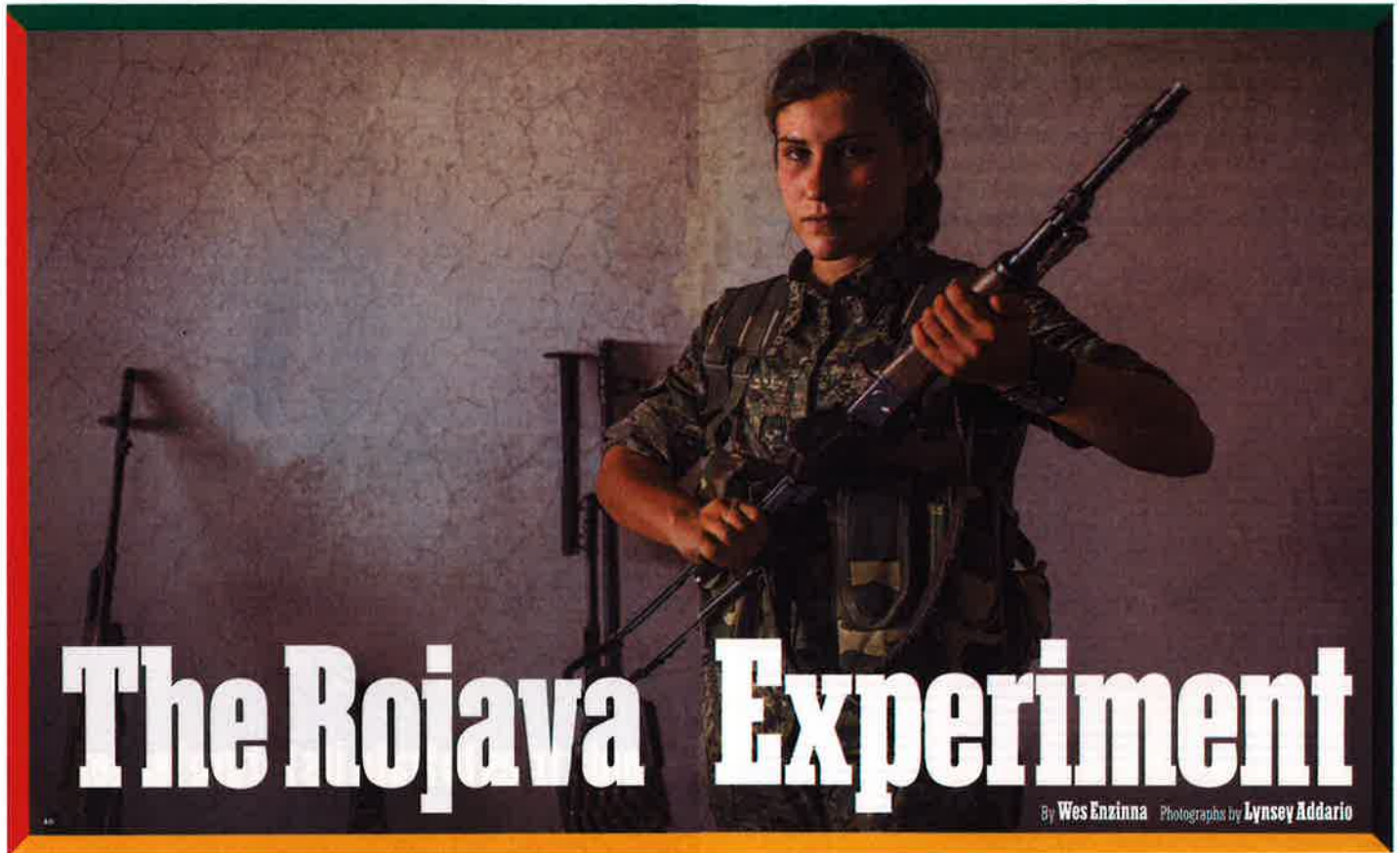
De l'autre côté du massif, le temple de Sharaf al-Din, un grand centre de pèlerinage du yazidisme, revit. « Ce sanctuaire a été attaqué à dix-sept reprises, raconte son gardien, le cheikh Smaïl Bahri, un religieux à la barbe broussailleuse et à la tête recouverte d'un léger voile blanc. Chaque fois, nous les avons repoussés grâce à l'ange paon. » Il ne s'est pas contenté du soutien de la divinité suprême de sa communauté. Devant sa maison, ses fils ont garé un pick-up équipé d'une mitrailleuse lourde. « Ce génocide, dit-il, avait été prédit par nos théologiens, mais nous ne savions pas quand il aurait lieu. » Selon son décompte, « il s'agit du 74^e massacre de Yazidis de



Un camp de réfugiés yazîdis sur le mont Sinjar. Près de 10 000 personnes y vivent dans des conditions extrêmement difficiles : elles doivent supporter la canicule, le froid glacial, la faim, la soif.

l'histoire ». Pour empêcher qu'une nouvelle tragédie ne se produise, il en appelle à l'aide de la communauté internationale. « C'est à elle d'assurer notre sécurité », répète-t-il.

Dans Sinjar libérée, un seul homme a osé rouvrir son échoppe. Saïd Khalaf, 25 ans, vend essentiellement des cigarettes et des canettes de Tiger, l'équivalent local du Red Bull, aux soldats. Mais il n'entend pas faire revenir sa famille, réfugiée dans un camp à Zakho. « Tant que Daech sera à 6 kilomètres d'ici, ils ne bougeront pas, dit-il. On ne nous referra pas le coup deux fois. » □



By **Wes Enzinna** Photographs by **Lynsey Addario**

One of the safer crossings into Syria is at a small town called Fishkhabour, in the far northwestern corner of Iraq. In a whitewashed shack on the shore of the Tigris River, an official from Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government pointed out the window toward a pontoon bridge that bobbed in the cola-colored water. A year ago, 30,000 refugees fleeing an Islamic State massacre in Syria walked for 30 hours before crossing it in the opposite direction, half-starved, half-dead, terrorized. The official told me and my interpreter, Mohammed Ismael Rasool,

that a few days before we arrived, an Italian volunteer was arrested by a border patrolman while trying to swim back toward Iraq. "Don't change your mind," he said, wagging a finger.

Our destination was a sliver of land in the far north of Syria: Rojava, or "land where the sun sets." The regime of President Bashar al-Assad doesn't officially recognize Rojava's autonomous status, nor does the United Nations or NATO — it is, in this way, just as illicit as the Islamic State. But if the reports I heard from the region were to be believed, within its borders the rules of the neighboring ISIS caliphate had been inverted. In accordance with a philosophy laid out by a leftist

revolutionary named Abdullah Ocalan, Rojavan women had been championed as leaders, defense of the environment enshrined in law and radical direct democracy enacted in the streets.

But much of the information emerging from Rojava seemed contradictory and almost fantastical. To the Turkish government, the territory, which is now the size of Connecticut and has an estimated 4.6 million inhabitants, was nothing more than a front for a Turkish group known as the P.K.K., or Kurdistan Workers' Party. Since its founding in 1978, the P.K.K., led by Ocalan, had been fighting for independence from Turkey, hoping to establish a homeland for the country's

14 million Kurds. The effort had caused the deaths of 40,000 people, thousands of them civilians, and led to the imprisonment of Ocalan. The American State Department designated the P.K.K. a terrorist organization in 1997. Having failed in Turkey, officials claimed, the P.K.K. was trying to create a Kurdish homeland amid the disruption of war. "We will never allow the establishment of a state in Syria's north and our south," President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey said in June. "We will continue to fight in this regard no matter what it costs."

But to sympathetic Western visitors, Rojava was something else entirely: a place where the seeds of the Arab Spring promised to blossom into utopia. "What you are doing," said Raymond Joliffe, a member of Britain's House of Lords, during a trip in May 2015, "is a unique experiment that deserves to succeed." A Dutch professor named Jan Best de Vries arrived in December 2014 and donated \$10,000 to help buy books for Kurdish university students. David Graeber, a founder of Occupy Wall Street, visited that same month and wrote before his trip that "the auton-

omous region of Rojava, as it exists today, is one of few bright spots — albeit a very bright one — to emerge from the tragedy of the Syrian revolution.”

In May, I saw an announcement on Facebook for the Mesopotamian Social Sciences Academy, a new, coed university in Rojava’s de facto capital, Qamishli. This in itself was revolutionary. For years, Bashar al-Assad and his father, Hafez, forbade many Syrian Kurds to study. In ISIS territory just 15 miles away, Kurdish girls were routinely tortured for being Westernized heretics — sometimes tied by their ponytails to car bumpers and dragged to their deaths. In Rojava, they were being educated.

When I sent a message to the academy’s Facebook page, requesting more information, I received a reply from Yasin Duman, a Kurdish graduate student living in Turkey. He had taught several courses there, he said, and when he found out I was a writer and professor in New York, we discussed a journalism class. Duman explained that Rojava’s youth had little experience with the idea of free speech. Perhaps I could teach them: “A free people has to have freedom of speech,” he said. It would be a cultural exchange. I would teach writing, and my students would show me what life was like in Rojava. We decided that I would spend

a week in July giving a crash course in journalism basics: how to report, how to interview and how to document the war raging around them.

Now, after three months and at least as many logistical hiccups, I was about to see this strange political experiment for myself. The official led us out of the office and onto a ramshackle skiff. We were technically entering a failed state. Yet when we came ashore on the other side of the river and passed a brick guard tower staffed with armed men, I saw a red, green and yellow tricolor banner — the flag of Rojava.

If Rojava succeeds, it will be the second partial homeland for the Kurds (the first is the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq, though the two administrations are unaffiliated). The modern quest for a homeland began in part as a response to the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, when Britain and France divvied up the Middle East into spheres of influence. Within years, millions of Kurds, who previously occupied a wild terrain surrounding the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers known as Kurdistan, found themselves subjects of the new nations of Iraq, Syria and Turkey. In Turkey, where Kurds make up nearly a fifth of the population, the state sought to solve demands for

recognition of Kurdish independence by denying the ethnic group’s existence. Laws have removed any trace of Kurdish identity from history books, banned speaking Kurdish in public and punished violators with long prison sentences. It wasn’t until 2013 that the government repealed a law banning the use of the letters Q, W and X, which appear in the Kurdish alphabet but not the Turkish one. In Syria, where roughly 10 percent of the population is Kurdish, similar policies were enacted by a police chief named Mohammed Talib Hilal, who in 1963 likened his country’s “Kurdish question” to a “malignant tumor.”

The chaos of war has made Rojava possible but also rendered its survival tenuous. The territory is governed by a P.K.K. affiliate called the Partiya Yekita Demokrat, which maintains a military called the Y.P.G., or People’s Protection Units, and an all-female force called the Y.P.J., or Female Protection Units. These forces have become key American allies in the region. Since last September, American airstrikes have supported Y.P.G. fighters, and in November, President Obama sent 50 elite Special Operations troops to Rojava to assist and advise the Kurds. Yet the Turkish government, which has allowed the United States to use Incirlik Air Base on the Syrian-Turkish border to



At a college in Kurdish Syria, a would-be utopia tries to train its future leaders.

coordinate airstrikes against ISIS, has increasingly targeted the Kurds rather than ISIS; since August 2014, Turkey has bombed Kurdish fighters in Iraq and Syria 300 times, and ISIS targets only three.

As I rode down a rutted road accompanied by Agid, my Kalashnikov-toting escort, we traversed a landscape of parched brown hills and fields of oil derricks — the region produces 15,000 barrels of oil a day, which is sold to locals and the Assad administration to fund some of the war effort against ISIS. Every dozen or so miles, we were stopped at checkpoints by men and women in green fatigues: members of the Asayis, the police force that the P.Y.D. established in 2012. They number roughly 6,000 officers, all of them elected; a women-only force deals with sexual assault and rape. (All recruits receive their weapons only after “two weeks of feminist instruction,” according to Cengidar Mikail, the director of the Qamishli police.)

In the downtown of a small city called Rmeilan, we found the first real sign of war: hundreds of martyr flags hung from lampposts. The streets were absent of young people, who were all at the front lines; the flags commemorated the soldiers who never returned, several thousand since 2012. They gave the streets the feel of a dance floor after a prom. Tumbleweeds skittered across the pavement. The spectral ensigns flapped overhead, hundreds and hundreds of them blowing as we drove past.

After four hours, we arrived in Qamishli, Rojava’s largest city, in a district of about 400,000 people. There were few young people here, either, save for some maimed soldiers crutching their way down crowded sidewalks. Beyond downtown, where paved roads turned to dirt, an armed guard waved from behind a six-foot-tall hill of sand, an improvised barricade in front

of the Mesopotamian Social Sciences Academy. Behind him loomed a two-story concrete fortress horseshoed around a courtyard and a sagging volleyball net.

One of the academy’s teachers, a 23-year-old named Reshan Shaker, ushered us in and explained one of the many contradictions of the war: The Assad regime, he said, occupied a high school on the first floor, while the academy was housed on the second. Sometimes the two sets of students played each other in volleyball. Downtown, we had passed an intersection where Assad’s regime still controlled several buildings guarded by armed men in sunglasses and black muscle T-shirts. A month before, a temporary calm between the regime and the P.Y.D. collapsed, and gunfire spilled into the street.

My accommodations for the next week were a spare room on the upper level with a mat on the tile floor. Shaker turned on the fluorescent overhead light. “It’s austere,” he said, “but we are at war. For us, studying is the same thing as holding a gun and fighting, so a little discomfort isn’t so bad, right?”

At 8 that evening, I walked into my classroom. Twenty-three young men and women sitting in rows of black plastic desks stood at attention when I entered, stiff as soldiers. On a wall, a poster said, “The society that doesn’t elevate itself will decay.” Should this experiment succeed, some of these 18-to-29-year-olds would become the future intellectual leaders of Rojava. No one looked at a cellphone; no one gazed out the window. They were as attentive as stenographers.

I introduced myself, told them to sit and asked them to do an exercise — a sort of instructional icebreaker. Interviews, I said, are the building blocks of journalism. I requested that they

interview one another about the most important thing that happened to them in the past year. They were confused — the Syrian educational model is lecture-oriented, and Ocalan himself would infamously lecture his followers for eight or nine hours without stopping. But once the students understood that I merely wanted them to talk to one another, I had a hard time quieting them down.

Nariman Hesso, 22 and wearing a green military-surplus coat, presented first, introducing the student seated beside her: Fidan Ahmed, 20, with a crown of curly black hair pulled back with a headband. She was in 10th grade when the Syrian civil war started, Hesso said. “The most significant thing to happen to her in the last year is that she was not very social and didn’t have many friends. But in the academy she has made friends and found her place.”

“The most important thing in the past year for Kawa was that he experienced the revolution in Syria and the revolt against Assad,” Mahmood Morad, 21, said, introducing Kawa Omer, 27. “And now he has gotten to know the philosophy of Abdullah Ocalan.”

“The most important thing that happened to Mohmmad is that he joined the revolution in Rojava,” offered Walid Haj Ali, introducing an 18-year-old named Mohmmad Dle. Ali placed a hand over his heart. “Here, Mohmmad says, he is becoming a new person.”

After class, the students took me to the cafeteria. It was Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, but I had seen students eating throughout the day, and now they prepared tea and ate from a plate of soft cheese. Though about 90 percent of Kurds are Sunni Muslims, ISIS considers them to be *kafir*, infidels. In May 2014, ISIS fighters kidnapped 186 Kurdish college students on their way home to Rojava after an exam in Aleppo, then forced them to attend a jihadist religious school; escapees were threatened with beheading.

“I’m an atheist,” said Ramah, an 18-year-old student with a neatly trimmed goatee. A crowd of students had circled around, curious about who I was, what music I liked, how I had ended up here. None of them had ever heard of Bob Dylan or Edward Snowden or Brooklyn, where I lived. They asked if Obama really was a Muslim. They asked if everyone in America was an atheist, like Ramah. I told them there were many Christians, Muslims and Jews, though I said I didn’t believe in God.

“Were you afraid when you discovered that God didn’t exist?” Ramah asked, imploring me with earnest, walnut-brown eyes.

“Why would I be afraid?” I said.

“In a world where there’s no God,” he said, “how do you deal with the constant fear of dying?”

The next morning, I met with a student named Sami Saeed Mirza. I had barely slept, kept up by the intermittent swoosh of fighter jets and a series of loud thuds, whether distant bombs or

The territory of Rojava, imagined as a homeland for Kurds, Arabs and Christians.



the innocuous din of street life, I couldn't tell. At one point, I went onto the rooftop and looked out at the horizon, a squiggly line of undulating sand spotted with a few stone huts. It was beautiful, in its way, a whole world painted with a single brush stroke of brown. Somewhere out there was the front line.

Mirza, 29, had sad, drowsy eyes and wore thick spectacles perched low on his nose. He hadn't noticed the commotion. "I'm used to the sound," he said. Unlike other students at the academy, Mirza grew up outside Syria in a small village in western Iraq. He is not a Muslim or an atheist but a Yazidi, part of an ethnic and religious minority that practices a modern form of Zoroastrianism. He hadn't heard of Abdullah Ocalan until recently. In August 2014, ISIS extremists attacked his village, near the city of Sinjar, and butchered as many as 5,000 of his neighbors. While Mirza and his family were trapped on a mountain for four days, waiting to die, a battalion of women — Y.P.J. soldiers — fought through the ISIS lines and created a path for them to escape. Mirza, severely dehydrated and on the verge of collapse, fled.

"The battle made me think of women differently," he told me. "Women fighters — they saved us. My society, Yazidi society, is more, let's say, traditional. I'd never thought of women as leaders, as heroes, before."

Mirza heard about the academy at a refugee camp, and here his education in feminism had continued. He and his fellow students studied a text that Ocalan wrote on gender equality called "Liberating Life." In it, Ocalan argues that problems of bad governance, corruption and weak democratic institutions in Middle Eastern societies can't be solved without achieving full equality for women. He once told P.K.K. militants in Turkey, "You don't need to be [men] now. You need to think like a woman, for men only fight for power. But women love nature, trees, the mountains. ... That is how you can become a true patriot."

"I've learned the truth," Mirza said. "The leader has shown us the correct interpretation of society." Rojava's Constitution — its "social contract" — was ratified on Jan. 9, 2014, and it enshrines gender equality and freedom of religion as inviolable rights for all residents. The Sinjar massacre gave Rojavan authorities an opportunity to show that



Women gathering after a meeting in Qamishli to decide how to deal with security in their neighborhood.

they were deadly serious about protecting these rights. Still, I wondered if the rescue of Yazidis like Mirza wasn't also strategic, a way to enlist the minority group in the defense of Rojava.

"Why do you think the Y.P.G. and Y.P.J. saved you?" I asked.

"Maybe I know, maybe I don't," he said. "But they are the only ones who came to help us. America didn't come. The *pesh merga*" — Iraqi Kurdistan's military — "didn't come." Now he wanted to devote his life to the teachings of Ocalan. "I was nothing before coming to the academy," he said.

Despite his imprisonment nearly a thousand miles away, Abdullah Ocalan, who is now 66 or 67 (he has no birth certificate), looms as a Wizard-of-Oz-like presence in Rojava. His avuncular visage — broad, bushy eyebrows; a gregarious, toothy grin obscured by a cartoonishly lush mustache — appears everywhere: in the halls and classrooms of the academy, in government buildings, in community centers, in police stations and on pins and patches on the chests of soldiers. This strange founding-fatherhood is the culmination of an unlikely political career that began in November 1978, when Ocalan first gathered six Kurdish revolutionaries at a teahouse in the town of Fis, in southeastern Turkey. His co-conspirators called him Uncle, or *Apo* in Kurdish, and called themselves the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or P.K.K.

Ocalan's initial impulse wasn't to fashion himself as a philosopher-politician. The P.K.K. members were unabashed Maoists, who used spectacular acts of violence against rival organizations and government soldiers to destabilize and delegitimize Turkey's authority in the predominantly Kurdish southeast. In 1980, Ocalan fled to Syria, where he was offered shelter by the regime of Bashar al-Assad. For the next 20 years, he led the struggle remotely — from a seaside villa, from which he issued orders to his commanders via messenger, letter and telephone. But in 1998, under pressure from Turkey, Assad kicked Ocalan out of the country. He escaped through Europe before he was captured in Kenya with the help of the C.I.A., which by then considered the P.K.K. a

terrorist organization. Ocalan's lawyers claimed that he was drugged and tortured by Turkish security forces while in custody. He was then paraded in front of TV cameras looking frail and confused, like a grandpa who had just woken from a nap, and he did the unthinkable: He renounced the P.K.K.'s effort to create an independent Kurdish homeland.

Ocalan was remanded to Imrali prison, on an island off the coast of Istanbul. This is when his conversion began — what one academic would describe as a transition from "Stalinist caterpillar to libertarian butterfly." He was the island's only prisoner, surrounded by 1,000 soldiers there to ensure he could not escape before his execution (a death sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment). The government allowed him to meet with senior P.K.K. commanders and lawyers to communicate to his followers the details of a cease-fire. He was also permitted books, finding inspiration in Western texts like Michel Foucault's "Society Must Be Defended" and Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities." Soon, one of his supporters gave Ocalan his first book by an obscure Vermont-based philosopher named Murray Bookchin. After Ocalan read it, he requested everything Bookchin had ever written. Oliver Kontny, a translator and P.K.K. sympathizer who was working for Ocalan's lawyers at the time, told me that Ocalan let "all of us know that he was working on a paradigm change based on what he learned from Bookchin."

Bookchin, a mustachioed octogenarian who lived in Burlington, Vt., and typically wore suspenders and pocket protectors, had no idea Ocalan was reading his work — in fact, he thought hardly anyone was. Born in 1921 in the Bronx, Bookchin joined the Communist Party's Young Pioneers organization at age 9. But by the 1950s, he had sworn off Marxism-Leninism and pioneered a radical ideology he called "social ecology," which argued that all environmental problems stemmed from social issues like racism, sexism and inequality. While Bookchin enjoyed some notoriety in the 1960s and '70s (the academic Russell Jacoby once compared his influence on

'I was nothing before coming to the academy.'

the American left with Noam Chomsky's), by the 1990s Bookchin was little known in America, save by a faction of prominent environmentalists who ostracized him for his attacks on those he deemed not revolutionary enough. Gary Snyder, the Pulitzer-winning poet, said that Bookchin "wrote like a Stalinist thug," and the writer Edward Abbey called him a "fat old lady." An entire volume was published to denounce his work ("Beyond Bookchin"), and others lambasted him as a hypocrite because of, among other things, his love of Twinkies and Dunkin' Donuts.

By the time Ocalan was discovering Bookchin's writing, Bookchin was depressed and spent his days in a wheelchair, according to his partner and assistant Janet Biehl's recently published biography, "Ecology or Catastrophe." "I feel very much like a stranger in a strange world," Biehl recounts Bookchin telling her one night. A society without a vibrant revolutionary leftist movement, he said, "is not a world in which I ... want to live."

In solitary confinement, Ocalan studied Bookchin's magnum opus, "The Ecology of Freedom," at once a sweeping account of world history and a reimagining of Marx's "Das Kapital." In it, Bookchin argues that hierarchical relationships, not capitalism, are our original sin. Humankind's destruction of the natural world, he argues, is a product of our domination of other people, and only by doing away with all hierarchies — man over woman, old over young, white over black, rich over poor — can we solve the global ecological crisis.

In another work, "Urbanization Without Cities," Bookchin proposed an alternative to the modern nation-state that he called "libertarian municipalism." Bookchin believed that the lesson of both Marxist and liberal governments was that the

state was an inevitably corrupting influence and antithetical to human freedom. Bookchin favored what he called the "Hellenic model" of democracy, the type of direct, face-to-face government once practiced in ancient Greece. He argued that only by recovering this system could humanity address injustice, and only in this way could radical movements avoid reproducing the same inequalities they had initially set out to defeat.

It was, needless to say, pretty dreamy stuff. But Ocalan saw in it a path toward a new type of revolution. Bookchin's proposal for achieving independence through "municipal assemblies" suggested to Ocalan a way of finally achieving the elusive Kurdish dream. Maybe the P.K.K. didn't have to *take* state power. Maybe it could obtain Kurdish rights by creating its own separate communities *inside* existing countries, resorting to violence only if attacked. Maybe all along, Ocalan had been mistaken to think that liberation could be achieved by creating a Kurdish-run nation-state, Marxist or otherwise.

Enthralled and seeking guidance, Ocalan had his lawyers send an email to Bookchin. Biehl was sitting at their computer one morning in April 2004, spring snow still covering the streets of Burlington outside, when it popped up in Bookchin's inbox. Bookchin was lying nearby on a day bed, unable to sit up because of his joint pain. He and Biehl had watched Ocalan's arrest on television, but Bookchin dismissed him as "just another third-world Leninist." Now, as Biehl read the email aloud, Bookchin discovered that Ocalan considered himself Bookchin's "student," and "had acquired a good understanding of his work, and was eager to make the ideas applicable to Middle Eastern societies."

A few weeks later, Bookchin replied, expressing reluctance to engage in a dialogue. "You should know that I am quite an elderly man ... who is virtually incapable of walking because of osteoarthritis and heart problems," Bookchin wrote. "Much remains to be explored, which my health and age prohibit me from doing. If you care to write to me further, I ask you to please be patient with an old radical."

In March 2005, Ocalan issued the "Declaration of Democratic Confederalism in Kurdistan." By then, Bookchin had cut off communication. ("Bookchin was heartbroken," Biehl told me. "He was devastated that the revolution had never happened, and he didn't trust anybody.") The manifesto called on all P.K.K. supporters to implement a version of Bookchin's ideas; Ocalan urged all guerrilla fighters to read "The Ecology of Freedom." He instructed his followers to stop attacking the government and instead create municipal assemblies, which he called "democracy without the state." These assemblies would form a grand confederation that would extend across all Kurdish regions of Syria, Iraq, Turkey and Iran and would be united by a common set of values based on defending the environment;

respecting religious, political and cultural pluralism; and self-defense. He insisted that women be made equal leaders at all levels of society. "The worldview for which I stand," Ocalan told his lawyers privately, "is very close to that of Bookchin."

When news spread throughout the P.K.K. of Ocalan's conversion, some were naturally hesitant to abandon the old model of Marxist-Leninist terrorism. "Who cares about some marginal anarchist with 50 followers?" one P.K.K. commander supposedly complained. But in the end, they followed orders. The female leadership, in particular, embraced the new ideology. The P.K.K. set about forming clandestine assemblies immediately in Syria, Iraq and Turkey, waiting for the opportunity to expand. Bookchin "was the greatest social scientist of the 20th century," according to a P.K.K. tribute sent to Biehl after Bookchin's death in July 2006. "Bookchin has not died. ... We undertake to make [him] live in our struggle."

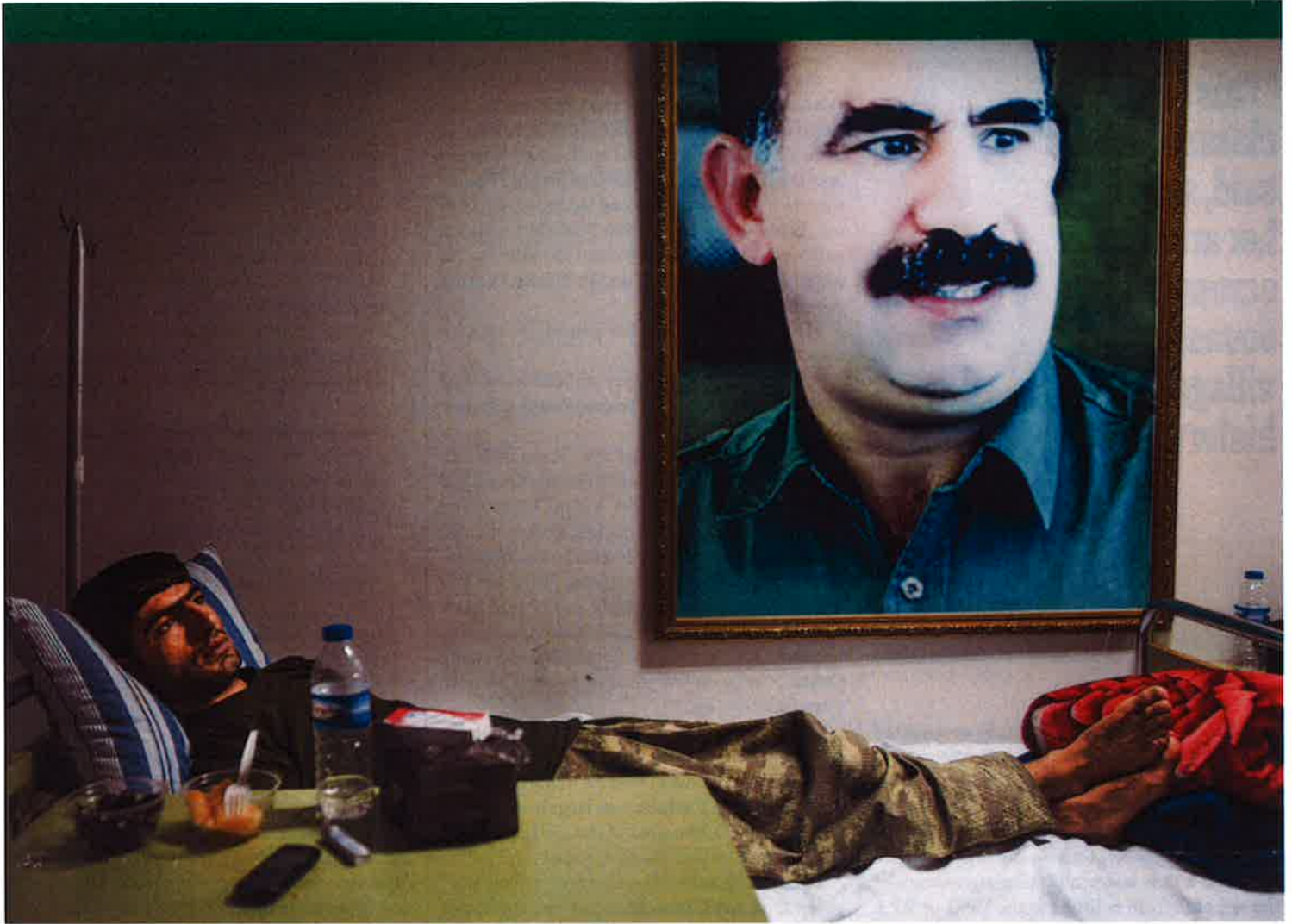
If a version of Bookchin's dream is taking root now, it's in a context he never imagined. "Rojava is something beyond the nation-state," said Hediye Yusuf, co-president of Jazeera canton, the local municipality of which Qamishli is part. "It's a place where all people, all minorities and all genders are equally represented."

I met with Yusuf at her office in Rmeilan, at the former headquarters of the state-owned Syrian Petroleum Company, where she and her fellow politicians do business behind rows of blast walls and barricades. Yusuf, a solemn woman who spent much of her 20s imprisoned by the Assad regime, sat at her desk and explained the policy of "co-governance." Every position at every level of government in Rojava, she said, includes a female equivalent of equal authority. Just as Yusuf was co-governor of Jazeera, Salih Muslim, the chairman of the P.Y.D., had a female counterpart, a woman named Asya Abdullah.

Yusuf shared power with an Arab tribal leader named Sheikh Humeidi Daham al-Hadi. At the start of the civil war, Hadi, who controls a fighting force of 3,000 soldiers, was allied with Al Qaeda's affiliate in Syria. Since joining the P.Y.D.'s coalition government, he has embraced Ocalan's ideology, and his soldiers have been incorporated into the Y.P.G. "Hadi is certainly not a feminist," Yusuf said, "but he supports us because we offer a new, functional society that respects everyone, unlike Assad, unlike ISIS, unlike Erdogan." My interpreter spoke briefly on the phone with Hadi, but we were told it wasn't safe to visit him. He joked about his new codependent relationship with an interviewer in 2014. "I didn't ask to share power with a woman," he said, seated alongside Yusuf. "They made me do it."

I visited a sweltering building in downtown Qamishli where 46 members of the Martyr Ramsi commune had assembled to discuss security in the region. Theirs was one of 97 neighborhood-based communes in Qamishli. There are

'Rojava is something beyond the nation-state. It's a place where all people, all minorities and all genders are equally represented.'



Zafer Erkandi, 22, recovering in Qamishli after being shot while fighting ISIS. Pictured on the wall is Abdullah Ocalan, father of Rojava's utopian philosophy.

hundreds of others in Afrin and Kobani, Rojava's other two cantons. The communes are Bookchin's utopian idea materialized — municipal assemblies, enshrined in the social contract as the building blocks of society. The 46 people in attendance were seated on plastic chairs, fanning themselves with cardboard; the glowering, olive-pitted eyes of Ocalan watched over the room from a poster.

"We have had several recent close calls with ISIS sympathizers," a woman said, standing up. Jihadists had been coming to town, posing as refugees and then planning attacks on the city. "What are we going to do?"

"Let's set up an extra patrol," said a man, resting his hands on his enormous potbelly.

"Who wants to volunteer first?" asked another woman, who wore a long polka-dot *abaya* and a matching head scarf.

A withered woman raised a hand. "Me," she said. The thought of her patrolling with an AK-47 was improbable, but no one questioned her.

Chenar Salih, a representative for the Movement for a Democratic Society, or Tev-Dem — a coalition of six political parties that the P.Y.D. has

formed to help govern Rojava — marveled at how rapidly locals had taken to the new system, though she explained that some tribal leaders have had a hard time relinquishing authority. "We were not expecting this," she told me at her office downtown, a few blocks from the Martyr Ramsi commune. She believed that Turkey or Iraq would be liberated first, but "since the Arab Spring, Rojava has become the center of the Kurdish revolution."

To ensure that a Kurdish majority doesn't dominate, Salih claims the P.Y.D. has implemented checks on its own power. "As a repressed minority in Turkey," she said, "we know the importance of giving everyone an equal role in government." On March 13, cantonwide elections were held in Jazeera. Out of 565 candidates, there were 237 women, 39 Assyrians and 28 Arabs, from a multitude of political parties.

But some say the P.Y.D.'s claims of inclusiveness are a ruse. According to Jian Omar, the spokesman for the Future Party, an opposition Kurdish group in Syria, the P.Y.D. is a "dictatorship" whose "arbitrary practices against the Kurdish people in Syria" include "repression, assassinations and

detentions for those who oppose P.Y.D. policies."

Human Rights Watch has also raised some serious concerns about the P.Y.D.'s rule. In February, after a three-week visit, the group released a report on "Abuses in P.Y.D.-Run Enclaves in Northern Syria," detailing how soldiers opened fire on unarmed civilian protesters in 2013; how 13-year-old boys and girls were serving in its military; and how a 36-year-old drug addict was beaten to death by the police, supposedly for cursing the name of Ocalan. In October, Amnesty International published even more troubling concerns, accusing the Y.P.G. of committing "war crimes" by razing entire Arab villages as punishment for harboring ISIS fighters — a tactic once used by the Turkish government against the P.K.K.

"We have evidence they were cooperating with ISIS," Hediye Yusuf told me when I asked about allegations of forced displacements, and she denied the claim that homes of civilians were ever purposefully destroyed. But she admitted that "we are in the middle of a war and a revolution, and we've made mistakes." She

'This is my classroom,' she said, sweeping her arms out across the devastated village. 'World history.'

pointed out that the P.Y.D. had fully cooperated with the Human Rights Watch investigation, and the perpetrators had been punished — one with a life sentence in prison. A Human Rights Watch adviser, Fred Abrahams, even applauded the P.Y.D. for its response to the report, which included a new law prohibiting anyone under the age of 18 from enlisting in the Y.P.G. or Y.P.J. Since then, underage fighters have returned to the battlefield. (During my visit, I attended a martyr's funeral in Qamishli for a 16-year-old Y.P.G. fighter.)

Also troubling is the cult of Ocalan. Today, according to several sources, the P.Y.D. co-chairman, Salih Muslim, a Syrian engineer who was trained by the P.K.K., is making some key decisions in Rojava. But even he describes his role as mainly implementing the ideas Ocalan communicates from prison. "There is a reason that we apply Apo's philosophy and ideology to Syria," Muhammad told an interviewer in November 2011. "It offers the best solution to Kurdish problems." When I asked Yusuf in her office if she thought such reverence for a leader contradicted efforts to create a society based on radical grass-roots democracy, she echoed Muhammad. "I don't know why the West always vilifies Ocalan," she said. "We love him and follow his philosophies, put quite simply, because they are *correct*."

During my time at the academy, it was easy to forget about my students' uncertain futures. Their curiosity seemed somehow amplified, not exhausted, by the violence surrounding them. I settled into something of a routine — sleeping on the floor and sharing meals and jokes with them, playing volleyball during midday breaks.

One evening, during a discussion about the relationship between war and a free press, they asked me about Murray Bookchin. The academy's library housed several of his books, but my pupils knew nothing about the details of his life. "Was he thrown in prison, too?" asked Sipan Syr, a towering, bearded man in a white polo shirt with the collar up. "Is there a movement to carry out his ideas? Did they lock him up like Ocalan because they feared his power?"

"No," I said. "People have mostly forgotten about him."

Silence lingered. Another student asked if he was still alive. No, I said, he died nearly a decade ago.

Our only real conflict involved how much they were willing to reveal about their own lives. I had asked my students to write a short essay about where they were four years earlier, when the war started, and where they hoped to be in another four years. The mood shifted. "Why are you asking us about our personal lives?" said Malk Ali, a student with owlish, obsidian eyes, giving him more than a passing resemblance to a young Ocalan. "Why do you need to know where we were *four years ago*?"

"They're getting a bit suspicious," Rasool, my interpreter, warned me. I realized that my question — about their whereabouts at the beginning of the revolution, which was largely started by young people — smacked of the kind of interrogations Kurds endured under Assad.

I assured them that I was genuinely interested about their lives. Sami Saeed Mirza, the Yazidi man, covered his face with his hands. Other students stared back coldly. Malk Ali asked me to leave. The students held a private meeting in our classroom, and I stood in the hall, briefly listening through the door before going to my room. The muffled sounds of shouting lasted until midnight. I worried they were going to throw me out of the school, in which case I imagined I could flee across the Turkish border, about five miles away, which had been officially closed since 2013. As I struggled to sleep, curled up in my sleeping bag, I was more saddened than scared.

At class time the next evening, I waited in our room, the faint pop of what sounded like distant gunshots punctuating the evening's calm. Rasool and I were the only ones there. "Dude," he said, "no one's going to show up."

But then they did: Sami, Nariman, Mahmoud, Walid and even Malk Ali, who had challenged me. Without waiting for me to say anything, he stood up and explained that their education encouraged them to challenge their teachers.

"We reject the master-and-slave relationship as a model for the teacher-and-student relationship," Ali said. "But we've decided that you're welcome to continue teaching us."

Ramah, the atheist, stood up and said, "I'm so happy you're here." They all approached my desk and turned in their assignments.

Four years ago ...

I applied for a job as an engineer, and as soon as they learned that I was Kurdish, I was not accepted for the job.

When the civil war started, I was living in Afrin. At that time, we were deprived of everything. ... If there was a small argument between an Arab and a Kurd, the Arab would protect the Arab, and the Kurd would protect the Kurd, even if the Kurd was in the wrong. ... I experienced a lot of racism.

I had just entered [university] and was studying electrical sciences. My dream was to become an electrical engineer, and I passed, but I had to stop studying because the whole world collapsed.

I was: a zero, a joker.

Rojava started educating the Kurdish people, and here I am now at Mesopotamia Institute. ... Honestly my happiness is indescribable.

I can now say that I am committing suicide in order to be resurrected.

The academy's rector asked me to leave the school four days into what was supposed to be a five-day course. A battalion of several hundred new recruits was being moved to the front lines, and the academy would be a temporary shelter. It was a fitting metaphor: the ivory tower turned into barracks.

"We'll take you somewhere else," said Reshan Shaker, the young teacher who had first shown me my room at the academy. He was going to be my escort, and he grabbed a Kalashnikov for protection. "This is the last safe place the soldiers will sleep in for a while, so I'm happy to give it up."

A few days later, we followed the soldiers' route to the front. Shaker, who wore skinny jeans and a plaid button-down, accompanied me to Tel Brak, a village 15 miles south of Qamishli that then served as an outpost against ISIS, whose fighters were encamped less than a mile away. Three days earlier, they had tried to retake the village. Parts of downtown were so ruined they looked more like an archaeological dig than a town. In one of the still-standing homes, we met Deniz Derik, a 24-year-old Y.P.J. commander who wore pink socks and a calculator watch, her coal-black hair pulled into a ponytail tucked beneath a backward camo cap. Derik was in charge of 23 girls who lived with her at the house. Her troops were aged 14 to 21, though she claimed the youngest ones were "in training." The house's parlor, where I first met her, was decorated with two teddy bears — one pink, one yellow. In the

breast pocket of her camo shirt, she kept a bullet and a cyanide pill, for suicide in case of capture. Her young cadets called her "Smiles," because even under fire, she grins.

Outside, the signs of the recent ISIS occupation were everywhere. Theocratic graffiti read, "The gates of paradise lie in the shadow of the sword." In an alleyway so full of rubble it resembled a dry riverbed, a blindfolded ISIS prisoner led by a Y.P.G. soldier shambled past, trying not to fall.

"Why are you in school and these kids are in the military?" I asked Shaker, who was walking beside Derik and me.

"Anyone who wants to can come to the school," he said, "as long as they prove they are serious." "Would you want to study?" I asked Derik.

She explained that even soldiers studied Ocalan's theories for two hours per day. "This is my classroom," she said, sweeping her arms out across the devastated village. "World history."

We passed a martyr flag hanging from a lamp-post, celebrating a dead Y.P.G. soldier. "He was my friend from high school," Shaker said. He told us how he fought Assad's regime in 2012

in his hometown, Tel Abyad, and he said that all the students at the academy were trained in combat as well as Kurdish history and Ocalan's philosophy.

It occurred to me then that his generation, a whole lost segment of Syria's youth, has been forced to become either refugees or warriors. And for those who choose the latter, their only options are different flavors of militancy: the Islamic State, Assad's regime, the Kurdish revolution. Syrians have endured an endless cycle of extreme conditions over the past four years, and so, perhaps, it should be no surprise that only the most extreme ideologies, no matter how brutal or utopian, are thriving.

"I didn't know he had been martyred," Shaker said, sighing. He snapped a photo with his cellphone, to send to the boy's mother.

Derik led us to a mangled storefront, its plate-glass windows smashed and serrated. Inside, she had stashed a blanket that she sometimes used for naps. Y.P.J. fighters aren't allowed to marry, and I asked if she had ever wanted a husband.

"Are you proposing?" she said, punching me on the arm and smiling.

"Are you afraid of dying?" I asked her a few moments later.

"Afraid?" she said. "Why should I be afraid? Being a martyr is the best thing possible. ... Fighting is ugly," she added. "But fighting for this is beautiful. Fear is for your Western women in their kitchens."

We ventured into a bombed-out schoolhouse to drink water in the shade. It was 110 degrees outside, but cool in the dusky building. The abandoned classrooms were filled with spent ammunition casings, extinguished campfires, the walls Swiss-cheesed with bullet holes. In one classroom, I found an ISIS lesson still chalked on the board. Just a few months earlier, this room was filled with pupils of the Islamic State, most likely Syrian kids not so different from Shaker and Derik, but imbibing drastically different lessons. "Allah the mighty revealed the Revelation to his people," the chalkboard read.

"Everyone has to choose a side now," Derik said. "ISIS has chosen the side of slavery. We've chosen the side of freedom."

"We're fighting for our ideas," Shaker said. "Ideas, like people, die if we don't fight for them." ♦

Mourners and security forces burying three fighters in Qamishli after a celebration of their lives and deaths as martyrs.

