

INSTITUT  
**KURDE**  
DE PARIS

Information and liaison bulletin

**N° 400**

**JULY 2018**

*The publication of this Bulletin enjoys a subsidy  
from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Culture*

This bulletin is issued in French and English

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

Monthly review  
Directeur de la publication : Mohamad HASSAN  
Misen en page et maquette : Şerefettin  
ISBN 0761 1285

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- **TURKEY: END OF EMERGENCY STATE OR... END OF RULE OF LAW?**
- **ROJAVA: UNO ACCUSES TURKEY OF MASSIVE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRÎN**
- **IRAQ: POST-ELECTION NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT ENDING, VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH; KURDISTAN IS PREPARING FOR ITS ELECTIONS...**
- **IRAN: INCREASING MILITARY TENSIONS BETWEEN THE KURDISH PARTIES AND STATE REPRESSION FORCES**

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### **TURKEY: END OF EMERGENCY STATE OR... END OF RULE OF LAW?**

**A**fter the June 24 presidential and parliamentary elections, in which Erdoğan was re-elected in the first round, the newly elected deputies were sworn in on the 7th. The Ankara parliament, "inflated" to 600 seats (from 550 previously), now includes 295 AKP M.P.s, 49 MHP (far-right party allied with AKP), 146 CHP (Kemalists), 43 İyi ("Good party", split from the MHP, refusing the alliance with Erdoğan), and 67 HDP (left and "pro-Kurdish"). Thus Erdoğan will need the support of the MHP to govern, which worries the Kurds. On the 9th, Erdoğan was in turn sworn in his huge palace in a

"cock a snook" to the West ceremony: among the 21 heads of State present were leaders as popular with Western capitals as the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, Russian Prime Minister Dimitri Medvedev and the Hungarian Victor Orban... With this ceremony, Turkey enters into the system wanted by Erdoğan (and obtained by massive fraud during the constitutional referendum of April 2017): it is now a country without a Prime Minister, and with a President at the same time Head of State, Chief Executive, Chief of Armies and Leader of the ruling party, there to stay until at least 2023...

The previous day, Erdoğan had clearly indicated the continuity of his political line by a decree-law sacking 18,632 new officials: 9,000 policemen and 6,000 soldiers thus lost employment and rights to retirement and social security, and 12 associations, 3 newspapers and one TV channel were banned (RFI).

On the evening of the 18th, the state of emergency established after the coup attempt of July 14, 2016, already renewed seven times, was finally lifted. But the content of the bill prepared to replace it makes many wonder if this so-called end of the state of emergency is not rather... the end

of the rule of law. Akif Hamzacebi, vice president of the CHP parliamentary group, declared: "With this bill, they are trying to make the state of emergency permanent". Indeed, many provisions of the state of emergency are remaining in force: provincial governors still may restrict traffic in certain areas as they see fit, prohibit meetings and gatherings, the police can access the telephone and bank statements of suspects or dismissed persons and their spouses... Only progress: contrary to the state of emergency, it will be possible to legally challenge one's dismissal (but there will be no compensation in case of reinstatement). "In the new system, President Erdoğan has all the power, so there is no need for emergency law...", said Pelin Ünker, economic correspondent for Cumhuriyet, herself threatened with a lawsuit after she dared to describe the participation of former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım's sons of in offshore shipping companies, revealed in the "Paradise Papers". Berat Albayrak, Erdoğan's son-in-law (and new finance minister) has also launched a lawsuit against journalists who reported on his offshore investments...

Another measure of the bill seems to have been thought right to counter Selahattin Demirtaş: the former co-chair of the HDP, imprisoned since November 2016, has just obtained 10,000 Turkish pounds of damages because his release requests have not been reviewed within the legal 30-day period. It is probably by chance that this time would be brought up to 90 days...

Human Rights Watch (HRW) has expressed concern over the draft law, which will also allow the presidency to arbitrarily dismiss judges and other officials and the police to detain suspects during 12 days without charge...

Several reports published this month accuse Turkey of human rights violations. The Diyarbakir section of the Turkish Human Rights Association (İHD) detailed in its latest biannual report, published on the 27th, the abuses committed by the security forces in the country's Kurdish provinces, including illegal detention and torture perpetrated during military operations. According to this report, 1154 sick prisoners, 402 of them seriously, are "practically abandoned to death", while 700 children under 7 years old are incarcerated with their mother, and another 44 in remand. The report also notes a massive use of violence against civilians, with an increase in violence against women. According to the IHOP collective human rights platform, between July 2016 and April 2018, 134.144 people were dismissed and at least 228.137 were arrested (including 845 who criticised the *Olive Branch* Operation against Afrin).

Arrests and indictments went on throughout the month. On the 5th, Gulizar Tasdemir, expelled from Norway after the rejection of her application for asylum, was arrested on her arrival to Istanbul. On the 11th, Islamic leader Adnan Oktar, famous for his TV shows and creationist books, was arrested with 166 of his followers in 120 simultaneous raids. Fervent supporter of Erdoğan, Oktar expressed his "confusion and surprise", adding that it would have been better to arrest supporters of the PKK... The group, whose assets were confiscated and entrusted to administrators, is the subject of 40 different charges: sexual violence, blackmail, kidnapping, constitution of a criminal organisation, military espionage, money laundering... On July 9, 30 people were arrested in Şırnak in several raids, and 4 sent to the city's high security prison for "membership in a terrorist organization". Among them, the HDP

Manisa candidate to the elections, Veysi Durgut, and Ramazan Çağırca, father of a girl of 10 years, Cemile, killed on September 4, 2015 by the security forces during the siege of Cizre, and whose refusal by the Authorities to allow her burial under curfew had forced the family to keep the body in a refrigerator for days.

On the 16th, the head of the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper in Ankara, Erdem Gül, prosecuted for articles revealing the supply of weapons by the MIT (Turkish secret service) to Syrian jihadist groups, was finally acquitted. On the same day, in a raid on the HDP office in Istanbul, police arrested 16 people for "possession of illegal posters". On the 17th, investigations for "terrorist propaganda" were opened against two HDP M.P.s from Diyarbakir, Musa Farisoğulları and Remziye Tosun (the M.P. for Sur) for attending the funeral of a PKK fighter killed in action. On the 20th, another inquiry against HDP M.P.s Feleknaş Uca and Mehmet Rüştü Tiryaki was opened in Batman for their presence at the funeral of another fighter killed on the 8th, and finally on the 30th another against the HDP female co-president Pervin Buldan, for expressing support to them...

On 18 October, an Ankara court again refused Selahattin Demirtaş's release, while an investigation was announced against Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu for "insulting the president" because of a caricature; the real reason is that the CHP leader had publicly called the Erdoğan regime a "dictatorship" and "one-man regime".

The next day, six people were detained in Van following the death of a policeman who had been wounded on 14th during a raid, and the same day, the businessman and HDP member Kamil Acar was kidnapped by masked

armed men in Diyarbakır Province (SCF). His vehicle was found on the Şanlıurfa-Diyarbakır road, within two kilometres from a police station. Several drivers testified to illegal checkpoints held by masked men, but the police denied their existence... Previously detained in connection with the KCK (Union of Kurdistan Communities) investigation, Acar had been released on parole.

On the 20th, the police arrested in Ankara several participants in a demonstration commemorating the 2015 Suruç suicide attack against young people, volunteers to help rebuild Kobanê, including many students. Claimed by Daech, it had left 31 dead and 100 wounded.

In addition, several people have been denied their most basic rights. On the 9th, Kurdish politician Esmâ Yılmaz, mother of a one-year-old girl, who has been in pre-trial detention since December 2017, was denied medical release on bail, while her child, imprisoned with her, must follow 6 months of treatment in a hospital, but still needs breast milk (SCF). On the 30th, a 76-year-old Kurdish woman, Sisê Bingöl, had to remain in prison in Mersin despite the steady deterioration of her health, which was reported by the Muş hospital. Bingöl, who has diabetes, suffers from heart, liver and kidney disorders and high blood pressure, but Tarsus hospital published a scandalous report certifying that she can remain in detention ... (ANF)

Besides, the line of cultural repression against the Kurds is confirmed. On the 26th, the Turkish translation of the Soviet-era book *History of Kurdistan (Kürdistan Tarihi)*, authored by Lazarev and Mihoyan, published in 2001 by *Avesta*, was subjected to a new ban accompanied by a fine to the publisher. A dozen books dealing with

Kurds have been banned recently for "terrorist propaganda", including a book of Yezidi prayers! On the 31st, the Kurdish TV children's channel *Zarok TV* was fined 5% of its annual income for "terrorist propaganda" after broadcasting two songs whose lyrics contained the word "Kurdistan" ... (WKI)

Many foreigners were also affected by the arrests. On the 5th, two brothers, British citizens of Iraqi origin, Ayman and Hariam Barzan, were arrested on their arrival at the Dalaman airport, in the South-West of the country, and detained on remand for "terrorist propaganda" in favour of the PKK, because of their publications on social networks. If Cristina Cattafesta, the 62-year-old Italian human rights activist arrested in June for the same reason, was finally able to return to Italy on the 6th July, thanks to the personal intervention of the Italian Foreign Minister (ANSA, Italy), on the 12th, three French men and one woman were arrested in Şırnak on charges of having served as couriers for the PKK. The French national Ebru Firat, from Toulouse, of Kurdish origin, had already been arrested in 2016 and is serving a five-year sentence. The three French, arrested with 13 other people, were finally released in the early evening. On the 25th, a German citizen was in turn placed in pre-trial detention in Hatay. Then, on the 27th, Turkey tried to kidnap a Gülenist educational executive in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, but the small plane of the Turkish army had to take off without the teacher after the mobilisation of his students and the Mongolian authorities, who summoned the Turkish ambassador... (AFP)

But the most serious case concerning the repression of foreigners in Turkey remains that of the American pastor Andrew Brunson, accused of terrorism for the benefit of both the

PKK and Gülen! It could literally make Turkish-American relations implode. On the 18th, the Izmir court decided to place Brunson under house arrest, while the Trump administration hoped for his release. Based furthermore on an anonymous testimony, this decision made the US President mad. Tense telephone talks on 29 August between Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu did not solve anything. According to the *Washington Post*, Trump had negotiated with Erdoğan at the last NATO summit for the release of Brunson in exchange for Israel's release of Ebru Ozkan, a Turkish national accused of serving as a Hamas courier. Israel did release Ozkan, but the Turkish counterpart did not come... On the 29th, Vice President Mike Pence sent "a message on behalf of the President of the United States of America" to "President Erdoğan and the Turkish government" that they should take "immediate measures to free this innocent man of faith and send him home to America, failing which the United States will impose significant sanctions on Turkey". Donald Trump then tweeted in the same direction. The tone came up when Erdoğan spokesman Ibrahim Kalın described this "threatening language" as "unacceptable", adding "We will never tolerate anyone's threats".

Turkish military operations against the PKK also continued in both the Kurdish provinces of the country and Kurdistan of Iraq, where Turkish army installed 11 military bases. The Turkish military literally did not stop this month claiming the "neutralization" of PKK fighters, publishing independently unverifiable balance sheets likely to flatter the nationalist sentiments of the regime supporters...

On Sunday, July 1, the army claimed to have "neutralized" 8 Kurdish fighters over the weekend

in strikes on the Avasin-Basyan region of Kurdistan and Van and Şırnak in Turkey. The police in Soran announced that the day before, a 19-year-old woman working in a field had been killed by a Turkish mortar shell near the border. On the morning of the 2nd, further strikes on the Amedi (Dohuk) area caused the civilians to panic, and on the 4th, the Turkish staff announced that they had struck again that day and the day before on the Iraqi side near Qandil, Avasin-Basyan and Gara, and on the Turkish side Şırnak province, killing 11 PKK members. On the 6th, the Turkish bombardment caused forest fires in the Bradost Mountains and on the 8th, of numerous crops in Dohuk, while the staff still claimed the elimination of 22 Kurdish fighters in Mardin and Hakkari. On 7, 10 and 11, *Hürriyet* announced from military sources the “neutralization” of at least 40 PKK militants. For its part, the PKK claimed on the 9th the death of 3 Turkish soldiers in Kurdistan of Iraq in an attack on their positions in the

Barzan region, north of Erbil, while the Turkish Air Force announced the death of 25 Kurdish militants in one week, then the 11th, the destruction of 28 “PKK targets”... On the 12th, the Turkish Ministry of the Interior announced the “neutralization” of Welat Gever (war name of Sefer Acar), coordinator of a 1998 attack on a helicopter over Kurdistan that killed 15 soldiers. On the 13th, the army announced that it had neutralized 76 PKK members between the 6th and the 12th in Kurdistan and the provinces of Şırnak, Hakkari, Kars, Ağrı, Mardin and Bitlis, then 53 others on the Turkish side from 13 to 17. On the 14th, Kurdish witnesses from Iraq reported night strikes near Shiladze that frightened the local population, while the Turkish army claimed to have killed 6 Kurdish fighters, then on the 19th, in a new announcement on the 13<sup>th</sup>, the PKK “logistics manager” Delil Karakocan (Hasan Cakmak's war name) near Mount Bradost (*Kurdistan* 24). On the 23rd, the 2-year circulation

ban imposed on 30 different areas of Hakkari in the districts of Çukurca, Şemdinli, Yüksekova and the city center was again extended by the governor for at least 15 days. On the 24th, after PKK militants killed 15 Turkish soldiers north of Erbil, new strikes hit Kurdistan of Iraq. On the 26th, the army announced that it had neutralized 12 PKK members, and night fighting took place near Sidakan in Erbil province. On the 30th, the Turkish Ministry of Interior declared that 36 PKK terrorists had been “neutralized” between 23rd and 30th July in Turkey and Kurdistan of Iraq. Moreover, the Turkish staff tweeted that 10 members of the PKK had been neutralized on the 29th in the Metina region of Kurdistan... But these reports issued regularly by the Turkish authorities on the losses inflicted on PKK fighters are unverifiable, often fanciful and unreliable, pertaining to wartime propaganda... Finally, on the 31st, the army again imposed a curfew on the Diyarbakir region.

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## ROJAVA: UNO ACCUSES TURKEY OF MASSIVE VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRÎN

**T**he June report of the United Nations' High Commission on Human Rights (HCHR), published on 8<sup>th</sup> July, accuses Turkey of massive violations of Human Rights in Afrîn.

([https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ohchr\\_-\\_syria\\_monthly\\_human\\_rights\\_digest\\_-\\_june\\_2018.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ohchr_-_syria_monthly_human_rights_digest_-_june_2018.pdf)).

Drawing a frightening picture of the situation in the region, it describes the security situation as “unstable” with fighting between groups, “a high level of violent crime” and “civilians subjected to rape, harassment, kidnaping and murder”. “Civilians informed the

*HCHR that certain members of armed opposition groups operating in the region are well-known former criminals, smugglers or drug dealers”*. Overall, the report confirms the large scale plundering of the region is continuing, the plundered goods being sold at Azaz, a town controlled by Turkey. The HCHR also drew up a list of 11 kidnappings of civilians for ransom, the fate of some remaining unknown. Moreover, the report mentions the discrimination against people suspected of links with the Kurdish forces. It also confirms the settling of thousands of fighters and their relatives as well as displaced civilians from other parts of Syria in the houses

of Kurds fleeing the Turks, who refuse to give them back to their legitimate owners. The latter are often turned back at checkpoints when trying to return, jailed on suspicion of being members of Kurdish forces or simply taken off to unknown destinations. The charge of membership in the Kurdish forces is also used as a pretext for confiscating property. Expressing concern at this policy of ethnic cleansing, the HCHR demands that Turkey “*be watchful that all the groups that it commands or or controls in Afrin (...) strictly observe their obligations regarding International Humanitarian Rights*”. A demand that has every likelihood of going unheeded...

On the 18<sup>th</sup> a communiqué from the German society for endangered peoples (*Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker*, GfbV) blackened still further the picture drawn up by the UNO report: 120 kidnappings, 7 murders, 10 cases of rape and 27 raids that destroyed civilian property, 4 camps burned between 1<sup>st</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> July. A source also reports the disappearance of 3,000 to 7,000 Kurds whose families are keeping quiet out of fear. The Turkish troops and the jihadists collect mobile phones to discover who revealed their attacks. The eviction of Kurds is now reaching the “legal” level, with the (pro-Turkish) Afrin “local Council” starting to check the title deeds (ANF) ... Furthermore, there are testimonies of deliberate murders, such as that of 2 brothers of Jindiris, seriously wounded by pro-Turkish looters. Found the next day tied to a tree before his house, one of them, a father of 4, died in hospital through lack of medicines. Another group admitted to the murder of the 2 young Kurds, whose family refused any financial compensation (SCF). Finally on the 14<sup>th</sup> the Rojava administration announced that the occupation forces had burnt 4,000 trees, including many olive trees — over 1,000 at Khuziana, in Mobate (Maabatli) district and earlier in the week at Rajo, 3,000 olive trees, oaks and pomegranate trees. On the 27<sup>th</sup> some militia occupying Bulbul cut down 68 trees that they sold in Turkey (AFP). Destroying olive trees, which are the main source of wealth of the inhabitants is also a way of practicing ethnic cleansing...

Meanwhile resistance is continuing. While on 1<sup>st</sup> July the Turkish Army shelled the YPG positions round the towns of Malkiyah and Anab, near Manbij, killing 3 fighters, on the 10<sup>th</sup> the YPG announced they had carried out several attacks between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>. On the 5<sup>th</sup> July a pro-

Turkish fighter guarding an army base was killed by a sniper, on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 3 others were killed in an ambush on the Rajo-Afrin road and an important commander, Mohammed al-Sulayman, was killed at Bulbul, and an explosive device killed 2 pro-Turkish fighters at a check point at Chara. The SDF, who sent back from the East 2,000 troops towards Afrin on the 24<sup>th</sup>, on the 31<sup>st</sup> called on the citizens to be vigilant: Turkish soldiers wearing stolen YPG uniforms are attacking civilians to discredit the SDF.

At Manbij, a town with an Arab majority population, located 30 km from the Turkish border, the situation remains tense. After reaching an agreement in June on a Turkish-American “road map”, which defines a buffer zone round the town separating the Turkish forces from the SDF, Turkish troops started to patrol near the town while the YPG announced a “withdrawal” (largely cosmetic) of their “military advisers”. On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, two US Senators, one Republican, the other a Democrat, came to the town. During a meeting with the military Council one of them stressed the importance of maintaining the American presence (AFP). On the same day the *Fars* news agency reported the arrival of fresh American contingents. On the 3<sup>rd</sup>, the commander of the military Council, Xelil Bozi, declared that if Turkish troops tried to enter the town they would be fired upon (*Sputnik*). On the 5<sup>th</sup> a rally to protest against the invasion of Afrin was targeted by a bomb that wounded 22 people and caused at least 1 death (ANF, *Ahval*). On the 15<sup>th</sup> the SDF indicated that the last YPG members had left the town — an announcement confirmed on the 17<sup>th</sup> by the Military Council. It was, however, denied by Turkey, which maintained that the withdrawal was not complete. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, the pro-Damascus daily *El Watan*

announced that, according to a source in the local administration, the Military Council, like the majority of the local inhabitants, learning from the example of Afrin, preferred that the town pass again under Syrian control rather than fall into the hands of the Turkish invaders (*Sputnik*). No confirmation of this statement has come from Manbij.

Alongside these events, the SDF continued their offensive against ISIS on the Eastern bank of the Euphrates, advancing slowly because of the many explosive devices the Jihadists had installed. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, according to the Syrian Centre for Human Rights (SCHR) a bomb attack against the SDF at Bsayra (Deir Ezzor Province) killed 11 fighters and 7 civilians, including 3 children. Seeing its usual way of operating, this attack, which was not claimed, could well have been by ISIS. This did not stop the SDF from taking over the towns of Madina and Qabrata, Southeast of the former stronghold of the group, Dashishah (Hassaka). On the 10<sup>th</sup> the Turkish TRT television channel reported that the coalition had provided the SDF with 200 lorries of weapons and ammunition. A similar delivery (250 lorries) the month before had already provoked Turkey’s fury...

On the 13<sup>th</sup> the SDF announced the beginning of operations against Hajin, one of the last ISIS strongholds. The evening before an air strike close to the village of al-Sussa, about 25 km Southeast of Hajin, had killed 26 jihadists but also 28 civilians, used as human shields (SCHR). The coalition announced the opening of an enquiry into this probable “blunder”, which could also have been carried out by Iraqi planes... On the 14<sup>th</sup> the coalition’s artillery shelled several ISIS positions round Hajin. On the 24<sup>th</sup> the SDF announced they had taken other villages in the Rodah region, while the US

Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, boasted in a communiqué of their “bravery” and their “sacrifices”.

Another change in the situation, a political one this time, concerns the contacts between the autonomous administration of North Syria and the Damascus regime. On the 2<sup>nd</sup>, after the government had met the Kurdish delegates in Damascus and Qamishli, *Al-Masdar News* announced an agreement between the Syrian Army and the YPG. The latter was said to have accepted to remove from the streets and areas under their control in Hasaka, the posters depicting Abdullah Ocalan, and to allow the Army to open recruiting offices. In return, the YPG is said to have asked Damascus to introduce the teaching of the Kurdish language into the education system, to count the time spent in the YPG as periods of military service, and to appoint a Kurd at a position of responsibility in the Oil Ministry. On the 10<sup>th</sup>, a few days after a fresh meeting held in Qamishli, the Damascus army did indeed host the Syrian flag over the Nishwah quarter in Hassaka, while the pictures of Ocalan were removed from the walls. The Kurdish authorities nevertheless denied any agreement with Damascus.

On the 13<sup>th</sup>, the municipality of Tabqa, affiliated to the North Syrian Federation, accepted to give the staff of the State company managing the great dam located 50 Km from the town, access to it to carry our maintenance — which amounts to shared management between the Federation and Damascus. Taken by ISIS early in 2014, regained by the SDF in 2017, the dam, considerably damaged by the Coalition’s air strikes, needs repair. “Cooperation exists in this case because the dam belongs to all Syrians” declared Hamid al-Faraj, a member of Tabqa’s administration. Another agree-

ment reached a few months ago covers the oil from the Rmeilan and Jabsah sites (Hassaka Province), controlled by the Kurds. The latter transfer a third of the production to the Homs refinery, refining the rest themselves (*Spoutnik*). However the Russian news agency notes that the calculation is based on an official rate of production of 38,000 barrels per day, whereas before the war it was 160,000...

On the 16<sup>th</sup> the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), the political expression of the SDF, began its 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress at Tabqa, bringing together for 2 days 240 public figures, elected local councillors but also representatives of the “official” (tolerated) Damascus opposition. These participants have to decide on a platform for negotiations with the regime (*AFP*). On the 19<sup>th</sup>, Ilham Ehmed announced that the SDC would open offices in the provinces of Lattaquia, Damascus, Hama and Homs, before confirming on the 20<sup>th</sup> that negotiations were indeed held in Tabqa.

The pro-regime daily *al-Watan* announced on the 20<sup>th</sup> that as well as the items already published by *Al-Masdar* the Kurdish forces would surrender the government the town or Raqqa, several oil and gas fields and that the SDF would be incorporated into Damascus’s Army... These assertions were refuted by par Salih Muslim, former co-president of the PYD, now responsible for the SDF’s external relations. He pointed out that he was ready to negotiate with Damascus, but in the presence of international mediators and with certain guarantees. Taking care to distinguish between State organisations (like the company that manages the dam) and institutions affiliated to the regime, he pointed out that the Tabqa agreement was dictated by public interest and had no

political significance. He further considered that the spreading of deceptive information by *al-Watan* proved that Damascus was not sincere in its negotiations. The contents of this publication had indeed not been confirmed by the Kurds. The SDF made the point in the 24<sup>th</sup> that they would keep control of the dam.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, according to *AFP* a delegation of the SDC consisting of civilian and military leaders came to Damascus at the government’s invitation. Omar Oussi, a Kurdish member of the Damascus Parliament, confirmed its arrival, declaring that negotiations would cover how “easing the army’s entry into the territories with a Kurdish majority population East of the Euphrates and the restoration of State institutions. In exchange the Kurds would obtain recognition in the Constitution of their “cultural rights”. On the 28<sup>th</sup> the SDC declared, in a communiqué, that it had been decided to form joint committees to pursue the negotiations “aiming at decentralising Syria”, according to Sihanouk Dibo, a member of the SDC (PYD). The Damascus regime did not comment on these declarations. The discussions could last a year, so wide is the gap between the SDC’s demands and the centralising practices of the regime.

At the end of the month eyes were turned to Idlib, controlled by the *Al-Nosra* Front — a formerly *Al-Qaida* affiliate — and Turkish troops. This last rebel region is the likely target of the next offensive by Damascus and its allies. On the 26<sup>th</sup> Ilham Ehmed let it be heard that the SDF might help Damascus. For his part, Aldar Khalil, co-president of the TEV-DEM (Movement for a Democratic Society) declared that one of the stages for regaining Afrin was to put pressure on Turkey to have it leave Syrian soil. (*Rûdaw*).



## IRAQ: POST-ELECTION NEGOTIATIONS WITHOUT ENDING, VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH; KURDISTAN IS PREPARING FOR ITS OWN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS...

**A**ll through the month of July, while Province by Province the recounting of the ballot papers of May's election continued — with results always being challenged — the demonstrations against corruption and the absence of basic services in the South of the country grew ever greater — as did the repression! Despite all this, negotiations between the parties have been pursued under cover to try for a government agreement — without any success, so far. In Kurdistan preparations for the Parliamentary and Presidential elections, due on 30<sup>th</sup> September, continued. Evaluating the situation in Kurdistan with measured optimism, the political veteran Hoshyar Zebari stated that Iraq had changed: the elections not giving any list a sufficient majority, the different lists would have to dialogue more than before, while all the Iraqi communities, Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish are themselves divided. Zebari deems the situation in Kurdistan has improved with the ending of the economic and air embargoes, the improvement of relations with Baghdad, especially the regular sending of its share of the budget. If the Kurds want to succeed in the post-election negotiations, he said, they must unite.

The operation of manual recounting of the ballot papers, limited to polling stations for which complaints for fraud were raised, have been initiated all through the month, in one province after another. They began with Anbar, Dohuk, Kirkuk, Erbil, Nineveh (*Ninawa*, or Mosul Province), Salahaddin and Sulaimaniyeh. *"The recounting process first began with Kirkuk, since that was where there were the biggest number of protests"* Imad Jamil, of

the Electoral Commission, pointed out to *AFP*. Furthermore it was at Kirkuk that a car bomb attack occurred on the 1<sup>st</sup>, aimed at a warehouse containing ballot papers. It caused 1 death and at least 19 injured — but failed to destroy any ballot papers, since the police opened fire in time... In Kirkuk the PUK had won 6 seats, 3 others going to the Turcoman Front, 3 others to the Arab Alliance and 1 to the Christians. On the 9<sup>th</sup> several political parties, who had not obtained being present during the recount, rejected its results, alleging a manipulation of the ballot papers... In Sulaimaniyeh the recount was begun on the 10<sup>th</sup>, boycotted by the 4 Kurdish Parties that had challenged the initial results: Goran, the Islamic Union (*Yekgirtû*), the Islamic Komal and the Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CDJ), who demanded an overall recount and not a limited one. Despite the corrections affecting its score, the PUK remained in the lead at Kirkuk and at Sulaimaniyeh. On the 12<sup>th</sup> the recount began in Erbil, boycotted by the same parties as for Sulaimaniyeh. On the 14<sup>th</sup> it began in Dohuk, where it lasted till the 17<sup>th</sup>. The one at Nineveh began on the 17<sup>th</sup> and included the displaced peoples' camps, never taken into account till then following a decision by the Parliament.

Finally the manual recount, described by UNO observers as "transparent", ended for the country as a whole on the 26<sup>th</sup>. The committee responsible for it announced on the 24<sup>th</sup> that it expected the biggest differences with the initial results to appear in Kirkuk Province...

Made necessary by the atomisation of the results, the post-election

negotiations were at first handicapped by the re-counting process, likely to alter the initial results, and then by the demonstrations in the South of the country. In Kurdistan, the KDP and the PUK, regional winners of the elections, finally set aside their post-referendum quarrels to present a common front in the discussions. Each of those 2 parties committed itself not to undertake any alliance without the other, then in the middle of the month they announced a programme likely to provide a common basis for discussions was near. According to *Rûdaw*, this programme includes *"the carrying out of Article 140, a referendum to decide the fate of the disputed territories, the formation of a balanced government of Shiites, Sunni Arabs and Kurds, the passing of all Parliament's laws and decisions on the basis of an agreement and not on that of the majority opposed to minority positions, and a balanced sharing of government positions"*. The two parties called on the other Kurdish organisations to back this programme.

In general all the lists said they wanted to avoid the repetition of the post-2010 situation of a Shi'ite monopoly of power, inter-community opposition and marginalisation of the Sunni Arabs. The Kurds have sought to revive the "historic alliance" of Kurds and Shiites that followed the fall of Saddam Hussein (*Asharq Al-Awsat*). At one point, it was talked of a Kurdish alliance with Hadi al-Ameri's *Fatah* list, which would have had 60 M.P.s — thus passing before Moqtada Sadr's *Sayrûn* coalition (45 seats). On the 24<sup>th</sup>, for the first time since the elections, delegations from *Fatah* and Nuri al-Maliki's "State of Law" party came to Erbil, however by the end of the month no alliance had emerged...

On the other hand, inter-party discussions, without really stopping, had to become more discrete in the face of the violence developing in the South: on 8<sup>th</sup> July, in Basrah, the police fired real bullets on demonstrators protesting about the lack of jobs, electricity and water as well as other basic services and the corruption of the police. According to the police, 8 demonstrators were wounded, but an elected local Councillor counted 1 killed and 3 wounded. On the 13<sup>th</sup> demonstrations led by local tribal chiefs took place at Najaf and Babel. At least 3 people were killed and dozens wounded. When the demonstrators took Najaf airport by storm, the Shi'ite religious leader, Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, expressing his solidarity with the movement, demanded a peaceful resolution. The demonstrations then extended to the provinces of Kerbela, Maysan and Dhi Qar as well as to the Shoula quarter in Baghdad, entering the sixth day of their movement on the 14<sup>th</sup>. To try and curb the movement, the government interrupted the social media and most of the internet services throughout the country, while the movement took an anti-Iranian tone (a photo of Khomeiny was burnt), Baghdad engaged in alternating concessions and repression: firing on the crowds, causing 2 deaths (12 killed and over 250 wounded according to local media) and many arrested. On the 22, Muqtada al-Sadr decided the suspension of post-election discussions until the "legitimate demands" of the Iraqis were met. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, as the demonstrations entered their third week, the Council of Ministers met to discuss how to calm the movement down and some arrested people were released. However, at the end of the month the demonstrations were still going on...

The internal politics of Kurdistan were dominated by the preparations for the parliamentary elections, due

on 30<sup>th</sup> September. This reactivated the debate on the Region's Presidency, which has been vacant since Masud Barzani's resignation on 1<sup>st</sup> November last. He had then refused any further extensions of his term of office, as Parliament had done. His powers had then been shared out between the Prime Minister, Parliament and the judicial power. However, contrary to the demands of some of the parties, the Provincial and Presidential elections will not take place together with the Parliamentary ones... Some KDP and PUK Members of Parliament demanded that the first task of the next Parliament should be the drawing up of a Constitution that could clarify the President's role (*Kurdistan* 24).

On 1<sup>st</sup> July, the Parliament, despite the opposition of the Kurdish Islamist parties, but with the support of the KDP, the PUK and *Goran*, extended the anti-terrorist law, passed in 2006 following the two 2004 bomb attacks in Erbil, which had caused 101 deaths. Already extended 4 times it was due to expire (*Kurdistan* 24). *Human Rights Watch* voiced concern about the fate of 1,200 people, mostly Arabs, incarcerated in the Region, the Islamist parties have expressed doubt about both the effectiveness of the law and the guilt of some of the young people jailed (*Al Monitor*).

On the 5<sup>th</sup>, Kurdistan's Electoral Commission announced that it would accept declarations of candidature for Parliament from the 7<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> July. The candidates of 37 parties and lists began officially to register as from the 7<sup>th</sup>. On the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament voted the suspension of the Region's Presidency until sitting of the next legislature, which should make a decision about it during its first two years of office. This vote follows the filing by *Goran* and the KDP of 2 draft Bills to this effect. The PUK also supported this decision,

which was opposed by the Islamic Group (*Komal*) and the Islamic Union (*Yekgirtû*). The latter called for either the suppression of the post or that the Presidential elections occur at the same time as the Parliamentary ones (*Kurdistan* 24). The electors have started to check their presence on the new electoral register, based on the ration cards (*Rûdaw*).

In the morning of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Kurdistan was shaken by new terrorist attack: three armed men took hostages in the Erbil governor's offices. One civil servant was killed and four police wounded before the intruders were shot down after four hours shooting. The attack was not immediately claimed. The three assailants were Erbil teenagers, two were 16 and the third was 18 (*AFP*). The next day the Erbil Security (*Asayish*) issued a warrant for membership of ISIS against an Iraqi M.P., Mullah Salim Shushkayi (*Komal*). He was said to be linked to another mullah, arrested three weeks earlier, Ismail Susai, himself linked to the three attackers of the governor's office. Shushkayi, who is said to have sought refuge in Sulaimaniyeh, rejected these accusations and the "New Generation" movement attacked the warrant as a "settling of political scores" after *Komal* had voted against the extension of the anti-terrorist Law. On the 26<sup>th</sup> *Goran*, *Komal*, the Islamic Union of Kurdistan and the Islamic League (*Yekgirtû*), also expressed their support for Shushkayi in a common communiqué.

In the disputed territories, anti-Kurdish actions are continuing. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, the mayor of Daquq (Kirkuk), Amir Khudakaram Mohammed (UPK), stripped of office by the (Arab) interim governor, Rakan Said Jabouri, indicated he would appeal this decision, made, according to him on the excuse that he "hoisted the

*Kurdistan flag, supported the independence referendum and that the PKK was present in the district”... On 10<sup>th</sup> July, 600 Kurdish families from three Kirkuk villages complained they had been driven from their lands by the North Oil Company from whom they had received expulsion notices, while other villages, populated by Arabs, had not been bothered. Their present location had already been imposed on them in 2005 by the company (*Rûdaw*). On the 17<sup>th</sup> the mayor of the Sargaran (Kirkouk) sub-district, Luqman Husein, accused the governor of carrying out a policy of arabisation against the Kurdish villages of his sub-district, denouncing the settling, in Kurdish villages, of thousands of armed Arabs who received identity cards (WKI). On the 18<sup>th</sup> *Kurdistan 24* announced it had secured copies of an official order of the 11<sup>th</sup> July in which the Minister of Health dismissed Kirkuk’s Director General of Health, Sabah Zangana (a Kurd), to replace him by a Turcman. Finally, *Rûdaw* revealed that since federal forces had taken over the disputed territories on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 30 Kurdish villages near the town of Dibis, round Daquq and Tuz Khurmatu (Kirkuk) had had to be evacuated because of threats by non-Kurdish groups, especially armed Shi’ite Arabs brought there during Saddam Hissein’s dictatorship. In some cases even the Kurdish names of the villages were changed. On the 26<sup>th</sup> 6 Kurdish police officers were sacked in Kirkuk (the local PUK was only able to secure the suspension of this decision). Amongst the Kurdish leaders in Kirkuk who have been stripped of office since October 2017, are the Governor, the Director of Security, the Director General of Health, the Director General of Agriculture, the Mayors of the towns of Kirkuk, Dibis, Daquq and Tuz*

Khurmatu, as well as the Police Chiefs of the district and suburban area... In the city of Kirkuk itself, by the end of the month, after a Kurd had been shot by an officer of the Iraqi Army, the Iraqi anti-terrorist forces surrounded the *Azadi* hospital to which his body had been taken and deployed in several Kurdish quarters in fear of an uprising.

In certain cases the abuses of power by members of the Shi’ite militia trying to drive Kurdish villagers out of their homes combined with attacks that more probably came from ISIS militia, because the threat from Jihadists is unceasingly growing again. At the beginning of the month Baghdad deployed new forces in the province and began the construction of a security barrier along the Syrian border. Actions against ISIS are incessant. On the 30<sup>th</sup> June, ISIS’s expert in finance and logistics, Abu Obaida, was killed near Mount Qarachogh, not far from Makhmour, in a joint operation by the Coalition and the Peshmergas. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> the Iraqis launched an operation in the orchards of Baquba (Diyala), destroying and defusing the mines laid there by the Jihadists.

It was at Diyala that the number of ISIS victims in June was the highest: 16 killed and 36 wounded, before Kirkuk (10 killed 36 wounded) and Baghdad (19 killed and 18 wounded). On the 3<sup>rd</sup> a raid South of Kirkuk was able to kill 14 Jihadists. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, while the Kurdish Prime Minister, Nechirvan Barzani, declared he was ready to cooperate with Baghdad to ensure the security of the disputed areas, a vast joint operation of the Iraqi Army and the Peshmergas (the first since October 2017) launched near the Iranian borders, resulted in the death of 1 Jihadist, the capture of 9 others and the destruction of 8

vehicles (*AFP*). On the same day, also for the first time since the referendum, a meeting took place between the Kurdish and Iraqi troops, in the course of which the latter asked for authorisation to launch raids against ISIS in areas held by the Pehmergas — an authorisation refused by the former.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> a bomb detonated at the passing of an Iraqi police patrol caused 1 death and 3 wounded Southwest of Kirkuk. As a reprisal, the Iraqi Air Force destroyed several Jihadist vehicles and a camp, killing 7 others in another operation on the 12<sup>th</sup>, before launching ground operations on the 14<sup>th</sup> towards Tuz Khurmatu (*Rûdaw*). On the 17<sup>th</sup>, Iraqi fighter aircrafts carried out several strikes to the Northwest of Kirkuk, reporting having killed 14 Jihadists. However, on the 18<sup>th</sup> at least 11 people were wounded in the city of Kirkuk by 3 explosions — unclaimed but evocative of ISIS methods. On the same day the police in Nineveh announced the capture of 23 Jihadists West of Mosul, and a joint operation of the Iraqi Army and Peshmergas with Coalition air support, again aimed at Mount Qarachogh. However, on the same day as the attack on the Erbil governor’s offices, some armed men, presumably Jihadists, attacked in the evening a police station at Makhmour and killed 4 people there (*Kurdistan 24*).

In Mosul, another 50 Shabak families left for Dohuk due to the lack of security and of basic services. In view of the degradation of security conditions in the disputed territories, even some Iraqi commanders, according to *Rûdaw*, are demanding that the Peshmergas be enabled to return, especially to Kirkuk, Diyala, Salahaddin and the areas round the Hamrin Mountains...

## IRAN: INCREASING MILITARY TENSIONS BETWEEN THE KURDISH PARTIES AND STATE REPRESSION FORCES

**T**ension has increased, this month, in Iranian Kurdistan, also affecting the neighbouring areas of Iraqi Kurdistan. On 2<sup>nd</sup> July the Iranian border guards defined in Iraqi Kurdistan near Haji Oamaran a band of “no man’s land” of 10 km by 2 km, threatening of shooting the villagers if they failed to evacuate the zone within 72 hours. 50 families are said to be concerned (*Kurdistan* 24). The Iranians have been regularly shelling the area for several years now, claiming to aim at opposition fighters. The Regional Government of Kurdistan (KRG) appealed to the Iranian Government to put an end to these blind bombardments while asking the Kurdish fighters not to launch operations towards Iran from its territory.

In the evening of the 7<sup>th</sup>, fighting took place between KDPI Peshmergas and Guardians of the Revolution (*pasdaran*) near the mountain village of Koke, near Bokan (Western Azerbaijan), causing 4 killed or wounded amongst the *pasdaran*. Claiming the operation on the 9<sup>th</sup>, the KDPI pointed out that the Iranian security forces had avenged their losses by attacking and arresting local civilians. After the confrontations, several military helicopters flew over the mountains. Some fighting had already taken place on 23<sup>rd</sup> June near Piranshahr.

In the morning of the 9<sup>th</sup>, the Iranian border guards crossed the Iraqi Kurdistan borders in the Kela Shin district, near Sidakan, and confiscated a thousand sheep that, they said, were grazing too close to their outposts. They then arrested 2 shep-

herds, who had come to fetch their sheep and then some of their relatives who had come for news of the shepherds... The mayor of Sidakan, Ihsan Chalabi, stressed that neither sheep nor civilians had ever crossed the border. All were released on the 10<sup>th</sup> after the intervention of the Kurdistan border guards. According to Chalabi, the same thing had happened in 2017 over 43 cows – but these, however, were never given back...

In the evening of the 11<sup>th</sup> a Kurdish member of the *pasdaran* was killed near Piranshahr by 2 KDPI Peshmergas who, according to that organisation, had been captured and injured by him in the past. Another Kurdish *pasdar* is said to have been killed in the same week. In the afternoon of the 13<sup>th</sup>, the Iranian artillery shelled again the Choman region of Iraqi Kurdistan for 20 minutes, forcing the shepherds to flee. According to the mayor of Haji Oamaran, Farzang Ahmad, there were no casualties. The next day there were several fights between the *pasdaran* and KDPI Peshmergas at Nowdeshah and Paveh (Kermanshah). According to the *pasdaran*, 1 of their men and 3 Peshmergas were killed. The KDPI announced having killed 2 *pasdaran* (*Rûdaw*). On the 17<sup>th</sup>, intense artillery shooting caused fires and the flight of civilians from the Sidakan region of Kurdistan, but without making civilian casualties. The next day, the KDPI announced that 2 of its Peshmergas had been killed. During the night of 20/21, 11 *pasdaran* were killed and 8 others wounded when fighters of the PJAK (a party linked with the Turkish PKK) attacked one of their bases near the village of Dari

in the Marivan region, provoking the explosion of its stock of ammunition (*RFI*). The PJAK claimed the attack the next day. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> Iran indirectly warned the KRG in a communiqué, threatening “certain neighbouring countries” that if they failed to better control the border insecurity, it would act by itself to “target terrorist bases in these countries” (*Kurdistan* 24).

In this context of increasing military tension, arrests and executions have followed one another all through the month. According to *Hengaw*, during the first 15 days of July at least 43 Kurds, including 12 shepherds, were arrested and incarcerated in Iran, 18 accused of “political activities”, 2 of “religious activities”, another of “media activity”. Among the detainees, 8 are originally from Iraqi Kurdistan and four others from Turkish Kurdistan. Among the executions, still according to *Hengaw*, only in the week of the 16<sup>th</sup>, the Iranian Government hanged 10 Kurdish prisoners accused of murder, the last 3 at Urumiah. Amongst these, a man of 65, who had been in prison for 10 years (*Kurdistan* 24). The denial of political prisoners’ rights is also an everyday practice, as with Ghader Mohammad Zadeh, sentenced to 18 years for *moharebeh* (hostility to God, an iniquitous punishment for dissidents). Although Zadeh has already served 12 years of his sentence, he was refused conditional release and the prison authorities have removed his bed and forcibly transferred him to the labourers section. As a punishment for protesting he was moved to isolation on 9<sup>th</sup> June and has begun a hunger strike on the 15<sup>th</sup>, which he was

continuing at the end of the month.

Another Kurdish political prisoner, Ramin Hossein Panahi, 24 year of age, is in Death Row since January, accused of “*having taken up arms against the State*” without any proof of his having taken part in armed operations of the Kurdish party *Komala*. In April the Iranian Supreme Court approved his sentence, but his execution, planned for 3<sup>rd</sup> May was postponed after an international uproar at the United Nations and several NGOs. Mid-June some activists demonstrated to stop his execution before UNO at Erbil. A group of lawyers including his own sent to the Supreme Guide, the President and the Supreme Court, letters requesting a stop to his execution, letters which remained without answer. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> the “pro-Kurdish” party of Turkey HDP also called for the immediate stopping of his execution in a letter to the Iranian Ambassador in Turkey. On the 4<sup>th</sup> Panahi’s family expressed anxiety following his transfer to a cell for detainees accused of drug dealing, while the authorities cancelled all leave for the staff of the prison in which he is kept (*Hengaw*)... It seems the authorities sought to make believe an execution was imminent, to torture him and his relations psychologically. On the 5<sup>th</sup> Panahi was sent to a public cell but everyone is still worried about the danger of his execution, especially as his brother, Amjad Hossein Panahi, tweeted that the guards had told the prisoner “*You will not leave this block, you will either be executed or die in this prison*” (*Iranfocus*). On the 20<sup>th</sup> Amjad again expressed his anxiety: “*The authorities of Sanandaj prison told Ramin that he did not need medical treatment as he would soon be executed*”. *Hengaw*, that reports this decla-

ration, also indicated that it was considered to transfer the prisoner to Rajai Shahr prison, near Teheran, which has a sorry reputation for using torture, rape and murder, and is considered one of the worst prisons in Iran...

On the 7<sup>th</sup>, exactly one year to the day of the attack (on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2017) against the Parliament and Khomeiny’s mausoleum, which had caused 12 deaths and 42 wounded, 8 Kurds found guilty were executed. The operation had been claimed by ISIS.

The Iranian Intelligence Services (*Ettela’at*) are also continuing to kidnap Kurdish activists. Thus for the activist Peyman Abdi in Marivan, taken to an unknown location, or Abdulwahid Pûr, kidnapped in Mahabad. Furthermore the Kurdish student at Teheran, Meryem Faraji, 33 years old, who had taken part in the organisation of the demonstrations against the regime in January 2018, and had disappeared since 5<sup>th</sup> July, was found dead. Her body was so charred that it could only be identified on the 15<sup>th</sup> by ADN analysis. It also bore traces of torture (*WKI*)... She had been sentenced to 3 years jail, then reduced to supervised freedom and forbidden to leave the country for 2 years.

Dozens of Iranian Kurds, who had supported the Iraqi independence referendum held last September were also jailed, fined or beaten up (*Hengaw*). Thus the family of Ramin Kardani, a Kurdish activist from Saqqez, indicated that he had been sentenced to 4 years jail. The journalist, Bextyar Xoşnaw, who had, moreover, sent reports to foreign media, was sentenced to 74 whip lashes and a fine of 1.800.000 tomans...

Finally many Christians, including Kurds, were arrested by

agents of the Intelligence Services for “*preaching Christianity on Internet*”, like Massoumeh Taqinejad, 30 years old, arrested on the 19<sup>th</sup> at her home in Kermanshah with her son and kept incommunicado since then. Her computer and her personal effects were confiscated when she was arrested. The Special United Nations Rapporteur on Human Rights in Iran, Ahmad Shahid, declared during the 28<sup>th</sup> session of the United Nations Council for the defence of Human Rights that Iran continued to violate the rights of religious minorities like the Yarsans, Bahaiis, Christians, Sufis, and Sunni Moslems: between March 2017 and March 2018 47 Kurdish women and 3 Christian women were arrested for their faith by the Security Services.

Abroad an affair involving several people of Iranian origin, including the Iranian diplomat Assadollah Assadi, on duty in Vienna since 2014 and three other people originally from that country living in Belgium, has just re-activated the memory of the sinister murders of opponents committed by the regime’s Secret Services long years ago. The people arrested all appear to be involved in a plot to attack the National Council of the Iranian Resistance (NCIR) during its annual meeting near Paris. Firstly the Belgian Police arrested a Belgian-Iranian couple from Antwerp transporting 500 gr. of explosives and detonators hidden in a vanity case. Then Assadi was arrested the next day in Germany and accused of acting like a foreign Intelligence agent and of plotting to commit a murder. A fourth suspect, also an Iranian living in Belgium, then detained in France, is due to be rapidly extradited to Belgium. According to the German authorities, Assadi, a member of the Iranian

Intelligence Service operating under diplomatic cover, met the couple in Luxemburg to give them the explosives. The NCIR identified the couple as infiltrators sent from Teheran. On the 5<sup>th</sup> the Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Abbas Araghchi, summoned the French, German and Austrian Ambassadors in Teheran to protest and denounce *"a plot aimed at damaging relations between the European Union and Iran"* ... These denials are not very convincing in the face of the assassinations of the historic leaders of the KDPI: Abdulrahman Ghassemlou in Austria in 1989 and Sadegh Sharafkandi in Germany in 1991. The Iranians have also attacked the KDPI at Koy Sandjak in 1996, assassinated hundreds of members of the party in Iraqi Kurdistan, including 3 in 2018. The latest Kurdish activist assassinated is Iqbal Muradi, a longstanding member

of the Kurdistan Human Rights Association, found on 17<sup>th</sup> July in a river near Penjwin with 7 bullets in his body... At the end of the month the KDPI reported holding "detailed information" according to which Iran planned "major military and terrorist operations" against this party to divert attention from the declining economic and political situation in Iran.

Regarding general news, in the night of the 11<sup>th</sup> a collision occurred between a tanker lorry coming from Iraqi Kurdistan and a passenger bus, followed by an enormous explosion that caused at least 27 deaths near Sanandaj. According to a local journalist, there were clashes between demonstrators and the police after the disaster. The local authorities decreed 3 days mourning in Kurdistan. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> a 5.9 magnitude earthquake caused 128 injured in the

Kurdish regions of Iran. The tremor was felt in Iraqi Kurdistan, especially in Halabja, Sulaimaniyeh, Erbil, Soran and Raparin. Last year already a powerful quake had caused 5,000 deaths and thousands of injured and 70,000 homeless. Residents complained at the lack of support by the government.

On the economic level, although the KRG discusses putting several border passage points up to international standards and even creating a "free zone" at Parviz-Khan (Sulaimaniyeh), a 650 million dollar project, the situation of the Kurds of Iran remains difficult, especially with the drop of Iranian currency. In Sanandaj the cleaning agents of the Salawat district have been on strike since the 20<sup>th</sup> and were continuing their movement by the end of the month. They haven't been paid for the last 7 months.

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# Erdogan : un président pour deux Turquie

La réélection de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, le 24 juin, a exacerbé les tensions entre deux clans qui se divisent autour d'un président n'ayant cessé, ces dernières années, de faire du clivage une carte électorale.

**DELPHINE MINOUI** @DelphineMinoui  
CORRESPONDANTE À ISTANBUL

**MOYEN-ORIENT** Les yeux rivés vers l'horizon, le regard triomphant de Recep Tayyip Erdogan domine la place Taksim. «*Tesekkürler İstanbul*» («*merci İstanbul*») annonce le poster géant du président turc, réélu avec 52,5 % des voix. Impossible de le rater : couvrant intégralement la façade d'un immeuble de six étages, au cœur de cette place historique de la ville, il a fait son apparition dès le lendemain de sa victoire, dimanche 24 juin. «*J'ai encore du mal à m'y faire*», peste Utku, en passant sous l'affiche. Cet enseignant turc y voit la fin d'un rêve, celui d'une Turquie plurielle. «*Je fais partie des 47,5 % de Turcs qui ont voté contre Erdogan*, tranche-t-il quand on lui demande pour quel candidat il a voté. *J'appartiens à l'autre moitié du pays qui ne se reconnaît ni dans le visage de cet autocrate ni dans le nouveau décor qu'il nous impose.*»

Utku relève la tête, parcourant du regard les nouveaux «*symboles*» de Taksim : la grande dalle piétonne sans charme où les touristes du Golfe prennent la pause en mode selfie, la nouvelle mosquée sortie de terre en moins d'un an et ces imposantes bâches annonçant la construction d'un Opéra ultramoderne aux allures de centre commercial sur les ruines de l'ancien centre culturel Atatürk, le père fondateur de la République... «*Partout, Erdogan impose sa marque islamo-capitaliste et nationaliste. Comme si une Turquie en chassait une autre*», souffle Utku.

«*La Turquie contemporaine a toujours été minée par les clivages et les tensions : religieux contre laïques, Turcs contre Kurdes, villes contre zones rurales... Mais aujourd'hui, après seize années de pouvoir, c'est autour de la personne même de Recep Tayyip Erdogan que s'exacerbe la polarisation*», analyse Emre Erdogan, professeur de sciences politiques à l'université Bilgi. Pour ce fin observateur des évolutions du pays, le scrutin a mis en lumière deux clans opposés : d'un côté, les pro-Erdogan, adeptes du culte de la personnalité et en quête d'un «*puissant leader*»; de



l'autre, les anti, épris de démocratie et remontés contre «*le règne d'un seul homme*» (selon le nouveau système présidentiel dessiné par Erdogan).

Ce clivage s'est ressenti le jour du vote. «*J'ai choisi Erdogan les yeux fermés, parce qu'il sait ce qu'il veut. Il est capable de déjouer les complots, de défier l'Occident*», avance Ece, une étudiante de 20 ans. Chemise décolletée sur jean délavé, elle n'a rien du cliché de la partisane voilée, tel qu'il est souvent dépeint par l'opposition, mais confirme l'engouement d'une bonne moitié du pays en faveur du concept de l'«*hyperprésident*». Hacir, elle, porte un foulard. Cette médecin de 24 ans a naturellement voté pour Erdogan, «*car il a offert une liberté exceptionnelle aux femmes de mon milieu*», dit-elle en évoquant l'époque, pas si lointaine, où sa mère, une femme pieuse, n'avait pas le droit de se voiler à l'université. Aujourd'hui, elle admet avoir certaines réserves sur la «*vision*» de l'ancien maire d'Istanbul, élu une première fois président en 2014, après avoir occupé le poste de premier ministre. «*Mais en l'absence de candidat capable de tenir un discours politique aussi solide que le sien, pas question de voter pour quelqu'un d'autre ! Il n'y a pas photo : sa force, c'est sa personne !*»

**Une intolérance croissante**

## au sein des familles

Dans l'autre camp, le discours est en retour fermement anti-Erdogan. «*J'aspire avant tout à une vie normale. En seize ans, Erdogan a divisé la société en la politisant. Aujourd'hui, tout est politique : être féministe, homosexuel, défenseur de l'environnement, signataire d'une pétition pour la paix...*», déplore Mustafa, un graphiste qui, à l'instar de 30 % des Turcs, a voté pour Muharrem Ince, le

favori de l'opposition (élu devant le candidat kurde Selahattin Demirtas et la «*dame de fer*», Meral Aksener).

«*Polariser, c'est mobiliser. Erdogan en a fait sa recette électorale*», observe Emre Erdogan. Fini le temps de la main tendue vers les Kurdes et des efforts de rapprochement avec l'Europe du début des années 2000. «*Lors des derniers scrutins, Erdogan a joué la carte de la division pour mieux régner*», poursuit le politologue. Présidentielle de 2014, législatives de 2015, référendum sur la nouvelle Constitution de 2017... Au rythme des dernières élections, le fossé renforcé par la fin du cessez-le-feu avec le PKK, en 2015 et la paranoïa suscitée par le putsch raté de 2016 – n'a cessé de se creuser. En s'alliant le dimanche 24 juin avec le MHP, un parti d'extrême droite nationaliste, Erdogan a également confirmé que sa survie politique primait sur celle de son parti-is-

lamo-conservateur, l'AKP.

Autre tendance ainsi révélée par le dernier scrutin: la polarisation entre « blocs » politiques s'est accentuée. « La grande majorité des électeurs d'Erdogan ont voté soit pour l'AKP, soit pour le MHP au Parlement. Et, dans le camp adverse, on a vu par exemple des électeurs d'Ince, le candidat du parti social démocrate CHP, voter pour la faction de gauche prokurde HDP – une manœuvre stratégique pour lui garantir de passer le seuil des 10 % au Parlement », constate Emre Erdogan. Son tout nouveau livre, *Le Dialogue sous cloche* (paru en turc),

confirme ces orientations: l'absence de compromis (80 % des personnes interrogées jugeant les partisans du clan adverse « arrogants ») ou encore l'intolérance croissante au sein des familles (79 % des sondés désapprouvant le mariage de leur fille avec un supporteur d'un « autre parti »).

« Maintenant que les élections sont passées, on peut s'attendre à ce qu'Erdogan fasse quelques gestes de pacification », prédit Jana Jabbour, spécialiste de la Turquie. L'annonce, cette semaine, d'une levée prochaine de l'état d'urgence et la remise en liberté condi-

tionnelle du journaliste Mehmet Altan vont dans ce sens.

Mais Erdogan doit aussi composer avec ses alliés ultranationalistes, fermement anti-Kurdes et favorables à la poursuite d'opérations militaires au-delà des frontières du pays. La personnalisation du pouvoir, désormais actée avec l'entrée en vigueur de la nouvelle Constitution, offre également peu de place au dialogue et à la critique: un tribunal d'Izmir vient d'ordonner le placement en détention provisoire de douze personnes accusées d'« insulte au chef de l'État ». ■

AFP

## Syrie: deux sénateurs américains à Minbej après des tensions avec la Turquie

Qamichli (Syrie), 2 juillet 2018 (AFP)

DEUX SÉNATEURS américains se sont rendus lundi à Minbej, dans le nord de la Syrie, où des négociations entre les Etats-Unis et la Turquie ont permis de réduire les tensions liées à la présence de combattants kurdes dans la ville.

A plusieurs reprises, les autorités turques ont menacé de lancer une offensive contre Minbej et la milice kurde des Unités de protection du peuple (YPG), alors que la ville accueille aussi des forces américaines et françaises.

La milice kurde, allié crucial des Etats-Unis dans la lutte antijihadistes, est considérée comme un groupe "terroriste" par Ankara.

Mais les efforts diplomatiques entre Washington et Ankara, deux alliés au sein de l'Otan, ont permis l'adoption début juin d'une feuille de route afin de réduire les tensions.

Dans la foulée, les forces turques ont commencé à patrouiller aux alentours de la ville, tandis que les YPG ont annoncé le "retrait" de Minbej de leurs derniers "conseillers militaires".

Lundi, Lindsey Graham, républicain de l'Etat américain de Caroline du sud, et

Jeanne Shaheen, démocrate du New Hampshire, ont effectué une visite dans la ville avec des membres du Conseil militaire de Minbej.

"Le but de la visite était d'évaluer la situation sécuritaire à Minbej", a déclaré à l'AFP le porte-parole du Conseil militaire de Minbej, Sherfan Darwish.

Le Conseil est lié aux Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), une alliance de combattants kurdes et arabes qui a délogé le groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI) de Minbej en 2016, avec l'aide de la coalition internationale emmenée par Washington.

Le sénateur Graham a souligné l'importance du maintien de la présence américaine lors d'une rencontre avec des commandants du Conseil militaire de Minbej, selon une vidéo publiée lundi par un site internet lié aux FDS.

"Je vais dire au président (Donald) Trump qu'il est important que nous restions ici pour vous aider. Vous êtes des amis des Etats-Unis et si nous partons, ce sera terrible", a affirmé le sénateur.

M. Trump a indiqué par le passé qu'il souhaitait un retrait des forces américaines engagées en Syrie, mais son état-major a insisté à maintes reprises sur leur maintien pour empêcher une résurgence de l'EI. ●



JULY 8, 2018

## IS controls 75 villages in Kirkuk, Salahuddin, Diyala: Former Iraqi Interior Minister

Baxtiyar Goran / July 08-2018

**ERBIL (Kurdistan24.net)** – According to a former Iraqi interior minister, there are 75 villages in three provinces under the control of the so-called Islamic State (IS).

Baqir Jabr al-Zubeidi, former Iraqi Minister of Interior, said in a statement on Sunday that IS extremists remain in control of over 75 villages in the southern Rashad district stretching to the areas of Mutaibija and al-Azim in northern Baghdad.

"I have received intelligence that Da'esh is hiding in the Hamrin Mountain and control 75 villages" located in Kirkuk, Salahuddin, and Diyala provinces, Zubeidi said, using the Arabic pejorative for IS.

He added that despite the collapse of "the Caliphate State" in Mosul, the extremists still have a strong presence from Hamrin Mountain to Samara city.

On July 4, the Iraqi Army, Federal Police, and Iran-backed Hashd al-Shaabi launched a military operation against IS militants in the outskirts of Diyala, Salahuddin, and Kirkuk.

The operation aims to clear areas in the vast desert



Iraqi Federal Police also led an operation against the Islamic State in mid-June, capturing four members and burning three hideouts. (Photo: Reuters)

border triangle between the three provinces, which has recently seen insurgent attacks, bombings, ambushes, and kidnappings.

The campaign is called "Revenge of the Martyrs" in honor of the eight persons IS kidnapped and executed shortly after.

IS has recently intensified attacks on Kurdish villages in disputed areas, prompting residents to take part in defending their areas and demanding the return of the Peshmerga.

Peshmerga officials and the anti-IS Coalition, formally known as Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve (CJTF-OIR), recently met to assess the security situation in the contested areas between Erbil and Baghdad.

According to a Peshmerga Ministry statement, "both sides agreed on the need for an immediate review of security and military plans in the disputed areas." ♦



# Comment Erbil tente de tourner la page du référendum

**ÉCLAIRAGE** Les résultats des dernières élections législatives ont permis un retour au statu quo du partage du pouvoir entre le PDK et l'UPK.

Emmanuelle COUSIN | OLJ  
03/07/2018  
www.lorientlejour.com

Les deux partis historiques du Kurdistan irakien, le Parti démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) et l'Union patriotique du Kurdistan (UPK), ont repris des couleurs. Le fiasco du référendum de septembre 2017 avait plongé la région autonome dans une profonde crise politique et économique, et l'avait fait revenir des années en arrière. Mais les résultats électoraux du 12 mai 2018 ont confirmé la mainmise des deux partis dans leurs fiefs respectifs, et le paysage politique qui se dessine actuellement à Bagdad pour la formation d'un nouveau gouvernement devrait leur permettre de revenir dans le jeu politique.

Les résultats des élections ont permis un retour au statu quo du partage du pouvoir entre le PDK et l'UPK, qui avait été contesté en 2013 par la montée en puissance des partis de l'opposition. Le parti d'opposition Goran (Le changement, en kurde) menaçait particulièrement l'UPK et comptait sur ces élections pour la devancer et balayer le bipartisme pour de bon. Or, dans la région kurde, le PDK sort grand gagnant en remportant 25 sièges parlementaires et l'UPK arrive second avec 18 sièges, loin devant le Goran qui n'en obtient que 5. Désabusé, le mouvement contestataire a annoncé envisager de se retirer complètement du processus politique irakien. S'il était attendu que les élections confirment le rapport de force en faveur du clan de Massoud Barzani – la mort du leader historique de l'UPK, Jalal Talabani, en octobre 2017, puis celle de Nawshirwan Mustafa, chef du mouvement Goran, la même année, lui ont ouvert la voie comme seule figure fédératrice du Kurdistan –, la victoire de l'UPK dans la province de Souleymaniya est pour le moins surprenante. C'est dans cette même province que s'est déclenchée cet hiver une violente vague d'hostilités vis-à-vis de la gouvernance de l'UPK, caractérisée par une corruption endémique. La population kurde subit les conséquences d'une grave crise économique, aggravée à la suite du référendum par les mesures puni-

tives de Bagdad et la reprise de la riche province pétrolière de Kirkouk, réduisant de moitié les revenus pétroliers de la région autonome. Les États-Unis avaient donné leur bénédiction à l'UPK pour qu'il envoie ses peshmergas réprimer les mouvements contestataires qui défiaient Erbil. Dimanche 24 juin, suite aux nombreuses plaintes pour fraudes et irrégularités concernant le scrutin du 12 mai, neuf juges nommés par la Cour suprême irakienne ont annoncé qu'un nouveau décompte serait effectué dans les circonscriptions qui ont donné lieu à une contestation, notamment dans les régions kurdes. Pour certains analystes, ces résultats inattendus sont le signe d'une ingérence iranienne dans le jeu politique kurde pour maintenir en place l'UPK, avec qui l'Iran entretient des liens étroits. L'analyste Abdullah Hawez avait révélé la présence de Kassem Soleimani, le commandant des forces iraniennes al-Qods, à Souleymaniya le jour des élections, sur son compte Twitter.

## LUTTES INTESTINES

Habituellement à couteaux tirés, le PDK et l'UPK ont décidé de faire front commun à la fois face à l'opposition kurde et face à Bagdad. Au cours des dernières semaines, en amont des rencontres avec Bagdad, les deux partis se sont retrouvés pour « élaborer un programme commun de demandes, qu'une seule délégation représentative ira porter à Bagdad au nom des Kurdes ». Prompt à rebattre les cartes, Mala Bakhtiar, chef exécutif du bureau politique de l'UPK, déclare d'un ton conciliant à L'Orient-Le-Jour que « notre responsabilité nous impose de mettre de côté nos rivalités, il y va de la survie du GRK (Gouvernement de la région autonome) ». Pourtant, quelques mois plus tôt, Massoud Barzani accusait « l'UPK d'avoir sabordé le bateau pour couler le capitaine », en faisant référence à la docilité – voire la complicité – avec laquelle l'UPK a laissé l'armée irakienne reprendre Kirkouk à la suite du référendum. En réalité, des décennies de luttes intestines interkurdes minent le Kurdistan. Depuis la fin de leur guerre civile (1994-1997), l'UPK et le PDK privilégient leurs intérêts partisans via de multiples jeux d'al-



Une large affiche appelant à voter « oui » au référendum d'indépendance kurde, organisée l'année dernière. Azad Lashkaril Reuters

liances avec les Kurdes de Syrie et le PKK de Turquie, et les voisins régionaux, la Turquie et l'Iran. Acculés par le fiasco du référendum sur l'autodétermination de septembre 2017, les Kurdes doivent désormais faire front commun face à Bagdad afin de retrouver voix au chapitre dans la renégociation des dossiers qui les opposent au gouvernement fédéral. D'après Mala Bakhtiar, la priorité concerne la question du budget – Bagdad a réduit la part du budget allouée à la région autonome à 12,6 %, alors que 17 % sont prévus dans la Constitution –, le versement des salaires des fonctionnaires kurdes, notamment des peshmergas, la redistribution des ressources pétrolières, mais aussi le statut des « zones disputées », comme Kirkouk.

## NÉCESSITÉ D'UN KURDISTAN FORT

Les deux partis politiques kurdes avaient félicité conjointement la nouvelle alliance scellée le 13 juin entre Moqtada Sadr et Hadi al-Ameri, le chef du Fateh, le parti le plus pro-iranien sur la scène irakienne. D'après leur communiqué, il s'agissait d'une avancée positive vers « le début d'une feuille de route politique pour surmonter la crise politique actuelle en Irak et au Kurdistan ». Le bloc kurde PDK-UPK pourrait s'allier à son tour à cette coalition, à la condition qu'elle s'engage à faire avancer les dossiers qui le concerne. Le soutien kurde permettrait à la coalition, qui s'est élargie le week-end dernier, grâce à une alliance avec le bloc du Premier ministre actuel, Haïder al-Abadi, d'atteindre le nombre de voix nécessaire pour former le prochain gouvernement irakien. Ce qui vaudrait aux Kurdes, à l'image de 2006 et 2014, le titre de « faiseurs de rois ».

Néanmoins, habitués des volte-face et trahisons qui caractérisent la « zone verte », les Kurdes ne font confiance à aucun interlocuteur. Ils gardent un goût amer de celle de l'ancien Premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, qu'ils avaient pourtant contribué à porter au pouvoir, et plus récemment celle du Premier ministre sortant M. Abadi qui a réprimé le projet d'autodétermination. « Tous les partis se montrent à l'écarte dans la phase des négociations postscrutin, mais c'est une fois au pouvoir qu'ils sacrifient la cause kurde », affirme le haut politique kurde.

« Conscients qu'aujourd'hui ils ne sont plus en mesure d'imposer leur ligne rouge à Bagdad, les Kurdes adoptent un rôle de spectateur et parlent à tout le monde », analyse Adel Bakawan, chercheur associé à l'EHESS, spécialiste des Kurdes d'Irak, quitte à s'allier à une coalition comprenant M. Abadi, qui incarne pourtant la débâcle du référendum, et Hadi al-Ameri, l'obligé des Iraniens et ennemi de leur parrain américain. Barzani avait entrepris le référendum de septembre pour exercer une pression sur Bagdad, mais son pari s'est retourné contre lui et le Kurdistan en a payé le prix fort. Désormais, les Kurdes se sont fait une raison et comptent atteindre leurs objectifs graduellement, en misant sur la légalité de leurs revendications et le soutien de la communauté internationale. Car s'il y a bien un consensus qui réunit les puissances régionales rivales, c'est « la nécessité d'un Kurdistan fort dans un Irak uni », conclut le spécialiste Adel Bakawan. ■

# A Diyarbakir, les Kurdes craignent le retour aux années noires

## L'alliance de l'omnipotent président turc avec les ultranationalistes présage une reprise des méthodes dures contre la société civile

DIYARBAKIR (TURQUIE) -  
envoyé spécial

**A** lors que Recep Tayyip Erdogan et son entourage se préparent à entamer un nouveau mandat, à Diyarbakir et ailleurs en pays kurde de la Turquie, on se prépare à un avenir lourd de périls. Pour beaucoup, la réélection de M. Erdogan à la tête d'un système présidentiel qui organise sa domination personnelle sur l'appareil d'Etat, mais aussi son alliance reconduite avec les ultranationalistes du Parti de l'action nationale (MHP), va confirmer une vision exclusivement sécuritaire de l'action de l'Etat dans le Sud-Est, censée aboutir à l'écrasement du mouvement kurde.

Malgré le relatif succès de son émanation légale, le Parti démocratique des peuples (HDP), qui entre au Parlement en obtenant 11,62 % des voix et la majorité dans onze départements situés en pays kurde, on se prépare déjà à des heures sombres. « Ces résultats rendent la paix inimaginable à ce stade », confiait un responsable du HDP le soir des élections.

Deux ans après la défaite des insurrections urbaines lancées par le PKK à la suite de l'effondrement du processus de paix, l'idée d'une poursuite des méthodes dures domine dans les conversations et les commentaires politiques de la région. En plus de l'alliance avec les nationalistes, elle s'est trouvée encore renforcée par l'apparition, lors de la campagne de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, de figures incarnant le traitement brutal de la question kurde par Ankara dans les années 1990.

Le 17 juin, la présence de Tansu Çiller au dernier meeting de campagne à Istanbul du président Erdogan a été particulièrement mal vécue par beaucoup de Kurdes de Turquie. Son mandat de première ministre (1993-1996) fut marqué par les pires abus de forces paramilitaires dans la région, lors de la période dite de la « sale guerre ». Mehmet Agar, son ancien ministre de l'intérieur,



Dans un magasin de Diyarbakir, au lendemain de la victoire de Recep Tayyip Erdogan à la présidentielle, le 25 juin. Emre Tazegul / AP

dont le fils a été élu député AKP dimanche 24 juin, est également revenu en grâce dans l'entourage du chef d'Etat turc.

### « Signal clair »

Souleyman Soyly, ministre sortant de l'intérieur, une autre figure des années noires, s'est quant à lui illustré à quelques jours du scrutin par des propos accusant le barreau de Diyarbakir, un des derniers foyers de contestation au sein de la société civile dans les régions kurdes, de soutien au terrorisme. « Le retour de ces personnalités dans le camp du pouvoir est un signal clair de la part d'Erdogan : il veut criminaliser la société civile kurde. Cela peut annoncer de nouvelles vagues d'arrestations maintenant qu'il est élu avec tous les pouvoirs », estime Serhat Eren, avocat à Diyarbakir, proche du mouvement kurde.

Pour son aîné, Fethi Gümüs, bâtonnier de Diyarbakir de 1990 à 1994, si les méthodes ont changé, l'objectif reste le même. « Il y a vingt ou trente ans, on nous arrachait des aveux sous la torture. J'ai moi-même été torturé cinquante-deux jours durant en 1985 pour des raisons politiques. Les gens vivaient dans la terreur d'un système qui usait de moyens illégaux.

Aujourd'hui, on ne torture plus, on n'enlève plus, mais on vit dans la peur d'une justice officielle, utilisée par le pouvoir d'un seul homme pour détruire ses opposants. »

Cet homme de 71 ans qui nous reçoit dans une villa cossue imprégnée d'un parfum de menthe fraîche sait depuis début juin qu'il encourt vingt-deux ans de prison pour appartenance à une organisation terroriste. En cause, ses activités au sein d'une émanation pourtant légale du mouvement kurde. « Erdogan est imprévisible et tout dépend de lui. Du jour au lendemain, il peut décider de faire machine arrière, relancer le processus de paix s'il pense que cela sert ses intérêts. Mais nous nous attendons à ce qu'il poursuive cette politique encore plus durement sous son prochain mandat », anticipe-t-il.

Dans le sud-est de la Turquie, la poursuite de la lutte contre le mouvement kurde ne saurait se passer de moyens militaires. Depuis 2015, la présence des forces de sécurité turques est massive et la région fourmille de rumeurs quant à la formation d'embryons de groupes paramilitaires autour d'associations acquises à la figure du président Erdogan. Un acteur de la contre-guérilla des décennies passées est en tout cas revenu

sur le devant de la scène : les koricu, ou gardiens des villages, un ensemble de milices kurdes pro-gouvernementales fondées dans les années 1980 pour lutter contre le PKK dans les campagnes.

### « Notre guerre va continuer »

A Çinar, une bourgade écrasée de chaleur des environs ruraux de Diyarbakir, Seyithan Karadag, président de Fédération des koricu du Sud-Est, se réjouit du résultat des élections de dimanche : « La réélection de notre président va nous permettre d'éradiquer le PKK, notre guerre va continuer de manière encore plus efficace grâce au système présidentiel », annonce-t-il d'un ton sentencieux. Une broche formée d'un croissant et d'une étoile sertis de brillants en plastique au revers de sa veste de costume, il accueille, en kurde, sa langue maternelle, un villageois venu demander une audience.

Pour M. Karadag, il n'y a pas de problème kurde en Turquie, mais un problème de terrorisme. Dans le bureau sombre qui occupe le premier étage d'un immeuble situé dans une petite rue commerçante, M. Karadag montre fièrement sur son téléphone une photographie de lui en tenue de milicien, l'œil dans la mire d'une mitrailleuse, lors des combats contre le PKK, dans la vieille ville de Diyarbakir, début 2016. « Depuis la reprise du conflit, 3 000 koricu ont été formés en soldats professionnels à Izmir [ouest du pays]. Leur expérience va être utile à notre armée, ils connaissent le PKK et on ira où il faudra aller. Notre président n'a besoin de la permission de personne pour nettoyer les terroristes à l'intérieur ou à l'extérieur de notre pays. »

En 2018, et pour la première fois de leur histoire, ces combattants kurdes loyalistes ont été déployés par l'armée turque dans l'enclave d'Afrin, prise aux forces kurdes locales, liées au PKK, avec le soutien de groupes armés syriens à dominante islamiste. Ils interviennent également en soutien aux forces turques dans le nord de l'Irak contre les bases du PKK. Des tribunaux de Diyarbakir aux hautes vallées du Kurdistan irakien, en passant par les régions du nord de la Syrie, la guerre du président réélu Erdogan contre le mouvement kurde ne connaît pas de frontières. ■

ALLAN KAVAL

# What's behind nationalist gains in Turkey's Kurdish regions?

As many struggle to explain the rise in the nationalist vote in Turkey's Kurdish-majority southeast, some observers see the impact of police and military reinforcements in the region and the influence of the security establishment.



Sibel Hurtas  
July 6, 2018  
www.al-monitor.com/

The most controversial results in Turkey's June 24 elections came from the predominantly Kurdish provinces in the country's southeast. The Nationalist Action Party (MHP), whose hard-line nationalist rhetoric hardly appeals to the Kurds, saw a three-fold increase in its votes in the region, while the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), the torchbearer of the Kurdish political movement, suffered a decline.

Given the diametrically opposed policies of the two parties, many analysts agree that swing votes and internal dynamics cannot explain the phenomenon. Hence, the MHP's gains and the HDP's decline require separate analyses.

Examples of how MHP votes increased from the November 2015 elections include the following provinces: Van (from 6,348 to 16,240), Mus (from 2,708 to 7,051), Diyarbakir (from 6,619 to 11,965), Mardin (from 3,701 to 10,426), Sirnak (from 3,081 to 9,368), Hakkari (from 2,232 to 5,166), Siirt (from 2,379 to 5,312).

Local observers note the MHP has made no special effort to boost its popularity in the region since the 2015 elections. Bahar Kiliçgedik, a long-time journalist in Diyarbakir, told Al-Monitor that the MHP hardly did any campaigning ahead of the June 24 polls. Referring to MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli, she said, "Bahçeli never came to the region and never held any rallies during the campaign period. I failed to observe any activity on the part of the [MHP's] provincial branches either. The only things I came across were the Bahçeli posters hung on the facades of provincial offices."

The lack of MHP electioneering, coupled with the party's sharpened nationalist rhetoric, have led analysts to look to external dynamics to explain the party's gains in the region.

In an interview with Al-Monitor, researcher and writer Kemal Can pointed to two possible factors: the significant increase in the number of security forces in the region, and the influence of the security bureaucracy.

He said, "The first reason is related to the increase in the number of the security forces, as some local surveys confirm. There is also data suggesting that the voting behavior of the security forces has shifted from the [ruling] Justice and Development Party [AKP] to the MHP. This is not enough to explain fully the numerical increase but could still create small proportional differences."

The second factor could be the influence of the security bureaucracy and the so-called village guards — government-armed Kurds helping the security forces — "in terms of relocating ballot boxes and controlling and manipulating the voting," Can said. "They might have used that influence in favor of the MHP. Though hard to prove, this is possible."

The HDP, too, is struggling to explain the MHP's gains in the region. The issue will feature in an election report by the party, to be released in the coming days.

In remarks to Al-Monitor, HDP spokesman Ayhan Bilgen drew attention to the so-called 142-code papers, which allow members of the security forces to vote at any ballot box. He suggested that security forces were directed to vote in areas with smaller electorates. "In [relatively bigger] provinces such as Sanliurfa and Mardin, the votes of 3,000 or 5,000 security officers cannot sway the outcome, but in Hakkari, they managed to get one lawmaker elected by directing that many security officers to vote in the region," he said.

"The second issue is multiple voting," Bilgen said, stressing that the 142-code papers were prone to abuse, allowing their holders to vote multiple times without detection. "There is no record system to control such voters. We have no idea how many people could have voted multiple times in this



The leader of Turkey's Nationalist Action Party, Devlet Bahçeli, gestures as he addresses his supporters during an election rally, Ankara, Turkey, June 23, 2018. ADEM ALTAN/AFP/Getty Images

way," he said.

The increase in the number of security forces in the southeast stems from reinforcements sent to the region since 2015, when the authorities launched a massive crackdown on armed Kurdish militants holed up in urban areas. More police and soldiers are said to have been sent to the region ahead of the elections, increasing the number of those who could vote without being registered at a specific ballot box.

When it comes to the HDP, its own showing in the region also defied expectations. Though the party managed to surpass the 10% national threshold to enter parliament, the support it received from local Kurds was well below what it had hoped for in the face of the mounting nationalist rhetoric of both the MHP and the AKP. Most notably, conservative Kurds disgruntled with the AKP had been expected to gravitate to the HDP. The results, however, show the opposite.

For Bilgen, this also has to do with external factors. The loss of votes is observed mostly in areas such as Nusaybin and Kiziltepe, which suffered the most in the 2015-2016 crackdown, he said. "The voter loss in those areas is 20-25%. Those people saw their neighborhoods destroyed and lost their homes. There was significant migration. We will analyze electoral registers to make a definitive conclusion," Bilgen added.

On a self-critical note, Bilgen said the party underperformed in bringing its voters to the ballot boxes, noting that many Kurds had moved to western provinces as seasonal workers during the summer. "Similarly, our organization was not strong enough in terms of the distribution of ballot box overseers," he added.

The spokesman stressed that almost all invalidated votes in the region were HDP votes. About 300,000 HDP votes were classed as invalid during the count, he said. This is a significant figure, given that the number of votes that propelled President Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the 50% mark for a first-round victory in the presidential polls was about 700,000.

The heavy influence of external factors leaves little room for a political analysis of the results. Neither the HDP nor the MHP appears likely to make any fundamental changes to its Kurdish policies based on the results.

"I don't expect the MHP to consider softening its Kurdish policy in light of the vote it got from the region," Can said, adding, "On the contrary, if the vote increase is really due to the reasons we contemplate [the influence of the security bureaucracy], this was achieved exactly because the MHP opted for a hard-line rhetoric."

Stressing that voter shifts from the AKP to the MHP were observed across Turkey, Can said, "The AKP's increase of the nationalist dosage served the MHP."

Bilgen, for his part, conceded that Kurds could have seen shortcomings or weaknesses in the HDP. "Yet this does not mean that there is a better alternative than the HDP, but that they see shortcomings," he said. "Voters have [expressed] objections and criticism of the HDP, and we will analyze those as well." ♦

*Sibel Hurtas is an award-winning Turkish journalist who focuses on human rights and judicial and legal affairs. Her career includes 15 years as a reporter for the national newspapers Evrensel, Taraf, Sabah and HaberTurk and the ANKA news agency. She won the Metin Goktepe Journalism Award and the Musa Anter Journalism Award in 2004 and the Turkish Journalists Association's Merit Award in 2005. In 2013, she published a book on the murders of Christians in Turkey. Her articles on minorities and unresolved killings appear on the Faili Belli human rights blog.*

# An economy that's too hot

YENIKOY, TURKEY

There is a growing risk that Turkey will slide into a financial crisis

BY PETER S. GOODMAN

Looming like a fortress over the Black Sea, Istanbul's new airport has been engineered to provoke awe, underscoring Turkey's desire to reclaim its imperial glory.

The project is expected to cost nearly \$12 billion and carve six runways across a swath of land as big as Manhattan. When completed in a decade, the complex is supposed to transport some 200 million people a year, dwarfing all rivals as the busiest airport on the planet.

But the airport has also become a symbol of a less savory aspect of Turkey's modern incarnation: its reckless disregard for arithmetic and the independence of critical government institutions. Together, they have placed the nation at growing risk of sliding into a financial crisis.

In a global economy increasingly plagued by worries — like an unfolding trade war and higher oil prices — Turkey may present the most immediate cause for alarm. The country's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who has dominated national life for 15 years, was sworn in again on Monday following a re-election victory that came with extraordinary new powers. He has wielded his influence to deliver relentless economic growth through unrestrained borrowing, lifting debt levels to alarming heights. And the additional authority he has been granted is expected to further test the limits of economic reality.

In a sign of unease among global investors, the value of Turkey's currency, the lira, has plunged roughly one-fifth this year, raising prices for households and businesses alike. It dropped some more on Monday, as Mr. Erdogan handed the job of economic chief to his son-in-law, in what markets construed as a sign that he does not intend to adopt a more responsible mode of stewardship anytime soon.

The airport — its first phase is to open in October — has been brought to life with heaps of public money delivered to construction companies closely tied to Mr. Erdogan. The government has bestowed upon them guarantees against any losses. If, as many economists expect, the airport proves grander than



Merchants in Istanbul's Grand Bazaar complain that they must pay their rent in dollars and euros while selling their wares in the Turkish currency, which is dwindling in value.

the flow of passengers, the public will wind up with the bill.

To villagers who have been shoved off their land to make way for the new airport, the project has become a monument to their worst fears. "Erdogan is watching out for his own people," said Bora Dayilar, a farmer whose grazing land was subsumed by the project. "We are left with nothing."

Fears of disaster may seem out of place in an economy that remains one of the fastest growing on earth, having expanded 7.4 percent last year.

But that growth has been fed by potentially unsustainable borrowing, both public and private.

The government has been subsidizing vast infrastructure projects like the airport and a \$13 billion, 28-mile-long canal linking the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. And many businesses have borrowed in foreign currencies, which means their debt burdens have risen as the lira has surrendered value.

Major Turkish companies are now trying to persuade banks and other creditors to extend relief, perhaps portending a wave of bankruptcies that could leave financial institutions and taxpayers staring at untold losses. As of the end of April, Turkish private sector companies owed more than \$245 billion in foreign debt, or nearly one-third the size of the country's overall economy.

"That's a huge number," said Selva Demiralp, an economist who previously worked at the Federal Reserve bank in Washington and now teaches at Koc University in Istanbul. "And the govern-

ment is encouraging them to borrow more."

Staying current on that debt requires that foreign investors continue to entrust funds to Turkey — an increasingly questionable proposition.

Turkey could attract money by continuing to lift interest rates, already at 17.75 percent. But that would depress economic growth and end the festivities for the real estate and construction industries.

Or Turkey could continue the growth party while watching inflation mount as the lira sinks further. That might condemn crucial corporations to insolvency and perhaps force the government to seek a rescue from the International Monetary Fund, a course that would surely entail painful spending cuts.

"Turkey could be the next country to disintegrate," said Marie Owens Thomson, global chief economist at Indosuez Wealth Management in Geneva. "It has all the ingredients of the beginning of a failed state."

Some of Turkey's problems reflect the troubles assailing emerging markets in general. As the Fed raises interest rates in the United States, investors have been pulling money out of developing nations like Argentina, Mexico and Turkey while betting on the dollar. That has pushed down the value of emerging market currencies.

But Turkey stands out as a uniquely vulnerable economy, given its unorthodox financial stewardship.

Ever since a failed coup d'état that sought to topple him two years ago, Mr.

Erdogan has opened the credit taps to ensure continued economic growth. The central bank has sought to restrain growth, lifting rates to stabilize the lira and contain inflation. This has provoked the wrath of the president.

Mr. Erdogan has claimed that inflation is actually the result of high interest rates, which is not unlike asserting that chemotherapy causes cancer. Before the elections, he threatened to assume control of Turkey's central bank and to abolish high rates. Investors took that as further impetus to flee, pushing the lira down to record lows. The central bank halted the rout by lifting rates yet again. By then, though, its integrity had been severely damaged.

"Everyone is in crisis right now," said Can Oz, owner of a book and magazine publishing house in Istanbul, Can Publishing. "It's all around us. Everyone who has the slightest intellect and knowledge of the economy knows this. But the government is hiding it."

Can Publishing's profits have dropped as the decline in the lira has forced the company to pay more for paper from Finland and glue from Germany. "Our margins have been cut dramatically," Mr. Oz said.

Inside Istanbul's Grand Bazaar, a labyrinth of shops selling jewelry, carpets and antiques, merchants complain that they must pay rent in dollars or euros even as they collect lira for their sales. Their rent is effectively going up while sales decline, in part because of a severe dip in tourism after a spate of terrorist attacks. "The Turkish lira is like ice in hot weather," said Zeki Uckardes, who sells scarves from a stall inside the bazaar. "The second you take it out, it starts to melt."

The most vulnerable companies are those that have borrowed in foreign currencies.

Four years ago, Makro, a national chain of supermarkets, decided to pursue an aggressive expansion. It borrowed 200 million lira, then worth about \$88 million, from seven Turkish banks, agreeing to interest rates of about 18 percent. In a bid to limit its debt burden, it borrowed an additional \$12 million in United States dollars, taking advantage of dollar loans at only 5 percent interest.

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**"Turkey could be the next country to disintegrate. It has all the ingredients of the beginning of a failed state."**

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The company began opening new stores and hiring more workers. But by the middle of 2017, the lira had lost more than one-third its value and Turkish in-



"Everyone is in crisis right now," said Can Oz, owner of a book and magazine publishing house in Istanbul, Can Publishing. "It's all around us."

terest rates were climbing. The company's monthly debt payments had risen by almost 50 percent, to 6 million lira. At the same time, Makro's revenue plunged as discount grocery chains entered the market. With its debt payments on track to spike this year to nearly 9 million lira per month, Makro filed for a court-supervised debt restructuring. It recently emerged with an agreement that has it paying off its bank debts by selling real estate assets, while gaining debt forgiveness from suppliers.

How business will fare may depend on what it learned the last time Turkey faced such challenges.

In 2001, when Turkey absorbed a crisis so severe that it sought help from the International Monetary Fund, Vural Ak nearly lost his company, Intercity, which supplies leased cars. In those days, Mr. Ak, Intercity's founder and chief executive, paid for European cars in European currencies, while collecting his revenues in lira. When the lira plunged, he was nearly wiped out.

The lesson stuck. In recent years, as Mr. Ak has expanded Intercity into a company with a fleet of 50,000 vehicles, he has insisted on pricing his leases in euros to match the loans he takes out to buy new models. His competitors have borrowed in dollars and euros, too, but take in lira. Many have come knocking, he said, in hopes that he will buy them and spare them from their unavoidable fate: liquidation.

In an office the size of an airport lounge, the floor-to-ceiling windows lined with toy trucks, Mr. Ak exuded the satisfaction of someone seemingly in-

oculated against the chaos around him.

Still, his company is not unscathed. Some 60 percent of his revenue comes from selling used cars after leases are complete. With inflation rampant and anxiety pervasive, Mr. Ak must discount the vehicles to find buyers. Last year, Intercity lost money.

In Yenikoy, a village near the new airport, the sense of crisis has been building since Mr. Erdogan unveiled the project, chasing the dream of turning the city into a global airline hub to rival London and Dubai.

Earth movers now tear at the pale soil alongside the Black Sea, constructing the bigger airport. Mr. Dayilar and the other villagers of Yenikoy sit in the way.

Mr. Dayilar applied for a security job at the new airport, but was turned down for not having completed middle school. He applied for a cleaning job but had heard nothing. "God help us," Mr. Dayilar said. "I'm unemployed. I don't know what I'm going to do." ●

# Iran. Lorsque le Bazar gronde

Quand ce haut lieu de la vie sociale et économique de l'Iran manifeste son mécontentement, tout peut arriver, estime l'éditorialiste iranien Amir Taheri.

—**Asharq Al-Awsat**

(extraits) Londres

**L**e Grand Bazar de Téhéran est resté fermé le 25 juin pour la deuxième journée de suite. Et dans d'autres villes, notamment Ispahan, Mechhed, Bandar Abbas, Kerman et Tabriz, les commerçants ont organisé des actions symboliques semblables en solidarité avec leurs confrères de la capitale. Ce n'est pas une mince affaire. La dernière fois que cela s'est produit avec une telle ampleur, c'était lors du soulèvement contre le chah, qui a abouti à la révolution de 1979.

Le Grand Bazar de Téhéran, ce sont plus de quarante allées reliées entre elles, d'une longueur totale de 10,6 kilomètres. Il se divise en vingt sections, chacune étant réservée à un commerce particulier, de l'alimentation à l'orfèvrerie, en passant par les marchands de tapis. Ainsi, on y trouve tout ce qu'il faut pour couvrir les besoins d'une ville comme Téhéran, avec ses plus de 15 millions d'habitants.

Mais ce n'est pas seulement un lieu de commerce. Le Grand Bazar représente tout un mode de vie. Il renferme six mosquées, trente hôtels, plus de vingt banques, des bureaux, neuf instituts religieux, treize écoles primaires et secondaires, deux théâtres et une "maison de la force" (*zurkhana* en persan), où des hommes forts – réels ou supposés – pratiquent la lutte traditionnelle et la musculation.

Les commerçants du Grand Bazar contribuent également en grande partie au financement du clergé chiite. Sans cette ressource, les religieux chiites n'auraient pu conserver leur place à travers l'histoire iranienne, riche en tempêtes et bouleversements.

**Cohésion sociale.** De même, le Grand Bazar joue un rôle essentiel dans la cohésion sociale du pays, à travers plus de cinq cents associations de bienfaisance qui reposent sur son soutien financier. Il est également lié à un nombre incalculable de confréries soufies. On peut citer le mouvement Al-Qaïmiya, qui a près d'un million et demi de membres dans le seul grand Téhéran et qui fait une démonstration de son pouvoir d'influence chaque année à l'occasion de [la fête de l'Achoura, en

**Pas seulement un lieu de commerce, le Grand Bazar représente tout un mode de vie.**

commémoration des martyrs du chiisme], en organisant plus de cinq cents défilés de deuil dans tous les quartiers de Téhéran. Au-delà de la capitale, elle entretient un réseau d'associations régionales à travers tout le pays, et en cas de besoin, elle peut mobiliser des personnes en provenance de centaines de villes et de milliers de villages. Enfin, et surtout, le Grand Bazar donne du travail, directement ou indirectement, à plus de six cent mille Iraniens.

L'origine du Grand Bazar remonte à près de quatre cents ans, à l'époque des premiers Séfavides. Toutefois, sous le règne du fondateur de la dynastie des Pahlavi, Reza Chah [1878-1944], le Grand Bazar a adopté une attitude critique envers le projet de modernisation du régime, qui voulait limiter l'influence des religieux et promouvoir le commerce et les entreprises selon le modèle européen. Sous le

règne du fils et successeur de celui-ci, Mohammad Reza Chah [1919-1979], l'attitude du bazar avait été plutôt bienveillante, au moins au début. Mais, à partir de 1978, les choses ont évolué vers une franche hostilité envers la dynastie pahlavi. C'est ainsi que le Bazar a contribué, y compris financièrement, à la révolution et à la prise de pouvoir de l'ayatollah Khomeyni.

Aujourd'hui, le Grand Bazar ne déborde plus d'enthousiasme pour le régime khomeyniste, même s'il ne fait pas preuve d'une hostilité ouverte. Il faut donc se demander si les événements actuels représentent une saute d'humeur passagère ou la perte durable d'un des principaux bastions du régime.

En Iran, les apparences sont toujours trompeuses. C'est pourquoi il est possible que les protestations actuelles résultent en réalité d'une lutte de pouvoir au sein même du pouvoir. Ce serait alors quelqu'un de proche du guide suprême [ultraconservateur], Ali Khamenei en personne, qui orchestrerait les manifestations, dans le but d'affaiblir le gouvernement [du Premier ministre modéré] Hassan Rohani.

Une série d'éléments accréditent cette thèse. Premièrement, des faucons au sein du conseil islamique ont signé un texte qui propose de donner quinze jours à Rohani pour proposer une nouvelle politique, faute de quoi il devra se soumettre à un vote de confiance au Parlement.

Selon eux, il a perdu l'aura nécessaire pour gouverner le pays depuis que Donald Trump a rompu l'accord nucléaire signé avec l'ancien président américain Barack Obama.

Deuxièmement, de hauts responsables militaires, dont l'ancien

chef des Gardiens de la révolution, le général Yahya Rahim Safaoui, et l'ancien chef des bassidjis, ont indirectement critiqué Rohani. Enfin, de nombreux faucons au sein du clergé en ont publiquement fait de même, tout en exprimant leur soutien au Bazar.

Mais à en croire d'autres analystes, le Bazar exprime les

**Quinze jours à Rohani pour proposer une nouvelle politique.**

préoccupations de toute la société iranienne face aux difficultés économiques et à la répression. Des craintes semblables avaient provoqué d'énormes manifestations l'hiver dernier. Là encore, un certain nombre d'éléments vont dans le sens d'une telle analyse, à commencer par le fait que les médias officiels du pays ne qualifient pas ces manifestations de "perfidie complot des services du renseignement sioniste et américain" comme ils ont l'habitude de le faire depuis 1979. Certains médias prétendent que ces manifestations sont le fait d'agents provocateurs et de saboteurs, mais personne ne suggère un lien avec des organisations de l'opposition en exil, des [nostalgiques du chah] ou des partis marxistes.

Une seule chose est certaine : le Grand Bazar dispose de solides moyens pour mobiliser le peuple et pour organiser des démonstrations de force dans la rue. Celui qui provoque l'ire du Bazar commet une énorme bêtise en sous-estimant le danger que cela peut représenter.

—**Amir Taheri**

Publié le 27 juin

## Pas encore une révolution

Les troubles que connaît l'Iran sont le fait d'une minorité de privilégiés lésés par la chute du rial face au dollar.

—The Iranian Washington

La manifestation qui s'est déroulée le 24 juin au Grand Bazar de Téhéran est à plus d'un égard le contraire du mouvement de protestation qui a éclaté dans les petites villes du pays en janvier. Elle réunissait des Iraniens privilégiés, comme les personnes qui vendent des smartphones à la classe moyenne et les membres de celle-ci.

Ces deux mouvements n'annoncent pas l'imminence d'une révolution. Pourquoi ne peut-il pas y avoir en Iran de manifestations comme dans n'importe quel autre

### Depuis 2013, l'économie iranienne s'est améliorée dans l'ensemble.

pays (il n'y a que moi qui suive les actualités françaises?) sans que les experts de Washington y voient le signe que le gouvernement est au bout du rouleau? Personne n'aime le régime iranien, mais analyser, ce n'est pas défendre. Je sais qu'à l'époque de Donald Trump, le vœu pieux constitue l'analyse politique dans les cercles du pouvoir, mais le reste de la population n'a pas à tout avaler.

Depuis 2013, année de l'élection du président Hassan Rohani, l'économie iranienne s'est améliorée dans l'ensemble. Le rial a repris une partie de sa valeur par rapport au dollar et s'échange souvent à 40 000 contre 1. L'Iran détenait un excédent sain l'année dernière, rapporte le *Guardian*, qui cite à ce propos l'économiste Bijan Khajehpour : "L'Iran avait un excédent de 17 milliards de devises l'année dernière : ses exportations non pétrolières se sont montées à 47 milliards de dollars et il a vendu pour 55 milliards de pétrole."

L'effondrement que connaît la monnaie iranienne face au dollar depuis quelques mois est d'origine politique, et non économique. Il n'y a aucune raison objective pour qu'un rial vaille deux fois moins de dollars aujourd'hui qu'il y a un an. Ceci s'explique probablement par le manque de crédits accordés à l'Iran par les pays arabes du Golfe et le retrait de Trump de l'accord sur le nucléaire conclu en 2015 sous les auspices des Nations unies. En projetant de réimposer unilatéralement des sanctions contre l'Iran d'ici à début novembre, Trump a poussé de nombreuses grandes entreprises, entre autres les français Total et PSA et le russe Lukoil, à annuler leurs projets d'investissement. Même si la Chine se précipite pour combler le vide, la perspective du renouvellement des sanctions n'en crée pas moins une énorme incertitude.

La population iranienne s'efforce donc aujourd'hui d'acheter des dollars et d'envoyer des capitaux à l'étranger pour les mettre à l'abri de la dépréciation de la monnaie iranienne que causeront les sanctions. Ironie du sort, ces agissements ne font qu'affaiblir le rial face au dollar et donc aggraver la fuite des capitaux.

Le plus étrange, c'est que celle-ci n'est peut-être pas aussi importante qu'on le suppose. La rumeur veut que 30 milliards de dollars soient sortis du pays au printemps, mais il n'y a aucune preuve. Ce chiffre énorme repose peut-être sur une mauvaise compréhension d'une estimation par le FMI des fonds qui se trouvent hors du pays – parce qu'il faut du temps pour que le pétrole soit payé –, mais qui reviendront. Il est possible que la crise soit en partie provoquée par un malentendu.

L'éminent économiste iranien Djavad Salehi-Isfahani déplore que l'Iran autorise le transfert de fonds à l'étranger bien plus librement que d'autres pays, comme l'Inde, qui est pourtant beaucoup mieux intégrée à l'économie mondiale. Le laxisme iranien (à savoir une trop grande liberté économique accordée aux détenteurs de capitaux) contribue au problème.

**Œufs en dollar.** De toute façon, comme on ne paie pas ses œufs en dollar en Iran, la multiplication par deux de la valeur de celui-ci par rapport au rial n'affecte pas la plupart des gens. En revanche, les marchands du Grand Bazar qui achètent des smartphones à l'étranger et les revendent sur le marché iranien plongent s'ils ne doublent pas leurs prix en rial, ce qui risque de nuire à leur activité. D'où cette manifestation, que le gouvernement a calmée en promettant de dédommager les importateurs de téléphone.

La manifestation a en outre été marquée par des slogans contre la politique du gouvernement en Syrie [et le soutien à la cause palestinienne] et le fait qu'il y dépense de l'argent au lieu de le dépenser dans le pays. Cette manifestation était tout ce qu'il y a de plus normal. Elle n'avait rien de révolutionnaire.

—Juan Cole

Publié le 26 juin

## "À mort la Palestine"

Ce slogan inédit chez les manifestants iraniens fait réagir ce site égyptien.

—Al-Bawaba News

Le Caire

L'Iran n'a jamais soutenu les Palestiniens, mais a exploité leur cause et en a fait son fonds de commerce afin de s'implanter dans les pays arabes et de pouvoir réaliser ses projets expansionnistes. Certes, il y a les fameuses brigades Al-Quds iraniennes [brigades de Jérusalem], mais les crises en Irak, en Syrie et au Yémen montrent que celles-ci n'ont pas été créées pour affronter Israël, mais pour tromper les chiïtes et créer des rixes avec les Arabes. Ni le transfert de l'ambassade américaine en Israël de Tel-Aviv à Jérusalem ni la poursuite de la politique israélienne de judaïsation de la ville n'ont fait réagir ces milices.

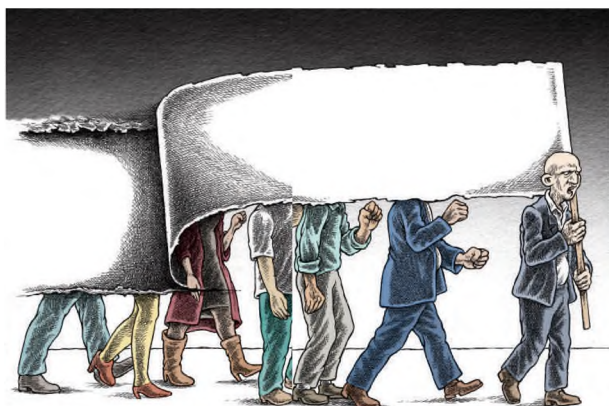
Des extraits d'une vidéo circulant sur les réseaux sociaux montrent des manifestants iraniens scandant "mort à la Palestine". Certains ont immédiatement expliqué que c'était une manipulation des services secrets iraniens, destinée à ternir l'image des manifestants, qui apparaissent ainsi comme des agents israéliens et américains.

Or ce ne sont pas les premières manifestations du genre. D'autres, semblables, ont déjà eu lieu à la fin de l'année 2017. On n'y a pas entendu ce slogan, mais d'autres demandant la fin de l'interventionnisme du régime en dehors des frontières et l'utilisation des milliards qu'il gaspille dans des guerres régionales pour l'amélioration de la situation économique interne.

À Ramallah, le porte-parole du Fatah palestinien, Oussama Al-Qawasmi, a réagi : "Est-ce que les Iraniens pensent réellement que leur gouvernement a déboursé le moindre argent pour les Palestiniens?" Et d'ajouter : "Nous n'avons jamais vu l'Iran contribuer à la construction d'une seule école, université, hôpital ou autre projet de développement."

—Jihane Mustapha

Publié le 30 juin



### SOURCE

#### THE IRANIAN

Washington, États-Unis  
iranian.com

Créé en 1995, *The Iranian* est un site généraliste iranien en anglais, basé aux États-Unis et destiné à la diaspora iranienne. Le site est lié au Conseil national irano-américain, une organisation qui apporte son soutien aux Iraniens établis aux États-Unis.

# Syrie: les forces pro-kurdes face aux ambitions d'Erdogan et Assad

Matteo Puxton, édité par Maxime Macé. / 05 Juillet 2018  
<http://www.francesoir.fr>

La frontière turco-syrienne est une zone de tensions particulièrement importantes où se mêlent des intérêts très divergents. Matteo Puxton, agrégé d'Histoire, spécialiste des questions de défense et observateur de référence du conflit irako-syrien, présente en partenariat avec "France-Soir", le conseil militaire de Manbij, composante des Forces démocratiques syriennes, qui tente de résister aux ambitions turques et à la pression du régime de Damas.

Le conseil militaire de Manbij, créée en avril 2016 par les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS) alors sur le point d'investir la ville, témoigne surtout de la manière dont les Kurdes de l'YPG ont su créer des unités non-kurdes dans cette coalition voulue par les Américains, et qui ont en réalité très peu d'indépendance face à l'YPG.



Le conseil militaire de Manbij (CMM) est une coalition établie le 2 avril 2016 près du barrage de Tishreen, sur l'Euphrate, au sein des FDS. Le CMM est formée de cinq unités arabes et une turkmène, notamment de Kataib Sams as-Shamal (arabe), dont le commandant adjoint devient le commandant militaire du CMM, et Liwa al-Salajaka (turkmène).

Parmi les autres formations du groupe, le Bataillon des Révolutionnaires de Manbij (BRM), qui apparaît aussi à ce moment-là, et qui recrute dans la communauté turkmène de Manbij. Les Kurdes de l'YPG, qui constituent l'ossature des FDS, veulent en effet que ce soient des forces locales qui s'emparent de la ville de Manbij, tenue par l'Etat islamique au-delà de l'Euphrate. Le conseil militaire de Manbij est mal vu par la Turquie, qui à la même époque, en armant et en soutenant avec son artillerie les rebelles



Le Conseil militaire de Manbij doit faire face aux pressions de la Turquie et du régime de Damas. ©DR

syriens de la poche d'Azaz, au nord d'Alep, tente d'aider ces derniers à chasser l'EI de l'est de la province d'Alep, où se trouve Manbij.

La ville elle-même est encerclée dès la fin mai par les FDS et l'assaut sur la ville commence le 31 mai, mené par le CMM, avec un fort soutien aérien américain. Selon les Etats-Unis, l'organisation conduit la bataille avec 2.000 combattants, appuyés par 500 Kurdes de l'YPG, et des forces spéciales américaines dont certains membres portent l'écusson de la milice kurde. Un commandant du CCM donne le chiffre de 60% de combattants arabes et 40% de combattants kurdes. Un journaliste présent à Kobané au moment de la bataille a plutôt l'impression que les Kurdes supportent, en fait, le gros de la bataille. La vidéo de l'Etat mise en ligne début août 2016 montre d'ailleurs davantage l'YPG.

Le conseil militaire de Manbij perd son chef, Faysal Abou Layla, tué par un sniper. Il est remplacé par Adnan Abou Amjad. La ville est libérée après deux mois de combat, le 12 août, et l'YPG annonce en avoir retiré ses combattants quelques semaines plus tard. Le 14 août, un Conseil militaire d'a-Bab est créé, en vue de la libération de cette ville située au sud-ouest de Manbij. Mais la Turquie déclenche l'opération Bouclier de l'Euphrate moins de dix jours plus tard, bloquant la route aux FDS.

Début mars 2017, alors que les Turcs et leurs alliés rebelles ont pris al-Bab à l'Etat islamique et se dirigent vers Manbij, s'escarmouchant avec les FDS, le conseil militaire de Manbij, après un accord négocié avec la Russie, cède certains villages proches de la ville au régime syrien, ce qui stoppe les attaques turques et rebelles. Le chef du Bataillon des Révolutionnaires de Manbij, Ahmad Arsh, apparaît à cette occasion en uniforme de la police des frontières du régime syrien sur Russia Today. Les Américains augmentent leur présence militaire à Manbij pour montrer leur soutien au CCM et aux FDS, déployant des Humvees et des véhicules blindés Stryker du 75th Ranger Regiment.

De son côté, la Turquie justifie alors par l'histoire ottomane la récupération de la ville de Manbij. Le 20 mars, le conseil militaire de Manbij libère, lors d'une amnistie, 22 habitants locaux qui avaient servi l'EI et avaient été capturés pendant la bataille de Manbij en 2016.

En avril 2017, le CCM envoie 200 combattants épauler les FDS qui combattent dans la ville de Tabqa, au sud-ouest de Raqqa. Un reportage de journaliste local explique que les Kurdes du PKK venus des monts Qandil, en Irak, contrôlent tous les organes importants à Manbij. En outre, ils collaborent avec le régime, jusqu'à pratiquer l'échange de renseignements. Comme ailleurs dans le Rojava (Kurdistan syrien), le régime continue d'assumer financièrement les services publics en échange d'un contrôle ou d'un droit de regard sur des organes clés, comme le renseignement. Le journaliste accuse également les Kurdes de vider les silos de grain de



Source : <https://syria.liveuamap.com>



⇒ la ville et de démonter certaines installations pour rééquiper Kobané ravagée par les combats.

L'Asayish, la police militaire kurde, contrôle Manbij, avec seulement 30% d'Arabes (50% dans la police routière). Le renseignement kurde règne en maître, dirigé par un vétéran des monts Qandil, Dalil. Il commence à traquer les personnes suspectées d'être favorables aux rebelles syriens appuyés par les Turcs. Une source pro-rebelle raconte que l'YPG livre les déserteurs des forces armées syriennes à la branche du renseignement militaire d'Alep.

En juin, les combattants du conseil militaire de Manbij sont sur le front au sud de Raqqa. Fin août, les Américains s'escarment avec les rebelles pro-turcs autour de Manbij, alors qu'ils entraînent les combattants du CCM en parallèle. Pour Kyle Orton, la formation est le parfait exemple de façade à travers lequel l'YPG exerce une domination sans partage sur un territoire non-majoritairement peuplé de Kurdes. Le 29 août, le groupe perd son chef militaire, Adnan Abou Amjad, tué au combat à Raqqa contre l'EI. Il est remplacé en septembre par Mohammad Mustafa Abou Adel. Son adjoint est Sheikh Ibrahim Binawi.

En novembre, les sheikhs tribaux de Manbij et des alentours protestent auprès des FDS au regard de la politique de conscription forcée que les Kurdes tentent d'introduire depuis le mois d'octobre; peu après le recrutement est réorganisé sur la base du volontariat. Les Kurdes ont essayé de faire passer l'idée de la conscription via Kataib Shams al-Shamal, sans succès. Ils doivent relâcher un chef tribal arrêté pour avoir protesté. Ce même mois le véhicule du chef du conseil militaire de Manbij est visé par un IED (engin explosif improvisé).

**E**n janvier 2018, les Etats-Unis réaffirment leur volonté de coopérer avec le conseil militaire de Manbij (qui disent-ils, est à 60% arabe, 40% kurde...). Le CMM aurait bloqué l'envoi de renforts par l'YPG pour la défense du canton d'Afrin, selon une source rebelle. Après la chute du canton d'Afrin en mars entre les mains de l'armée turque, la formation jure de défendre Manbij, désormais visée par la Turquie, coûte que coûte. Fin mars, les forces de sécurité ouvrent le feu sur une manifestation pro-régime organisée par des forces tribales autour de Manbij. Le 23 mars, Sharfan Darwish, le porte-parole du conseil militaire de Manbij (Kurde de Manbij), est blessé lors d'une attaque sur la route Manbij-Alep. Le 30 mars, un soldat américain et un soldat britannique des forces spéciales sont tués par l'explosion d'un IED lors d'une opération anti-Etat islamique à Manbij. L'YPG, après un accord américano-turc en juin, devrait finalement retirer ses effectifs de Manbij.

L'emblème du conseil militaire de Manbij comporte un bouclier jaune (qui rappelle l'écusson de manche de l'YPG), encadré de deux fusils d'assaut AK-47; au-dessus du bouclier est écrit "Conseil militaire", et dans le bouclier "Manbij" et la date de fondation, 2016. L'arrière-plan avec les rayons fait penser à l'emblème de Kataib Sams as-Shamal, qui est à l'origine du CMM et lui donne son premier chef.

Le conseil militaire de Manbij a un site Internet, une page Facebook, une chaîne Youtube. Le porte-parole du groupe Sharfan Darwish a un compte Twitter.

Les différents réseaux sociaux listés ci-dessous ont une publication abondante (en particulier la page Facebook), ce qui dénote une branche média bien organisée. Si les emblèmes de l'YPG n'apparaissent jamais sur celle-ci, on observe toutefois que le conseil militaire de Manbij calque sa position sur les FDS dominées par les Kurdes. Les montages vidéos, en particulier, et notamment les camps d'entraînement de la formation, témoignent de l'influence de l'YPG dans leur présentation générale et leur fonctionnement. Le CMM est à l'évidence largement sous l'influence de la branche syrienne du PKK.

Le conseil militaire de Manbij semble tenir une réunion mensuelle avec tous les acteurs locaux de la ville et de ses environs. Il rencontre fréquemment l'administration civile, ainsi que la fondation pour les familles des martyrs de Manbij. Un comité de l'Intérieur établit, par exemple, des circulaires pour l'Aid. Le conseil militaire d'al-Bab, établi par les FDS avant la reprise de la ville par l'armée turque et ses alliés rebelles en février 2017, reste basé à Manbij et publie régulièrement des communiqués via la page Facebook du CMM.

La page Facecook relaie les nouvelles du quotidien de la ville de Manbij



Académie militaire du CMM. La présentation générale, avec les drapeaux, les posters des "martyrs" rappellent fortement les camps du PKK ou de l'YPG.

et des environs. Le 2 juin, le comité de l'Intérieur assouplit la législation sur les véhicules du 28 février précédent, qui interdisait l'achat de véhicules dans les zones rurales ou les faubourgs de Manbij pour les faire entrer ensuite dans la ville. Le 3 juin les veuves des "martyrs" du CMM forment un syndicat. Le 9 juin, deux IED explosent dans Manbij, l'un sur le square principal, l'autre près de l'hôpital. Le 13 juin, un IED explose sur la route menant à Alep, blessant une petite fille. L'explosif était placé dans un sac poubelle sur le bord de la route. Le 20 juin, la formation filme les patrouilles militaires turques à portée visuelle des positions avancées de ses combattants. Le 1er juillet, une vidéo du conseil militaire de Manbij filme une mission de réconciliation avec le clan Bani Said.

Comme souvent en Syrie, les "martyrs" sont régulièrement honorés. Le 5 juin 2018, le conseil militaire de Manbij commémore la mort de Faysal Abou Leyla, tué pendant la libération de la ville deux ans plus tôt.

**L**a page Facebook défend aussi les positions politiques des FDS. Le 13 juin, on peut voir des combattants originaires de Jaraboulous, faisant partie du conseil militaire de Manbij, témoigner pour affirmer qu'ils veulent reprendre la ville aux mains des Turcs depuis 2016 et l'opération



Dans l'académie militaire, poster des deux premiers commandants du CMM, tués au combat: Faysal Abou Leyla à droite, et Adnan Abou Amjad à gauche.

Bouclier de l'Euphrate. Le 19 juin, une vidéo montre l'association des Turkmènes de Manbij rejeter l'occupation turque de la Syrie et celle de Manbij.

Le 23 juin, le CMM publie les photos de la visite du général américain Votel, commandant du CENTCOM, deux jours plus tôt. Une vidéo montre un chef de tribu soutenir la formation dans sa volonté de défendre la ville contre la Turquie. Le 24 juin, la page Facebook relaie la justification par le directeur du centre média des FDS à propos du couvre-feu établi la veille à Raqqa. Le 25 juin, une vidéo montre une manifestation dénonçant "l'occupation turque" en Syrie. Le 2 juillet, une vidéo du CMM montre une délégation américaine en visite dans Manbij.

La page Facebook se plaît aussi à rapporter les troubles dans la zone conquise par l'opération turque Bouclier de l'Euphrate en Syrie. Le 17 ⇒

⇒ juin, le CMM rapporte des affrontements à al-Bab entre factions rebelles pro-turques, dont Ahrar al-Sharqiya, et d'autres entre Jaysh al-Islam et la division du Sultan Mourad au nord-ouest de Manbij. Le 23 juin, la page Facebook signale des affrontements entre les factions rebelles appuyées par la Turquie et Jaysh al-Islam à proximité de Manbij.

De ce que l'on voit des documents publiés par la page Facebook, les forces de la formation sont essentiellement des forces d'infanterie légère munies de l'invariable trio AK-47/AKM / PKM / RPG-7. On n'observe pas de véhicule. Le 2 juin, l'académie militaire du "martyr" Faysal Abou Leyla achève la formation d'une vague de 188 recrues, qui ont reçu pendant 15 jours un entraînement idéologique et militaire. Ce même jour, l'académie du "martyr" Mahmoud Ali pour les forces de sécurité intérieures termine la formation d'un mois pour 90 recrues ayant reçu une instruction idéologiques et militaire. Le 12 juin, l'académie militaire du "martyr" Faysal Abou Leyla achève la formation d'un nouveau groupe de 220 recrues. Ces recrues viennent de Manbij mais aussi de Hasakah et Shaddadi, et comprennent probablement un certain nombre de Kurdes. La formation a duré 15 jours, elle a été idéologique et militaire. Le 29 juin, le quatrième régiment des martyrs du CMM, tout juste créé, est filmé durant une session d'entraînement. On remarque la présence de femmes combattantes. Une vue aérienne de la formation permet de compter plus de 170 hommes alignés en rangs. Le 30 juin, une vidéo montre un camp de formation pour les cadres, très calqué sur ceux de l'YPG kurde. La formation dure 45 jours dans une académie militaire installée par le CMM.

L'étude des documents produits par le Conseil militaire de Manbij, recoupée avec les analyses de spécialistes, permet d'apprécier l'influence de l'YPG kurde et du PKK sur cette structure. Elle est difficile à mesurer précisément, toutefois l'organisation de la branche média de la formation et ses académies militaires témoignent de l'encadrement fourni par l'YPG. Le CMM n'a pas l'intention d'abandonner Manbij aux Turcs, malgré le départ prévu, en théorie, des conseillers kurdes de l'YPG. De la même façon, le régime syrien entretient l'agitation qui lui est favorable dans la région. Le 24 juin dernier, une vidéo mise en ligne par un groupe inconnu jusqu'ici, la Résistance populaire à Manbij, proclame vouloir chasser l'occupant étranger de la région (Turquie, Etats-Unis et France sont nommés). Ce mouvement ressemble fort à celui né il y a quelques mois dans la province de Raqqa. Reste à savoir s'il est capable de faire autre chose que des vidéos de propagande: pour l'instant ce groupe n'a pas fait parler de lui. ♦



Session d'entraînement dans une académie militaire du CMM. On compte plus de 170 recrues.



Le 10 juin, deux "martyrs" du CMM sont enterrés à Manbij, dont une femme.



13 juillet 2016

## Extraction de pétrole en Syrie: qu'en est-il de l'accord conclu par Damas avec les Kurdes?

13.07.2018 // fr.sputniknews.com

Un accord aurait été conclu par le gouvernement de Bachar el-Assad avec les Kurdes de Syrie, concernant la production kurde de pétrole sur les sites d'al Rmeilan et d'al Jabsah, dans la province d'Hassaké au nord-est du pays, a déclaré à Sputnik une source proche du dossier.

Il y a quelques mois, Damas aurait signé avec les Kurdes un accord aux termes duquel ces derniers devraient redistribuer un tiers du pétrole brut extrait par leurs soins à la raffinerie d'Homs pour les besoins du gouvernement syrien, tout en gardant les deux tiers restants raffinés sur place pour leurs propres besoins, a raconté à Sputnik une source très au fait de la situation relative à la pro-

duction de pétrole en Syrie.

**«Les Kurdes extraient 50.000 barils par jour sur les sites d'al Rmeilan et d'al Jabsah, dans la province d'Hassaké», a précisé l'interlocuteur de l'agence.**

On suppose toutefois qu'ils produisent illégalement bien plus de pétrole qu'ils ne veulent bien le déclarer.

La source a rappelé à cet effet qu'avant la guerre, 160.000 barils étaient produits chaque jour sur le site d'al Rmeilan, alors qu'à présent, il ne s'agirait plus que de 38.000 barils par jour. Le rendement du site d'al Jabsah a ainsi mystérieusement chuté de 30.000 à 12.000 barils par jour.

L'interlocuteur de Sputnik a souligné que le gou-



vernement syrien comptait bientôt reprendre le contrôle de l'ensemble du territoire, ce qui signifierait le rétablissement du contrôle de Damas sur la totalité des champs pétroliers en Syrie.

Combattants des YPG

Après la défaite des terroristes de Daech\* en 2017, les Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), constituées essentiellement de formations armées kurdes, se sont emparées de plusieurs grands champs pétroliers dans la région située à l'est de l'Euphrate. Le gouvernement syrien a à plusieurs reprises averti qu'il comptait bien reprendre le contrôle de ces sites. ●

\*Organisation terroriste interdite en Russie

# Le « sultan » Erdogan intronisé avec les pleins pouvoirs

Recep Tayyip Erdogan prête serment, ce lundi, pour un nouveau mandat de cinq ans aux pouvoirs très élargis.

ANNE ANDLAUER  
ISTANBUL

**TURQUIE** Si la vie politique de Recep Tayyip Erdogan inspire, un jour, un jeu vidéo, certains lui ont déjà trouvé un nom : « Superdogan ». Depuis quelques semaines, les fans du chef de l'État turc diffusent sur les réseaux sociaux une vidéo de deux minutes reprenant le décor d'une partie de Super Mario, la mascotte de Nintendo. Sous les traits du petit plombier, Recep Tayyip Erdogan franchit un à un les obstacles (putschistes, militants kurdes, manifestants de Gezi...) pour conquérir, en fin de partie, le titre de Superdogan.

Qu'on s'en réjouisse ou qu'on s'en déssole, le superlatif s'impose. Dès qu'il aura prêté serment, lundi après-midi, Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'entamera pas seulement un second mandat de président. Il prendra les rênes d'un système qui abolit 95 ans de tradition parlementaire dans la République de Turquie. Sa victoire, dès le premier tour, aux élections du 24 juin précipite l'entrée en vigueur du « régime présidentiel » adopté par référendum en avril 2017.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan refuse d'employer ce terme. Il appelle sa création « système du gouvernement de la présidence du peuple ». Derrière ce nom alambiqué, on chercherait en vain un équivalent aux États-Unis ou du côté français. « C'est un système qu'on pourrait qualifier de "superprésidence", au sens où le chef de l'État concentre en sa personne l'essentiel du pouvoir sans mécanismes de contrôle », résume le politologue Ismet Akça.

À compter de ce lundi, la Turquie n'a plus de premier ministre. Recep Tayyip Erdogan est à la fois chef de l'État, de l'exécutif, des armées et du parti au pouvoir, le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP). Le nouveau Parlement, qui lui est largement acquis, n'a aucun moyen de contrôler ce « super-président », alors que ce dernier dispose du droit de dissolution. Pire, les députés abandonnent des prérogatives : celle de censurer un ministre ou le gouvernement, d'avoir le dernier mot sur la loi de budget, de poser des questions au chef de l'exécutif, de fixer les critères de nomination dans la bureaucratie... Tous les hauts fonctionnaires devront désormais leur emploi à Recep



Recep Tayyip Erdogan – réélu président de la Turquie dès le premier tour, le 24 juin –, à son arrivée au Parlement, samedi à Ankara.

Tayyip Erdogan, de même que les hauts magistrats, tous désignés, directement ou indirectement, depuis le palais présidentiel.

« Il n'y a plus de séparation des pouvoirs », résume encore Ismet Akça. Le chef du Parti d'action nationaliste (MHP), allié de Recep Tayyip Erdogan et



« La nation turque nous a confié une lourde responsabilité en faisant du MHP le parti clé au Parlement »

DEVLET BAHÇELI, CHEF DU PARTI D'ACTION NATIONALISTE (MHP)

artisan de sa victoire, a semblé le concéder au lendemain du double scrutin. « La nation turque nous a confié une lourde responsabilité en faisant du MHP le parti clé au Parlement et en nous donnant la mission d'équilibre (des pouvoirs) », a estimé Devlet Bahçeli. Plus limpide encore, cet extrait du discours inaugural du député Durmus Yilmaz qui, en raison de son âge, officiait samedi en tant que président par intérim du nouveau Parlement : « Les mécanismes de contrôle, qui sont la conséquence naturelle d'un système de séparation forte des pouvoirs, n'existent plus », a constaté cet élu du Bon Parti (opposition nationaliste), par ailleurs ancien président de la Banque centrale.

Paré de son costume de superprésident, Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'a aucune raison de ne pas respecter sa promesse de campagne : lever l'état d'urgence, en vigueur depuis le coup d'État manqué du 15 juillet 2016. Il rassurera à peu de frais les investisseurs étrangers, puisque la Constitution l'autorise désormais à émettre des décrets dans la très large sphère de son pouvoir exécutif. La « lutte contre le terrorisme », principale justification de deux années d'état d'urgence, pourra toujours être renforcée par des décrets présidentiels, font valoir les officiels turcs, soucieux de ne pas froisser l'allié ultranationaliste, qui souhaitait un maintien du régime d'exception.

C'est d'ailleurs la seule ombre qui pèse sur la victoire de Recep Tayyip Erdogan : dans la nouvelle législature, l'AKP ne dispose pas seul de la majorité

absolue (il compte 295 sièges sur 600). Le président turc aura besoin du soutien du MHP pour contrôler le Parlement, et pourrait avoir à céder devant ses lignes rouges. « Le pragmatisme extrême d'Erdogan, qui était autrefois capable de prendre une décision puis son contraire deux mois plus tard, sera bridé par son alliance avec le MHP, qui est beaucoup plus rigide sur certains sujets, à commencer par la question kurde », observe le politologue Ismet Akça. Comme lui, de nombreux experts s'attendent à un durcissement de la politique du président, servie par l'exacerbation des thèses nationalistes. ⇒

Encore sonnée par sa défaite, l'opposition aurait une bonne raison de se ressaisir : les élections municipales prévues en mars 2019. S'il mobilise ses militants et choisit bien ses candidats, le Parti ré-

publicain du peuple (CHP, social-démocrate) pourrait mettre en danger l'AKP dans les plus grandes villes, Istanbul et Ankara. Au lieu de cela, depuis le 24 juin, le premier parti d'opposition

s'enfonce dans les querelles internes. Recep Tayyip Erdogan pourrait saisir cette occasion et avancer la date du scrutin local. ■

LE FIGARO

lundi 9 juillet 2018

# Les grands chantiers du reis turc

## Les élections municipales

Elles sont programmées dans neuf mois, en mars 2019, et « ne seront pas avancées », assurent des proches de Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Les mêmes qui, il y a trois mois, juraient que les législatives et la présidentielle se tiendraient à la date prévue, en novembre 2019... Le président turc a décrété la semaine dernière la mobilisation dans les rangs de son parti. « Un marathon nous attend », a-t-il dit à propos de ces municipales. L'AKP réalise traditionnellement de moins bons scores aux scrutins locaux. C'est d'ailleurs l'une des raisons qui ont poussé Tayyip Erdogan à avancer la date des élections nationales : un résultat décevant aux municipales aurait compliqué sa tâche à la présidentielle. Le chef de l'État devrait notamment se concentrer sur Istanbul et Ankara. Les deux plus grandes villes turques lui sont acquises depuis 25 ans, mais elles ont toutes deux dit « non » à son régime présidentiel lors du référendum d'avril 2017. Les maires AKP de ces mégapoles, ainsi que ceux d'autres grandes villes, ont été écartés à l'automne dernier. Recep Tayyip Erdogan doit désormais choisir avec soin ses têtes d'affiche pour 2019... ou avant.

## Raviver l'AKP

Le président turc est un politicien trop avisé pour ne pas voir le demi-échec subi par son parti aux dernières législatives. L'AKP n'a obtenu que 42,5 % des suffrages, son plus mauvais score en dix ans si l'on écarte les élections de juin 2015, où il avait perdu sa majorité absolue (récupérée cinq mois plus tard). Sa popularité s'érode notamment chez les jeunes et dans les centres urbains, où les cadres locaux tendent à se reposer sur les acquis de seize ans de pouvoir. Les municipales seront un premier test, mais la reconquête de l'électorat AKP sera un défi de longue haleine pour son leader incontesté.

## L'économie

C'était une autre grande raison derrière la convocation d'élections (très) anticipées le 24 juin. Depuis plus d'un an, la santé

de l'économie turque va de mal en pis et la récession guette. La monnaie nationale, la livre, ne cesse de perdre de la valeur face au dollar et à l'euro, le chômage dépasse 10 % (20 % chez les moins de 24 ans) et les prix s'envolent. Le taux d'inflation a atteint 15,4 % en juin sur un an, un record depuis 2003. « Tirer les taux d'intérêt et l'inflation vers le bas sera l'une de nos priorités », a répété jeudi dernier Binali Yildirim, qui perd son poste de premier ministre et devrait prendre prochainement la présidence du Parlement. Tayyip Erdogan aura désormais la haute main sur la politique économique, et peut-être monétaire. Investisseurs et marchés attendent de savoir si le président, ennemi autoproclamé des taux d'intérêt, reviendra sur l'indépendance de la Banque centrale, comme il l'a laissé entendre pendant la campagne. Ils guetteront aussi, ce lundi, l'annonce du nouveau cabinet et le nom du nouveau ministre de l'Économie.

## La bureaucratie

Dans les institutions, la transition du régime parlementaire en place depuis neuf décennies vers un régime hyperprésidentiel ne se fera pas du jour au lendemain. D'autant que ces institutions subissent depuis bientôt deux ans une purge aussi inédite que massive, consécutive au putsch manqué de l'été 2016 (plus de 18 600 fonctionnaires ont encore été limogés dimanche, comme au moins 110 000 autres ces deux dernières années). Des ministères - à commencer par celui du premier ministre -, des secrétariats, des directions... vont disparaître ou fusionner, d'autres institutions vont être créées... À tous les échelons de la bureaucratie, des milliers de fonctionnaires attendent une réaffectation et jouent des coudes pour un meilleur poste. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, qui choisit désormais tous les hauts fonctionnaires, fera en sorte de verrouiller la machine institutionnelle à son profit. Mais son allié ultranationaliste, dont il dépend au Parlement, pourrait se montrer gourmand. Les autorités prévoient d'étaler

**15,4 %**

Le taux d'inflation

en juin sur un an, un record depuis 2003

la transition sur un an. Le calcul est optimiste.

## La politique étrangère

jamais la Turquie n'a eu de relations aussi tendues avec l'Occident. La récente victoire de Tayyip Erdogan prouve que ses électeurs ne lui en tiennent pas rigueur... quand ils n'applaudissent pas, pour beaucoup, ses semonces régulières contre « l'hypocrisie » de l'Europe et des États-Unis, qu'il accuse de soutenir les ennemis de la Turquie (PKK, disciples de l'imam Fethullah Gülen...). Réaliste sur les chances (nulles) d'adhésion de son pays à l'UE pendant ce nouveau mandat, Recep Tayyip Erdogan a exposé pendant la campagne sa vision de la politique étrangère, affranchie de l'idéalisme de ses derniers premiers ministres : une Turquie forte militairement (l'industrie de l'armement turc connaît un essor sans précédent), capable d'affronter les menaces tout en devenant un acteur-clé dans sa région (Syrie, Irak, etc.). Plus que jamais, chaque partenaire sera jugé à l'aune de la lutte d'Ankara contre le « terrorisme ». Les relations avec Moscou, empreintes de ce pragmatisme, continueront d'être une priorité pour Recep Tayyip Erdogan. ■

A. A.

# Erdogan, doté de pouvoirs renforcés, nomme son gendre aux Finances

Ankara (AFP) - 09/07/2018  
<http://www.lepoint.fr>

**Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a entamé lundi un nouveau mandat de cinq ans avec des pouvoirs renforcés, et dévoilé un gouvernement resserré au sein duquel il a confié à son gendre le poste clé des Finances.**

M. Erdogan, 64 ans, a prêté serment au Parlement, s'engageant notamment à préserver les principes de la Turquie laïque fondée par Mustafa Kemal Atatürk et à accomplir sa tâche d'une manière "impartiale".

Au pouvoir depuis 2003, d'abord comme Premier ministre puis président, M. Erdogan a été réélu le 24 juin, remportant l'élection présidentielle dès le premier tour avec 52,6 % des voix, loin devant ses concurrents.

Après la prestation de serment, M. Erdogan a déposé une gerbe au mausolée d'Atatürk avant de présider une cérémonie au palais présidentiel, inaugurant une nouvelle ère dans l'histoire moderne de la Turquie avec le passage au système présidentiel, aux termes d'une révision constitutionnelle adoptée par référendum avec une marge étroite en avril 2017.

Saluant "un nouveau début" pour la Turquie, il a promis, dans une apparente tentative d'apaiser une société extrêmement polarisée, de servir tous les Turcs.

"Je ne suis pas seulement le président de ceux qui ont voté pour moi, mais de l'ensemble des 81 millions" de Turcs, a-t-il déclaré.

## SON GENDRE AUX FINANCES

Dans la soirée, il a dévoilé un nouveau cabinet de seize ministres (contre 26 actuellement), dont le plus en vue est son gendre Berat Albayrak, qui s'est vu confier le portefeuille clé des Finances.

Le ministère de la Défense a été attribué au chef d'état-major Hulusi Akar. Le chef de la diplomatie sortant Mevlut Cavusoglu a été reconduit.

Marié à la fille aînée de M. Erdogan, Esra, M. Albayrak, 40 ans, qui occupait depuis 2015 le poste clé de ministre de l'Energie, a connu ces dernières années une irrésistible ascension.

Sa nomination aux Finances survient dans un contexte économique difficile avec une inflation élevée, une forte dévaluation de la monnaie et un



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan prie avec sa femme Emine au palais présidentiel à Ankara, le 9 juillet 2018. Photo fournie par la présidence turque. ( Turkish President Office/AFP / KAY-HAN OZER )



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan le 29 mai 2018 à Istanbul avec son gendre Berat Albayrak, nommé lundi ministre des Finances. ( AFP / OZAN KOSE )

important déficit des comptes courants, en dépit d'une croissance solide.

Les marchés, qui redoutent des pressions de M. Erdogan sur la Banque centrale, semblent avoir mal accueilli la nomination de M. Albayrak aux Finances, la livre turque chutant de plus de 2 % dans la soirée face au dollar.

Outre les ministres, M. Erdogan a nommé au poste de vice-président Fuat Oktay, un technocrate qui avait par le passé dirigé l'Agence turque de gestion des situations d'urgence (Afad).

L'accession de M. Erdogan à cette "hyperprésidence" intervient près de deux ans après une tentative de coup d'Etat, le 15 juillet 2016, menée par des militaires factieux et suivie de vastes purges notamment au sein des forces armées, de la police et des administrations, avec l'arrestation ou le limogeage de dizaines de milliers de personnes.

La dernière vague de purges, annoncée dimanche, a touché plus de 18.000 personnes,

en majorité des soldats et des policiers, qui ont été limogés par un décret-loi présenté comme le dernier sous l'état d'urgence instauré au lendemain du putsch manqué.

## "AUTOCRATIE INSTITUTIONNALISÉE"

Dans le nouveau système, le poste de Premier ministre, occupé par Binali Yildirim, a été supprimé, et le chef de l'Etat détient désormais l'ensemble du pouvoir exécutif et pourra promulguer des décrets.

Il nommera également six des treize membres du Conseil des juges et procureurs (HSK), chargé de désigner et destituer le personnel du système judiciaire.

"L'essentiel des pouvoirs seront concentrés entre ses mains, il n'y aura plus de Premier ministre et presque aucune des procédures de contrôles et de contrepois d'une démocratie libérale. En d'autres mots, la Turquie sera une autocratie institutionnalisée", estime Marc Pierini, chercheur à l'institut Carnegie Europe.

Lors des législatives qui se sont tenues en même temps que la présidentielle, le parti islamo-conservateur de M. Erdogan, l'AKP, a obtenu 295 sièges sur 600 et ne contrôle le Parlement que grâce à son alliance avec les ultranationalistes du MHP, qui compte 49 élus.

De nombreux experts craignent que cette alliance conduise à un durcissement de la politique menée par M. Erdogan, notamment sur la question kurde.

Des dirigeants étrangers, comme le Vénézuélien Nicolas Maduro et le Soudanais Omar el-Béchrir ou encore le Premier ministre russe Dmitri Medvedev, ont assisté à la cérémonie, ainsi que le président bulgare Roumen Radev et le Premier ministre hongrois Viktor Orban. ●

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# L'opposition turque déchirée par sa défaite face à Erdogan

La réélection du président a sonné le glas d'une alliance de circonstance

ISTANBUL - *correspondante*

Les lendemains sont difficiles pour l'opposition au président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan, sonnée par ses piètres résultats lors du double scrutin – législatif et présidentiel – du 24 juin. Premier constat, l'alliance de circonstance formée par les partis d'opposition – les républicains du CHP, les nationalistes du Bon Parti, les islamistes du Parti de la félicité – afin de battre M. Erdogan dans les urnes, a cessé d'exister. « Cette alliance électorale n'a plus lieu d'être », a déclaré Aytun Çıray, le porte-parole du Bon Parti, qui n'a pas exclu de coopérer au parlement avec le Parti de la justice et du développement (AKP, islamo-conservateur) actuellement dirigé par M. Erdogan.

L'AKP a obtenu 295 sièges sur les 600 que compte le nouveau Parlement mais son score est en déclin de 7 % par rapport aux législatives de novembre 2015. Ses résultats sont en baisse dans 70 des 81 départements du pays. Soucieux de « corriger les erreurs », le numéro un turc a avancé la date du congrès annuel au 18 août. Il se prépare aux élections municipales prévues pour mars 2019.

Grâce aux 49 sièges remportés par leurs alliés du Parti de l'action nationaliste (MHP, droite ultranationaliste), les islamo-conservateurs gardent la haute main sur le Parlement, devenu une simple chambre d'enregistrement dans

le cadre de l'« hyperprésidence » que M. Erdogan s'apprête à endosser pleinement après sa prestation de serment, lundi 9 juillet.

Ce jour marquera le début de « l'ère Erdogan », dans la continuité de « l'ère ottomane » et de « l'ère seldjoukide », selon Ibrahim Karagül, l'éditorialiste du quotidien pro-gouvernemental *Yeni Safak*. Victorieux de la présidentielle avec 52,59 % des voix, loin devant son rival, Muharrem Ince, le candidat du Parti républicain du peuple (CHP, centre gauche), M. Erdogan a toute latitude pour institutionnaliser son régime autocratique et poursuivre la « transformation civilisationnelle » du pays.

## « Sans voix »

L'opposition ne lui fera pas ombre. Avec 146 sièges seulement, le CHP reste le principal parti d'opposition mais il est faible et isolé. Le plus vieux parti de Turquie peine à tirer les leçons de sa défaite. Une lutte interne a surgi entre Kemal Kılıçdaroglu, son secrétaire général, et Muharrem Ince, le candidat malheureux à la présidentielle. M. Ince et ses partisans réclament la tenue d'un congrès extraordinaire afin de prendre la direction du parti, ce que refuse M. Kılıçdaroglu.

Amertume et mécontentement sont palpables chez les militants du CHP, lesquels ne s'expliquent toujours pas l'absence de réaction de la direction du parti au soir des élections. Au moment où les ré-

**Avec 295 sièges sur 600 et l'appui de la droite ultranationaliste, l'AKP a fait du Parlement une chambre d'enregistrement**

sultats étaient annoncés à la télévision, Semra, une infirmière du quartier de Kadıköy, sur la rive asiatique d'Istanbul, est allée devant le siège du CHP dans l'espoir d'entendre les dirigeants. « Muharrem Ince n'a pas fait de déclaration à l'attention des militants ce soir-là et Kemal Kılıçdaroglu était invisible », déplore-t-elle.

Semra, son frère ainsi que leur mère âgée de 90 ans ont donné leur voix à Muharrem Ince. Ils croyaient fermement, sinon à la défaite du candidat Erdogan, du moins à la tenue d'un second tour. « Les résultats nous ont laissés sans voix. Mon frère a eu une crise de hoquet si forte que nous avons dû appeler le médecin », raconte l'infirmière.

## Parti chauvin

Une grande partie des opposants à M. Erdogan n'ont pas compris pourquoi, au soir du scrutin, les résultats ont été diffusés à la télévision par l'agence de presse offi-

cielle Anadolu. La rapidité avec laquelle Anadolu a publié les résultats ainsi que les scores disproportionnés attribués à M. Erdogan, crédité de 70 % des votes dépouillés dès 18h45 alors que les 180 000 bureaux de vote avaient fermé à 17 heures, ont entretenu le doute sur le rôle joué par l'agence.

Les résultats sont surprenants. Ainsi une bonne partie des voix perdues par le CHP sont allées au Bon Parti, son allié de la droite nationaliste aux législatives, désormais présent au Parlement avec 43 députés, ainsi qu'au Parti de la démocratie des peuples (HDP, gauche pro-kurde), qui obtient 67 sièges.

Muharrem Ince souhaitait que le HDP soit représenté au Parlement. Il fallait tout faire pour que le parti pro-kurde, honni par les islamo-conservateurs, franchisse le seuil des 10 % nécessaires pour entrer à l'Assemblée nationale. Sinon, selon le système proportionnel en vigueur pour les législatives, les voix du HDP seraient allées à l'AKP.

Le HDP a donc reçu les faveurs des « Turcs blancs » (laïcs et républicains) des villes. En revanche, ses scores ont baissé dans les régions à majorité kurde du sud-est du pays par rapport à ceux obtenus lors des législatives de 2015. Contre toute attente, le MHP, le parti le plus chauvin de l'échiquier politique turc, a recueilli des voix parmi la population kurde. ■

MARIE JÉGO

AFP

## Syrie: 18 morts dans l'explosion d'une voiture piégée dans l'est

Beyrouth, 6 juillet 2018 (AFP)

DIX-HUIT PERSONNES, dont 11 membres des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS), ont été tuées vendredi dans l'est de la Syrie dans l'explosion d'une voiture piégée devant un siège de cette coalition de combattants arabes et Kurdes soutenue par les Etats-Unis, a indiqué une ONG.

"Un dirigeant et 10 membres des FDS ainsi que sept civils, dont trois enfants, ont été tués par l'explosion d'une voiture piégée devant un siège des FDS à Bsayra, une localité de l'est de la province de Deir Ezzor", a dit à l'AFP le directeur de l'Observatoire syrien des droits de l'Homme (OSDH), Rami Abdel

Rahmane.

L'attentat n'a pas été revendiqué, mais M. Abdel Rahmane n'a pas exclu qu'il soit l'oeuvre du groupe Etat islamique (EI), qui a souvent mené des attaques similaires.

L'organisation ultra-radical a perdu de larges secteurs de la province de Deir Ezzor, frontalière de l'Irak, à la suite de deux assauts distincts menés d'un côté par les forces gouvernementales, sur la rive ouest du fleuve Euphrate, et de l'autre par les FDS, sur la rive est.

Le groupe jihadiste maintient une présence dans des villages de l'est de la province de Deir Ezzor.

Les FDS ont lancé début mai la dernière phase de leur offensive pour mettre fin à la présence de l'EI dans l'ensemble de cette région de Syrie.

L'EI ne contrôle plus aucune ville en Syrie, mais il maintient quelques milliers de combattants dans des villages, localités et poches. ●

# La coalition au pouvoir fait pencher la Turquie vers l'extrême droite

Audrey Parmentier, le 11/07/2018  
www.la-croix.com

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, vainqueur de l'élection présidentielle, a dévoilé son cabinet ministériel.

Son alliance avec le parti ultranationaliste turc, le MHP, dirigé par Devlet Bahçeli, lui permet de garder la main sur le parlement turc.

Lundi 9 juillet, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé la composition de son gouvernement. S'il conserve quelques caciques de son parti de la justice et du développement, (AKP), deux nominations ont créé la surprise. Son gendre Berat Albayrak, ancien ministre de l'énergie, a été propulsé au portefeuille clé des finances et le général Hulusi Akar a pris la direction du ministère de la défense.

**La part de risque de Recep Tayyip Erdogan**

Le président affiche son désir de continuité tout en y inscrivant une part de risque. Rien de nouveau. Sauf que le chef de l'État turc devra composer avec la coalition formée de son parti conservateur et du parti d'action nationaliste (MHP), dirigé par Devlet Bahçeli, âgé de 70 ans.

Recep Tayyip Erdogan a été réélu, le 24 juin, dès le premier tour avec 52,6 % des voix mais c'est son alliance avec le MHP qui permet à l'AKP de garder la mainmise sur le Parlement. Si les pouvoirs du président turc ont été renforcés aux termes d'une réforme constitutionnelle adoptée par référendum en avril 2018, il aura besoin de la majorité parlementaire pour faire valider ses lois.

**Un mouvement néofasciste, anticom-**



Devlet Bahçeli (à gauche) et Recep Tayyip Erdogan à Ankara, le 27 juin 2018. / KAY-HAN OZER/AFP

**muniste, anti-kurde et anti-chrétien**

Parti d'extrême droite fondé en 1969, le MHP a recueilli 11 % des voix, un score bien au-dessus des prévisions. « C'est le parti le plus stable de Turquie, il surfe sur la vague nationaliste depuis des années », déclare Étienne Copeaux, chercheur et spécialiste du monde turc.

Dans les années 1970, le parti de Devlet Bahçeli reposait sur sa branche militaire appelée « les Loups gris », très puissante à cette époque. Ce mouvement est décrit comme néofasciste, anticommuniste, anti-kurde ou encore anti-chrétien. Si les Loups gris sont entrés en sommeil, ils conservent des relations très étroites avec le MHP dont l'actuel président est un

ancien membre.

Certains Loups gris se sont dispersés dans différents groupuscules militaires proches de l'extrême droite. « La guerre autour des Kurdes dépend de ces équipes spéciales, composées de professionnels ultra-violents. Le MHP les chapeaute bien que ce soit un peu plus compliqué que cela », explique Étienne Copeaux.

**Devlet Bahçeli et Recep Tayyip Erdogan, deux habiles tacticiens**

Peut-on parler d'un virage à droite dans la politique de Recep Tayyip Erdogan ? « Non, l'arrivée du MHP officialise simplement les positions de l'AKP déjà très nationalistes », répond Étienne Copeaux. Cette coalition ne devrait pas entraîner de grand changement politique mais risque de bloquer les négociations, déjà au point mort, avec le PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan), groupe armé kurde qualifié d'organisation terroriste par la Turquie.

Les deux partis semblent s'accorder sur la politique interne mais cette entente peut achopper sur la scène internationale. « Alors que le parti d'extrême droite est profondément anti-européen, Recep Tayyip Erdogan n'a pas encore coupé les ponts avec Bruxelles », considère Didier Billion, spécialiste de la Turquie et du Moyen-Orient.

Longtemps ennemis politiques, Devlet Bahçeli et Recep Tayyip Erdogan sont deux habiles tacticiens. Le président turc avait besoin de mordre sur l'électorat d'extrême droite tandis que le chef du MHP devait exister sur la scène nationale. En attendant, l'idéologie du petit parti nationaliste turc, semble être le grand gagnant de ce scrutin. ♦

euronews 14 July 2018

## Turkey's Erdogan says Syrian government forces targeting Idlib could destroy accord - source

By Reuters • 14/07/2018  
<http://www.euronews.com>

**ISTANBUL (Reuters)** - Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan told Russian leader Vladimir Putin on Saturday an accord aimed at containing the Syrian conflict could be destroyed if Syrian government forces target the Idlib region, a Turkish presidential source said.

The two presidents spoke by telephone after the Syrian government raised the national flag on Thursday over areas of Deraa in the southwest that was in rebel hands for years. The source said Erdogan voiced concern about the treatment of civilians there.

"President Erdogan stressed that the targeting of civilians in Deraa was worrying and said that if the Damascus regime targeted Idlib in the

same way the essence of the Astana accord could be completely destroyed," the source said.

With help from Russia and Iran, President Bashar al-Assad has now recovered most of Syria but anti-Assad rebels still control Idlib in the northwest, while a Kurdish-led militia controls the northeast and a large chunk of the east.

Turkey has set up a series of observation posts in Idlib as part of a deal which it reached last year with Russia and Iran in the Kazakh capital Astana to reduce fighting between insurgents and the Syrian government in de-escalation zones.

Erdogan said the avoidance of "negative developments" in Idlib was important in terms of



encouraging rebel groups to attend a meeting in Astana planned for July 30-31, according to the source.

Separately, the Kremlin confirmed in a statement Putin's phone conversation with Erdogan on Saturday and said they had discussed joint efforts to solve the Syrian crisis. ♦

# Les États-Unis relèguent le problème turc de l'Alliance au second rang

Isabelle Lasserre/ 11 juillet 2018  
http://www.lefigaro.fr

IL Y A ENCORE six mois, l'ambiance, entre la Turquie et ses alliés de l'Otan, était à couteaux tirés. Il n'était pas une semaine sans que des « engueulades » opposent les états-majors de l'Alliance aux responsables turcs. Avec leur turbulent allié, deuxième armée de l'Otan en termes d'effectifs et seul pays musulman du club, les sujets de désaccord s'accumulent depuis plusieurs années. En Syrie d'abord, où Recep Tayyip Erdogan combat les forces kurdes du PYD, alliées aux États-Unis et à la France dans la lutte contre Daech. Autre sujet qui fâche : l'alliance avec la Russie, que tout le monde pensait tactique mais qui a été renforcée par la vente, à un prix défiant toute concurrence, de deux batteries antiaériennes S-400 par Moscou. Non seulement les missiles sol-air russes sont incompatibles avec le système de l'Otan, mais ils font redouter à l'Alliance des fuites d'informations confidentielles vers la Russie.

Le putsch raté de juillet 2016 a aussi laissé des traces. Beaucoup des correspondants de l'Otan au sein de l'armée ont été victimes des purges d'Erdogan et ont fini en prison. Certains ont décidé de rester en Europe, où ils ont demandé l'asile. « Au début, les choses ont été assez compliquées à gérer. L'Otan a vu de nouvelles têtes arriver. Finalement, la relation s'est normalisée », explique un diplomate européen de l'Otan. Comme avant la tentative de putsch, c'est la moustache qui fait la différence. « Il y a deux types d'officiers turcs : ceux de l'Otan, qui n'ont pas de moustache et sont restés kémalistes. Et ceux de Turquie, pro-Erdogan, qui tous portent la moustache ! » Mais le malaise est aussi exprimé par les responsables turcs, qui considèrent que l'Otan et les États-Unis ont été complices du coup d'État manqué. « La montée du sentiment antioccidental en Turquie est basée sur la perception que l'Ouest mène constamment des opérations contre la Turquie », affirmait récemment un diplomate turc rencontré à Bruxelles.



Ankara reproche aussi aux Européens de ne pas manifester assez de compassion envers leurs victimes du terrorisme, notamment celles du PKK, le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan. « Les élites politiques turques ne considèrent plus l'Occident comme le centre de pouvoir mais comme un centre de pouvoir parmi d'autres. Erdogan pense que l'émergence de nouvelles puissances donne plus d'autonomie à sa politique internationale, y compris au sein de l'Otan », poursuit-il.

## L'HEURE EST AU COMPROMIS

À l'Otan cependant, les divergences avec la Turquie sont rarement évoquées publiquement. Les Américains ont besoin des bases militaires turques pour continuer à jouer leur rôle dans la région. Ils ont aussi besoin de la Turquie face à l'Iran, leur principal ennemi dans la région. Quant à l'Europe, elle est liée à Ankara qui joue pour elle, moyennant finances, le rôle de garde-frontières en contenant les quatre millions de réfugiés syriens qui vivent en Turquie. Mais la question est dans toutes les conversations de couloir : la Turquie a-t-elle vocation à rester dans l'Otan, dont elle est membre depuis 1952 ?

Est, ou plutôt était, car souvent Turquie varie, et, depuis plusieurs semaines, l'heure est plutôt au compromis. Sur le terrain syrien d'abord, où Turcs et Américains se sont mis d'accord sur un

plan de retrait des miliciens kurdes de la région de Manbij, dans le nord du pays. Ankara a fait taire ses menaces d'intervention à l'est de l'Euphrate contre les zones kurdes. Quant aux missiles russes S-400, ils sont désormais liés par Washington aux bombardiers américains F-35 qui équipent l'armée de l'air turque. Un haut responsable américain a récemment prévenu que les États-Unis pourraient bloquer la vente des avions si Ankara ne renonçait pas aux batteries russes.

L'alliance russo-turque pourrait d'ailleurs se refroidir. Si le régime de

Damas lance avec le soutien de l'armée russe une offensive au nord, dans la région d'Idlib, la dernière encore contrôlée par la rébellion, la Turquie prévient qu'elle quittera le groupe d'Astana, où elle est engagée aux côtés de la Russie et de l'Iran. La participation à cette initiative de Vladimir Poutine pour trouver une solution à la crise syrienne avait été pour Ankara le symbole de sa prise de distance à l'égard des alliés occidentaux. Mais un renforcement de l'engagement de Moscou auprès de Bachar el-Assad serait une couleuvre difficile à avaler pour le pouvoir turc, qui a toujours été du côté des rebelles.

« Finalement, l'Otan est l'un des derniers liens qui raccrochent la Turquie à l'Occident. L'Alliance reste un pilier de leur politique de défense », commente un diplomate européen de l'Alliance. Il en est certain : « La Turquie n'est pas en train de quitter l'Otan. La préparation du sommet a été moins compliquée que prévu. Depuis sa réélection, Erdogan est plus serein. D'habitude, c'est le gars qui fait tout exploser. Maintenant il y en a d'autres... » Avec ses menaces répétées contre l'Otan, le mépris qu'il manifeste envers ses alliés européens, Donald Trump a relégué le problème turc au deuxième rang... Plus qu'Erdogan, c'est lui qui menace aujourd'hui l'unité de l'Otan. ■

REUTERS

## All Kurdish YPG have left Syria's Manbij: local militia

July 15, 2018 BEIRUT (Reuters) -

The last Syrian Kurdish YPG fighters left the northern Syrian town of Manbij on Sunday, the militia controlling the town said, fulfilling a longstanding Turkish demand that the YPG withdraw.

Turkey objects to the presence of the YPG in Syria near its border. It views the

YPG as a terrorist group and an extension of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which has waged a three-decade insurgency on Turkish soil. Washington sees the YPG as a key ally in the fight against Islamic State.

"The Manbij Military Council announces that the last batch of (YPG) military advisers completed its withdrawal on July 15, 2018, after completing their mission of military training and preparation of our forces....," the militia controlling the town said in a statement.

The Manbij Military Council is a militia allied to the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in northern Syria. It has repeatedly said there were no YPG fighters in Manbij, only some YPG military advisers.

The announcement came after Turkey and the United States reached a deal last month over Manbij after months of disagreement. Under that deal, the YPG would withdraw from Manbij and Turkish and U.S. forces would jointly maintain security and stability around the town. ●



# La coûteuse politique étrangère de l'Iran laisse le pays exsangue

Les sommes colossales qu'investit Téhéran pour étendre son influence au Moyen-Orient affaiblissent le régime sur le plan intérieur, estime l'universitaire Farhad Khosrokhavar. Mais seule une nouvelle génération pourra reprendre la contestation lancée par le mouvement de 2009

Par FARHAD KHOSROKHAVAR

L'Iran est face à un dilemme : il n'a pas les moyens économiques de sa politique régionale et internationale. Les pressions des Etats-Unis après leur sortie de l'accord de Vienne sur le nucléaire de 2015 y sont pour quelque chose, mais, structurellement, les causes de la crise sont internes et relèvent d'une politique expansionniste qui est extrêmement coûteuse pour une société exsangue. Selon diverses estimations, le conflit en Syrie coûte à l'Iran entre 9 et 14 milliards dollars par an, le financement du Hezbollah entre 3 et 7 milliards, celui du Hamas un milliard, sans mentionner les Houthis au Yémen, l'Irak et l'Afghanistan, où Téhéran tente d'acheter son influence en finançant les divers acteurs politiques.

Cette politique étrangère, qui consiste à étendre l'influence iranienne hors de ses frontières afin d'assurer son hégémonie face à l'Arabie saoudite, mais aussi sa protection face aux Etats-Unis, coûte quelques dizaines de milliards de dollars par an, si on y ajoute la corruption endémique des différents acteurs concernés. Cette somme doit être réévaluée d'au moins 20 à 30 % parce que

**L'IRAN FAIT FACE  
À UN DÉFI  
PARTICULIER PARCE  
QUE SA POLITIQUE  
ANTI-AMÉRICAIN ET  
ANTI-ISRAËLIENNE LE  
PRIVE DE SOUTIENS  
EN OCCIDENT**

l'exportation du pétrole souffre de la nouvelle politique d'isolement américaine et est limitée à cause de la vétusté des installations pétrolières, parce que l'Europe hésite à s'approvisionner en Iran de peur de la réaction américaine et parce que la corruption généralisée gangrène l'économie nationale. Cela représente au bas mot entre le quart et le tiers des revenus pétroliers.

Or, l'Iran souffre par ailleurs de maux multiples. Comme la plupart des pays de la région, il connaît une sécheresse qui dure depuis plus d'une décennie et cause des dégâts extrêmement importants à l'agriculture, mais aussi à l'écologie et à l'ensemble de son économie. Le pays est obligé d'importer une grande partie de ses produits agricoles de base et connaît une pénurie en eau au sud, qui provoque la désertification de nombreuses zones.

## **CORRUPTION ET CLIENTÉLISME**

Par ailleurs, une politique idéologique trop axée dans la défense du clergé et des affidés du pouvoir empêche une répartition équilibrée du budget de l'Etat entre différents secteurs : tout ce qui relève de l'idéologie et de l'islam institutionnel bénéficie de grandes largesses, grevant l'économie. Le fossé entre les classes s'est transformé en un gouffre et une fraction infime de la population, grâce à la corruption et au clientélisme de l'élite au pouvoir, s'enrichit indécentement, sans montrer une quelconque capacité à entreprendre, un peu sur le modèle de nombreux pays arabes de la région.

Contrairement à la première décennie du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, où les mouvements sociaux comme le Mouvement vert provenaient des classes moyennes et brandissaient la démocratie comme leur revendication majeure, ceux qui ont vu le jour dans plus d'une centaine de villes en Iran en 2017-2018 étaient issus des couches pauvres, semblables aux révoltes du pain dans d'autres

pays du Moyen-Orient et de l'Afrique du Nord.

Or l'Iran, tout comme l'Egypte, la Jordanie, l'Algérie, voire dans une moindre mesure le Maroc et l'Arabie saoudite, voit se succéder des régimes politiques sans légitimité démocratique qui perdurent en raison de l'absence de mouvement de protestation : dans le monde arabe, les acteurs protestataires ont eu leurs beaux jours entre fin 2010 et 2012 à l'occasion des « printemps arabes » ; en Iran, la protestation a culminé avec le Mouvement vert en juin-juillet 2009. Depuis, tous ces mouvements se sont épuisés, leurs acteurs ont été neutralisés et le nouvel Etat s'est fait le détenteur du pouvoir de répression sans légitimité, mais sans contestation non plus.

Si l'ensemble des régimes de la région souffre d'un déficit de légitimité – la plupart de ceux qui s'opposent à l'Iran se ressemblent pour le mépris des droits des citoyens et bénéficient de la complaisance de l'Occident au sujet de leur répression –, l'Iran fait face à un défi particulier parce que sa politique anti-américaine et anti-israélienne le prive de soutiens en Occident. Cet isolement est d'autant plus grand que l'alliance entre l'Arabie saoudite, Israël et les Emirats contre l'Iran bénéficie du soutien sans nuance des Etats-Unis. Et l'Iran ne fait pas partie de ces pays comme l'Egypte, qui survivent grâce à l'infusion des dollars saoudiens et de l'assistance américaine.

Sur le plan intérieur, les mouvements sociaux souffrent d'un déficit lié à la lassitude de ceux qui ont déjà lancé le Mouvement vert de 2009. Il faudra encore quelques années pour que de nouvelles générations prennent la relève et transforment la protestation contre les conditions de vie intolérables comme la vie chère, le salaire de misère, la corruption généralisée des élites, l'absence de solution crédible aux maux sociaux comme le chômage mais aussi l'environnement... Elles revigoreront la remise en cause de ces régimes sans légitimité et sans assise réelle dans la société. ■



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# Turkey Has Made a Quagmire for Itself in Syria

The Turkish military has discovered it's much easier to invade Syria than to govern it.

By Borzou Daragahi | July 13, 2018  
<https://foreignpolicy.com>

**A**FRIN, Syria — Murmurs of kidnappings for ransom hung in the air, and shootings and bombings continued just outside the city. Two women walked along the street adjacent to the government compound. “I’m scared to speak because of there,” one said, pointing to the collection of buildings from which Turkey and its local allies run the Afrin enclave. “There’s no safety. There’s no security.”

Inside the compound, Turkish officials and Syrian allies cited some good news about Afrin during a tour for international journalists sponsored by the Turkish government. Numerous major Turkish charities are operating inside Afrin, helping distribute aid, establish democratic governance, and train local security forces.

But even some working for the local authorities described lingering hostilities between the enclave’s Kurds and Arabs, as well as between those who came here to settle from other parts of Syria and those who are natives. Adding to the tensions have been a steady spate of attacks by the Kurdish-led forces who ran Afrin — a drab jumble of low-lying buildings and dilapidated roadways surrounded by hilltops — until they were ousted by Turkish forces in late March as part of a two-month military operation called Olive Branch. Turkey succeeded at driving its Kurdish enemies away from its own border and at connecting swaths of Syria controlled by Ankara’s Syrian partners to the east and south of Afrin.

But Turkey, without quite realizing it, also made itself the de facto ruler of this part of Syria. The responsibility seems more of a quagmire than the Turkish government originally expected.

“When the Turks invaded, they basically signed up to govern the place,” said Aaron Stein, a Turkey and Syria specialist at the Atlantic Council, a Washington think tank. “They are now on the hook for everything from delivering water, picking up trash, administering health and education. Security is not very good. There are clearly the indications of an insurgency. For now, it’s manageable. But talk to me in five years.”

Turkish authorities kept an eye on the journalists they brought on buses into Syria but also gave us a bit of leeway to wander near the city’s main bazaar. Many Turkish officials were candid about the challenges they face in bringing order. “The priority in Afrin is still security, security, security,” a senior Turkish official said.

The July 1 foray inside Syria offered a look at the future challenges involved in stitching back together a country torn apart by seven years of civil war. As with nearby Jarablus and Azaz to



Turkish soldiers and Ankara-backed Syrian Arab fighters pose for a group photo in the Kurdish-majority city of Afrin in northwestern Syria after seizing control of it on March 18, 2018. (Omar Haj Kadour/AFP/Getty Images)

the east, which it has also occupied, Turkey hopes to shape Afrin into a livable enclave to draw back Syrian refugees — including more than 3 million who have settled in Turkey — and give itself more leverage over the future of Syria. Perhaps 140,000 Syrians have arrived in the Afrin region since the Turkish takeover, not least because of the successful distribution of humanitarian aid. But the Turks are clearly eager to pull out of Afrin and leave the region to be run by local allies.

Officials said that local security forces, many drawn from Free Syrian Army units, are being trained up, and hinted that Turkish forces would recede from the city center toward outposts in the countryside within days. As in Jarablus and Azaz, Turkish forces, together with interpreters, have launched five-week courses to prepare local Arab security personnel to take over.

After the training, the lightly armed security forces are capable of policing the streets and holding their own against Kurdish rebels. But they’d likely crumble under a sustained assault by Russian-backed Syrian forces. For now, Moscow, Ankara, and Tehran are clinging to a fragile understanding about which country holds sway over which part of Syria. But Turkey’s commitment to the enclave may falter should Russia, now the key power in Syria, forcefully demand the regime reimpose its rule.

Meanwhile, local violence remains a challenge and appears to be accelerating. The Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) claimed a July 7 attack on Turkish soldiers outside the city of Afrin. The same day, at least 10 people were severely wounded in a car bomb that struck Jarablus. Several people, including two children, were killed and injured in a July 8 motorcycle bomb that struck the nearby city of Bab. In recent days, Turkish warplanes and artillery struck alleged YPG positions on Afrin’s outskirts, local media reported.

The YPG has claimed involvement in some of the attacks. But locals attribute some of the

security troubles to Turkey’s Arab and Turkmen allies — the Free Syrian Army units that took part in the war to oust the Kurdish militia and rebel units relocated from other parts of Syria to Afrin in deals with the regime in Damascus. One Kurdish resident of Afrin said the rebel units pin portraits of former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, who sprayed chemical weapons against Kurds, to their vehicles. “Free Syrian Army use terrible method to humiliate those suspected of being” members of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), he said.

A June report on Afrin by the United Nations cited “high levels of violent crime, with civilians falling victim to robberies, harassment, abductions, and murder,” especially targeting those perceived as sympathetic to the Kurdish-led forces. The report also warned of “reports of lawlessness and rampant criminality” committed by rebel groups under the control of Turkish forces, naming several units of the Free Syrian Army.

A Kurdish resident of Afrin told Foreign Policy that more than 200 people have been detained by Free Syrian Army brigades that include the Shamiya (or Levant) Front, Ahrar al-Sharqiya, and the Hamza Division. Relatives pay ransoms of up to \$20,000 to get loved ones released from makeshift detention centers at the rebel groups’ headquarters. Residents must also sometimes make payments of up to \$5,000 to get motor vehicles back. Human Rights Watch last month accused the Syrian rebels of pillaging the homes of Afrin’s Kurdish residents.

“The rebels are trying to set up local protection rackets to pay their underling fighters,” Stein said. “They have high operating costs to keep their fighters on side.”

Many of the rebel fighters lack roots in Afrin. Amer Mohammed, a 38-year-old fighter of the Suleyman Shah Brigade, hails from Hama and has been fighting for years for Turkish-backed rebel groups — against the regime, the Islamic State, and the YPG. He has settled in Afrin

with his wife and nine children.

The conservative values of the rebel groups and newcomers from areas such as the Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta, where besieged Syrians were forced to surrender to the regime of President Bashar al-Assad and board buses for other parts of Syria earlier this year, sometimes clash with the region's leftist-minded Kurds. One man showed a journalist on the trip a picture of his mother without her headscarf, complaining that the rebel groups that have taken over city make women uncomfortable being in public without conservative Islamic headdresses.

A Turkish flag flew atop the Syrian rebel flag on the administrative compound, but no one in Afrin said they cared about such symbolism. They welcomed the Turks so long as they provided services and security. Almost everyone in

Afrin has harrowing tales about the time before Turkey's arrival. Most had spent years wandering around Syria, escaping from various enclaves whenever they became engulfed in war.

Munzer Kano, 24, lived with his family in Afrin during the early years of the Syria conflict before it was taken over by the YPG, an affiliate of the PKK. He and his family escaped to the city of Aleppo but then fled back here once the YPG was driven out. "You have to have money here, but otherwise I feel free and safe," Kano said — a gallon of milk here costs about \$2.75, and a gallon of baby formula upward of \$20, above the means of the vast majority of Syrians. Other locals said they were happy to be rid of the YPG's draconian military draft, which forced young men to undergo highly ideological military training and to serve in its militia.

Those critical of Afrin's post-YPG status quo tended to blame the problems on remnants of the Free Syrian Army, rather than Turkish forces seeking to take a hands-off approach to governance and policing. But confusion and chaos appear to be inching up. One of the two women walking alongside the government compound said she didn't care who ran the enclave so long as they could provide security. "We hear explosions and gunfire," she said. "We don't know who's responsible."

Stein argued that Turks may be stuck in northern Syria, unable to fully pull out for domestic political reasons. "They can't leave because security will deteriorate," he said. "Security deteriorates, and people move back across the border. You've signed yourself up for a long-term occupation." ■

The Washington Times July 15, 2018

# Consolidating a dictatorship, deepening divisions

By David L. Phillips - July 15, 2018  
www.washingtontimes.com

ANALYSIS/OPINION:

The Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) entered into a unilateral ceasefire prior to Turkey's elections on June 24. Though Turkish armed forces repeatedly attacked the PKK headquarters in the Qandil Mountains of northern Iraq, the PKK refused to take the bait. It understood that renewed conflict would be used by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to rally his nationalist base and justify an even more intense crackdown.

Kurds in Turkey preferred to show their power at the ballot box. They hoped to deprive Mr. Erdogan of a majority in the election for president, thereby forcing a second round. Furthermore, the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) would pass a critical threshold and be seated in parliament if it gained more than 10 percent of the popular vote.

The election was no surprise. Mr. Erdogan won the presidency with 52 percent, while the HDP's charismatic presidential candidate, Selahattin Demirtas, received less than 9 percent. Though conditions were stacked against the HDP, it still got 12 percent. In a free and fair elections, the HDP would have done much better.

Mr. Demirtas conducted his campaign from jail, imprisoned on trumped-up terrorism charges. He communicated with voters via his lawyers and social media.

Turkey's state-controlled media gave Mr. Erdogan 181 hours of coverage during the six weeks prior to elections. Mr. Demirtas received less than one hour.

The government declared a state of emergency, which prevented campaign rallies. Police

checked identification cards at polling stations. The presence of armed pro-government paramilitary groups intimidated Kurdish voters. The heavy security presence deterred Kurdish voters.

International election monitors were obstructed from Kurdish areas. More than 300,000 ballots in the mostly Kurdish southeast were invalidated.

Kurdish voters also faced logistical challenges. Ballot boxes were relocated from Kurdish communities, forcing Kurds to travel up to 20 miles from their homes. Hundreds of thousands of Kurdish voters were displaced and ineligible to vote because their homes were destroyed by the Turkish military and they could not register at an address.

The Kurdish leadership was incapacitated. In addition to Mr. Demirtas, the Turkish government jailed 12 Kurdish members of parliament and took direct control of 82 Kurdish municipalities, incarcerating elected mayors. It arrested 5,000 local Kurdish activists.

Elections can either advance national reconciliation, or intensify polarization based on how the election is conducted. Democratic elections allow voters to express dissent, giving them an opportunity to manifest their grievances through a political process. Turkey's recent elections did not heal wounds. It worsened divisions, serving as a vehicle for Mr. Erdogan to consolidate his dictatorship.

When voters objected, Mr. Erdogan threatened violence targeting dissenters. What's done is done. Mr. Erdogan was recently inaugurated with great fanfare and is ensconced in the presidency for another five years.

Mr. Erdogan promised a security solution to the Kurdish conflict. He pledged to drain the swamp by targeting Kurdish communities. As evidenced by more than 40 years of conflict, there is no



Suppression of the Kurdish Vote Illustration by Greg Groesch/The Washington Times

military solution to Kurdish aspirations for greater political and cultural rights. The PKK enjoys broad popular support because its struggle gives dignity to the Kurds.

Kurdish leaders warn that the PKK will renew its insurgency. They have been pushed by Turkey's bogus election and Mr. Erdogan's bellicose rhetoric. The resumption of armed conflict will mark a new phase in Turkey's civil war with regional implications, as armed Kurdish groups in Syria and Iran join the fray to support their Kurdish brethren.

Turkey is at a fork in the road. Mr. Erdogan can intensify his authoritarian rule and intensify Turkey's war against the Kurds, or he can seek to rule inclusively and solve Turkey's ethnic strife through negotiations. Stakes are high. If Mr. Erdogan foregoes peace talks with the PKK, the ensuing spiral of deadly violence could consume Turkey itself. ●

• David L. Phillips is director of the Program on Peace-building and Rights at Columbia University's Institute for the Study of Human Rights. His most recent book is "An Uncertain Ally: Turkey Under Erdogan's Dictatorship" (Routledge, 2017).



JULY 14, 2018

# Iraqi forces placed on 'high alert' as violent protests enter sixth day

Karzan Sulaivany / July 14-2018  
kurdistan24.net

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi on Saturday placed the country's security forces on "high alert" as people in Iraq's southern provinces continue to demonstrate lack of government services and corruption.

According to Reuters, the nationwide order was delivered overnight by Abadi, who is also the country's Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

"Reinforcement troops from both the Counter-Terrorism Service and the Army's Ninth Division have already been dispatched to Basra, where demonstrators gathered for the sixth consecutive day, to help protect the province's oil fields," Reuters reported, citing security sources.

After returning from Brussels where he met with Global Coalition forces, on the sidelines of a NATO

summit, to speak about the lasting defeat of the Islamic State, Abadi held talks with officials in Iraq's oil-hub of Basra to discuss unrest in the province.

Exports out of Basra account for over 95 percent of Iraq's revenue, but officials have stressed oil shipments have not yet been affected by the protests.

Days of protests over the lack of public services and unemployment in the country culminated on Friday in Iraqi demonstrators halting air traffic in the Najaf Airport and blocking access to the Umm Qasr port in the province of Basra.

Air traffic was put on hold as protesters holding Iraqi flags stormed Najaf International Airport, an eyewitness told Kurdistan 24.

"We are living in the biggest oil exporting region of the world, yet this is our life. Public services are wholly inadequate despite the province generating over 90 percent of the country's total revenue. We need water, electricity, and employment. We still



*Protests have been raging in southern Iraq for nearly a week as people demand basic services and an end to unemployment. (Photo: Archive) Iraq Basra Haider al-Abadi*

suffer after 15 years" since the fall of the regime, a protester complained to Kurdistan 24 during a live broadcast on Friday.

Protests erupted five days ago in Basra, the oil-rich province in southern Iraq, and later spread to other cities across Iraq.

Demonstrators, demanding better public services, faced off with security forces. Among their main concerns are the distribution of electricity and water, and high unemployment. ♦



TheNewArab

16 JULY 2018

# Last Kurdish YPG fighters leave Syria's Manbij to avoid tensions with Turkey

<https://www.alaraby.co.uk>  
16 July, 2018

The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) led the 2016 offensive to rid Manbij of the Islamic State group and had kept military advisers in the town to train local forces.

The last members of a Kurdish militia pulled out on Sunday from the Syrian town of Manbij, allied Arab fighters said, under a deal reached to avoid clashes with Turkey.

The Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) led the victorious 2016 offensive to rid Manbij of the Islamic State group and had kept military advisers in the town to train local forces.

It announced last month it would begin withdrawing from the town as the local Manbij Military Council (MMC) was capable of holding it on its own.

"The last group of military advisers from the People's Protection Units finished withdrawing on July 15, 2018 after completing their mission to train and develop our forces, under the deal with the international coalition," the MMC said.



Turkish forces patrol the outskirts of Syria's Manbij. [Getty]

Turkey - an arch-rival of the YPG - has downplayed the reports of a withdrawal of Kurdish fighters from the town.

"We find reports that the PYD/YPG have completely withdrawn from Manbij to be exaggerated. The process is still continuing," a Turkish foreign ministry source told Reuters.

"Withdrawal from the checkpoints on the patrol route is ongoing. Joint patrol preparations

are continuing. Therefore, at this stage, reports that PYD/YPG have completely withdrawn from Manbij do not reflect the truth."

The YPG forms the backbone of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), the Kurdish-Arab alliance that has ousted IS from swathes of Syria with help from the US-led coalition.

But the militia is considered a "terrorist" group by Ankara, which sees it as the Syrian branch of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), outlawed in Turkey.

Ankara and allied rebels overran the YPG's north-western bastion of Afrin in March and threatened to continue on to Manbij.

That raised the spectre of a possible confrontation with the American and French coalition troops stationed in the town.

A flurry of diplomacy between the US and Turkey produced a joint "roadmap" in May to coordinate security in Manbij and avoid a clash.

The YPG announced in June it would withdraw its forces from Manbij, but did not specify how many were still left in the town.

Turkish troops began patrolling areas north of Manbij, which Syria's infuriated regime saw as a breach of its sovereignty.

Since conflict broke out there in 2011, Syria has been sliced up into various zones of control, with the regime making a comeback to hold more than 60 percent of the country.

But much of its north is controlled by the YPG or its allies, and the US-led coalition fighting IS operates several bases there. ●

# Abadi, Maliki seek alliance with Iraq's Kurds

Nearly two months since Iraq's parliamentary election, the winning parties are still discussing an alliance to form the new government.



Omar Sattar  
July 18, 2018  
www.al-monitor.com



Reza/Getty Images  
The flag of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

**B**AGHDAD — Even as Iraqis continue to take to the streets to protest unemployment and poor services, and although the judiciary-appointed commission has yet to announce the official results of the ballot recount for the recent parliamentary elections, the winning blocs are nevertheless proceeding with consultations to form the next government.

After alliances among Shiite blocs were made public — and for the first time following the May 12 general elections — there were visits to Erbil to discuss the government formation. A Fatah Alliance delegation led by Hadi al-Amiri arrived July 6 in Erbil, and a delegation of the State of Law Coalition led by Nouri al-Maliki held talks he deemed “successful” with the Kurdistan Democratic Party’s (KDP) leaders July 7, also in Erbil.

The KDP, which is led by Massoud Barzani, voiced during the encounters conditions for an alliance with the largest “Shiite bloc” tasked with forming a government.

KDP member Khosro Kuran said, “In order for the KDP to ally with a particular straightforward and known bloc, the latter needs to commit to the [Iraqi] Constitution, particularly when it comes to Kirkuk and the rest of the disputed areas. It is also required to have a government program to successfully bring about the things that the former governments failed to do with regards to this subject.”

Article 140 of Iraq’s constitution calls for a referendum to determine the status of Kirkuk and other territories disputed between the central government and the Kurdistan region, but Baghdad has consistently delayed a vote.

“There were preliminary talks with the Shiite blocs in Erbil, which brought the State of Law Coalition and Fatah Alliance closer together. Yet it is too early to speak of an alliance,” Kuran told Al-Monitor.

Nevertheless, he pointed out that the KDP’s talks with the winning blocs are held on neither a sectarian nor nationalist basis, although reports spoke of a list of joint conditions between the KDP and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Spokesman for the PUK Saadi Ahmad Bira told a Baghdad-based newspaper, “Both parties’ politicos will meet July 12 in Erbil to select the Kurdish delegation that will engage in talks with the winning blocs.” Bira anticipated that both parties will draft a list of Kurdish demands in the upcoming days, the newspaper reported.

Speaking to Al-Monitor over the phone, Bira said, “The PUK communicated its demands to the Shiite delegations that visited Kurdistan. These demands consist of improving services and living conditions in the Kurdistan Region.” He noted that “outstanding issues between Baghdad and Erbil should be resolved as part of a constitutional framework. Parties winning the ballot are required to resolve them as part of a clear government program.”

Knowingly, the Kurds call for the application of Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution to normalize the situation in Kirkuk and other disputed areas, perhaps have peshmerga forces restore Kirkuk, and settle the Kurdish oil dispute and share of the federal budget. Before the Kurds take part in the government, the concerned Shiite bloc needs to ensure the fulfillment of these demands.

It is possible to attribute the delayed Kurdish-Shiite talks — it’s been nearly two months since the elections — to obstructed inter-Shiite talks to form “the largest bloc” in charge of designating a premier under the Iraqi Constitution. Although Sairoon Alliance leader Muqtada al-Sadr announced earlier that he reached an alliance with Haider al-Abadi’s al-Nasr Coalition and the Fatah Alliance, these alliances have yet to become official. Sadr wrote in a July 9 statement, which coincided with the Kurdish-Shiite talks, “Political blocs should refrain from involving the US and our neighboring countries in talks on forming alliances and what comes next. This is our business as Iraqis — not theirs.”

He added, “My advice is that all political blocs refrain from forming abhorred sectarian and ethnic alliances and alignments. In turn, I am against any [purely] Sunni, Shiite, Kurdish or other alignment.” He reiterated that he is willing “to cooperate to reach an alliance that goes beyond any partisan, sectarian and nationalist shares.”

**T**hese remarks indicate that Sadr is so far dissatisfied with the talks and that Shiites have begun resorting to Kurdish and Sunni blocs in order to form the largest bloc or agree on a candidate for the premiership.

Karim al-Nuri, a member of the Fatah Alliance, told Al-Monitor, “The present talks will neither be official nor produce a significant thing before ratifying the elections’ outcomes and announcing when the first parliament session is going to be held.”

“The Kurdish political parties cannot be excluded from the future government. Everyone is aware of that, and it is only normal to negotiate with them. This, however, does not necessarily mean that alliances are being shaped presently,” he added.

Nuri indicated that “similar talks to exchange views are also being held with the Sunni parties that won the elections. Yet they will not be based on sectarian shares.”

So far, there appears to be no significant, clear international interference in the Iraqi talks. Those who won the elections are convinced that the manual recount will not change much when it comes to the number of seats they grabbed. The most prominent actors on the Iraqi scene, however, are Washington and Tehran, and neither plans to get involved or pressure political blocs to halt talks about a government formation. Such talks could drag on for months, as all parties are standing firm on their demands regardless of how long this takes them.

The latest talks in Erbil are only a prelude to the decisive talks that will take place in Baghdad once the elections’ official results are ratified. Subsequently, a “consensual” Shiite premier will be designated, although it is hard to ensure that the Kurdish and Sunni parties’ demands will be met. Despite being well aware of that, Kurdish and Sunni parties are holding on to particular demands until they get the posts they wish for. ♦

*Omar Sattar is an Iraqi journalist and author specializing in political affairs. He has worked for local and Arab media outlets and holds a bachelor’s degree in political science.*

REUTERS

# Kurdish-backed body aims to widen authority in Syrian northeast

July 16, 2018 TABQA, Syria (Reuters) -

The political arm of the Syrian Democratic Forces militia said on Monday it would work to set up a unified administration for areas it controls, a step that would consolidate its authority in northern and eastern Syria.

The Kurdish-led SDF holds around a quarter of Syria, much of it captured from Islamic State with the help of the U.S.-led coalition. It is the biggest chunk of the country outside the control of President Bashar al-Assad's government.

The plan announced on Monday at a congress of the Syrian Democratic Council in Tabqa aims to bring together civil councils that have emerged across SDF territory in the north and east.

"This is an administration to coordinate among the areas because there are gaps ... to secure needs in all areas," Ilham Ahmed, the co-chair of the SDC and a top Syrian Kurdish politician, told Reuters.

Ahmed said the initiative was still in the early phases of discussion and the goal was to include all SDF territory. "It will have a benefit when it comes to ensuring security and stability," she said.

The SDF is spearheaded by the Kurdish YPG militia but has expanded beyond majority Kurdish parts of the north. Its territory now includes Raqqa city, Islamic State's former Syrian base of operations, and the eastern Deir al-Zor province at the Iraqi border.

The group wants the Syrian conflict to end with a decentralized system that secures rights for minorities, including Kurds. The YPG and SDF have mostly avoided conflict with Assad during the seven-year war, setting them apart from rebels in western Syria who fought to topple him. The SDF and YPG say they do not seek an independent state.

Riad Darar, the second SDC co-chair, told Reuters that in the absence of a political solution, the SDC aimed to strengthen the administration of SDF-held areas.

## INSURGENCY

The plan will combine the councils of Raqqa, Deir al-Zor and other areas, as well as the autonomous administration of the eastern Jazeera region. The new "organized entity (will) practice a form of governance ... draw up practical policies for people's lives and provide services," he added.



Darar said the SDF sought to become part of the army in a future, decentralized Syria, after there is a peace settlement.

Despite their big territorial sway, Syrian Kurdish groups have consistently been left out of U.N. peace talks, in line with the wishes of NATO member Turkey. Ankara views the YPG as part of the Kurdish PKK movement, which has mounted a decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state.

Assad said last month that Damascus was opening "doors for negotiations" with the SDF, but if these failed it would resort to force to recapture the areas where some 2,000 U.S. forces are stationed.

Though Kurdish leaders say they are ready to talk to Damascus, Ahmed signaled there had been no moves toward negotiations. She said Assad's comments had not moved beyond "the theoretical level".

The Kurdish-led administrations in northern Syria last year began a three-stage election that aimed to deepen their autonomy through the new elected institutions.

But the third and final stage of that election was postponed indefinitely after Turkey launched an incursion into the Kurdish Afrin region of northwest Syria, a leading Kurdish politician told Reuters last month. ●

RUDAW

16 JULY 2018

# KDP and PUK finalizing agenda for Baghdad negotiations

By Rudaw.net 16/7/2018

**P**IRMAM, Kurdistan Region — Politburo members from the Kurdistan Democratic Party hosted their Patriotic Union of Kurdistan counterparts in Erbil on Sunday to finalize an agenda for going to Baghdad.

The aim of the KDP-PUK meeting is to complete a mutual package which they will jointly bring to Baghdad.

A high-ranking KDP official said the agenda is not only intended for negotiations with Iraqi parties.

"Rather, we will discuss it with the US and EU countries," said the official.

Aras Haso Mirkhan, a KDP leadership member, said they have good common ground with the PUK to reach an agreement before negotiations among the winning parties of



Members of the KDP and PUK meet in Pirmam, Kurdistan Region, on July 16, 2018. Photo: Rudaw

the election start to form a new government.

After meeting with the PUK and preparing a joint agenda, the KDP is expected to take the initiative again

to invite Gorran, CDJ, Komal and KIU to "join the alliance and participate in writing up the joint agenda through which discussions will be held with Iraqi parties," Mirkhan

said.

Voting recounts have been undertaken in Kirkuk, Erbil, Sulaimani, and Duhok, but Iraq's Independent High Electoral Commission is yet to announce final results.

The KDP official said the discussion so far held with Iraqi parties "were not official and were only friendly meetings" because the federal court has not yet made a final ruling on the outcome of the election. This is in addition to the instability created by the protests staged in southern Iraq.

Protests over a lack of jobs and public services have brought many southern provinces to a halt.

"We will not wait until the protests are curbed. Rather, we will be preparing a joint agenda with the PUK. Then we will reach out to the other parties and present the agenda to them so that it becomes a joint agenda of all of us. If they refuse to join the agenda, the KDP and PUK should then prepare themselves for the task together," Mirkhan said.

The KDP declared that they will be taking the initiative and ➤

reach out to all the parties in the Kurdistan Region to go to Baghdad on the basis of a joint agenda.

Saadi Ahmad Pira, a PUK politburo member and spokesperson, however said that it is impossible to discuss meetings and holding talks with Iraqi parties while widespread protests are staged in south Iraq.

"The discussion will stop for now. Baghdad is busy with internal affairs. Whenever we decide to go to Baghdad, there is a national agenda that contains all the wants of the Kurds," Pira said.

Iraq held a parliamentary election on May 12. It is yet to form a new government. The current government's mandate was extended by parliament as it was set to expire at the end of June.

"In terms of the formation of a government, we will support any party or anybody that is prepared to meet the demands of the Kurds,"

Pira added.

According to information obtained by Rudaw from KDP and PUK officials, the agenda that is going to be prepared by the KDP and PUK will include some demands, most important of which will be: "the implementation of article 140, holding a referendum to decide the fates of disputed territories, forming a balanced government among Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, all the decisions and laws passed by the parliament should be done so on the basis of the principle of agreement, not on the basis of majority versus minority, government positions should be distributed in a balanced manner."

Recently, some Iraqi delegations and leaders of some Iraqi parties visited Erbil, which was the place where parties came to four years ago to negotiate the formation of the current government. But KDP officials have said they will not allow

a strong Iraqi government to be formed in Erbil only to sideline the Kurds later.

A KDP official who didn't want to be mentioned by name said he met with KDP head Masoud Barzani recently who was optimistic about future developments and that Barzani had thought the Kurdistan Region would be even in a stronger position than it was in before the independence referendum.

A PUK official who didn't want to be identified said they will reach an agreement with the KDP if the agreement ensures the needs and wants of the people of Kurdistan and important Kurdish questions.

"However, it is important if all the parties are united and together. We will try to reach out to them again, but we are sure they won't come," he said.

Haider al-Abadi's Nasr and Moqtada al-Sadr's Sayirun delegations were expected to visit Erbil to

meet with Barzani, KDP and PUK politburos. But their visit was delayed because of the protests.

Mirkhan said Barzani had recently met with US, British and EU officials and had told them that Kurdistan's patience regarding Kirkuk and other areas will not continue. Additionally, Kurdistan will tie the solution of these areas to its participation in the formation of the government and the foreigners should play their role before Kurdistan's patience runs out.

In early discussions with Iraqi parties, the KDP had stressed the need to protect "consensus, balance and partnership".

The KDP and PUK, traditionally the two largest Kurdistan parties, collectively secured 43 seats in the election, according to official preliminary results released by the Iraq High Independent Electoral Commission in May. ■

LA CROIX 18 JUILLET 2018

## Fin de l'état d'urgence en Turquie, une détente en trompe-l'œil

Audrey Parmentier, le 18/07/2018  
www.la-croix.com

Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé la levée de ce régime en vigueur depuis deux ans dans le pays. Cependant, le nouveau projet de loi « antiterroriste » s'inspire fortement des dispositions de l'état d'urgence au risque de les pérenniser.

Des agents de sécurité turcs se tiennent devant la nouvelle mosquée de la place Taksim à Istanbul le 16 avril 2018 pour protester contre la prolongation de l'état d'urgence. Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé dans la nuit du mercredi 18 au jeudi 19 juillet la levée de ce régime en vigueur depuis deux ans dans le pays.

Il n'a pas été renouvelé une huitième fois. En Turquie, l'état d'urgence a été levé dans la nuit du mercredi 18 au jeudi 19 juillet. Du moins sur le papier, puisque ce régime risque de perdurer à travers un projet de loi « antiterroriste » qui sera débattu au Parlement dans les prochains jours. Réélu le 24 juin dès le premier tour, le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan entend bien garder la main sur le pays.

Instauré après le putsch manqué du 15 juillet 2016, le régime de l'état d'urgence en Turquie a entraîné de vastes purges notamment chez les fonctionnaires. Les autorités turques traquent les proches supposés du prédicateur Fethullah Gulen, actuellement en Pennsylvanie, accusé d'être responsable du coup d'état raté.

### « TOUS REMPLACÉS PAR DES FIDÈLES D'ERDOGAN »

Sous l'état d'urgence, 34 décrets-lois ont été émis par les autorités turques. « Ces décisions ont force de loi et permettent beaucoup de choses », explique Étienne Copeaux, chercheur et spécial-



Des agents de sécurité turcs se tiennent devant la nouvelle mosquée de la place Taksim à Istanbul le 16 avril 2018 pour protester contre la prolongation de l'état d'urgence. Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a annoncé dans la nuit du mercredi 18 au jeudi 19 juillet la levée de ce régime en vigueur depuis deux ans dans le pays. / Yasin Akgul / AFP

iste du monde turc. Au total, 77 000 suspects ont été incarcérés et plus de 150 000 personnes fonctionnaires ont été limogées ou suspendus à la suite de décrets-lois.

Militaires, journalistes, écrivains ou encore avocats ont été les principales victimes de ces purges. « Ils ont tous été remplacés par des fidèles de Recep Tayyip Erdogan », reprend Étienne Copeaux. Dans le secteur éducatif, des écoles accusées d'être proches du mouvement guleniste ont été fermées et environ 5 800 universitaires ont été radiés. « Certains universitaires ne peuvent plus sortir de Turquie et doivent vivre en attendant leur arrestation. Il y a des milliers de personnes qui sont dans cet état d'incertitude », déclare Étienne Copeaux.

Les opposants politiques et particulièrement les Kurdes ont aussi été victimes de vastes purges. Le plus connu est le président du parti pro kurde (HDP), Selahattin Demirtas, incarcéré depuis novembre 2016. Dans les villes kurdes, au sud-est de la Turquie, certains maires ont été arrêtés pour être remplacés par des proches de l'AKP. « Ces gens arrêtés ne seront pas libérés parce qu'on lève l'état d'urgence », prévient Étienne Copeaux.

### « UNE INSTITUTIONNALISATION D'UN RÉGIME PROVISOIRE »

Et peu de chose risque de changer, puisque la fin de l'état d'urgence ne met pas un terme à ses dispositions. « Nous allons poursuivre sans relâche notre lutte à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur de nos frontières », a prévenu le chef d'État turc ➤

► lors de la commémoration du putsch manqué, dimanche 15 juillet. Fortement inspiré des mesures de l'état d'urgence, le nouveau projet de loi « antiterroriste » montre que la politique de Recep Tayyip Erdogan est loin de s'assouplir.

« Les dispositions de l'état d'urgence vont être reconduites en loi permanente donc c'est un durcissement », analyse Étienne Copeaux avant de

reprendre: « C'est une institutionnalisation d'un régime qui était provisoire. » Par exemple, le nouveau texte permet aux autorités de continuer, pendant trois années, de limoger tout fonctionnaire lié à une organisation terroriste.

En levant l'état d'urgence, le président turc ne prend aucun risque. Désormais, la Turquie dispose d'un régime présidentiel qui confère à Recep

Tayyip Erdogan des pouvoirs plus étendus. « Politiquement, il peut se permettre de lever l'état d'urgence. C'est le seul maître à bord », explique Étienne Copeaux. Le projet de loi « antiterroriste » devrait être approuvé à la majorité au parlement grâce à l'alliance réalisée entre le parti conservateur AKP et le parti ultranationaliste (MHP). ●



21 juillet 2018

## Kurdistan iranien: 11 militaires tués dans des affrontements avec des rebelles

Par RFI le 21-07-2018 Avec notre correspondant à Téhéran, Siavosh Ghazi <http://www.rfi.fr>

Onze militaires ont été tués et huit autres blessés dans des affrontements qui ont eu lieu dans la nuit du 20 au 21 juillet dans la région de Marivan, située dans le Kurdistan iranien.

Il s'agit de l'attaque la plus meurtrière des groupes rebelles dans la région du Kurdistan iranien. Selon le préfet de la région, les assaillants ont attaqué une base des Gardiens de la révolution. L'explosion du dépôt de munitions de la base a provoqué la mort des militaires iraniens, selon les autorités. Plusieurs rebelles ont été tués ou blessés dans les affrontements qui ont suivi, ont affirmé les mêmes responsables.

Selon les responsables locaux, les rebelles font partie du groupe Pjak, la branche iranienne du PKK turc. Des affrontements éclatent régulièrement entre les forces de l'ordre et les rebelles kurdes qui ont intensifié ces derniers mois leurs opérations le long de la frontière. Les rebelles s'infiltrent en Iran depuis le Kurdistan irakien ou la Turquie.



Les rebelles kurdes ont intensifié leurs opérations le long de la frontière avec l'Irak. [www.google.fr/maps](http://www.google.fr/maps)

L'Iran accuse les pays ennemis comme l'Arabie saoudite, Israël ou encore les Etats-Unis d'aider les groupes rebelles kurdes, mais aussi des mouvements sunnites qui mènent des opérations armées dans la province du Sistan-Balouchistan à la frontière avec le Pakistan. ◆



23 juillet 2018

## Irak : un fonctionnaire et trois assaillants tués dans l'attaque contre le gouvernorat d'Erbil

Texte par FRANCE 24 avec AFP et Reuters / 23/07/2018 <https://www.france24.com>

Un fonctionnaire a été tué lundi au siège du gouvernorat d'Erbil dans une attaque menée par trois hommes armés qui ont été abattus par les forces de sécurité, ont indiqué des responsables du Kurdistan irakien. L'attaque n'a pas été revendiquée.

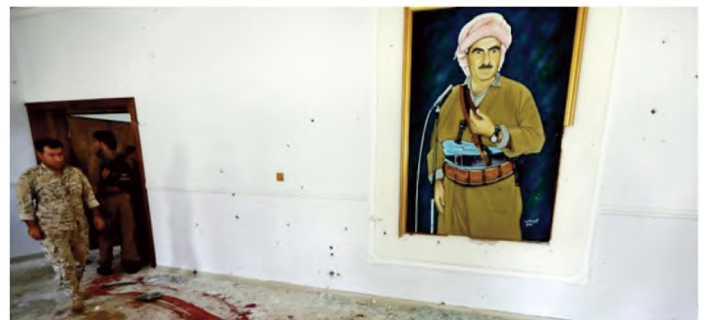
Des hommes armés, présentés par les autorités comme des membres de l'organisation de l'État islamique, sont entrés lundi 23 juillet au siège du Gouvernement régional du Kurdistan irakien (GRK). Un fonctionnaire a été tué et au moins l'un des assaillants s'est fait exploser, a-t-on appris des autorités.

Équipés d'armes de poing et de fusils d'assaut, les assaillants ont pénétré dans le bâtiment par l'entrée principale et par une entrée secondaire. Les premiers éléments de l'enquête montrent qu'au moins un fonctionnaire a été tué et que deux policiers ont été blessés. Selon les autorités, tous les assaillants ont été abattus.

### Une attaque "terroriste", l'EI soupçonnée

"Nous pensons que les assaillants appartiennent à l'État islamique en raison des méthodes qu'ils ont utilisées pour entrer dans le bâtiment depuis l'entrée principale (...). Deux hommes ont ouvert le feu sur les gardes", a déclaré un responsable kurde. "Les deux autres sont entrés par une entrée secondaire qui n'était pas surveillée. Ils ont crié 'Allah Akbar'", a-t-il ajouté.

À l'issue de près de quatre heures d'échanges de tirs, "l'opération s'est terminée avec la neutralisation des trois assaillants", a déclaré le numéro



Un homme regarde des taches de sang sur le sol après une attaque contre le siège de la province d'Erbil, dans capitale du Kurdistan irakien (nord), le 23 juillet 2018 ©SAFIN HAMED, AFP

deux de la police de la région autonome, Farhad Mohammed, qui a qualifié l'attaque de "terroriste" mais s'est refusé quant à lui à "accuser un groupe en particulier dans l'immédiat".

L'organisation de l'État islamique avait déjà mené une attaque en 2015 contre le bâtiment du ministère de l'Intérieur du Kurdistan à Erbil, faisant des morts et des blessés.

Les peshmergas (combattants kurdes) ont participé activement à la lutte contre l'EI, notamment pour repousser le groupe jihadiste du nord du pays. ■



# A Deraa, l'étincelle de la révolution syrienne s'est éteinte

Un convoi d'officiers de l'armée régulière a investi, jeudi, les secteurs rebelles de cette ville emblématique, qui fut le théâtre en 2011 des prémices du soulèvement anti-Assad



Des soldats de l'armée syrienne brûlent le drapeau des insurgés, près de la frontière avec la Jordanie, dans la province de Deraa, le 7 juillet.

YOUSSEF KARWASHAN/AFP

## RÉCIT

AMMAN - envoyé spécial

L'étendard du régime syrien flotte sur les quartiers sud de Deraa pour la première fois depuis sept ans. Jeudi 12 juillet, un convoi d'officiers de l'armée régulière et de membres de la police militaire russe a investi les secteurs rebelles de cette ville emblématique, à la pointe sud de la Syrie, qui fut le théâtre en 2011 des prémices du soulèvement anti-Assad. Ce déploiement s'est fait sans combat, conformément à l'accord de cessez-le-feu, conclu le 6 juillet, entre l'armée russe et les chefs des groupes armés.

Cet arrangement, qualifié de «*réconciliation*» par Damas mais que les insurgés vivent comme une capitulation, était intervenu après deux semaines de bombardements, qui ont causé la mort d'environ 150 civils. Après avoir repris le contrôle, durant l'hiver et le printemps, de la totalité de la banlieue de Damas ainsi que de l'autoroute entre Homs et Hama, le pouvoir syrien était déterminé à rassembler son autorité sur cette région stratégique, adjacente à la Jordanie et au plateau du Golan, partiellement occupé par Israël.

L'accord, dicté aux rebelles sous la menace d'une reprise des bombardements, prévoit leur désarmement et leur amnistie, ainsi que le retour des institutions étatiques. Une partie des insurgés pourrait se reconvertir en force de police locale ou bien intégrer une unité de l'armée consacrée à la lutte contre l'organisation Etat islamique (EI). Ceux qui refusent d'abandonner le combat anti-Assad ou qui ne croient pas aux promesses de «*réconciliation*» de Damas devraient être transférés dans la province d'Idlib, l'ultime possession rebelle, au nord-ouest du pays, qui promet d'être la pro-

chaine cible de l'aviation russe.

C'est l'épilogue de sept années de lutte, le dernier souffle d'une insurrection à bout de forces, victime de la brutalité du régime Assad, des inconséquences de la communauté internationale et de ses propres erreurs.

### « OUBLIEZ VOS ENFANTS »

A Deraa, tout a commencé par un graffiti. «*Jay alek el dor ya doctor*» («*Ton tour arrive, docteur*»). Il est tracé par une bande de jeunes, un soir de la fin février 2011 sur le mur d'une école de la ville. Dans un Proche-Orient en pleine ébullition, après le renversement des despotes tunisien et égyptien, Zine Al-Abidine Ben Ali et Hosni Moubarak, le pied de nez au dictateur syrien, ophtalmologue de formation, est explicite.

Les affrontés sont rafiés dans les jours qui suivent par les services de renseignement et aussitôt torturés. «*Ils nous fouettaient les pieds avec des câbles électriques*, a raconté au Monde l'un des membres de l'équipée nocturne, rencontré en 2013, dans le nord de la Jordanie, où il s'était réfugié. *Ils voulaient à tout prix nous faire dire que nous avions été manipulés par un agent étranger.* »

La détention des adolescents se prolongeant, une délégation de parents se rend chez le chef de la branche locale de la sécurité politique, Atef Najib. Ce cousin de Bachar Al-Assad, connu pour ses manières brutales et son train de vie tapageur, aurait alors eu ces mots : «*Oubliez vos enfants et allez retrouver vos femmes. Elles vous en donneront d'autres. Et puis si vous n'êtes pas capables de leur faire des enfants, amenez-nous vos femmes. On le fera pour vous.* »

Véridiques ou non, ces propos se répandent comme une traînée de poudre. L'offense faite aux pères de famille scanda-



lise cette ville de 100 000 habitants, pétrie de conservatisme tribal. Des dizaines d'habitants outragés organisent une marche de protestation, le vendredi 18 mars, à la sortie de la prière. Ils sont repoussés par des canons à eau et des tirs à balles réelles, qui font deux morts, les deux premiers martyrs du soulèvement syrien. Leurs funérailles, le lendemain, drainent des centaines de personnes dans la rue, aux cris de «*Celui qui tue son peuple est un traître*». Nouveaux coups de feu et nouveaux morts.

Les condoléances offertes par le vice-ministre des affaires étrangères, Fayçal Meqdad, un natif de Deraa, dépêché sur place par le pouvoir, n'apaisent pas la fièvre, pas plus que la libération de quelques-uns des malheureux tagueurs.

À la vue de leurs ongles arrachés, la colère de la population redouble. Le palais de justice et le siège du parti Baas, la formation au pouvoir depuis cinquante ans en Syrie, sont incendiés. Les autorités locales ripostent en attaquant le 21 mars la mosquée Al-Omari, dans la vieille ville de Deraa, devenue le quartier général des protestataires.

«*C'était comme une guerre*, se rappelle Manal Abasie, une comptable de 46 ans, qui habitait à proximité et qui est aujourd'hui exilée à Amman. *L'électricité a sauté, il y avait*

des coups de feu partout. Je n'oublierai jamais la voix des gens qui formaient une chaîne humaine autour de la mosquée et suppliaient les soldats de ne pas les tuer. "S'il vous plaît, ne tirez pas, nous sommes vos frères..."» Peine perdue. Les kalachnikovs crépitent. Des dizaines de manifestants sont abattus dans et autour du lieu de culte.

Le 30 mars, dans son premier discours depuis le début de la contestation, Bachar Al-Assad compare les indignés de Deraa à des «*conspirateurs*» à la solde d'Israël. «*Ce discours a exaspéré encore un peu plus les gens qui s'attendaient à des excuses*», témoigne Jihad Al-Mahameed, l'un des initiateurs de la marche fondatrice du 18 mars, qui travaillait à l'époque comme directeur d'une banque, et qui est, lui aussi, installé à Amman.

#### ARMES DE LA GUERRE YOUGOSLAVE

A la fin du mois, une colonne de chars pénètre dans Deraa, dont les sorties sont toutes bouclées. Le président a confié à son frère Maher, chef de la 4<sup>e</sup> division blindée, la garde prétérienne du régime, la responsabilité de mater la ville rebelle. Des snipers prennent position sur les toits et jusque dans les minarets des mosquées. Les militaires pourchassent porte à porte les frondeurs et les quelques déserteurs qui les ont rejoint. Au bout de dix jours, l'armée se retire, pensant avoir purgé la ville de ses «*groupes terroristes*». Mais en solidarité avec Deraa, des manifestations ont éclaté un peu partout dans le pays. Une révolution est née.

«*Je n'en croyais pas mes yeux, se remémore Mounir Al-Hariri, un ex-général des services de renseignement, qui était alors en poste dans la ville voisine de Souweida. Pour nous, les gens de la vieille génération, qui connaissent les liens historiques de Deraa avec le Baas, il était inconcevable que cette ville se soulève*», ajoute ce haut gradé, réfugié à Amman, qui est l'un des rares responsables des moukhabarat (les renseignements) à avoir fait défection.

Du fait de sa localisation sur le plateau volcanique du Hauran, en lisière de la Jordanie et d'Israël, la cité a toujours été sensible aux sirènes du nationalisme arabe, dont le parti au pouvoir a fait son fonds de commerce. Signe de son loyalisme, la ville a fourni au régime certains de ses plus hauts dignitaires, comme Fayçal Meqdad et le vice-président Farouk Al-Chareh.

«*Si Atef Najib n'avait réagi comme il l'a fait, il n'y aurait peut-être pas eu de révolution, estime Mounir Al-Hariri. Si Bachar était allé sur place, avait dédommagé les familles et puni son cousin, comme des notables le lui avaient demandé lors d'une audience à Damas, tout Deraa serait descendue dans la rue pour l'acclamer.*» Tayssir Massalma, un militant des droits de l'homme, originaire de la ville, nuançait en 2013: «*Les enfants de Deraa ne sont pas la raison de la révolution, ils en sont l'étincelle. La révolte aurait de toute façon fini par éclater, à cause des pratiques du régime*».

Durant la seconde moitié de l'année 2011, les dissidents s'organisent. Ils se barricadent dans les ruelles de la vieille ville, nommée Deraa Al-Balad. Leurs rassemblements sont protégés par les conscrits qui ont jeté leur uniforme et par de jeunes locaux qui pren-

## TOUT A COMMENCÉ PAR UN GRAFFITI, UN SOIR DE FÉVRIER 2011 : «*TON TOUR ARRIVE, DOCTEUR*». LE PIED DE NEZ À BACHAR AL-ASSAD, OPHTHALMOLOGUE DE FORMATION, EST EXPLICITE

nent les armes. Ils se revendiquent de l'Armée syrienne libre (ASL), une organisation créée au mois de juillet, par un colonel exilé en Turquie, qui ambitionne de devenir le bras militaire de la révolution. A l'automne, ces combattants en baskets et jeans moulants mènent leurs premières attaques.

En réaction, la répression s'intensifie. Des milliers d'habitants de Deraa et des villages agricoles environnants, qui se sont soulevés dans son sillage, passent dans les chambres de torture des moukhabarat. Des abattoirs, où l'on pratique bastonnades, électrocutions et viols à la chaîne. Les meneurs politiques du mouvement sont particulièrement ciblés. L'architecte Maan Al-Awdat, connu comme le «*Guevara du Hauran*», est assassiné par un franc-tireur le 8 août 2011.

«*Bachar et sa clique veulent nous empêcher de réfléchir, nous enfermer dans le cycle de la vengeance et déclencher une guerre civile, prédit en mars 2012 Najati Tayara, un professeur de philosophie, alors installé à Amman. Et malheureusement, ils sont en train de réussir.*» Les révoltés de Deraa, qui s'étaient indignés que le régime ait introduit des fusils et des liasses de billets dans la mosquée Al-Omari, en mars 2011, pour accréditer l'idée d'un complot de l'étranger, supplient désormais la communauté internationale de leur envoyer des armes.

Les premières arrivent fin 2012. Des avions croates, les soutes pleines de matériel hérité de la guerre civile yougoslave (missiles antichars, lance-grenades, canons sans recul, etc.) se sont posés à Amman et leurs cargaisons ont discrètement franchi la frontière. Ces livraisons sont payées par l'Arabie saoudite, décidée à faire tomber Bachar Al-Assad pour affaiblir l'Iran, allié de Damas et adversaire numéro un de Riyad au Proche-Orient. La Jordanie, protégée du royaume saoudien, structure cette filière d'armement clandestine.

Ses cadres sécuritaires, qui proviennent en grande partie des tribus du nord, liées par le sang aux populations du sud de la Syrie, ont pris langue avec les rebelles de Deraa. L'opération est conduite avec l'assentiment des Etats-Unis qui ont posé une condition: pas de missiles sol-air. Washington redoute qu'en plus de détruire des appareils civils syriens, ses tout nouveaux alliés ne ciblent aussi des avions israéliens.

#### RIVALITÉ ACRIMONIEUSE ENTRE REBELLES

La prudence est d'autant plus de mise que le

nord de la Syrie, où le Qatar et l'Arabie saoudite ont envoyé des armes dès le printemps 2012, avec la bénédiction de la Turquie, s'est transformé en Far West islamiste. Les groupes radicaux, qui tiennent le haut du pavé, tiraillent à tout-va pour passer sur Al-Jazira, la chaîne de télévision qatarie, sans se soucier des civils, qui paient le prix des représailles. L'une de ces factions, nommée Front Al-Nosra, composée en partie d'Irakiens, va bientôt officialiser son allégeance à Al-Qaida.

Dans le sud, quelques salafistes jordaniens, en mal de djihad, ont rejoint Deraa. Mais les services de sécurité du royaume, beaucoup plus professionnels que leurs homologues turcs, veillent au grain. Les destinataires des armes croates sont des groupes labellisés «*ASL*», sans idéologie marquée, que les opposants politiques qualifient de «*modérés*». Leur commandant est le colonel Ahmed Naameh, un ex-officier de l'armée régulière, connu pour sa méfiance à l'égard des islamistes.

L'objectif de ces rebelles est de faire de Deraa la tête de pont d'une offensive contre Damas, située une centaine de kilomètres plus au nord. Des combattants formés en Jordanie, sous supervision américaine, sont envoyés par vagues successives dans la Ghouta, la banlieue de la capitale syrienne, aux mains de l'opposition. Bien que le sud du pays soit beaucoup plus militarisé et fortifié que le nord, du fait de sa proximité avec Israël, les anti-Assad, dopés par leur ravitaillement en armes, enregistrent quelques victoires. Malgré les bombardements du régime, notamment l'emploi de barils explosifs, une arme dévastatrice, ils consolident leur emprise sur les quartiers sud de Deraa, désormais coupée en deux. Et ils avancent dans la campagne environnante.

Leur plan subit un coup d'arrêt en avril 2013, lorsque les forces gouvernementales reprennent le contrôle d'Otaiba, à l'extrémité orientale de la Ghouta. Cette localité, reliée à la province de Deraa par une route en plein désert, permettait aux insurgés du sud syrien d'infiltrer la banlieue de Damas. Un mois plus tard, les rebelles perdent la ville de Khirbet Ghazaleh, maillon-clé sur l'autoroute menant de Deraa à la capitale, qu'ils étaient pourtant sur le point de conquérir.

A l'origine de ce fiasco, la rivalité acrimonieuse entre deux chefs de guerre rebelles, le colonel Naameh d'une part, et Bachar Zoabi de l'autre, commandant de la Brigade Yarmouk, l'un des plus puissants groupes armés du sud. Exaspéré que le premier, basé à Amman, ait accouru sur le terrain pour se filmer en train de proclamer victoire et que, dans le même temps, le ravitaillement en munitions qu'il avait demandé ne lui soit pas parvenu, le second avait ordonné à ses hommes de se retirer de la ville, précipitant sa reprise par les loyalistes.

L'épisode, emblématique des dissensions qui minent la rébellion, pèsera de longs mois sur le moral des insurgés. Un an plus tard, en mai 2014, Ahmed Naameh est kidnappé par des membres du Front Al-Nosra. Dans une vidéo enregistrée par ses ravisseurs, son dernier signe de vie, le colonel af-

firme avoir orchestré la débâcle de Khirbet Ghazaleh à la demande de ses contacts arabes et occidentaux, inquiets du rôle joué par le groupe djihadiste dans l'offensive.

Bien qu'obtenue sous la pression et donc sujette à caution, cette « confession » souligne un phénomène exact : l'influence croissante des capitales anti-Assad sur la rébellion de Deraa. Depuis fin 2013, les chargements d'armes qui lui parviennent sont gérés par une discrète cellule, installée à Amman, le Military Operations Center (MOC).

Des experts d'une dizaine de pays arabes et européens – dont l'Arabie saoudite, la Jordanie, le Qatar, les Emirats arabes unis, la France et le Royaume-Uni – participent à cette salle d'opérations, sous la baguette de l'Agence centrale de renseignement (CIA) américaine. En plus de fournir des armes, des formations et des salaires aux groupes jugés fiables, cette structure finance un site Internet qui relaie leur propagande. Le MOC n'a pas de droit de veto sur les plans d'attaque des rebelles. Mais selon qu'il les valide ou non, l'aide offerte est plus ou moins importante.

Ce système produit rapidement des résultats. En février 2014, après l'échec des négociations de paix de Genève, 49 groupes estampillés « ASL », représentant près de 30 000 combattants, se regroupent sous la bannière du Front du Sud. Cette coalition se dote d'un credo « MOC-compatible », mettant l'accent sur le pluralisme et la bonne gouvernance.

Même s'il intègre des factions d'inspiration islamiste, ce rassemblement concrétise la domination, dans la région de Deraa, des unités révolutionnaires, dotées d'un prisme national. Par opposition aux formations djihadistes, à l'optique transnationale, comme le Front Al-Nosra et l'EI, qui pullulent respectivement dans le nord et l'est de la Syrie. L'ancrage des rebelles du sud dans le tissu social local – conséquence du relatif enclavement de la région de Deraa et du fait que la Jordanie verrouille beaucoup mieux sa frontière que la Turquie, par où s'infiltrèrent des milliers d'extrémistes non syriens – contribue aussi à leur force.

En octobre 2014, les anti-Assad s'emparent de la colline de Tel-Hara, l'un des points les plus élevés de la région sud, site d'implantation d'une base d'interception électronique syro-russe. En décembre, ils investissent la localité de Cheikh Miskin, menaçant ainsi de couper la voie de ravitaillement des quartiers nord de Deraa, restés sous contrôle gouvernemental. Cette percée incite un baron des moukhabarat, Rustum Ghazaleh, à mettre le feu à sa villa, située dans un village voisin, de peur qu'elle ne tombe entre les mains de ses ennemis – Ghazaleh mourra quelques mois plus tard, en avril 2015, des suites d'une altercation avec un autre patron des services de sécurité syriens.

En février 2015, les rebelles repoussent une violente offensive des prorégime, emmenée par le Hezbollah, le mouvement chiite libanais, allié d'Assad et financé par Téhéran. Le fait que des forces pro-iraniennes se rapprochent de sa frontière inquiète

Israël, dont la République islamique est la bête noire. En plus de conduire des frappes ciblées contre ces éléments, l'Etat hébreu s'est mis à fournir de l'aide humanitaire aux Syriens du Golan, soignés par milliers dans les hôpitaux de Galilée. Ce soutien inclura à partir de 2017 quelques livraisons d'armes à des groupes rebelles, censés faire la police le long de la zone de démarcation traversant le plateau.

Le Front du Sud poursuit sa poussée au printemps 2015. Il s'impose à Bosra Al-Cham, une localité de l'est de Deraa. Puis, il déloge les loyalistes du terminal de Nassib, à la frontière avec la Jordanie, carrefour commercial-clé, par où transitent les marchandises à destination du Golfe et de l'Europe. Mi-2015, le Front du Sud a étendu son emprise sur les deux tiers du Hauran et la moitié sud du plateau du Golan. Cette progression coïncide avec une avancée des rebelles du nord qui, sous le commandement du Front Al-Nosra, se sont emparés des villes d'Idlib et de Jisr Al-Choghour. Et avec la conquête de la cité antique de Palmyre par l'EI. Pour la première fois depuis 2011, le régime vacille sur ses bases.

Les combattants de Deraa n'iront cependant pas plus loin. La bataille qu'ils lancent en juillet 2015, à grand renfort de propagande, pour « libérer » les secteurs de la ville qui leur échappent, capote au bout de quelques jours. « *Le MOC a refusé de nous soutenir sur cette attaque, de même qu'il a toujours refusé de nous fournir des missiles sol-air, qui nous auraient permis de protéger nos territoires contre les bombardements incessants du régime* », déplore Ibrahim Al-Jabawi, l'ex-directeur de l'organe de communication du Front du Sud. « *Le MOC nous a donné suffisamment d'armes pour harceler les troupes syriennes, mais jamais assez pour marcher sur Damas, renchérit Essam Al-Rayyes, un ancien porte-parole de la rébellion. Ce que Bachar Al-Assad a reçu de l'Iran et de la Russie a toujours été plus important.* »

Même si l'administration Obama a appelé à la chute de Bachar Al-Assad, ses deux priorités au Proche-Orient sont en fait la destruction de l'EI et la conclusion de l'accord sur le nucléaire iranien. Patronner une offensive contre Deraa en pleine phase finale des négociations, avec pour risque évident de braquer Téhéran, le protecteur du régime syrien, n'est guère dans l'intérêt de Washington. Dans l'esprit de ses soutiens occidentaux, le Front du Sud a vocation à pousser Bachar Al-Assad à négocier, pas à le faire tomber. « *Notre destin n'est plus entre nos mains, le conflit est devenu un grand jeu entre Washington, Moscou et Téhéran* », maugrée à l'époque le conseiller politique d'un groupe rebelle.

La prudence est d'autant plus de mise dans les capitales occidentales que la prise de Nassib a viré au fiasco. Les rebelles ont non seulement associé le Front Al-Nosra à leur opération, en violation des consignes du MOC, mais ont été aussi incapables d'empêcher les pillages dans la zone franche adjacente au terminal. Le saccage des usines et des entrepôts par les villageois des environs

et le kidnapping de plusieurs chauffeurs routiers exaspèrent les Jordaniens qui ferment aussitôt leur frontière. L'épisode relance les doutes, lancinants outre-Atlantique, sur la capacité des rebelles à s'administrer et à faire barrage aux djihadistes.

#### L'INCOHÉRENCE DE DONALD TRUMP

Arrive septembre 2015, le démarrage de l'intervention militaire russe en Syrie. Le tapis de bombes qui s'écrase sur les zones rebelles du nord résout le dilemme des parrains du Front du Sud. Plutôt que de surenchérir, les Etats-Unis et le royaume hachémite concluent une trêve informelle avec Moscou. En échange d'un gel des combats, le Hauran et le Golan échappent aux raids des Mig russes, qui se concentrent sur Alep. Le MOC ordonne alors à ses obligés de rediriger leur arsenal contre les groupes extrémistes du sud, comme l'Armée de Khalid Ibn Walid, qui a fait allégeance à l'EI. L'impératif antiterroriste finit de l'emporter sur les velléités de changement de régime.

En juillet 2017, l'entente jordano-américano-russe est formalisée dans un accord de « désescalade », signé par Donald Trump, le nouveau locataire de la Maison Blanche, et son homologue du Kremlin, Vladimir Poutine. Le cessez-le-feu s'enracine. Les rebelles se mettent à espérer que leur sort pourrait être différent de celui de leurs camarades d'Alep, poussés à la capitulation sous le blitz russe. Mais Donald Trump, qui n'est pas à une incohérence près, annonce dans le même temps la fermeture du MOC. L'aide militaire et financière s'arrête en décembre.

Quand en mars 2018, la Ghouta ploie à son tour sous les coups de massue de Damas et Moscou, la CIA recontacte ses clients de Deraa. Elle leur déconseille de reprendre les armes pour soulager la banlieue damascène, affirmant que dans un tel cas, Washington ne pourrait pas s'opposer à des frappes russes. Les rebelles obtempèrent, persuadés que les Etats-Unis s'efforcent de préserver la zone de « désescalade ». Le département d'Etat agit même la menace de « *réponses fermes et appropriées* » en cas d'attaque du Kremlin et de son allié. Mais mi-juin, quand les unités d'élite de l'armée syrienne se massent à l'entrée du Hauran, les insurgés reçoivent un message complètement différent de l'ambassade américaine d'Amman. « *Vous ne devez pas fonder vos décisions sur l'hypothèse ou sur l'attente d'une intervention militaire américaine.* »

C'est le feu vert à l'opération de reconquête du sud. Ecœurés, démobilisés après deux années de quasi-calme, parfois achetés et « retournés » par le régime, les groupes armés hissent le drapeau blanc les uns après les autres, le plus souvent sans combattre. Les forces gouvernementales se redéplient dans la région de Deraa. Le berceau de la révolution est devenu son cimetière. ■

BENJAMIN BARTHE

# Iran artillery fire in Kurdistan Region kills 2 PDKI fighters

By Rudaw.net 17/7/2018

**S**IDAKAN, Kurdistan Region – Iran firing artillery across the border into the Kurdistan Region killed two members of a Kurdish opposition group on Tuesday.

"Unfortunately, two of our Peshmerga, named Rahim Rostam from Mahabad and Idris Darwesh from Piranshar, joined the path our nation's martyrs," a

Local officials said the bombardments have caused fires.

"The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Tuesday afternoon intensely bombed the villages of Binerashken, Bane, Binpareza, Barhol, Barchikha, Katina, and



Barbizen. The bombing has caused fires in the area, but claimed no lives," Ihsan Chalabi, the mayor of town Sidakan, had initially told Rudaw.

Some villagers have evacuated their homes due to the shelling.

One civilian and two Iranian Kurdish Peshmerga were injured in Iranian shelling in the Haji Omran area in July 2017. File photo: Rudaw

Video shared by human rights agency Hengaw appears to show a family fleeing shelling in the area.

Mayor Chalabi said the fire department is on standby, but they have not been able to access the

area yet because of ongoing shelling.

Farzang Ahmad, mayor of the sub-district of Haji Omran, said Iran is shelling areas along the border, but no casualties have been immediately reported.

The area is roughly 100 kilometres northeast of Erbil.

Iran has shelled areas inside the Kurdistan Region on several occasions on the pretext of the presence of armed Kurdish groups on its border. Some shepherds were displaced by shelling on Friday.

Turkey also carries out military campaigns within the Kurdistan Region against the PKK. Turkish armed forces on Tuesday announced they had killed eight "terrorists" in their latest air operations.

The KRG has called on armed groups not to launch attacks against neighboring countries from Kurdistan Region territory. ■

# Arabization, Islamization and Kurdish ban in occupied Afrin

German Society for Threatened Peoples reported Arabization, Islamization and language bans in the northern Syrian Kurdish region of Afrin.

ANF GOTTINGEN Wednesday, 18 Jul 2018

<https://anfenglish.com>

**G**erman Society for Threatened Peoples (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker, GfbV) published a press release about the alarming atrocities committed by the occupant Turkish army and allied mercenaries in Afrin.

"While Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin talked about the conflict in Syria in Helsinki, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had his henchmen murder, expel and expropriate people in occupied Afrin. All Kurdish scripts and signs have been removed and even Kurdish lessons at the schools will not be resumed after the holiday", reported the GfbV Middle East expert Kamal Sido, who comes from Afrin himself, in Göttingen on Tuesday.

According to GfbV data, between 1 and 15 July, Kurdish activists documented around 120 abductions, 7 murders, 10 robberies and 27 raids during which the property of local people were destroyed. In addition, four fields were set on fire.

"That's just the tip of the iceberg," said Sido. "Since the occupation of the Kurdish region on March 18, the Turkish military has abducted at least 3,000 Kurds. There are estimates that as many as 7,000 Kurds have disappeared. For fear of further attacks many affected families want to remain unrecognized. Again and again, Turkish soldiers and Islamists are seizing cellphones from civilians to find out who reports about their attacks."

Fears of the Kurds losing their property to Arab-Sunni settlers from other parts of the country are also justified. "Last week, the "legal department" of the "local council" set up by the Turkish occupying forces, ordered all residents to submit their purchase contracts. These will be reviewed to complete the allegedly necessary legal procedures



for real estate," said Sido. The approximately 250,000 Kurds who fled Afrin due to Turkish aggression have no right to assert their claims.

The Turkish military has already brought tens of thousands of Arab radical Islamists into the Kurdish region. Many of these new settlers are armed and members of various Islamist groups. They support the Turkish occupation army and kill, torture and rob the Kurdish civilians remaining in Afrin. In the once very liberal and open region, the Islamic Sharia law has been introduced practically. Women without headscarves no longer dare to take to the streets. The cityscape is determined by men with long beards and women wearing Islamic niqab clothing. Through this Islamization, a Yazidi or Alevi life in Afrin is no longer possible. The approximately 1,000 people from the small Christian community have disappeared. ●

## Turkey in Syria

# Turkey in Syria Turkey struggles to keep the peace in Afrin

Looting is on the rise, and residents are chafing under Islamist rule

AFRIN / Jul 19th 2018  
www.economist.com

THE scene in the centre of Afrin, a Kurdish city in north-western Syria, hardly inspires confidence in the future. A destroyed statue of a mythical Kurdish hero is a reminder of the plunder of the city after its capture earlier this year by Arab and Turkoman rebels backed by Turkish tanks, from Kurdish rebels. The teenage son of one of the Arab rebels peddles cigarettes, a rifle across his knees. Another rebel directs traffic. Turkey argues it saved Afrin from terrorists and boasts of opening schools and hospitals. Residents are not exactly brimming with gratitude. "The Turkish soldiers are behaving decently," says a Kurdish merchant. "But the bearded ones are big trouble," he adds, referring to Islamist militants. "They've stolen so much."

More than 100,000 civilians, and scores of Kurdish fighters known as the People's Protection Units (YPG), fled Afrin when the Turkish army and its proxies swept in. Turkey considers the YPG an extension of the Kurdistan

Workers' Party (PKK), which has fought an insurgency against it for three decades. The Turks insist they have no plans to annex Afrin, and pledge to withdraw as soon as Syria's war ends.

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But the changes wrought by the incursion may be hard to undo. Turkish ministers suggested Afrin would become a magnet for some of the 400,000 Syrian Kurdish refugees in their country. However, it is mostly Arabs pouring into the region. (The YPG has not helped, reportedly stopping displaced Kurds from going home.) During a tour of the city organised by Turkish authorities, your correspondent met refugees from Ghouta, the Damascus suburb bombed to ruins by Syrian and Russian warplanes. One wave of human misery was breaking over another.

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, does not intend to reverse the tide. He has threatened to take the war against the YPG into other parts of Syria. This puts him on a collision course with America, which teamed up with the Kurds against Islamic State (IS) and still sees them as

insurance against an IS resurgence. (It denies their links to the PKK.) Mr Erdogan is not persuaded. "We have told all our allies and friends not to stand between us and terrorists," he said earlier this year. The prospect of an escalation is not far-fetched. Insurgents allied with Turkey have clashed with American troops in eastern Syria.

Tensions between the two allies have recently eased. Under Turkish pressure, the Americans persuaded the YPG to withdraw from Manbij, which the Kurds captured from IS two years ago. Turkey and America also agreed to co-ordinate patrols. But Turkey now says that unless YPG forces east of Manbij disarm, it will be only a matter of time before Turkey attacks the group. "The plan is for the YPG to go without a fight, but if they want one we will give them one," says one Turkish diplomat.

But Turkey may have bitten off more than it can chew. Security in Afrin is getting worse. A double bombing in June killed nine people. Reports of infighting and looting continue to surface. People in Afrin chafed under YPG rule, a local resident says, but the insurgents who followed are worse. "The Turks must make these monsters go home." ●



## Dancing with wolves

# President Erdogan's alliance with the far right pays off

The Nationalist Movement Party and their Grey Wolves

ISTANBUL / Jul 19th 2018  
www.economist.com

TURKEY'S right-wing nationalists have seldom had it so good. The government of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has embraced their main causes, bombing Kurdish insurgents at home and abroad, promoting militarism in education and using siege mentality as foreign policy. Their supporters have reaped the rewards of an

alliance with the ruling Justice and Development (AK) party. The *ulkuçuler*, as they are colloquially known, have landed scores of jobs in the bureaucracy amid the mass purges that followed the attempted coup of 2016.

They have emerged even stronger from the presidential and parliamentary elections held simultaneously on June 24th. *Ulkuçu* voters helped propel Mr Erdogan to a solid first-round victory. Their main political group, the Nationalist



Movement Party (MHP), won over 11% in the parliamentary contest, twice as much as most polls predicted. The ruling AK party, which ended up a few seats short of an outright majority, depends on the nationalists for support. Despite earlier speculation, Mr Erdogan, who took his oath on July 9th—flanked by democratic heavyweights such as Venezuela's president, Nicolás Maduro, and Sudan's leader, Omar al-Bashir—did not appoint any MHP members to his cabinet. (Instead, he placed his son-in-law, the former energy minister, in charge of the

➤ economy, a move the Turkish lira greeted by losing 4% of its value against the dollar in a matter of hours before rebounding slightly.)

The ulkuculer, many of whom have connections to Turkey's criminal underworld, have been celebrating their good fortune in style. Two days after the election the MHP's veteran leader, Devlet Bahçeli, took out a full-page advert in a number of newspapers, naming and reprimanding every pollster and journalist who criticised him in the run-up to the election. "We'll never forget what you did," he wrote. Another prominent ulkucu, Alaattin Çakıcı, a mafia boss convicted of ordering the assassination of his former wife, went slightly further, threatening one of the journalists Mr Bahçeli had listed, as well as six others, with murder.

Founded in the 1960s, the MHP traces its lineage to the 19th century, when part of the Ottoman elite embraced ethnic nationalism and

the union of all Turkic peoples as a remedy against the empire's disintegration. During much of the cold war, the ulkuculer were driven by opposition to communism. (The MHP's armed wing, known as the Grey Wolves, spent years fighting deadly street battles against leftists.) In the 1990s, the ulkuculer backed a scorched-earth offensive against the armed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), accompanied by many human-rights abuses, and opposed any expression of Kurdish identity.

In the early years of AK rule, when Turkey launched accession talks with the European Union and implemented a string of democratic reforms, they receded from view. Their courtship with political Islam, which began in the late 1970s, resumed in the 2010s after Mr Erdogan ditched his liberal allies, broke off peace talks with the PKK and went to war with the Gulen community, a powerful sect. An attempted coup in 2016, which the Gulenists spearheaded,

helped consummate the relationship.

Especially today, under a new constitution that places the entire executive in Mr Erdogan's hands, the MHP prizes its power in the bureaucracy much more than any cabinet seats, says Kemal Can, an expert on Turkey's right. The nationalists will probably shy away from taking an active role in economic and foreign policy, says Mr Can, but they will make sure Mr Erdogan continues to tend to domestic affairs with an iron fist. Although the government ended the state of emergency this week, tough new laws will take its place. In his letter from prison, Mr Çakıcı boasted about the power his men wield within the police and the army. "You do not own the state," he wrote, addressing Mr Erdogan. "The ulkuculer are the state's foundation."

This article appeared in the Europe section of the print edition under the headline "Dancing with wolves" ●



21 JULY 2018

## At least 10 Iranian Revolutionary Guards killed in border attack

Iranian border guards were killed by unidentified gunmen near the Iraqi border.

21 Jul 2018

www.aljazeera.com

**A**t least 10 Iranian border guards have been killed in an overnight attack by unidentified gunmen near the border with Iraq, according to media in Iran.

The incident took place near the town of Marivan, in a Kurdish area of Iran some 620km west of the capital, Tehran, according to the semi-official Fars news agency.

"The attack by the evil rebels and terrorists against a revolutionary border post and the explosion of a munitions depot caused the martyrdom of 10 fighters," a statement by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, as quoted by the semi-official Tasnim news agency, said on Saturday.

Provincial security official Hosein Khosheqbal told state television that 11 members of the Guards' voluntary Basij forces were killed in the overnight violence in Marivan, which he blamed on the Kurdish armed opposition group The Party of Free Life of Kurdistan (PJAK).

"The latest news is that the Basij [the government-aligned militia] and Guards forces are in hot pursuit of the attackers," Khosheqbal said.

It was not immediately clear why there was a discrepancy in the number of fatalities reported.

It was the largest number of Iranian troops killed in a single attack on the border with Iraq in recent years, though the area has seen occasional fighting between Iranian forces and Kurdish separatists as well as fighters linked to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL, also known as ISIS) group.

Earlier this month, the Guards said they had killed three fighters in a security operation near the border with Iraq. Nine others were reported killed



The attack caused the largest number of Iranian troops killed in a single incident on the Iraqi border in recent years [File: Vahid Salemi/AP]

by the Guards last month further north on the border.

There is little coordination between Iranian and Iraqi forces over security of the porous border that has also been used by ISIL to enter Iran.

Intelligence Minister Mahmoud Alavi said on Tuesday that security forces in southwest Iran arrested four suspected ISIL operatives who were planning attacks.

In June 2017, ISIL fighters carried out coordinated attacks at the parliament building in Tehran and the mausoleum of Iranian revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini south of the capital, killing at least 18 people. ♦



## Kurdish PJAK claims responsibility for killing 11 IRGC forces in Iran

TEHRAN, July 21 (Xinhua) --

The Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) claimed responsibility for a clash on Saturday, killing 11 forces of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), PJAK spokesperson Amed Shaho told Rudaw Media

Network.

Eight other IRGC forces were injured in the clash with Kurdish militant groups in west of Iran, official IRNA news agency reported.

The "terrorist" attack targeted a military base in Dari village near Marivan city in Kurdistan province, the report said.

The PJAK said it launched the attack in retaliation to the killing of its forces and the assassination of one of its members in the Sulaymaniyah province of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region.

The PJAK, an anti-Iranian Kurdish rebel group, is linked to Turkey's outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Iran's western Kurdistan province has been the scene of bloody clashes between the Iranian security forces and the Kurdish rebels during the past years. ●

# La contestation sociale s'étend dans le sud de l'Irak

Des heurts opposent les forces de sécurité aux manifestants, dont la mobilisation ne faiblit pas, en dépit des promesses du gouvernement

L'Irak est en proie à un vaste mouvement de contestation sociale dans les provinces du Sud, qui a fait au moins cinq morts et des dizaines de blessés depuis une semaine. Lancé à Bassora, la principale province pétrolière du pays, le 8 juillet, par des habitants protestant contre la déliquescence des services publics, le chômage et la corruption endémique, le mouvement s'est durci et s'étend désormais à toutes les provinces du Sud chiite.

Dimanche 15 juillet, de nouveaux heurts ont opposé les forces de sécurité aux manifestants, qui ont tenté de bloquer des installations pétrolières à Bassora et se sont attaqués à des bâtiments gouvernementaux et des sièges de partis politiques dans plusieurs villes, faisant au moins deux morts à Samawa et des dizaines de blessés à Bassora et Nasiriya parmi les manifestants et les forces de l'ordre.

Le premier ministre, Haïder Al-Abadi, a durci le ton, dimanche, dénonçant les actes violents autour des manifestations. « Profiter des manifestations pour brûler des bâtiments publics, couper

des routes, enflammer des pneus et attaquer les forces de sécurité est une tentative de faire reculer le pays », a plaidé le chef du gouvernement, pour qui « des éléments du crime organisé » se tenaient « prêts à susciter le chaos ». Il a ordonné la réouverture de l'aéroport de Nadjaf, envahi vendredi par des manifestants. Trois compagnies internationales avaient annoncé plus tôt la suspension de leurs vols vers la ville sainte chiite.

Les promesses sociales et les mesures sécuritaires n'ont pas suffi à juguler le mouvement. Samedi soir, le gouvernement avait annoncé une allocation immédiate de 3 milliards de dollars pour la province de Bassora, outre des annonces d'investissement dans l'habitat, les écoles, la santé, les réseaux d'électricité et d'eau.

Parallèlement, un couvre-feu a été décrété dans les principales villes du sud et plusieurs bataillons de l'armée et des forces antiterroristes ont été déployés en renfort. Depuis vendredi soir, l'accès à Internet et aux réseaux sociaux, utilisés par des activistes qui ont rejoint la mobilisation, est coupé presque tout le temps, no-

**Dans la région de Bassora, seulement 1% des emplois du secteur pétrolier sont occupés par des travailleurs locaux**

tamment à Bagdad et dans les provinces du Sud.

## Corruption endémique

Ce black-out imposé par les autorités a jusqu'à présent permis d'empêcher que le mouvement ne s'étende à la capitale, où les manifestations sont restées limitées. Dans le Sud chiite, les manifestants se disent déterminés à persévérer du fait d'une situation en constante dégradation, devenue particulièrement explosive durant l'été. Alors que les températures avoisinent les 48°C, les provinces du Sud souffrent de coupures d'électricité et d'eau récurrentes et de services publics défaillants, le tout en grande partie imputé à la corruption endé-

mique au sein des autorités fédérales comme provinciales.

Le chômage – officiellement de 10,8 %, mais deux fois plus élevé chez les jeunes, dans un pays où 60 % de la population a moins de 24 ans – est un problème majeur dans ces provinces, parmi les plus pauvres du pays. Alors que la majorité des champs pétrolières d'Irak, qui tire près de 90 % de ses ressources des hydrocarbures, se trouvent dans la région de Bassora, seulement 1 % des emplois sont occupés par des travailleurs locaux, les compagnies pétrolières étrangères employant essentiellement des étrangers. Dans d'autres régions du Sud, qui dépendent de l'agriculture, l'interdiction de planter des cultures comme le riz et le maïs, décrétée du fait d'une sécheresse record cet été, a provoqué la colère des agriculteurs.

Le soutien exprimé, vendredi, aux manifestants par le grand ayatollah Sistani, la plus haute autorité chiite d'Irak, a galvanisé la contestation. Elle cible le gouvernement, mais aussi les partis chiites sortis vainqueurs des élections législatives et l'Iran, que les manifestants accusent d'ingérence dans les affaires du pays. Après un taux d'abstention record aux législatives du 12 mai, le désarroi envers la classe politique, jugée corrompue, s'est amplifié, alors que la formation d'un gouvernement est suspendue à un recomptage des bulletins, sur fond d'accusation de fraudes. ■

HÉLÈNE SALLON



19 Juillet 2018

## Erdogan abroge l'état d'urgence mais poursuit les purges

Il aura fallu pas moins de 77 000 arrestations et 150 000 limogeages et suspensions pour, semble-t-il, apaiser la conscience de Recep Tayyip Erdogan, réélu en juin à la tête de l'Etat turc. Deux ans après la tentative de coup d'Etat qui a ébranlé la Turquie, l'état d'urgence arrive à son terme. Et pas question cette fois de le prolonger. Le régime d'exception a permis de traquer en masse les partisans supposés de Fethullah Gülen, l'imam accusé par Erdogan d'avoir fomenté le putsch manqué. Mais les purges terminées, « la lutte contre le terrorisme va [quant à elle]

se poursuivre dans le cadre des lois actuelles », a insisté Ankara.

Mais voilà, le cadre législatif a évolué. Ainsi, la révision de la Constitution turque, votée par référendum en avril 2017, est entrée en vigueur le 16 juillet. Et le président turc en ressort grand gagnant : pouvant gouverner par décrets, il dispose ainsi des mêmes pouvoirs que lui octroyait l'état d'urgence. C'est par décret-loi que le président turc a limogé quelque 18 000 fonctionnaires début juillet, dernière « rafle » censée conclure les purges. La méthode a été utilisée à 35 reprises depuis

le coup d'Etat raté du 15 juillet 2016.

Erdogan ne compte pas s'arrêter là. Une nouvelle loi antiterroriste doit être discutée cette semaine au Parlement. Elle devrait reprendre, dans les grandes lignes, les mesures appliquées pendant l'état d'urgence. La durée maximale de garde à vue devrait ainsi passer de quatorze à douze jours, contre cinq jours avant juillet 2016. En outre, les ministres disposent du pouvoir de limoger, sans passer par la justice, tout fonctionnaire qu'ils considéreraient « suspect ». Depuis juillet 2016, 126 655 fonctionnaires ont

été définitivement licenciés. Seulement 42 000 ont réintégré leur poste. Le personnel ainsi purgé a continué à percevoir un salaire le temps de l'enquête, assure l'ambassade de Turquie en France. Des mesures « musclées », pour l'ambassadeur, qui n'ont visé que des personnes liées au mouvement Gülen. Mais les médias critiques, les opposants prokurdes ainsi que les ONG ont également été victimes de la répression. La situation devrait perdurer malgré la fin de l'état d'urgence. L'exception est désormais devenu la règle.

CAROLINE VINET

# Putting Iraq-KRG Oil Relations on Solid Legal Ground

James F. Jeffrey and Bilal Wahab  
July 19, 2018  
<https://www.washingtoninstitute.org>

**Notwithstanding their decades of contention, the two governments must resolve their differences legally to make way for economic development and stave off public unrest.**

Despite their country producing 4.3 million barrels of oil per day, Iraq's population remains poor. Gathering in the streets of southern towns, masses are protesting government corruption, power shortages, and high unemployment rates. Consequently, the government must refocus its attention on economic prosperity and the daunting financial demands of reconstruction following years of war against the Islamic State. To that end, it should resolve its dispute with the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) over management of the oil and gas sector. Doing so would be the first of many crucial steps toward injecting rule of law back into the energy industry.

Currently, a messy but promising case to adjudicate management rights over these disputed resources sits before Iraq's Supreme Court. Should the case progress constructively, it will pressure the newly elected parliament to prioritize passage of a national hydrocarbons law. This in turn would infuse much-needed confidence into Iraq's risk-laden energy sector and invite greater foreign investment to boost production and revenues. Moreover, Kurdish recognition of the federal court foreshadows a more realistic approach to energy—one that aims to salvage and de-risk the KRG oil industry through better coordination, if not integration, with the federal industry.

## REENERGIZED AMBIGUITIES

In 2005, Iraq's new constitution enshrined federalism and the equitable sharing of oil and gas revenues. As the basis for its case that the KRG is supposed to take part in this arrangement, Baghdad cites three articles of the Iraqi constitution. Article 110 stipulates that the federal government shall have "exclusive authorities" in formulating "foreign sovereign economic and trade policy," presumably including the trade in hydrocarbons, which account for over 95 percent of Iraq's exports. Article 111 establishes that oil and gas are owned by all the people of Iraq. And the first paragraph of Article 112 stipulates that "present" oil and gas fields shall be managed by the central government alongside "the producing governorates and regional governments," essentially continuing Saddam Hussein's arrangements at the time of the constitution's enactment.

Yet the second paragraph of Article 112 implies a distinction between old and new oil, with 2005 as the dividing line. It asserts that "the federal government, with the producing regional and governorate governments, shall together formulate the necessary strategic policies to develop the oil and gas wealth." The KRG therefore premises all hydrocarbon production, excluding its claims to Kirkuk, on "new oil" provisions covered by the "together" phrase, which is not found in the article's first paragraph. In its view, this phrasing also supersedes the "exclusive authorities" granted to Baghdad in Article 110.

However these differing interpretations are ultimately reconciled, Article 112 clearly gives the government a mandate to pass legislation regulating the shared management of production, sale of crude oil, and the distribution of revenues. Due to constant power wrangling, though, these constitutional provisions have not yet been translated into regulations, let alone clear laws. In a major push during 2007-8, the United States offered to mediate a new hydrocarbons law, but both Baghdad and the KRG decided to stick with their self-serving interpretations of the constitution.

The Kurds, eyeing the exit door from Iraq, sought to build an independent petroleum industry, inviting international oil companies (IOCs) to look for hydrocarbons in their territory. They also began independently exporting oil in January 2014 and contracted with Turkey to export gas, in clear violation of Article 110. Today, the KRG independently exports almost 300,000 barrels of oil per day via Turkey.

For its part, Baghdad seeks to remain the locus of such decisionmaking; accordingly, it claims ownership of the KRG's oil exports and refuses to recognize Kurdish deals with IOCs. In effect, Baghdad acts as if Article 112 regulates all oil, including "new" oil—a stance that seems to violate the constitution just as surely as Erbil's unilateral exports do.

## COURT BATTLE

In 2012, the federal government took the KRG to the Supreme Court over the legality of its oil contracts and independent exports. But the KRG deliberately neglected to appear before the court until April of this year.

So far, the court has not made any rulings, requesting more information on the petroleum value chain instead. While the next and, perhaps, final hearing will take place on August 14, both parties are encouraged by the proceedings thus far. Federal officials feel they have a strong



case against the KRG, while Kurdish officials are pleased to see the court question the two constitutional articles cited by Baghdad as grounds for indictment. The court has also put the onus of formulating a national oil law on Baghdad, since the KRG passed its own natural resources law in 2007.

Moreover, past budget laws passed by the national parliament required the KRG to contribute certain oil export earnings to the country's overall exports—a practice that Erbil cites as clear recognition that its independent exports are legitimate. One deal in 2015 had the KRG and federal government equitably split the proceeds of 150,000 barrels per day produced in the Kirkuk fields, whose oil can only be exported via the Kurdish pipeline to Turkey. Today, however, federal authorities refuse to export that oil, avoiding KRG infrastructure at all costs. By so doing, they limit Iraq's northern export outlet—a self-defeating approach at a time when protests could threaten the flow of crude from the south.

## ONE COUNTRY, TWO INDUSTRIES

The ongoing legal vacuum has essentially bifurcated Iraq's energy industry. Although building an energy industry from naught was quite a feat for the KRG, its main goals—staving off the central government and building the economic foundation for an independence—led it to overreach at times, such as when it commandeered Kirkuk oil fields and revenues during the war against the Islamic State. The Kurdish energy industry also became increasingly less transparent as KRG officials sought to evade Baghdad.

Yet federal authorities refused to give the KRG a break from day one. They declared Erbil's production-sharing contracts illegal, blacklisted any interested IOCs, and sued buyers. Short-term and short-lived deals replaced law-based policy and strategy. Between 2013 and 2016, Erbil intermittently recognized Baghdad's determinant role by turning its oil over to the central government for export. In return, Baghdad's acceptance of this arrangement indirectly recognized the legality of the KRG's contracts. The Kurds also received their share ➔



⇒ of country-wide oil export earnings: around 17% in most budgets up until recently. But various technical disputes and instances of over-reach by both sides scotched several of these initiatives.

The disputes have also opened a door for more Iranian influence. Last month, Baghdad and Tehran agreed to swap 30,000 barrels of Kirkuk oil, with Iraqi oil feeding Iranian refineries and Iran delivering equal amounts of its own oil to Iraq's Persian Gulf ports. Warming oil relations could potentially enable Iran to evade U.S. energy sanctions, reminiscent of Baghdad's own evasion methods in the 1990s, when Iraqi oil tankers flew Iranian flags.

Going forward, the balance of power has clearly tipped in Baghdad's favor given Erbil's costly independence referendum, its loss of control over Kirkuk's oil fields, and its dire need for cash flow from Iraqi coffers. Yet Baghdad also realizes that the KRG energy industry is here to stay. And continuing to substitute gentleman's

handshakes for regulated production handovers and revenue sharing is unsustainable. Mutually destructive approaches hamper the progress of the Iraqi oil sector, which seeks to reintegrate and recover in a competitive market. In standing before the Supreme Court, the KRG has an opportunity to cash out on the constitution, the forging of which was one of its main institutional and legal achievements in the post-Saddam era. And Baghdad cannot simply play the bully now that it is dealing with the KRG's international energy partners, which include Russia's Rosneft and Turkey's BOTAS.

#### TOWARD RULE OF LAW

Allowing courts to settle Iraq's oil disputes is a principle worth supporting, since a transparent, rule-based energy industry is in the interest of all parties. Among other benefits, resolving the oil issue would help untangle Baghdad and the KRG's disputes over territory. It would also undercut Iran's influence, limit its opportunities for oil smuggling, and aid efforts to spot its

sanctions-busting efforts.

To that end, the priority of the next Iraqi government should be passing a national hydrocarbons law and constructing inclusive state institutions that reflect the constitution. Rationalizing Iraq's petroleum sector is necessary to maximize revenue and formulate economic policies needed to cope with recent public protests. The United States should resume the assistance it extended in 2007-8 toward passing an oil and gas law. It should also support the court proceedings as a positive precedent for conflict resolution, while offering the technical advice the court needs to pass a fair judgment. Baghdad and the KRG are both receptive to such assistance. ●

*James F. Jeffrey is the Philip Solondz Distinguished Fellow at The Washington Institute and former U.S. ambassador to Iraq and Turkey. Bilal Wahab is the Institute's Nathan and Esther K. Wagner Fellow.*



16 JULY 2018

## KDP, PUK join multi-party talks on forming next Iraqi government

By Rudaw.net 18/7/2018

**ERBIL, Kurdistan Region** – Iraqi President Fuad Masum chaired a meeting of some representatives of political parties in Baghdad on Wednesday evening.

Vice President Nouri al-Maliki said they discussed three subjects: ongoing protests, formation of the new government, and preparation of an agenda for the new cabinet.

Fazil Mirani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Mala Bakhtiar of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) were the only representatives of Kurdish parties present at the meeting.

Also in attendance were head of the Hikma party Ammar al-Hakim, Vice President Osama al-Nujaifi, Dhia al-Asadi of Sadr's Sayirun alliance, and Kazim al-Shemari of the Wataniya coalition.

No representative of the party of current Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi was present.

"All the participating political parties and parliamentary blocs decided to accept the final results of the parliamentary election," read a statement from Masum's office, adding that the result of the manual recount is expected soon.

Iraq held parliamentary elections on May 12, but the results have been disputed and a manual recount is underway.

No single party received a strong mandate from voters and alliances will be key to forming the next government. There have been



KDP's Fazil Mirani (2nd from right) and PUK's Mala Bakhtiar (2nd from left) join Sunni and Shiite leaders for talks in Baghdad on Wednesday. Photo: Rudaw

multiple negotiations over the weeks after the vote as parties jostle for position while waiting for results to be finalized.

Bakhtiar said that parties with a shared vision should ally together.

"Parties that have shared interests and views can form the biggest bloc and establish the government," he told reporters after the meeting.

He noted that neither the Shiite nor Sunni parties have formed majority alliances so far: "Only in Kurdistan are the majority of seats allied."

The KDP and PUK have agreed to join forces to negotiate with Iraqi parties in Baghdad in a bid to strengthen the position of Kurds who some pundits believe could play a kingmaker role since Shiite parties are divided over the shape of the next

government.

The two Kurdish parties – who together secured 43 seats in the contested results – have said they are open to uniting with other Kurdish parties. That looks unlikely at the moment.

The Change Movement (Goran), the Coalition for Democracy and Justice (CDJ), the Kurdistan Islamic Group (Komal), and the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), which combined secured 15 seats, have disputed the May 12 election results, ordering a full manual recount of votes. They accuse the KDP and PUK of rigging the election.

"The KDP and PUK came together to Baghdad and will be together in the future," said Bakhtiar. "Plus, KDP and PUK will have a shared

project for all problems between Baghdad and Kurdistan including economic, legal, and territorial disputes."

The acting government is currently facing a crisis. Iraqis angry about unemployment, government corruption, and lack of services have taken to the streets every day for over a week. Sporadic violence has broken out in the protests.

Abadi has appealed to the political parties for help in appeasing the protesters.

Bakhtiar said protesters "have some legitimate demands" and stressed the importance of the court ratifying final elections results so that the new government can be formed and get to work.

Masum said the parties that met at the presidential palace all agreed the demands of the protesters are "just," but stressed the need to stem violence.

The parties "showed support for the Iraqi government to take proper measures in fulfilling the demands made by protesters. They also stressed that law and order should be respected, security and stability should be protected, chaos should be prevented, public and private institutions should be protected, showing support for security forces to prevent troublemakers who have infiltrated the protesters and exploited the situation to realize their objectives," the statement read. ■

# Cooperating in Syria, up to a point

WASHINGTON

## U.S.-Russia relations are less rosy than the nations' leaders imply

BY ERIC SCHMITT  
AND THOMAS GIBBONS-NEFF

Despite political tensions between the United States and Russia, the two nations' militaries are cooperating closely — particularly in Syria, President Trump and President Vladimir V. Putin have said.

But their record of collaboration — or at least efforts to avoid conflict — in the war in Syria is far more mixed.

After his meeting with Mr. Trump in Helsinki, Finland, Mr. Putin said in a joint news conference on Monday that military cooperation in Syria could be “the first showcase example of the successful joint work” between the two Cold War rivals. He noted that communication channels between the two countries' militaries have been able to “avoid dangerous incidents and unintentional collisions in the air and in the ground.”

“Our militaries do get along very well, and they do coordinate in Syria and other places,” Mr. Trump chimed in on Monday. “Our militaries actually have gotten along probably better than our political leaders, for years.”

Yet it is not clear what room there is for close ties in Syria — other than preventing clashes on the ground or crashes in the sky — given Russia's backing of the government of President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and the United States' support for rebel factions.

Russian mercenaries have battled American commandos and their Syrian Kurdish allies. Russian and American warplanes have nearly collided.

Here are five areas where the American and Russian militaries have crossed paths in Syria over the last year.

### THE GENERALS

The two nations' top military officers, Gen. Joseph F. Dunford Jr., the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Gen. Valery V. Gerasimov, Russia's chief of the general staff, meet occasionally. They talk more frequently — mainly to help prevent the two militaries from jousting in increasingly close quarters in Syria.

The generals met on June 8 in Helsinki to discuss Syria, security in Europe and overall United States-Russia



A Syrian soldier leaned against a truck while Russian military police operated in the background in Dara'a Province, Syria.

military relations, General Dunford's spokesman said. It was their first face-to-face meeting since March 6, 2017, in Antalya, Turkey. They also met on Feb. 16, 2017, in Baku, Azerbaijan.

General Dunford has spoken with General Gerasimov more than a dozen times by phone in the past year or so.

“Both leaders recognize the importance of maintaining regular communication in order to avoid miscalculation and to promote transparency in areas where our militaries are operating in close proximity,” Lt. Cmdr. Hayley Sims, a Dunford spokeswoman, said in an email.

### BOUNDARIES BREACHED

Nearly three years ago, the Russian and American militaries established a special hotline to help prevent disasters in the air.

A United States Air Force officer at Al Udeid Air Base in Qatar calls a Russian officer at an air base in Latakia, Syria, every day to head off — or “deconflict” — potential problems over Syria.

The daily phone calls between the air officers have remained professional.

But the dialogue does not always translate into cooperation in the skies.

Last December, Russian fighter jets flew dangerously close to American warplanes in eastern Syria — including one near collision — for about a month.

American officials called it a repeated pattern of Russia violating an agreement to keep rival forces separate as they converged on the last main pocket of Islamic State militants in the country.

American and Russian commanders had agreed to fly on opposite sides of a 45-mile stretch of the Euphrates River to prevent accidents in eastern Syria's increasingly congested skies. But Russian warplanes violated that deal a half-dozen times daily, according to American commanders who said they complained to their counterparts.

In one instance, two Air Force A-10 attack planes flying east of the Euphrates River nearly collided with a Russian Su-24 Fencer just 300 feet away — a

## American and Russian officers in Syria talk frequently to prevent the two militaries from jousting in increasingly close quarters.

close call for jets flying at more than 350 miles per hour. The A-10s swerved to avoid the Russian plane, which was supposed to fly only west of the Euphrates.

Other Russian planes have flown for up to 30 minutes within striking distance or directly over allied ground forces, escalating tensions and risking being shot down, American officials said.



PAVEL GOLOVKIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Russian planes at a base in Syria. American and Russian commanders agreed to fly on opposite sides of the Euphrates River.

American officers said the violations were an effort by Moscow to test American resolve, bait Air Force pilots into rash reactions and help the Syrian Army seize and control territory ahead of diplomatic talks.

#### U.S. CRUISE MISSILE STRIKES

Moscow has played small but geopolitically significant roles in the two American cruise missile strikes that in April 2017 targeted an airfield and a year later hit two possible chemical weapons sites and a chemical research lab.

Moscow has been a key ally for Mr. Assad, who has used the Russian military to prop up Syria's weakened army. In turn, Russia has established a permanent presence at a key airfield and port in western Syria.

In the 2017 strikes, the Pentagon alerted Moscow before 59 Tomahawk cruise missiles hit Al Shayrat Airfield, ensuring that no Russian forces were killed or injured. Moscow said the strikes were couched under a "far-fetched pretext" and had put the Russian military on "the verge of fighting" American troops stationed in Syria's northeast.

As a result, Russia increased air patrols near American troops in Syria. It also bolstered Syrian air defenses with more advanced surface-to-air missiles. In response, the United States Air Force deployed additional advanced-fire aircraft to ensure no Russia forces attacked American ground troops.

This past April, the Pentagon was even more wary of a Russian military response after Mr. Trump launched a larger strike against the Syrian chemical weapons program.

Though American military intelligence officials expected blowback from the Russians, Moscow leveled only strong words at the Trump administration. Russian air defenses were not activated as American, French and British aircraft fired salvos of missiles.

"Our warnings have been left unheard," Russia's ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Antonov, tweeted after the attacks. "We are being threatened. We warned that such actions will not be left without consequences."

#### RUSSIAN MERCENARIES ATTACK

On Feb. 7, nearly 500 pro-Syrian government fighters attacked a small American outpost east of the Euphrates River. The American troops there — a mixture of Special Operations forces including Army Rangers and the elite Delta Force — were training and fighting alongside a group of Kurdish fighters called the Syrian Democratic Forces.

American military officials had watched the pro-Syrian government fighters gathering for roughly a week and had intercepted radio transmissions from people speaking Russian among them. Attempting to stave off a potential battle — one that could lead to a wider conflict — officials at the Pentagon alerted their Russian counterparts.

It was to no avail; Moscow denied that the Russian fighters on the ground were connected to Russia's military.

What ensued was a four-hour firefight that wounded one pro-American Kurdish fighter and killed hundreds of Russians and Syrians. The Pentagon called the incident an act of self-defense. Dozens of American airstrikes forced the pro-Syrian government forces into retreat, leaving the dead on the battlefield and collected later.

While the number of casualties from the firefight is disputed, American intelligence officials have said the Russians were mercenaries who belonged to the shadowy Wagner group, a private military company known for acting on behalf of the Kremlin with little oversight.

The mercenaries loosely coordinate with the Russian military in Syria, and, in the past, have seized oil and gas fields on behalf of Mr. Assad's government.

Following the battle, the Russian military started to electronically jam some American aircraft and drones.

#### CEASE-FIRES FALL APART

Earlier this month, rebels in southwestern Syria agreed to surrender in a Russian-brokered cease-fire, giving up control of Dara'a Province in another major victory for Mr. Assad and his Russian allies.

State news media reported that the Syrian government seized back the Nasyb border crossing with Jordan, which was held by rebels for three years, after an assault in insurgent territory that was backed by Russian airstrikes.

The area had been part of a so-called de-escalation zone, a cease-fire reached last year by Jordan, Russia and the United States to reduce fighting. The Trump administration had warned before the Russian airstrikes that Washington would respond to violations of the agreement.

In the end, however, the administration did nothing, and rebel leaders have said the United States told them to expect no American military help.



JULY 18, 2018

# In latest shuffle, Baghdad replaces Kirkuk's Kurdish Health official with Turkmen

Sangar Ali / July 18-2018 kurdistan24.net

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – The Iraqi Health Ministry has ordered the removal of a Kurdish official in the ethnically-diverse province of Kirkuk, replacing him with a Turkmen individual.

Kirkuk is an oil-rich province located south of the Kurdistan Region and north of the Iraqi capital of Baghdad. The multi-ethnic region has a diverse population made up of Kurds, Turkmen, Arabs, and Christians. Kurds account for the majority of the population.

The province is one of the disputed territories between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Federal Government of Iraq.

Iraqi forces and Iran-backed Shia militias have been in control of Kirkuk since driving Kurdish Peshmerga forces from the province last October.

Since then, many Kurdish officials have been removed from their posts and replaced with non-Kurdish ethnic groups, among them are the Governor, Kirkuk's Security Director, Agriculture Director-General, the Mayors of Kirkuk city, Dibis, Daquq, and Khurmatu, as well as the District and Suburban Police Director.

The latest one is the Director-General of Health in Kirkuk. According to an official letter obtained by Kurdistan 24, Iraq's Health Minister Adila Hmoud Hussein issued a formal order on July 11 to replace the current Kurdish Director-General, Sabah Zangana, with Karim Wali, an ethnic Turkmen.

The order also mentions that the office of Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi approved the change in the administration post.

The official order from Iraq's Health Ministry to replace Kirkuk's Director-General Sabah Zangana.

Kurdish lawmakers from Kirkuk have previously stressed to Kurdistan 24 that since Oct. 16 the province is witnessing a campaign of "forceful demographic change" that aims to weaken the Kurds in Kirkuk.

The former Iraqi Ba'ath regime, under Saddam Hussein's dictatorship, implemented Arabization campaigns in Kirkuk Province and other Kurdish-populated areas in Nineveh, Salahuddin, and Diyala.

The campaign was meant to change the demography of the areas by forcibly displacing the Kurdish residents and replacing them with Arabs from central and southern Iraq. ♦



JULY 23, 2018

# Iran warns KRG after heavy clashes with Kurds along border

Wladimir van Wilgenburg July 23-2018  
<http://www.kurdistan24.net>

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24)** – The Iranian Deputy Interior Minister for Security Affairs, Hossein Zolfaqari, indirectly criticized the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) on Monday and warned Tehran would take matters into its own hands if Iranian Kurdish groups don't stop its struggle inside Iran.

He called out "some neighboring countries for not preventing recent insecurity along common borders and warned that if they fail to act, the Islamic Republic will target terrorist strongholds in the countries," the Tasnim News Agency, which is affiliated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), reported.

The comments come after both the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK) fought heavy battles with Iranian forces.

Last week, Iranian cross-border shelling killed two PDKI fighters, and injured civilians.

Moreover, PJAK killed 10 Iranian border guards last Saturday in response to the assassination of Iranian Kurdish activist Iqbal Muradi in the Kurdistan Region's Penjwen on Wednesday, and the death of four PJAK fighters in clashes in Mariwan and Paveh.

Loghman H. Ahmedi, Member of the Executive Board of PDKI's Leadership, told Kurdistan 24 this is not the first time Iran has threatened Iranian Kurdish groups.

"They have made several threats. They use the words 'anti-revolutionary/zde enghab' to refer to us. They said they would attack our bases, assassinate our leadership wherever they can find them, all over the world. These threats have to be taken seriously," Ahmedi said.

"Their actual ability to carry out these threats is limited in the sense that they wouldn't be able to make a ground invasion," he added.

"We have always taken this kind of threats seriously, even when they don't say

anything we are aware that the Islamic republic is capable of terrorist actions. Twice in 2015 and 2017, they planted bombs in our camps," Kako Alyar, a member of the Central Committee of the Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan, told Kurdistan24. "Fortunately, no life was lost."

"Now that pressure from inside the country [protests, lack of legitimacy, and non-consensus among high officials] and from the international community has considerably increased, the regime tries its best to blame the Kurdish and other opposition parties and legitimize any terror acts, but we are aware of that and take necessary measures," he added.

Iran has carried out several assassinations against Iranian Kurdish opposition groups in recent months.

Two PDK-I Peshmerga fighters were targeted in a blast in Erbil's subdistrict of Binaslawa on March 1. The explosion killed Sabah Rahmani, 33, and wounded his father.

On March 7, Qadir Qadiri, a senior Kurdish Peshmerga Commander of the (KDP-Iran), was killed in Sulaimani's Rania city.

According to Ahmedi, there is no coordination between Turkey and Iran on attacks against the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and other Iranian Kurdish groups in the border area.

Last Sunday, there were heavy clashes between PJAK, a PKK-affiliate, and Iran forces.

"I don't think there is coordination between Turkey and Iran. People tend to see these regions as one, but they target specific bases," he explained, adding Iran targets civilian-populated areas "to upset and anger the people of the region and to incite them to put pressure on our Peshmerga in that region."

"The fact that they managed to kill two Peshmerga is something that happens in war. But we have not seen any signs of coordination between Turkey and Iran," the PDKI official said about Tehran's latest cross-border shelling.

Dr. Jonathan Spyer, Director of the Middle East Center for Reporting and Analysis, told Kurdistan 24 the uptick in conflict might be meant to build "pressure on the Iranian regime."

"I think there is a clear decision by Iranian Kurdish groups to revive and intensify armed activity, probably in light of the more general unrest in Iran and possibly with a tacit green light from elements in the US administration," he said.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday denounced the Iranian regime as "a nightmare for the Iranian people."

The KRG, meanwhile, has called on Tehran to end its indiscriminate shelling of areas near the Kurdish border and asked Iranian Kurdish fighters to avoid using the Region to attack its neighboring state. ♦

# Iran and Turkey pressure Kurdish groups on different fronts

**TURKEY AND Iran had rocky relations up until 2017, when they began to work more closely with Russia under the Astana peace process on Syria.**

By Seth J. Frantzman / July 22, 2018  
www.jpost.com

Eleven Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps and Basij militia members were killed and eight were wounded in the Iranian border town of Marivan on Friday. Iranian and Turkish media highlighted the incident, with Iran blaming "PJAK terrorists" and Turkey's TRT blaming "militants" for the killing. Turkish media noted that the PJAK, or Kurdistan Free Life Party, has been involved in recent deadly attacks on Iranian security forces and claimed it is aligned with the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, which Ankara is at war with.

As TRT notes, Both Ankara and Tehran are taking the incident seriously, but for different reasons. Turkey wants to highlight that "there is little coordination between Iranian and Iraqi forces over security of the porous border that has also been used by Daesh [ISIS] to enter Iran." Meanwhile, Iran is talking about conflict with the US, but its admission that Kurdish fighters were able to take down 11 IRGC members shows that it is concerned about a bubbling insurgency on the border. In recent months, as protests swept Iran and Tehran prepares to weather new Washington sanctions, Kurdish groups have stepped up their campaign. These groups include the PJAK and the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI).

Since August 2017, Turkey has said that Tehran and Ankara would launch a joint campaign against the PKK. A cease-fire with the PKK broke down in 2015, and Turkey has been fighting the group in eastern Turkey as well as in Iraq and in Syria. In August 2017, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Iranian Chief of General Staff Mohammad Baqeri. In June 2017, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu had also advocated cooperation, but said Tehran was in "de-escalation" with the PJAK.

Turkey and Iran had rocky relations up until 2017, when they began to work more closely with Russia under the Astana peace process on Syria. Erdogan met Iranian President Rouhani and Putin several times. The two countries diverged greatly on Syria though, with Turkey condemning Iran's role in supporting the Syrian regime's eastern Ghouta campaign this year, and Iran condemning Ankara's operation in the mostly Kurdish region of Afrin in Syria. But Turkey and Iran



A KURDISH People's Protection Units (YPG) fighter walks near residents who had fled Tel Abyad, as they reenter Syria from Turkey . (photo credit: REUTERS)

shared concerns over the Kurdistan Regional Government's referendum in September 2017 in Iraq. The rise of Kurdish power between 2015 and 2017 brought together Iraq, Iran, Syria and Turkey on some issues.

In Turkey's view, the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria are part of the PKK, and Ankara has labeled them terrorists. Yet Ankara has watched as the YPG became a partner of the US in Syria and helped form the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which liberated Raqqa from ISIS. The Turkish-backed invasion of Afrin was a way to reduce the YPG's power. Then Ankara set its sights on Manbij in northern Syria, an area the SDF liberated from ISIS in 2016, encouraging the US to create joint patrols with Turkey. The Turkish state-run Anadolu news agency reported on July 20 that the US would provide Ankara with new information on "operatives of the terrorist PKK, their locations and what they are doing." In addition, Turkish media have claimed that after Manbij, Turkey and the US will remove the YPG from "other Syria regions."

A unique set of circumstances enabled different Kurdish groups – primarily the YPG in Syria and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq – to grow in power in the last few years. The KDP held the presidency of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and not only helped defeat ISIS, but filled the vacuum left by retreating Iraqi forces in Kirkuk. It felt secure enough to push a referendum in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. But its gamble resulted in anger from Baghdad, and Baghdad's coalition-trained army, along with

Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias, rolled into Kirkuk in October 2017. Iran and Turkey threatened to close the border and Baghdad closed the airport, clipping the KRG's wings. It took the KRG months to recover even part of what it had lost.

Meanwhile, the YPG had helped defeat ISIS in Syria and gained respect of the international coalition. But by 2018, with ISIS mostly defeated, the US returned to working closely with Turkey, a NATO ally. The US wants to slap sanctions on Iran and wants Turkey to take part in the sanctions. It also fears Turkey turning to Russia. Ankara has used this for leverage in Syria. Turkey has pushed the YPG out of Afrin and has increased its military involvement in northern Iraq, fighting ISIS in the mountainous border region.

Iran, flustered by US sanctions, is also eyeing a Kurdish crackdown. This points to a widespread attempt to weaken Kurds in the region. Kurdish political groups don't get along with each other, but on each front they have lost influence and power. One issue they have faced is that they sought a close alliance with Western powers at a time when the West has tended to become fatigued with the Middle East. With the rise of more authoritarian regimes in the region, the Kurdish groups will now hedge their relations with the West and the local powers.■

IRAN

# LES AYATOLLAHS PEUVENT-ILS TOMBER ?



**MOUVEMENT INÉDIT**  
En signe de protestation contre la dévaluation continue du rial, la monnaie nationale, les commerçants ultraconservateurs du Grand Bazar de Téhéran ont fermé leurs boutiques, lundi 25 juin.

Sous l'un des régimes les plus répressifs du monde, des femmes et des hommes privés des droits élémentaires manifestent depuis plusieurs mois, sur fond d'économie en faillite. **PAR MARTINE GOZLAN**

**C**e sont toujours des images éparses, des vidéos en désordre, des rushes syncopés qui nous parviennent de la République islamique d'Iran. Qu'est-ce qui relie en effet la danse joyeuse d'une adolescente de Téhéran, Maedeh Hojabri, immédiatement arrêtée et contrainte de faire des excuses publiques pour avoir posté sa vidéo sur les réseaux sociaux, les cris de rage des agriculteurs de la région d'Ispahan ou du Khouzestan qui n'ont plus une goutte d'eau douce, ou les rideaux baissés des commerçants du Bazar de Téhéran, ces ultraconservateurs exaspérés par la chute du rial ? Une angoisse générale dans une ambiance de fin de règne. L'attentat déjoué contre le rassemblement des Moudjahidin du peuple à Villepinte le 30 juin, avec l'implication d'un diplomate iranien basé en Autriche, constitue un indice supplémentaire.

## Théocratie rapace

Certes, il y a toujours eu des « troubles » chez les ayatollahs, malgré la répression de la grande révolte de juin 2009, et en dépit de la vision lénifiante entretenue par les très habiles émissaires de Téhéran. Voici, nous disent ces experts, un vaste pays d'une remarquable stabilité dans une région chaotique. A ceci près que la population n'est plus dupe et redescend dans la rue pour crier son indignation devant les coûteuses entreprises militaires qui déstabilisent la Syrie, l'Irak, les frontières nord et sud d'Israël, à travers les bases des Gardiens de la révolution, le Hezbollah et

le Hamas. Cette rancœur s'accumulait depuis des années, au fur et à mesure que s'aggravait le fossé entre les riches protégés du régime et les démunis, classes moyennes comprises.

Le retrait américain de l'accord sur le nucléaire et le retour des sanctions – avec l'interdit sur les importations de pétrole dès le 4 novembre prochain – ont rallumé la mèche de la contestation. En réalité, elle ne s'est jamais éteinte. « *Les Iraniens veulent vivre une vie normale* », souligne un de leurs compatriotes, l'avocat et écrivain Ardavan Amir-Aslani (lire l'entretien p. 26). Une vie digne qui implique la sortie de l'islam politique et la fin d'une théocratie rapace. En mai 2017, lors de la réélection du président Hassan Rohani, nous rappelions dans ces colonnes qu'il s'était engagé à incarner, selon ses propres termes, « *le président des droits humains* ». Le bilan de son premier mandat était à cet égard dramatiquement nul, de la multiplication des exécutions capitales au statut infâme réservé à la femme. L'une des avocates les plus courageuses du pays, Nasrin Sotoudeh, lauréate du prix Sakharov, a été récemment embastillée – une fois de plus – parce qu'elle assurait la défense des femmes qui s'étaient dévoilées en public.

Les Iraniens n'ont pas attendu Donald Trump pour clamer à la face du monde leur volonté d'en finir avec la loi cruelle des ayatollahs. Ils savent que toute intervention extérieure les desservira. Alors que la vingt-cinquième heure va peut-être sonner pour les maîtres pervers et usés du libre peuple perse. ■

## “LE DÉCLIN DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE ISLAMIQUE A COMMENCÉ”

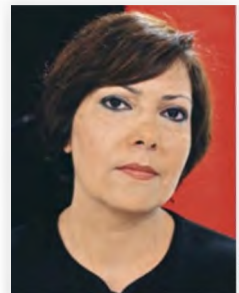
PAR AZADEH KIAN

**Marianne :**  
Quelles sont les dernières nouvelles de Téhéran ?

**Azadeh Kian :** Des commerçants du Bazar, piliers habituels du régime, aux ouvriers, aux paysans, aux minorités ethniques, aux femmes et aux étudiants, tout le monde manifeste. On a vu à Ispahan des rassemblements contre la pénurie d'eau, ensuite la contestation a gagné la province pétrolière du Khouzestan, et ainsi sur tout le territoire. Mais, pour que le régime soit réellement en danger, il faudrait une convergence entre toutes ces luttes, ce qui n'est pas encore le cas.

**Quelle alternative politique sérieuse peut se dessiner ?**

Celle que les Américains et les Saoudiens veulent mettre en avant, à travers l'organisation des Moudjahidine du peuple, est complètement rejetée par les Iraniens. En revanche, les pro-Khatami (l'ancien président réformateur, entre 1997 et 2005) sont en train de pousser une jeune génération réformiste. De l'autre côté, chez les proches du pouvoir, dans l'entourage immédiat d'Ali Khamenei, le Guide de la Révolution, certains vont jusqu'à contester



lbo / Syga

**UNIVERSITAIRE FRANCO-IRANIENNE,** cette professeur de sociologie à l'université Paris-Diderot est l'auteur de *l'Iran, un mouvement sans révolution ?* (Michalon)

très sérieusement le statut de ce même Guide. Tout cela se déroule sur la toile de fond d'une société inquiète, assaillie par des besoins urgents.

**Que signifie le slogan “Mort à la Palestine” scandé dans de nombreuses manifestations ?**

Le peuple a besoin des revenus du pétrole et il ne supporte plus que le régime les dépense pour la Syrie, l'Irak et la Palestine. Au Khouzestan, les gens n'ont même pas d'eau potable : ce sont les footballeurs iraniens qui, à leur retour de la Coupe du monde, ont offert trois machines à filtrer l'eau de mer pour que la population puisse boire ! Ce malheur donne la mesure de la colère qui monte. Le déclin de la République islamique a vraiment commencé. ■

PROPOS RECUELLIS PAR M.G.

**LE RETRAIT AMÉRICAIN DE L'ACCORD SUR LE NUCLÉAIRE ET LE RETOUR DES SANCTIONS ONT RALLUMÉ LA MÈCHE DE LA CONTESTATION, QUI, EN RÉALITÉ, NE S'ÉTAIT JAMAIS ÉTEINTE.**



Bruno Coulier / AFP

# “LE POUVOIR EST DIVISÉ, LE PEUPLE EXASPÉRÉ, LE PAYS EXSANGUE”

Avocat international et essayiste, Ardavan Amir-Aslani dresse le tableau des fractures qui se creusent et des troubles qui s'aggravent dans son pays natal. Entretien.



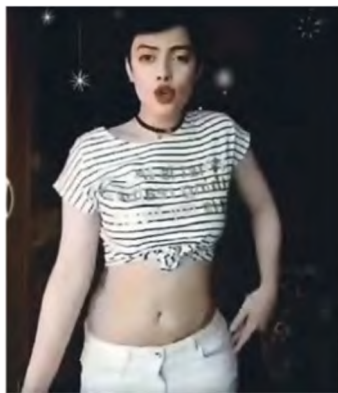
**DERNIER  
OUVRAGE PARU :**  
*De la Perse à l'Iran,*  
l'Archipel, 2018.

**Marianne :** Avec le retour des sanctions et de l'aggravation de la crise économique, jusqu'où la contestation peut-elle aller ?

**Ardavan Amir-Aslani :** Le pays va très mal. Depuis le retrait des Etats-Unis de l'accord nucléaire du 14 juillet 2015, l'économie iranienne est engagée dans une spirale descendante. Depuis un an, le rial, la monnaie iranienne, a perdu 60 % de sa valeur par rapport au dollar, créant la panique au sein de la population qui cherche désespérément à sauver, tant que faire se peut, ses économies. La quasi-totalité des grands groupes étrangers qui envisageaient de faire des investissements majeurs en Iran se sont retirés dont PSA, Total, Vinci, etc. Avec l'approche de la date butoir du 4 novembre et la transposition

des sanctions américaines sur l'énergie, l'Iran se prépare à vendre 1,2 million de barils de pétrole de moins par jour par rapport aux 2 millions précédemment. Cette situation laissera un trou de 3 milliards de dollars par mois dans le budget, soit presque 40 % des recettes pétrolières annuelles du pays. L'Iran risque de se retrouver exsangue d'ici quelques mois !

Les hypermarchés ont connu des ventes records ces derniers mois au fur et à mesure que les gens stockaient des produits alimentaires et toutes sortes d'équipements dans l'anticipation de la pénurie qu'ils voient se profiler à l'horizon. L'arrestation de cette jeune Iranienne de 19 ans qui avait partagé des vidéos de ses danses sans foulard sur Instagram a jeté l'opprobre sur le pouvoir, la population ne comprenant pas l'acharnement du gouvernement face à un fait banal et son inefficacité face à la détresse économique. L'absence d'un cadre réglementaire adéquat et des défaillances dans le secteur bancaire ont entraîné la faillite de quelques établissements financiers, ce qui concourt au sentiment général d'insécurité. La crise grave de l'eau et la sécheresse ainsi que les coupures régulières d'électricité aggravent encore le tableau.



Capture écran

**“L'ARRESTATION DE MAEDEH HOJABRI, cette jeune Iranienne de 19 ans qui avait partagé des vidéos de danse sans foulard sur Instagram, a jeté l'opprobre sur le pouvoir.”**

**“LA POPULATION EST FATIGUÉE DE QUARANTE ANS D'OSTRACISME, DE RÉVOLUTIONS, DE GUERRE ET DE SANCTIONS.”**



**“LA RÉPRESSION entrainera soit une prise du pouvoir par le corps des Gardiens de la révolution, soit une volte-face du gouvernement sur tous les enjeux internationaux qui empoisonnent les relations de Téhéran avec les grandes capitales.”**  
Ci-dessus, à Téhéran, le 30 juin.

Le pays connaît régulièrement des rassemblements de gens en colère. Ces mouvements contestataires n'ont pas encore pris une dimension nationale mais le risque est là. La population est fatiguée de quarante ans d'ostracisme, de révolution, de guerre et de sanctions. Même si la volonté de changement est profonde, les Iraniens n'ont plus envie de connaître les troubles révolutionnaires qu'ils ont connus en 1979. Si le gouvernement n'arrive pas à régler l'isolement croissant de l'Iran et ainsi améliorer le sort quotidien du peuple, les contestations vont s'intensifier et devenir sûrement de plus en plus violentes. La répression entrainera inéluctablement soit une prise du pouvoir par le corps des Gardiens de la révolution, soit une volte-face du gouvernement sur tous les enjeux internationaux qui empoisonnent les relations de Téhéran avec les grandes capitales.

**Que se passe-t-il au sein du régime, voire au sein de la maison du Guide ? Quelles sont les forces qui s'affrontent ?**

Le pouvoir est divisé. Le gouvernement Rohani a perdu toute sa crédibilité et sa légitimité électorale. Il a exagéré les dividendes que l'Iran allait pouvoir retirer de l'accord nucléaire qui est en fait mort-né. Le pays n'a même pas reçu une fraction des 200 milliards de dollars prévus. Cette perte de crédibilité se constate même au sein de la maison du Guide, qui semble vouloir écarter Rohani des tractations que l'Iran mène avec la Russie et la Chine dans l'espoir, totalement illusoire, de compter sur leur aide économique en cette nouvelle période de sanctions. Ainsi, c'est Velayati, le conseiller en relations internationales du Guide, qui est parti pour Moscou et Pékin et non pas Zarif, le ministre des Affaires étrangères. Cette initiative a davantage fragilisé le gouvernement Rohani, tant aux yeux des Iraniens qui n'accordent plus de crédit à ses dires qu'aux yeux des partenaires étrangers qui peuvent légitimement s'interroger sur l'opportunité de poursuivre un dialogue avec ce gouvernement.

**Avec la poursuite des affrontements en Syrie, l'escalade verbale et militaire se poursuit entre Jérusalem et Téhéran. Peut-on craindre un conflit ouvert ou va-t-on au contraire vers un apaisement négocié par la Russie ? Y a-t-il des contacts secrets entre Israël et la République islamique ?**

Les Iraniens ont vite compris que l'administration Trump est profondément alignée sur les positions israéliennes et saoudiennes. Ils savent que le moindre faux-pas de leur part rencontrera une vive riposte de la part de Jérusalem. C'est ainsi qu'au lendemain du retrait américain de l'accord nucléaire, le 8 mai dernier, les Iraniens, trop proches de la frontière israélienne dans le Golan syrien, ont vu leurs positions bombardées par Tsahal et se sont repliés aujourd'hui au-

delà des 70 km de cette frontière démontrant de la sorte leur volonté de désescalade. Les rumeurs parlent d'une rencontre indirecte, par l'entremise des Jordaniens, entre les Israéliens et les Iraniens à Amman afin justement d'empêcher tout dérapage.

#### **Finalement, le régime peut-il tomber ?**

Il y a un vrai désir de changement de la population iranienne qui ne s'identifie plus avec les valeurs incar-

nées par la théocratie au pouvoir. Soixante-dix pour cent des Iraniens ont moins de 40 ans. Cette jeunesse, majoritaire dans le pays, très éduquée et ouverte sur le monde via Internet n'a connu, en quarante ans de République islamique, que des restrictions au niveau des libertés sociales et le chômage. Les Iraniens veulent mettre un terme à leur isolement et tout simplement vivre une vie normale loin des menaces de frappes aériennes et de la débâcle économique. Le pouvoir en est

conscient, d'où les divisions en son sein entre les pragmatiques et les idéologues. Si les idéologues remportent la bataille, la chute du pouvoir sera inéluctable mais dans un bain de sang. Si les pragmatiques devaient prévaloir, l'Iran connaîtra une évolution rapide vers un mode de vie séculier et réintégrera sa juste place au sein de la communauté des nations. Mais le régime est-il réformable de l'intérieur ou non ? L'avenir nous le dira assez vite. ■

PROPOS RECUELLIS PAR M.G.

L'Orient  
LE JOUR

24 juillet 2018

## "Etat fasciste" contre "sombre dictature" : guerre des mots entre Erdogan et Netanyahu

OLJ/AFP 24/07/2018  
<https://www.lorientjour.com>

**TURQUIE-ISRAËL - Cet échange, le plus houleux entre les deux dirigeants depuis plusieurs mois, porte sur une loi en Israël définissant ce pays comme "l'Etat-nation du peuple juif"**

"Etat fasciste" contre "sombre dictature" : le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan et le Premier ministre israélien Benjamin Netanyahu ont croisé le fer mardi au sujet d'une loi en Israël définissant ce pays comme "l'Etat-nation du peuple juif".

Cet échange, le plus houleux entre les deux dirigeants depuis plusieurs mois, survient sur fond de tensions récurrentes entre la Turquie et Israël qui menacent de faire dérailler le fragile processus de normalisation des relations entre les deux pays entamé il y a deux ans.

Ardent défenseur de la cause palestinienne, M. Erdogan a ouvert les hostilités mardi en dénonçant pour la première fois et de façon virulente le texte adopté jeudi par le Parlement israélien, qu'Ankara considère comme "discriminatoire".

"Cette mesure a montré (...) qu'Israël était l'Etat le plus sioniste, le plus fasciste et le plus raciste au monde", a lancé M. Erdogan lors d'un discours devant son groupe parlementaire à Ankara, tandis que

des députés criaient "maudit soit Israël".

La réponse de M. Netanyahu ne s'est pas fait attendre : "Erdogan massacre des Syriens et des Kurdes et emprisonne des dizaines de milliers de Turcs (...) Sous son pouvoir, la Turquie devient une sombre dictature", a répliqué le chef du gouvernement israélien.

Ce regain de tension survient quelques jours après le vote par le Parlement israélien d'une loi qui désigne "l'Etat d'Israël comme l'Etat national du peuple juif où celui-ci applique son droit naturel, culturel, religieux, historique", en précisant que "le droit d'exercer l'autodétermination au sein de l'Etat d'Israël est réservé uniquement au peuple juif".

Ce texte, qui stipule également que l'hébreu est la langue officielle d'Israël alors que l'arabe n'a plus qu'un "statut spécial", a suscité des accusations de "racisme" à l'encontre de la minorité arabe qui représente 17,5% de la population, majoritairement juive.

La Turquie a été l'un des plus virulents détracteurs de cette loi qui a suscité plusieurs critiques dans le monde musulman, Ankara accusant les dirigeants israéliens de vouloir mettre en place un "Etat d'apartheid".

#### **"Esprit d'Hitler"**

"L'esprit d'Hitler qui a entraîné le monde dans une grande catastrophe a de nouveau fleuri parmi certains dirigeants israéliens", a déclaré M. Erdogan, coutumier des comparaisons entre l'Etat israélien et le Troisième Reich responsable de la mort de millions de juifs.

Rejetant les critiques, M. Netanyahu a soutenu mardi



Le président turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan a qualifié mardi Israël d'Etat "le plus fasciste et raciste au monde" après le vote la semaine dernière par le Parlement israélien d'une loi définissant le pays comme "l'Etat-nation du peuple juif". Photo d'archives/AFP

qu'Israël défendait "avec constance l'égalité des droits de tous les citoyens avant et après le vote de cette loi".

"Le Premier ministre d'un Etat d'apartheid sioniste bâti sur le racisme, l'occupation et le déplacement (de populations) est mal placé pour donner des leçons sur les droits de l'Homme à notre président", a répliqué le porte-parole de M. Erdogan, Ibrahim Kalin. Le porte-parole du président turc a qualifié la nouvelle loi israélienne de "tentative éhontée d'institutionnaliser la discrimination contre le peuple palestinien".

Cet échange illustre la fragilité des relations entre la Turquie et Israël, deux alliés importants des Etats-Unis au Proche-Orient.

Ces turbulences diplomatiques risquent de saborder la fragile normalisation des relations entamée en 2016 entre les deux pays, après une grave crise déclenchée par un

raid israélien meurtrier contre un navire d'une ONG turque se dirigeant vers la bande de Gaza en 2010.

Après plusieurs mois d'accalmie dans la foulée de l'accord de normalisation, les tensions ont fait leur retour, notamment après le transfert par les Etats-Unis de leur ambassade de Tel-Aviv à Jérusalem en mai dernier.

Ankara a sommé en mai l'ambassadeur d'Israël en Turquie de quitter le pays provisoirement après la mort de plusieurs dizaines de Palestiniens tués par des soldats israéliens à la frontière avec la bande de Gaza, lors de manifestations contre le transfert de l'ambassade américaine.

Le président turc, fervent défenseur de la cause palestinienne, avait à cette occasion accusé Israël de "terrorisme d'Etat" et de "génocide". ■



# How Israel grabbed Iran's nuclear secrets

TEL AVIV

Documents netted in heist indicate a program larger than was once suspected

BY DAVID E. SANGER AND RONEN BERGMAN

The Mossad agents moving in on a warehouse in a drab commercial district of Tehran knew exactly how much time they had to disable the alarms, break through two doors, cut through dozens of giant safes and get out of the city with a half-ton of secret materials: six hours and 29 minutes.

The morning shift of Iranian guards would arrive around 7 a.m., a year of surveillance of the warehouse by Mossad, the Israeli spy agency, had revealed, and the agents were under orders to leave before 5 a.m. to have enough time to escape. Once the Iranian custodians arrived, it would be instantly clear that someone had stolen much of the country's clandestine nuclear archive, documenting years of work on atomic weapons, warhead designs and production plans.

The agents arrived that night, Jan. 31, with torches that burned at least 3,600 degrees, hot enough, as they knew from intelligence collected during the planning of the operation, to cut through the 32 Iranian-made safes. But they left many untouched, going first for the ones containing the black binders, which contained the most critical designs. When time was up, they fled for the border, hauling some 50,000 pages and 163 compact discs of memos, videos and plans.

In late April, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced the results of the heist, after giving President Trump a private briefing at the White House. He said it was another reason Mr. Trump should abandon the 2015 nuclear deal, arguing that the documents proved Iranian deception and an intent to resume bomb production. A few days later, Mr. Trump followed through on his longstanding threat to pull out of the accord — a move that continues to strain relations between the United States and European allies.

Last week, at the invitation of the Israeli government, three reporters, including one from The New York Times, were shown key documents from the trove. Many confirmed what inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency, in report after report, had sus-



The Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, presenting Iranian nuclear program documents in Tel Aviv. He says the trove proves the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran was naïve.

pected: Despite Iranian insistence that its program was for peaceful purposes, the country had worked in the past to systematically assemble everything it needed to produce atomic weapons.

"It's quite good," Robert Kelley, a nuclear engineer and former inspector for the agency, said in Vienna, after being shown some of the fruits of the document theft. "The papers show these guys were working on nuclear bombs."

There is no way to independently confirm the authenticity of the documents, most of which were at least 15 years old, dating from the time when an effort called Project Amad was ordered halted and some of the nuclear work moved deeper under cover. The Israelis hand-picked the documents shown to the reporters, meaning that exculpatory material could have been left out. They said some material had been withheld to avoid providing intelligence to others seeking to make weapons.

The Iranians have maintained that the entire trove is fraudulent — another elaborate scheme by the Israelis to get sanctions reimposed on the country. But American and British intelligence officials, after their own review, which included comparing the documents to some they had previously obtained from spies and defectors, said they believed it was genuine.

This week, Iran denied Israel's claim as "laughably absurd." "Iran has always been clear that creating indiscriminate weapons of mass destruction is against what we stand for as a country, and the notion that Iran would abandon any kind of sensitive information in some

random warehouse in Tehran is laughably absurd," a spokesman for the Iranian mission, Alireza Miryousefi, said in an emailed statement.

From what the Israelis showed to the reporters in a secure intelligence facility, a few things are clear.

The Iranian program to build a nuclear weapon was almost certainly larger, more sophisticated and better organized than most suspected in 2003, when Project Amad was declared ended, according to outside nuclear experts consulted by The Times. Iran had foreign help, though Israeli officials held back any documents indicating where it came from. Much was clearly from Pakistan, but officials said other foreign experts were also involved — though they may not have been working for their governments.

The documents detailed the challenges of integrating a nuclear weapon into a warhead for the Shahab-3, an Iranian missile. One document proposed sites for possible underground nuclear tests, and described plans to build an initial batch of five weapons. None were built, possibly because the Iranians feared being caught, or because a campaign by American and Israeli intelligence agencies to sabotage the effort, with cyberattacks and disclosures of key facilities, took its toll.

David Albright, a former inspector who runs the Institute for Science and International Security, said in an interview that the documents contained "great information."

"Iran conducted many more high-explosive tests related to nuclear weapons

development than previously known," he told Congress last month.

But the archive also shows that after a burst of activity, a political mandate delivered at the end of 2003 slowed the program dramatically, just as American officials had concluded in a 2007 intelligence report. Israel, which has its own undeclared nuclear program, has long claimed that the Iranian program continued after 2003, and some documents show senior officials in Tehran's program — including two who were later assassinated, presumably by Israeli agents — debating how to split it into overt and covert elements.

One of the scientists warned that work on neutrons that create the chain reaction for a nuclear explosion must be hidden. "Neutrons' research could not be considered 'overt' and needs to be concealed," his notes read. "We cannot excuse such activities as defensive. Neutron activities are sensitive, and we have no explanation for them." That caution, the documents show, came from Masoud Ali Mohammadi, an Iranian nuclear physicist at the University of Tehran, who was assassinated in January 2010.

Mr. Netanyahu argues that the trove proves that the 2015 agreement, with its sunset clauses allowing the Iranians to produce nuclear fuel again after 2030, was naïve.

The fact that the Iranians went to such lengths to preserve what they had learned, and hid the archive's contents from international inspectors in an undeclared site despite an agreement to reveal past research, is evidence of their future intent, he has said.

But the same material could also be interpreted as a strong argument for maintaining and extending the nuclear accord as long as possible. The deal deprived the Iranians of the nuclear fuel they would need to turn the designs into reality.

Former members of the Obama administration, who negotiated the deal, say the archive proves what they had suspected all along: that Iran had advanced fuel capability, warhead designs and a plan to build them rapidly. That was why they negotiated the accord, which forced Iran to ship 97 percent of its nuclear fuel out of the country. Tehran would never have agreed to a permanent ban, they said.

The archive captures the program at a moment in time — a moment 15 years ago, before tensions accelerated, before the United States and Israel attacked Iran's nuclear centrifuges with a cyber-weapon, before an additional underground enrichment center was built and discovered.

Today, despite Mr. Trump's decision to exit the deal with Iran, the agreement remains in place. The Iranians have not

**"Iran conducted many more high-explosive tests related to nuclear weapons development than previously known."**



**Photographs that Israeli officials said were stolen from Iran's nuclear archive appear to show a metal chamber constructed to conduct high-explosive experiments.**

yet resumed enrichment or violated its terms, according to international inspectors. But if sanctions resume, and more Western companies leave Iran, it is possible that Iranian leaders will decide to resume nuclear fuel production.

The warehouse the Israelis penetrated was put into use only after the 2015 accord was reached with the United States, European powers, Russia and China. That pact granted broad rights to the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit suspected nuclear sites, including on military bases.

So the Iranians, Israeli officials said in interviews, systematically went about collecting thousands of pages spread around the country documenting how to build a weapon, how to fit it on a missile and how to detonate it. They consolidated them at the warehouse, in a commercial district with no past relationship to the nuclear program, and far from the declared archives of the Ministry of Defense. There were no round-the-clock guards or anything else that would tip off neighbors, or spies, that something unusual was happening there.

What the Iranians did not know was that the Mossad was documenting the collection effort, filming the moves for two years, since the relocation began in February 2016. Last year, the spies began planning a heist that one senior Israeli intelligence official said bore a strong resemblance to George Clooney's adventures in "Ocean's 11."

In most Mossad operations, spies aim to penetrate a facility and photograph or copy material without traces. But in this case, the Mossad chief, Yossi Cohen, ordered that the material be stolen outright. That would drastically shorten the time that the agents — many, if not all, of them Iranians — spent inside the building. But the Israelis wanted to be able to counter Iranian claims that the material was forged and offer it up for examination by international groups.

Clearly, the Israeli spies had inside help. They had learned which of the 32 safes held the most important information. They watched the habits of the workers. They studied the alarm system, so that it would appear to be work-

ing even though it would not alert anyone when the agents arrived around 10:30 p.m.

For all the cinematics of the raid, the immediate aftermath was absent much drama. There was no chase, said Israeli officials, who would not disclose whether the documents left by land, air or sea — though an escape from the coast, just a few hours' drive from Tehran, appears the least risky.

Fewer than two dozen agents took part in the break-in. Fearing that some of them would be caught, the Israelis removed the materials on several different routes. At exactly 7 a.m., as the Mossad expected, a guard arrived and discovered that the doors and safes were broken. He sounded the alarm, and the Iranian authorities soon began a nationwide campaign to locate the burglars.

The effort yielded nothing. And until Mr. Netanyahu's speech, the Iranians never said a word in public about what had happened.

Among the most fascinating elements of the archive are pictures taken inside what were once key facilities in Iran, before the equipment was dismantled in anticipation of international inspections. One set of photos taken by the Iranians appears to show a giant metal chamber built to conduct high-explosive experiments, in a building at Parchin, a military base near Tehran. Intelligence agencies had long suspected nuclear activity at the Parchin site, and Iran had refused to allow international inspectors in, saying that as a military base, it was off limits to inspectors and not part of any nuclear experiments.

By the time the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Yukiya Amano, was finally permitted to visit the site in 2015, it was empty, though the agency's report indicated that it looked as if equipment had been removed. The photos indicate that is exactly what happened: They show a large chamber that nuclear experts say is tailor-made for the kind of experimental activity that the international inspectors were looking for. It was part of a larger, previously known effort: Satellite photographs show that Parchin was so sanitized before the inspectors' arrival that tons of soil in the area had been removed to eliminate any traces of nuclear contamination.

The chamber appears to be part of neutron experiments that strongly point to an effort to build nuclear weapons. Nuclear explosions start when fast-moving particles known as neutrons split atoms of nuclear fuel in two, producing chain reactions that release more neutrons and enormous bursts of energy. At the core of an atom bomb, a device known as a neutron initiator — or sometimes a spark plug — creates the initial wave of speeding neutrons.

The Iranian papers repeatedly mention a specific substance used for making neutron initiators: uranium deuteride. Experts say it has no civil or military use other than making nuclear arms. ●



JULY 23, 2018

# Kurdish security neutralizes three gunmen in attack on Erbil Governorate

Sangar Ali July 23-2018  
www.kurdistan24.net

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) - Security forces killed three militants as an hours-long siege Monday morning on the Erbil Governorate building came to an end, a Kurdish security source confirmed early afternoon.**

The gunmen injured a policeman and entered the building around 7:00 am local time before official working hours began, the source explained.

Kurdistan 24 obtained CCTV footage of Monday's attack on the Erbil Governorate which shows the three suspects entering the building.

Soon after they stormed the office, Kurdish security forces surrounded the area and launched an operation to clear the building of any threat.

Tariq Nouri, General Director of Erbil Security, told reporters in a press conference soon after the siege ended that the three attackers had been identified as Erbil natives and residents.

"The motive behind the attack is unclear. It may or may not be a terrorist attack," Tahir Abdullah, Erbil deputy governor, told Kurdistan 24.

Barzan Qassab, the deputy director of Erbil security, however, said the attack was "certainly a terrorist act."



Kurdish security entering the Erbil Governorate building following an attack in the area, July 23, 2018. (Photo: Kurdistan 24) Erbil Kurdistan Iraq

Four security members were injured in the raid to retake the building, Qassab said.

An investigation into the incident has already begun.

The militants used light weaponry, and a gunfire exchanged between them and security forces went on for hours before the siege came to an end at 12:30 pm local time. All gunmen involved were reportedly killed.

A man by the name of Farhan Elya who worked in the Erbil Governorate building for years serving tea died of injuries sustained during the attack. He was rescued and taken to the hospital but unfortunately did not make it, a medical source told Kurdistan 24.

Erbil, the capital of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region, is known to be safe and secure, with very few attacks taking place over the past decade. ♦



JULY 22, 2018

# Protesters in Iraq call on government to end attacks by security forces

Karzan Sulaivany July 22-2018  
www.kurdistan24.net

**ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – Protesters in Iraq's Basra have called on the government to respect their rights and hold accountable those security forces which use force against demonstrators.**

As protests across southern Iraqi provinces enter the third week, people in Basra on Sunday called on the central government in Baghdad to end its use of force against demonstrators who argue they are exercising fundamental human rights.

Reporting from Basra, Kurdistan 24 correspondent Shivan Jabary spoke to several demonstrators who complained that security forces are using excessive force and detaining people merely because they are on the streets calling for their demands to be heard.

"This is the blood of a protester; he was killed on Saturday by security forces," a man holding a blood-stained shirt told Kurdistan 24.

"We are here calling for our rights; we are call-



*Iraqi riot police prevent protesters from storming the Basra Provincial Council building during a demonstration in the southern oil-hub, July 15, 2018. (Photo: Associated Press)*

ing on [Iraqi Prime Minister Haider] al-Abadi to meet our demands; we are calling for basic services (electricity, water); come kill us, we want our rights!" Another protester exclaimed.

Baghdad claims the weeks-long demonstrations are illegal because protesters "don't have offi-

cial permits."

On Friday, Amnesty International said Iraqi authorities had intentionally cut off internet access shortly before security forces attacked, and in some cases killed, protesters.

Internet service has been largely suspended, and social media sites blocked since demonstrations against a lack of basic services, unemployment, and poor living conditions began on July 8.

"The parliament has not done anything for us yet," one protester in Basra told Kurdistan 24 on Sunday. "We have called on the government to meet our demands for over four years. We want this failed system to leave, and for our people to be free."

At least 12 people have been killed and hundreds of others injured since the protests began. ♦

# Le ton monte dangereusement entre Trump et l'Iran

La tension culmine depuis la décision de Trump, en mai, de dénoncer l'accord nucléaire conclu en 2015.

PHILIPPE GÉLIE  @geliefig  
CORRESPONDANT À WASHINGTON

**DIPLOMATIE** Cela a les accents d'une déclaration de guerre, mais elle ne procède pas d'un conseil d'état-major ou d'une réunion de crise à l'ONU. Il s'agit d'un tweet rageur de Donald Trump, écrit en lettres majuscules lundi à 01h24 du matin, au retour d'un week-end de golf dans le New Jersey. « Ce n'est pas une diversion » par rapport à la polémique sur sa rencontre avec Poutine, a souligné la porte-parole de la Maison-Blanche, Sarah Sanders.

« Au président iranien Rohani : NE MENACEZ JAMAIS PLUS LES ÉTATS-UNIS OU VOUS PAIEREZ DES CONSÉQUENCES COMME PEU EN ONT CONNU À TRAVERS L'HISTOIRE. NOUS NE SOMMES PLUS UN PAYS QUI TOLÈRE VOS PAROLES DÉMENTES DE VIOLENCE ET DE MORT. FAITES ATTENTION! » Ce tweet d'artillerie lourde se voulait une réplique à la déclaration du président de la République islamique, dimanche, recommandant à son homologue américain de « ne pas jouer avec la queue du lion, il en viendrait à le regretter. [...] L'Amérique devrait savoir que la paix avec l'Iran est la mère de toutes les paix et que la guerre avec l'Iran est la mère de toutes les guerres ». Hassan Rohani anticipait lui-même sur un discours du secrétaire d'État, Mike Pompeo, prononcé dimanche soir en Californie, dans lequel il a promis le soutien des États-Unis aux Iraniens qui se rebellent contre le régime.

Cette rhétorique incendiaire s'inscrit dans un contexte de grande tension depuis la décision de Trump, en mai dernier, de dénoncer l'accord nucléaire conclu en 2015. Le rétablissement des premières sanctions contre le secteur bancaire iranien est prévu le 4 août. Un deuxième volet de mesures punitives s'attaquera en novembre aux exportations iraniennes de pétrole, que Washington veut réduire à néant. « Nous nous concentrons sur les pays qui importent du pétrole brut iranien afin de ramener ces transferts pratiquement à zéro d'ici au 4 novembre », a déclaré dimanche soir le chef de la diplomatie. Devant cette menace, Rohani a menacé de perturber le trafic maritime dans le golfe arabo-persique, une suggestion approuvée par l'ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Le spectre d'une guerre du



HO/AFP

L'Amérique devrait savoir que la paix avec l'Iran est la mère de toutes les paix et que la guerre avec l'Iran est la mère de toutes les guerres

HASSAN ROHANI,  
PRÉSIDENT  
DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE  
ISLAMIQUE D'IRAN

pétrole a fait monter lundi le cours du baril de brut au plus haut depuis trois ans.

## « Conséquences jamais vues »

Début juillet, Trump avait tancé les membres de l'Opec sur Twitter à propos des prix trop élevés du pétrole et du gaz : « Leur monopole ne fait rien pour aider, ils poussent même les prix à la hausse alors que les États-Unis défendent beaucoup de leurs membres pour très peu d'argent. BAISEZ LES PRIX MAINTENANT! » Le cours du carburant à la pompe est considéré comme un indicateur du bien-être économique des électeurs américains, qui se rendront aux urnes le 6 novembre pour des législatives où Donald Trump joue sa majorité. La menace de « conséquences jamais vues » vise à prévenir Téhéran que Washington ne tolérera pas de représailles à sa propre offensive. « J'ai parlé plusieurs fois au président ces derniers jours et il m'a dit que si l'Iran fait quoi que ce soit de négatif, il paiera un prix comme peu de pays en ont payé auparavant », a insisté lundi le conseiller à la sécurité nationale, John Bolton.

Fin mai, dans son premier discours de



Donald Trump lors d'une réunion de cabinet, mercredi, à la Maison-Blanche, à Washington. NICHOLAS KAMM/AFP

politique étrangère, Mike Pompeo avait dressé une liste de douze exigences à remplir par Téhéran, de la neutralisation de son programme nucléaire et de ses missiles à l'arrêt de toute déstabilisation régionale. Parallèlement, il annonçait « les sanctions les plus dures de l'histoire », qui forceraient l'Iran à « batailler pour maintenir son économie en vie ». Ces sanctions, susceptibles d'aggraver le mécontentement qui fait descendre la population dans la rue depuis janvier, conduisent l'Administration américaine à passer à l'autre volet de son travail de sappe : le soutien aux dissidents. Le réseau public BBG (Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, etc.) s'appête à développer une chaîne en farsi 24 heures sur 24, diffusée sur tous les supports existants (télé, radio, Internet), « afin que les Iraniens sachent que l'Amérique est à leurs côtés », dit Pompeo. Un effort de propagande « susceptible de fomenter l'insoumission », traduit le *Washington Post*.

Officiellement, l'Administration Trump vise « un changement de comportement » et non un changement de régime. Mais la frontière est mince lorsque Washington déclare une guerre économique et idéologique totale aux mollahs « hypocrites », qui « s'enrichissent comme une mafia » sur le dos du peuple et lui font vivre « un cauchemar ». ■

# Kurds discouraged by hard-liners in Turkey's new Cabinet

Turkey's new government looks too much like the old one to offer Kurds much hope for a peaceful political resolution.



Mahmut Bozarlan  
July 23, 2018  
/www.al-monitor.com

**DIYARBAKIR, Turkey** — Turkish President Abdullah Gul told journalists in 2009, "Some great things are going to happen on the Kurdish problem soon."

Everyone was excited by what appeared to be a door finally opening to resolving Turkey's volatile relationship with the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey and the United States. Four years later, a message from PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan from Imrali prison to mass crowds at Nowruz celebrations amplified hopes when he sensationally called for giving up guns and pursuing a political solution. Ocalan is serving a life sentence for treason.

Then an unexpected accord was reached in February 2015 at Istanbul's Dolmabahçe Palace between the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP) and government officials. The deal generated widespread optimism that a solution was imminent. But President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced he would not recognize the Dolmabahçe Accord one month later. Now the resumption of clashes, trench warfare in towns and Erdogan's declaration of a state of emergency have wiped out any hope for a solution.

The prevailing opinion was that Erdogan's softening Kurdish policy was causing him to lose support in parts of western Turkey where anti-Kurdish sentiment ran high, and that's why he reverted to a policy of force. The government, which kept saying it was in a struggle against terror, resisted any opening to possibly solving the Kurdish issue and even discarded what minor progress had been made. It seemed the Kurdish issue could no longer be even mentioned.

Debates eventually resumed just prior to the elections held last month. At that time, one of two outcomes seemed likely: The government would change or Erdogan would be re-elected, become even stronger and solve the issue. Erdogan did win and Kurds again turned their attention toward Ankara, wondering if any solution was in the making. But discussions were quickly shelved when the hard-line interior minister was reappointed and a hawkish senior general was named as the new defense minister.

"If there had been changes in these two ministries and the language of war, threats and insults had been abandoned, there could have been hope for a solution," but that can't happen with the same people in charge and the same forces at work, Diyarbakir citizen Kadir Karagoz told Al-Monitor.

Ayhan Bilgen, a parliament member and HDP deputy who won 52% of the votes in the mainly Kurdish southeast, said finding a resolution is essential, but there is not enough political will for it. He told Al-Monitor, "Turkey may delay the Kurdish issue, but that will make the issue even more complicat-



Supporters of Turkey's main pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party attend a rally, Diyarbakir, Turkey, June 20, 2018. REUTERS/Sertac Kayar

ed, more bloody. There is no other way but to solve this problem [quickly]."

Bayram Bozyel, deputy secretary-general of the Kurdistan Socialist Party, also believes the new administration has no intention of solving the problem peacefully. He said the appointment of hard-liners to the new Cabinet — including Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu and Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, a former chief of staff — proves his point.

"The current interior minister is a politician who made his career by opposing the Kurds. To reappoint him as the minister of interior in the new Cabinet tells us that the new government approves the current policy and wants to continue with it," Bozyel told Al-Monitor.

"The president immediately mobilized his new powers after the elections, which means he is after absolute power, immune to audit by the legislature, the judiciary and the media. These are signs that the situation can only get worse for the Kurds," he added.

Mehmet Vural, chairman of Dicle Social Research Center in Diyarbakir, is also among the pessimists, but he said the new administration can't just ignore the situation. He told Al-Monitor, "Today's regime is far from a solution," but that it must end its intransigence over the Kurdish issue. "There is no other way out. How long can they delay a solution?"

Vural went on, "There are no Kurds in the government, [only a] minor presence in the parliament. The current regime doesn't have the will or the intention to tackle the issue. Kurds are citizens and partners in this country. No matter how hard the regime resists, the Kurdish issue won't go away."

Like the others, Vural is even more pessimistic when he looks at the Kurd-free Cabinet. "There is no one who identifies himself as a Kurd. To the contrary, there are members known to be hostile to Kurds who see the issue only in terms of terror. If you ask me, the current government doesn't even acknowledge the existence of the issue, never mind searching for a solution."

Until now, the government has blamed the delays in resolving the Kurdish issue to the PKK's violence, repeating, "A solution can't be discussed with guns in their hands." But even though over the past couple of years, the PKK has suffered military setbacks that have left it no other option than to seek a political solution, one is no closer to materializing. ♦

Mahmut Bozarlan is based in Diyarbakir, the central city of Turkey's mainly Kurdish southeast. A journalist since 1996, he has worked for the mass-circulation daily Sabah, the NTV news channel, Al Jazeera Turk and Agence France-Presse (AFP)

REUTERS

## Israel's Netanyahu accuses Erdogan of 'massacring Syrians and Kurds'

July 24, 2018 JERUSALEM (Reuters)

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday rebuked Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan, accusing him of massacring Syrians and Kurds after Erdogan strongly criticized Israel.

Erdogan said a new Israeli law declaring that only Jews have



the right of self-determination in Israel legitimized oppression and showed that Israel is a fascist and racist country.

Netanyahu replied: "Erdogan is massacring the Syrians and the Kurds and is jailing thousands of his own people. This great democrat's criticism of the Nation State Law is the greatest compliment it could be paid." ●

REUTERS

# Islamic State makes comeback in Iraq with switch to guerrilla tactics

July 24, 2018/ BAQUBA, Iraq (Reuters) Ahmed Aboulencin

**MONTHS AFTER IRAQ declared victory over Islamic State, its fighters are making a comeback with a scatter-gun campaign of kidnap and killing.**

With its dream of a Caliphate in the Middle East now dead, Islamic State has switched to hit-and-run attacks aimed at undermining the government in Baghdad, according to military, intelligence and government officials interviewed by Reuters.

Islamic State was reinventing itself months before Baghdad announced in December that it had defeated the group, according to intelligence officials who said it would adopt guerrilla tactics when it could no longer hold territory.

Iraq has now seen an increase in kidnappings and killings, mainly in the provinces of Kirkuk, Diyala, and Salahuddin, since it held an election in May, indicating the government will come under renewed pressure from a group that once occupied a third of the country during a three-year reign of terror.

Last month saw at least 83 cases of kidnap, murder or both in the three provinces. Most occurred on a highway connecting Baghdad to Kirkuk province. In May, the number of such incidents in that area was 30, while in March it was seven, according to Hisham al-Hashimi, an expert on Islamic State who advises the Iraqi government.

In one incident on June 17, three Shi'ite men were kidnapped by Islamic State militants disguised as policemen at a checkpoint on the highway. Ten days later their mutilated corpses were discovered, rigged with explosives to kill anyone who found them.

Speaking in the Shi'ite holy city of Kerbala surrounded by children wearing photos of their slain fathers around their necks, Bassem Khudair, a relative of the men, said security forces were uncooperative.

He had implored the soldiers who found the men's bullet-ridden car to pursue the kidnappers but was refused.

"We went alone, bearing personal responsibility, as three of our own had been taken and we couldn't just watch," he said. "Six of us, all civilians, walked for about 10 or 12 kilometers. We found their documents scattered on the ground as we walked."

The next day, he received a phone call from his brother. The men were alive but held by Islamic State. One of the kidnappers had said they would be executed if the government did not release all female Sunni prisoners.

The kidnapper then called Khudair daily. Khudair informed the government but none of Iraq's intelligence agencies offered to trace the caller's location, he said.

Ten days later, the kidnapper told Khudair the men were dead. Military commanders in the provinces of Diyala and Salahuddin ducked responsibility for retrieving the bodies.

Diyala Provincial Council Chairman Ali al-Dani said the advantage currently lay with Islamic State. "The terrorists now are moving in small groups that are hard to track. Intelligence work is needed," he said.

"The situation is confusing, and the reason is the chaos within the security forces. There isn't one command leading security in the province. This strengthens Daesh," said Salahuddin Provincial Council Chairman Ahmed al-Kareem, using a pejorative term for Islamic State.

That kind of disarray among the security forces has allowed Islamic State to stage a comeback, according to military, police, intelligence, and local elected officials.

They said poor coordination, meager support from the central govern-



Children hold pictures of their fathers, who were killed by Islamic State militants at Kirkuk road, in Kerbala, Iraq July 5, 2018 REUTERS/Abdullah Dhiaa al-Deen

ment, and a culture of avoiding responsibility are hindering efforts to contain the group, which continues to stage a steady stream of lower-level attacks in addition to the spike in kidnap and murder.

A military spokesman did not respond to phone calls and written requests for comment. The U.S.-led coalition fighting Islamic State said in a statement that it "has no safe haven in Iraq".

## HIT AND RUN

The militants have regrouped in the Hemrin mountain range in the northeast, which extends from Diyala, on the border with Iran, crossing northern Salahuddin and southern Kirkuk, and overlooks Iraq's main highway. Officials describe the area as a "triangle of death".

Military and intelligence officials gave varying estimates of how many Islamic State fighters remain active in Iraq.

Hashimi puts the number at more than 1,000, with around 500 in desert areas and the rest in the mountains.

Al Qaeda once held sway over most of Iraq's Sunni areas until it was beaten by U.S. and Iraqi troops and their tribal allies during the "surge" campaign of 2006-2007.

Its remnants hid in the desert between Syria and Iraq and later turned into Islamic State. Some officials fear an even more radical group could emerge if there are gaps in security.

"Filth wandering the desert for a loaf of bread is what they are," said an intelligence official in Tikrit, the Salahuddin provincial capital. Fighters are resorting to Al Qaeda's tactics: quick attacks then retreating into the desert.

Even though they possess machine guns, anti-tank weapons and mines, the militants cannot penetrate cities because they no longer enjoy support among those Sunnis who once sympathized with them, said Eid Khalaf, Salahuddin's deputy chief of police.

"They can't get food or weapons from citizens," he said. "Their operations are primitive; they can't send a car bomb into a city."

Each Islamic State cell contains between three and five fighters, said Diyala Operations Commander Lieutenant General Muzher al-Azawi. He said there were no more than 75 fighters in the province.

"They hide in the mountains, making it hard to find them. They plant explosives, use hit-and-run tactics, and snipers. They set up fake checkpoints for kidnappings," he said.

## 'CITIES WILL FALL'

Numerous attempts to track down and kill Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi have failed, and his fighters are still active in other

Arab states.

In Syria, Islamic State still holds some territory but has suffered militarily. In Egypt, it is concentrated in the sparsely populated northern Sinai desert. It holds no territory but conducts hit-and-run attacks.

Islamic State has tried to rebuild in Libya through mobile units in the desert and sleeper cells in northern cities.

The group has exploited the ethnic and sectarian divide in Iraq. Iraqi and Kurdish forces fought together against Islamic State. Now ties are strained over a Kurdish bid for independence last year which Baghdad stifled.

Lack of coordination has caused a security vacuum in disputed territories, from which Iraqi forces dislodged the Kurds, creating opportunities for Islamic State.

“Are we expected to go into Diyala and help them clear the area then

withdraw again? We are not being attacked in those areas, Iraqi forces are. We are not there, they expelled us,” said a Kurdish security official.

Sunni tribesmen helped U.S. and Iraqi forces turn the tide in the war against al Qaeda. Local tribes now say they need help as Islamic State claws its way back.

“We know these areas better than the security forces and at least 280 of us have been kidnapped or killed,” said Shammar tribal chief Ali Nawaf.

Last month, militants drove into a village inhabited by Shammar tribesmen and kidnapped 30 men, he said. The next day, eight bodies were found tied up and blindfolded. Nawaf says he has 1,400 men ready to fight but they need help from the government in Baghdad.

“Either the government sends more forces, or we raise Daesh flags. If we don't plug this hole now, entire cities will fall,” Nawaf said. ●



26 JUILLET 2018

## Trump menace la Turquie de sanctions si elle ne libère pas un pasteur américain

Le dossier de ce pasteur accusé par Ankara de terrorisme empoisonne les relations entre les Etats-Unis et la Turquie.

Par LIBERATION, avec AFP  
26 juillet 2018 /

Donald Trump a annoncé ce jeudi d'«importantes sanctions» contre la Turquie si elle ne libère pas «immédiatement» un pasteur américain jugé pour terrorisme, au risque d'envenimer des relations déjà tendues avec Ankara.

Pour le président des Etats-Unis, le pasteur Andrew Brunson, «un formidable chrétien et père de famille», «souffre beaucoup». «Cet homme de foi innocent doit être libéré immédiatement», a-t-il réclamé sur Twitter après avoir déjà dénoncé la semaine dernière une «honte totale» lorsqu'un tribunal turc avait décidé de le maintenir en détention provisoire durant son procès, en cours depuis le printemps.

Mercredi, un autre tribunal a finalement décidé de placer en résidence surveillée cet homme qui était incarcéré depuis octobre 2016 en Turquie.

C'est «un premier pas bienvenu, mais ce n'est pas assez», a lancé jeudi Mike Pence lors d'une réunion internationale à Washington pour «promouvoir la liberté de religion» dans le monde. Selon le vice-

président américain, «il n'y a pas de preuves crédibles contre lui».

Il s'est alors directement adressé au chef de l'Etat turc Recep Tayyip Erdogan : «Libérez le pasteur Andrew Brunson ou soyez prêts à en payer les conséquences». «Si la Turquie ne prend pas des mesures immédiates pour libérer cet homme de foi innocent et le renvoyer chez lui en Amérique, les Etats-Unis imposeront des sanctions significatives contre la Turquie jusqu'à sa libération», a-t-il martelé.

L'arrestation du pasteur est l'un des nombreux dossiers qui empoisonnent les relations entre Ankara et Washington, alliés au sein de l'Otan, mais qui ont évité de justesse un risque de confrontation en début d'année en Syrie. Et la menace de sanctions a de nouveau fait monter la tension d'un cran.

«Nous ne tolérerons jamais les menaces de qui que ce soit»

L'administration américaine «doit comprendre qu'elle ne peut pas obtenir le résultat souhaité en menaçant la Turquie», a prévenu la présidence turque. «Personne ne peut donner d'ordre à la Turquie. Nous ne tolérerons jamais les menaces de qui que ce soit», a dit pour sa part le chef de la diplomatie



Le pasteur américain Andrew Craig Brunson à son arrivée le 25 juillet 2018 dans sa maison d'Izmir en Turquie où il a été placé en résidence surveillée après près de deux ans d'emprisonnement Photo - AFP

turque Mevlüt Cavusoglu, qui s'est entretenu au téléphone avec son homologue américain Mike Pompeo.

Le pasteur Brunson, qui risque jusqu'à 35 ans de prison, est accusé par les autorités turques de terrorisme et d'espionnage pour le compte de deux organisations qu'elles considèrent comme leurs bêtes noires: le réseau du prédicateur Fethullah Gülen auquel Ankara impute, malgré ses dénégations, le

putsch manqué de juillet 2016, mais aussi les séparatistes kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK).

La Turquie réclame de son côté l'extradition de Fethullah Gülen, installé aux Etats-Unis, et en fait régulièrement une condition pour le rapatriement d'Andrew Brunson, mais l'administration américaine refuse officiellement de lier les deux affaires. ◆

# Will Iranian Kurds be on front lines of US conflict with Iran?

The US administration appears to increasingly be looking at armed Iranian Kurdish opposition groups as part of its campaign to economically and militarily pressure Iran.



Fazel Hawramy  
July 25, 2018  
www.al-monitor.com

The Donald Trump administration is moving to increase pressure on Iran from Iraqi Kurdistan by appointing an Iran expert to head the US Consulate in Erbil. The move comes as armed Iranian Kurdish opposition groups have intensified their attacks on Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) positions in western Iran.

Washington replaced Ken Gross, the outgoing consul general, with Steven Fagin, director of the Office of Iranian Affairs at the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs. The appointment appears to be part of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's effort to dent Iran's ability to operate in the region amid the looming reimposition of US sanctions. The United States seeks to exert "unprecedented financial pressure" on Iran until it forces Tehran to make a "tangible, demonstrable and sustained shift" in policy, Pompeo said in a recent letter, co-authored with Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, to the European Union. On July 22, Pompeo delivered a speech to a California audience, including a number of Iranian Americans, in which he attacked the Islamic Republic, comparing its leadership to a mafia.

Neighbors of Iran are under extreme pressure from the United States to stop trading with it or face consequences. "This time around, the Treasury sanctions will be enforced very, very aggressively and very comprehensively," US Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing Marshall Billingslea told reporters in Ankara on July 20 following official meetings there. "I think the Turkish government understands our position on that."

As director of the Office of Iranian Affairs, which has several outposts around the world, including in Istanbul and Dubai, Fagin was responsible for developing, coordinating, recommending and executing US policy on Iran. He is also familiar with Iraq, Iran's important neighbor to the west, having been posted to the US Embassy in Baghdad prior to 2015 as director of the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Office. Al-Monitor unsuccessfully sought comment on his new appointment from the State Department.

For Iran, Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan are important trade and financial corridors where it has the upper hand vis-a-vis the United States in political, economic and military matters. Fagin's presence in Iraqi Kurdistan is significant given that the armed Iranian Kurdish opposition groups fighting the Islamic Republic are based in the region. Indeed, Fagin met last month with Mustafa Hijri, head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDPI).

The Trump administration had officially invited Hijri for a weeklong stay June 11-17 in Washington, where he held meetings at influential think tanks. KDPI and think tank sources briefed on the content of the meetings said the US government and the KDPI are sussing each other out, to gauge the seriousness of the other party. Hijri's meeting with Fagin was the first time that a director of the Office of Iranian Affairs had met with the secretary general of the KDPI and followed deadly attacks by the group in western Iran, including one against the IRGC on June 8 in which the Kurds claimed to have killed nine Iranians.

"The Americans want to know if the Kurds are united and a serious force," said a source at an influential US think tank, speaking on condition of anonymity. "On the other hand, the KDPI wants to know if Washington is serious about its aggressive stance on Iran."

A senior KDPI official confirmed the statement to Al-Monitor, saying, "Yes, it is true, we want to know how serious the Americans are." Developments following Hijri's meetings in the United States appear to support it as well.

The KDPI has upped its attacks on IRGC positions in western Iran by increasing the number of peshmerga in the country. The KDPI has also stepped up efforts to establish an entity through which all the Kurdish parties can coordinate their efforts against Tehran. A KDPI official told Al-Monitor that the various organizations are discussing a unified peshmerga



Iranian Kurdish peshmerga from the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran take part in a military exercise in Koya, east of Erbil, Iraqi Kurdistan, Oct. 22, 2017. TSAFIN HAMED/AFP

command to maximize their impact.

Meanwhile, on July 21, the Kurdistan Free Life Party, affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers Party, announced the killing of 15 Iranian soldiers near the town of Marivan, close to the border with Iraqi Kurdistan. Iranian authorities acknowledged that 11 IRGC and local Basij members were killed, with eight wounded in the clash. On July 23, Tehran threatened to attack Kurdish opposition group bases if the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraqi Kurdistan fails to take action. Feeling the heat, Nazim Dabagh, the KRG's representative in Tehran, told VOA Kurdish on the same day that the Iranian Kurdish opposition groups based in Iraqi Kurdistan should stop causing trouble for the KRG, and that if they want to continue their struggle against Tehran, they should relocate to Iran.

Iran sees Iraqi Kurdistan as its backyard and views Kurdish autonomy in the strategic area with suspicion. The Islamic Republic has enjoyed cordial relations with the dominant Iraqi Kurdish parties since the 1980s, but the presence of American forces in northern Iraq has raised concerns. IRGC officials regularly accuse the United States of instigating the attacks being carried out by Iranian Kurdish groups.

Earlier this month, US Ambassador to Baghdad Douglas Silliman broke ground for the new US Consulate compound outside Erbil. It will be the United States' largest such compound. Silliman said the project is a "strong symbol of the continued strong relationship between the United States and the Kurdistan Region for decades in the future." The ever-increasing US presence has caused some grumbling among locals.

The US military is expanding its presence at Bashur Airfield near the town of Harir in Erbil province. The base is located slightly more than 40 miles from the Iranian border near the Tamarchin/Haji Omran crossing. On July 21, dozens of farmers and animal herders poured into the streets of Harir to protest a ban allegedly imposed at the request of the United States to prevent locals from venturing into the mountains that overlook the airfield.

By far, however, Fagin's most challenging task will be squeezing Iran through the economies of Iraqi Kurdistan and Iraq, including preventing the IRGC from using these markets to evade sanctions, given the increasing difficulty of using Dubai and Istanbul to do so. Many Kurdish traders and top businessmen have been involved with the Iranian economy for years, and the Iranians have learned how to use their contacts to maneuver around sanctions. The Iranian tycoon Babak Zanjani, who has been sentenced to death in Iran for embezzling billions in Iranian oil money and was a close associate of the controversial Turkish Iranian gold trader Reza Zarrab, had operated in Erbil in the oil sector at the same time he was moving millions of dollars on behalf of the Iranian government to bypass nuclear-related sanctions.

"America wants to topple Iran through economic warfare," Taher, a currency trader at the old Dollar Market in Sulaimaniyah, told Al-Monitor. "The Iranian currency has become toxic and no one wants to touch it. It is →



→ like the [Iraqi] dinar in 2002, before Saddam Hussein was toppled.”

The US State Department has not had a presence in Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and therefore has had no firsthand knowledge of the country since then. By establishing the Office of Iranian Affairs in 2006, Washington had hoped to develop “on-the-ground expertise so that 10, 15, 20 years from now ... we've got a cadre of Iran experts ... to help us reorient our focus and our programs more directly on an important policy challenge for the United States, which is Iranian actions around the world.”

Back in 2006, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice announced a \$75 million State Department initiative to “support democracy in Iran” as part of the George W. Bush administration’s aggressive policy toward the Islamic Republic. Now, 12 years later, the United States appears to be bent on

making another push at toppling the Iranian government. Washington’s investment in a new generation of diplomats with expertise on Iran could benefit the Trump administration’s tough stance against Tehran, as one of these cadres will be based in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq with a bird’s-eye view of Iran.

Only time will tell whether Washington will engage in the “mother of all peace” or the “mother of all wars” with Iran. Armed Iranian Kurdish groups appear eager to be part of the latter. ♦

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L'EXPRESS.fr 28 juillet 2018

# Les Kurdes syriens vont poursuivre le dialogue avec le régime

## Premières discussions à Damas entre régime et Kurdes soutenus par Washington

Par AFP, publié le 28/07/2018  
<https://www.lexpress.fr>

**Qamichli (Syrie)** - Une coalition arabo-kurde engagée dans des négociations inédites avec le pouvoir à Damas a annoncé samedi la création de “comités” chargés de poursuivre les discussions, en vue d’une solution politique prévoyant une “décentralisation”.

Longtemps opprimés par le régime, les Kurdes de Syrie ont profité du conflit qui ravage le pays depuis 2011 pour instaurer une autonomie de facto dans les régions sous leur contrôle dans le nord et le nord-est syrien, soit près de 30% du territoire selon l’Observatoire syrien des droits de l’Homme (OSDH).

Une délégation du Conseil démocratique syrien, bras politique des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS) soutenues par Washington, a eu des discussions jeudi à Damas, à l’invitation du gouvernement syrien, les premières du genre.

“Il a été décidé de former des comités pour aller de l’avant dans les négociations afin de régler tous les problèmes en suspens”, a indiqué le Conseil démocratique syrien dans un communiqué.

Ces comités se pencheront sur des problématiques d’ordre “économique, militaire, juri-



Des membres du Conseil démocratique syrien lors d’une réunion à Tabqa, en Syrie, le 16 juillet 2018

[afp.com/Delil](http://afp.com/Delil)  
SOULEIMAN

dique et politique”, a précisé Sihanouk Dibo, un conseiller du Parti de l’union démocratique (PYD), une formation représentée au sein du Conseil.

Leur objectif sera “de mettre en place une feuille de route menant à la décentralisation de la Syrie”, a-t-il déclaré à l’AFP.

“Il est encore trop tôt pour parler d’un accord mais nous y oeuvrons”, a poursuivi le responsable, avant de préciser que les négociations seraient “longues et difficiles car le pouvoir de Damas est très centralisé”.

Le régime a Damas n’a pas commenté ces

négociations.

Fin 2017, le chef de la diplomatie syrienne Walid Mouallem avait reconnu que les Kurdes syriens souhaitaient “une forme d’autonomie”, estimant que cette question était “négociable”.

En menant ces négociations à Damas, les Kurdes auraient cherché à préserver au maximum leurs acquis et éviter un conflit avec le régime qui est en position de force après avoir réussi à reconquérir plus de 60% du pays avec l’aide de l’allié russe.

Le président Bachar al-Assad, qui critique le soutien américain aux FDS, avait d’ailleurs menacé en mai de recourir à la force pour reconquérir les territoires kurdes.

La minorité kurde (15% de la population) contrôle de vastes pans de territoires à cheval sur les provinces de Raqa et Alep (nord), mais aussi de Deir Ezzor et Hassaké, où se trouvent d’importants champs pétroliers.

En 2016, la communauté a proclamé une “région fédérale” qui gère ces territoires. Cette administration organise des élections à un niveau local et collecte des impôts. Elle a ses propres forces de police et écoles.

Avec l’appui de la coalition internationale, les FDS, fer de lance de la lutte contre le groupe jihadiste Etat islamique (EI), luttent toujours contre une poche de l’EI à Deir Ezzor. ●



Des membres des Forces démocratiques syriennes (FDS) et des soldats américains rassemblés au champ pétrolier d’al-Tanak avant de lancer un assaut contre le groupe jihadiste Etat is © Delil souleiman / AFP/Archives

# Turkish president, flush with victory, seizes broad powers

ISTANBUL

## Erdogan issues decrees that centralize authority over most areas of society

BY CARLOTTA GALL

Even before President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey was inaugurated, he began elbowing his way into the front ranks of the globe's strongmen.

Hours before taking the oath of office two weeks ago — after 15 years already in power — Mr. Erdogan published a 143-page decree changing the way almost every government department and public body in the country operates.

In the days since, he has issued several equally lengthy decrees and presidential decisions, centralizing power and giving him the ability to exert control in nearly all areas of life with almost unchecked authority.

At a moment when democratic systems around the world are under increasing pressure, Mr. Erdogan, who was re-elected in June, is among those leaders, like Vladimir V. Putin of Russia and Viktor Orban of Hungary, who are using the levers of democracy to vastly expand their authority.

Among the changes Mr. Erdogan has put in place under the new presidential system are these:

- The prime minister's office has been abolished;
- The military has been brought under firmer civilian control;
- The president will draft the budget and choose judges and many top officials;
- The president can dismiss Parliament and call new elections at will;
- The president appoints the head of the National Intelligence Agency, the Religious Affairs Directorate and the Central Bank, as well as ambassadors, governors and university rectors, among others;
- Virtually none of the president's appointments require confirmation.

None of the amendments Mr. Erdogan decreed were subject to public debate. The vast accumulation of power fulfills Turkey's shift from a parliamentary system to the presidential one that was narrowly approved by voters in a referendum last year.

The voluminous decrees, analysts say, promise months of administrative upheaval as agencies are abolished and government employees reassigned.

Critics have voiced concern at the lack of checks on the president's increased powers.

"The state is being reorganized



OZAN KOSE/AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

The lack of checks on President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's powers in Turkey has raised concern. "The state is being reorganized around Tayyip Erdogan," a columnist wrote.

around Tayyip Erdogan," the columnist Asli Aydintasbas recently wrote in the secular opposition newspaper Cumhuriyet.

Many of the changes, analysts point out, merely formalize what was already the case: It is Mr. Erdogan who makes the decisions. But the consolidation of his power is far-reaching.

Mr. Erdogan has also amended the counterterrorism law in expectation of lifting the state of emergency, which expired on Thursday and was put in place two years ago after a failed military coup against him.

The new measures bring the powerful Turkish military firmly under civilian control — a step that the president says is in line with changes required under the European Union's accession process. The bloc has dangled admission before Turkey for years.

But Mr. Erdogan and his fellow Islamists have long called for a presidential system and for greater civilian control over the military. Turkey's recent history has been filled with military coups, and the Islamists chafed more than others under military rule.

Mr. Erdogan has placed the armed forces chief of staff under control of the Defense Ministry, and the Supreme Military Council, which decides senior armed forces appointments, has been reconfigured to include more civilian ministers than military commanders.

Mr. Erdogan appointed a loyalist, the former chief of staff, Gen. Hulusi Akar, as his defense minister. General Akar opposed the 2016 coup — he was taken prisoner on the night of the failed coup by rogue officers — and has overseen a comprehensive purge of the armed forces in the two years since.

"It seems Erdogan has planned the transition to be as smooth as possible by naming Akar, Turkey's top soldier, as the defense minister," Murat Yetkin wrote in The Hurriyet Daily News.

Mr. Erdogan outlined his own powers in one new decree after his inauguration. He will appoint the chief of staff of the armed forces — along with the commanders of the land, air and naval forces and the deputy chief of staff — by presidential decision, which needs no confirmation process.

Decree 703, issued just before Mr. Erdogan was sworn in to his new term, also removed many of the regulations in the selection process for appointments.

For instance, the president will directly appoint the rectors of Turkey's public and private universities.

"Yes, U.S. President Trump can appoint a replacement to a vacant seat in the Supreme Court, but he does not appoint a police chief in Massachusetts or a public theater director in Boston," Ms. Aydintasbas commented in Cumhuriyet. "He cannot appoint a state governor or even a university rector," she added.

The decree also lowers the qualifications for judges appointed to the government's administrative courts, which regulate government departments. Previously, judges had to hold law or political science degrees, but they can now be drawn from any degree program.

One of Mr. Erdogan's most controversial moves has been the appointment of his son-in-law Berat Albayrak as minister of the newly combined Treasury and Finance Ministry.

A presidential circular published in the Official Gazette over the weekend

also placed the central bank under the responsibility of the ministry.

Mr. Erdogan has emphasized that changes are needed to make state institutions more responsive and efficient. But the latest regulations diminish the legal and practical independence of the central bank, Umit Akcay, an associate professor of economics at the Berlin School of Economics and Law, said in emailed comments.

Turkish equities and the country's currency fell in value in the days after Mr. Erdogan's appointment of a new cabinet that removed two highly re-

garded officials — Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Simsek and Finance Minister Naci Agbal — and that promoted Mr. Albayrak.

Mr. Albayrak addressed the changes at the central bank this month in an effort to calm the markets.

"The policy in the new period aims to render the central bank more effective than ever," he said at a news briefing. The central bank's decisions will be driven by market conditions, he said, promising "a more predictable, simple and determined monetary policy in line with the objectives."

Yet Mr. Albayrak's appointment is part of the concern unsettling investors, the credit ratings service Moody's said in a statement. "Such appointments will inevitably raise questions regarding the independence and experience of Mr. Erdogan's government," Moody's said.

Ms. Aydintasbas warned that centralizing power had never worked in Turkey.

"I believe that such concentration of power will tire Turkey out, lock out the state and overload the economy," she said. "I hope I'm mistaken." ●

euronews.

July 27, 2018

## Syrian Kurdish-backed council holds talks in Damascus

By Tom Perry BEIRUT (Reuters) 27/07/2018  
http://www.euronews.com

A senior Syrian Kurdish official is in Damascus this week for talks with Syrian government officials at the head of a delegation including members of the U.S.-backed Syrian Democratic Forces, an official said, their first declared visit to the capital.

The visit points to moves by the Kurdish-led authorities who control roughly one quarter of Syria to open channels to President Bashar al-Assad's administration as they seek to negotiate a political deal that preserves their autonomy.

The delegation in Damascus is headed by Ilham Ahmed, executive head of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC), said Riad Darar, SDC co-chair, speaking by phone from Vienna. The delegation arrived two days ago.

The meetings were expected to primarily discuss matters of service provision in the areas controlled by the Kurdish-led authorities, but Darar said that there was no set agenda and the talks might widen to political and security matters.

While the meetings did not mark the start of negotiations, Darar signalled that this was the aim, saying it was time to "solve our problems ourselves".

"We have a basis for negotiations," he added.

Any negotiations between Damascus and the SDF would raise new questions for U.S. policy in Syria, where the U.S. military has deployed into SDF-held territory during the campaign against Islamic State.

Assad says the U.S. forces are occupiers. For the first time, Assad said in May that he was "opening doors" for talks with the SDF. He also threatened force and said the Americans would leave one way or another.

The Syrian Kurds have grown wary of the United States, put on guard by conflicting statements over its plans in Syria.

The area controlled by the SDF, spearheaded by the Kurdish YPG, spreads across much of northern and eastern Syria and includes farmland, oil resources, and water.

### MOVING CAUTIOUSLY

The territory expanded well beyond the predominantly Kurdish regions of the north into Arab areas such as Raqqa during the campaign against Islamic State.

The main Syrian Kurdish groups have mostly avoided conflict with Assad during the war, at times even fighting common foes -- including rebels that his forces are gradually crushing with help from Russia and Iran.



The outcome of the Damascus meetings was not yet clear, Darar said, adding that he did not know which officials the delegation would meet. It was not clear how long they would stay.

Talks recently began over a return of state employees and repairs to one of Syria's most important pieces of infrastructure: the Tabqa dam, Syria's largest, which the SDF took from Islamic State last year.

Darar said those talks had been held with delegations that had come from Damascus. Referring to the Damascus visit, he said: "This is certainly the first visit that happened."

The Kurds have been consistently left out of U.N.-led diplomacy in line with the wishes of NATO member Turkey, which views Syria's dominant Kurdish groups as an extension of the militant Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

Darar forecast the failure of U.N.-backed efforts currently focused on setting up a constitutional committee grouping the government, the opposition and independents. "I don't think this committee will carry out its role," he said.

"The door of Geneva will be shut."

Syria's Kurds, which the state systematically persecuted for years, say they do not seek independence, but hope a political deal will safeguard the autonomy.

Syrian Kurdish leaders have moved more cautiously than Kurds in Iraq who voted for independence in a referendum last year. The vote, which Washington opposed, plunged them into crisis and regional isolation. Eventually, they were forced to backtrack. ●

# Shiite-Kurdish Understandings Pave Way for Largest Iraqi Parliamentary Bloc

Baghdad - Hamza Mustafa 23 July, 2018 - <https://aawsat.com>

Political efforts to form the largest bloc at parliament have not stopped despite the popular rallies that have swept many parts of Iraq and Sairoun alliance leader Moqtada al-Sadr's call that these consultations come to a halt until protester demands are met.

His call, however, fell on deaf ears and political forces and leaderships have forged ahead with their attempts to form the largest bloc.

An informed source told Asharq Al-Awsat that understandings between Shiite and Kurdish powers are ongoing to form this coalition.

A Shiite politician said that all Shiite powers, the Sairoun, Fateh, Nasr, State of Law and Hikma, want the next government to include Shiite, Sunni and Kurdish blocs to avoid the marginalization of any side.

Shiite delegations had been dispatched to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to hold consultations with local officials, starting with Kurdistan Democratic Party leader Masoud Barzani. Kurdish delegations were also sent to Baghdad to meet prominent Shiite leaders.

The Shiite politician said efforts are aimed at reaching a common vision that would revive the so-called historic Shiite-Kurdish alliance that was harmed during Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's second term in office between 2010 and 2014. The ties were also damaged in 2017 in wake of outgoing Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi's opposition to the Kurdish independence



A file photograph of Iraqi parliament in Baghdad. (Reuters)

referendum.

The informed source stressed that Barzani sought throughout his meetings to restore ties to the way they were when the Shiite-Kurdish alliance was struck.

Barzani's negative experience with Abadi in wake of last year's referendum may however be an obstacle in reaching this goal. He may therefore lean towards striking an alliance with Fateh coalition leader Hadi al-Ameri, whom he enjoys good ties with, instead of Abadi, said the source.

The Shiite politician revealed that recent consultations now put the Fateh coalition as the largest bloc in parliament, not the Sairoun, which had emerged as the shock victor in the May parliamentary elections.

After striking various political deals, the Fateh bloc now boasts 60 lawmakers, while Sairoun has 45.

The State of Law alliance is now part of the Fateh bloc, as are various Kurdish figures. Efforts are underway to bring in the Sairoun alliance, revealed the politician. Sunnis are also not being excluded.

Abadi's Nasr alliance has been approached to join the largest bloc, but the PM has not yet taken a decision on the matter, which may jeopardize his representation at the legislature. No less than 28 of his alliance members may opt to join the largest bloc, said the Shiite official.

Despite their reservations against some of the Shiite figures in this bloc, Kurdish lawmakers may consent to join it because they would like to avoid becoming part of the opposition. This move may allow them to bolster their historic alliance with Shiites in a hope that they may eventually reap concessions from them in return to at least obtain some of their demands, continued the official.

As for Sunni powers, MP Mohammed al-Karbouli said that even though they have been part of these recent political consultations, Shiite-Kurdish agreements will likely be struck at their expense.

Atheel al-Nujaifi, of the Decision alliance, told Asharq Al-Awsat that the Sunnis will be part of the largest parliamentary bloc.

"We do not want to return to sectarian divisions," he stressed.

On Sunni-Kurdish ties, he said: "There are few disputes in this relationship and they can be resolved." ♦



JULY 30, 2018

## After Saudi, Kuwait to expand commercial ties with Kurdistan

Kosar Nawzad July 30-2018  
<http://www.kurdistan24.net>

ERBIL (Kurdistan 24) – The Kuwaiti Consul-General in the Kurdistan Region, Omar al-Kandari, said on Monday that an economic delegation from his country intends to visit the region in the coming days to expand existing commercial relations.

Kandari's announcement comes after officials from Saudi Arabia, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) agreed on July 24 to transform the Kurdistan Region into a new center of trade and investment in Iraq.

The Consul-General's words were relayed in a statement about a meeting in Erbil with the President of the Erbil Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Dara Jalil Khayat.

The statement quoted Kandari as saying the Kuwaiti delegation's visit will send a message to his country's companies, businessmen, and industries to encourage them to work in Kurdistan.



The Empire Tower, a business skyscraper in the Kurdistan Region capital of Erbil. (Photo: Getty)

The Consul-General added that despite the presence of Kuwaiti companies already operating in Kurdistan, they are willing to develop commercial relations with the Region.

He did not specify an exact date for the visit but noted they were making efforts to expedite it.

During their meeting with KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, the Saudi delegation expressed its desire to "invest and have [Saudi] businesspersons in the Kurdistan Region benefit from the security, stability, and the suitable ground for investment." ♦

# Turkey's Erdogan Wants To Crush The Kurds And Recreate The Ottoman World

## OPINION

Jonathan Wachtel and Albert Wachtel  
On 7/31/18  
www.newsweek.com

Consumed by the need for grandeur, despots tend to share their monstrous plans, then execute them. Running to be reelected in a race warped in his favor, Turkey's President Erdogan campaigned by demonizing minority Kurds to create a common enemy—as tyrants do.

In troubled times, people worship self-assured leaders, and Erdogan sees himself as the anointed vessel of Ottoman resurrection. He allowed Islamic State to murder Kurds and unleashed his army on them. He must and can be stopped.

Kurds, formerly referred to as Mountain Turks, constitute more than 20% of the country's citizens. Many want independence, but in 1999, the inspirational, formerly separatist Marxist leader of the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), Abdullah Ocalan, urged peace after being captured and jailed. Most obeyed, but many still dream of uniting with Kurdish enclaves in Syria, Iraq and Iran to re-establish historic Kurdistan.

In 2013, Erdogan promised to recognize Kurdish identity and language, and increase Kurdish liberties. A truce followed, but hostilities resumed in 2015. Erdogan said he was responding to PKK terrorism. The PKK claimed Erdogan destroyed the ceasefire by building dams and security stations in Kurdish regions. In either case, a war was on. Erdogan attacked with helicopter gunships, artillery and armored divisions, murdering thousands and displacing 335,000 mainly Kurdish citizens. A UN report described destroyed villages as moonscapes.

Erdogan perceives Kurdish nationalism as an existential threat.

Recalling the Armenian Genocide, Turkish Nobel Prize winning novelist Orhan Pamuk lamented Erdogan's mass killings of Kurds. Pamuk was prosecuted for insulting "Turkishness," and public Pamuk book-burnings followed. International outcry spared Pamuk imprisonment, but he sees his once democratic moderate Muslim country heading towards "a regime of terror."

The coup attempt on Erdogan long over, he ended his two-year-old state of emergency but keeps Turkey in his grip. He accuses American Pastor Andrew Brunson, who for more than 20 years has served a small community in Izmir, of "Christianization," attacking Islam while supporting the coup and the PKK.

Seeking to overthrow Syrian President Assad, Erdogan allowed a highway of



U.S. President Donald Trump and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan gesture as they talk at the start of the NATO summit in Brussels, Belgium July 11, 2018. REUTERS / Kevin Lamarque

jihadi foreign fighters to transit Turkey, creating the incipient Islamic State and unleashing barbarous terrorism against any who were not fundamentalist Sunnis. With the Turkish military lolling, ISIS devastated Kurds in Syrian Kobani.

With U.S. air support, Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG) liberated Kobani and led the fighting that defeated the Islamic State. Erdogan sees the PKK and YPG as one, and accused Assad of allowing the PKK to maintain camps near Turkey's border, formerly a safe haven for refugees. Emboldened by Washington's earlier decision not to protect its Kurdish allies in Iraq, Erdogan attacked Kurdish Afrin in northern Syria, killing, terrorizing and ultimately creating a massive refugee crisis.

He is now changing Afrin's demographics by shipping in anti-Assad Syrian refugees from Turkey. He threatened to attack Kurds of Syrian Manbij, boasting that he would confront U.S. troops there. Instead of standing strong, Washington stood down, a grave mistake with autocrats. The YPG had to withdraw, and Turkish media celebrated a victory over America.

With Kurds of Syria under his Sunni Ottoman thumb, Erdogan wants to join equally hegemonic Shia Iran in killing eastern Kurdish nationalists in the Qandil Mountains bordering Iran and Turkey.

Despite his alliance with Shiite Iran, Erdogan sees himself as the vanguard of Sunnis. He supports the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood and its Palestinian terrorist wing Hamas, offending Egypt and the Palestinian Authority, which is in deadly conflict with Hamas. He promotes Muslim agitation at the Temple Mount/Nobel Sanctuary, offending Jordan, the guardian of the mosques there. He declares Jerusalem the primary city of Islam, offending Saudi Arabia, custodian of Mecca and Medina, Islam's holiest sites.

He is intent on buying the F35, America's stealth fighter, while playing off the purchase of NATO's missile defense system against the best Russian one, which will become even better if Moscow gets its hands on an F35. At the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) meeting last week, Erdogan professed his desire to join those economic competitors of the West.

If all this sounds irrational, that is because it is.

Turkish citizens abroad, like NBA player Enes Kanter, have spoken out against Erdogan's repressive regime. They must be united in a campaign to turn the Turkish people against Erdogan.

The free world must not appease tyranny. America, as the planet's most powerful nation, can offer crucial help. The U.S. should join the 29 countries that have recognized the Armenian Genocide. Acquiescing to Ankara's false denial encourages a related attack on the Kurds.

Turkey's current economic problems will prove useful in containing Erdogan. However, if political purges and attacks on Kurds intensify, the West should stop lending to Turkey and place economic sanctions on key functionaries including him and his family.

The sooner the free world acts against Erdogan, the safer our world will be. Turkey must be transformed. ♦

*Jonathan Wachtel served as Director of Communications and Spokesperson for the U.S. Mission to the United Nations. As a journalist he covered global conflicts for ABC, Fox and Worldwide Television News. Albert Wachtel, a professor at Pitzer College, one of the Claremont Colleges, has written for many national journals and newspapers. He has four books out.*