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KURDISTAN D'IRAK : CAMPAGNE DE GRANDE AMPLEUR CONTRE L'EXCISION

Depuis quelques années, des ONG – kurdes et étrangères – mènent, avec le soutien du **G o u v e r n e m e n t** Régional kurde, une campagne contre l'excision, pratiquée dans les régions les plus méridionales du Kurdistan, alors que cette pratique est inconnue dans le nord et l'ouest du Kurdistan.

En même temps qu'un travail d'information et de prévention, des équipes d'enquêteurs ont sillonné les trois gouvernorats pour connaître les chiffres exacts de cette pratique, ainsi qu'à Kirkouk.

Après un rapport de Human Rights Watch en juin 2010, le

Premier Ministre kurde Barham Salih avait publiquement exprimé son opposition à l'excision. Le 11 décembre dernier, une enquête officielle menée par un groupe de médecins sur un échantillon de 5112 femmes, avait établi que 41% étaient excisées. Une ONG, Wadi, avait auparavant mené une enquête dans l'ensemble des régions et avait constaté une baisse des chiffres selon l'âge des femmes. Pour les régions de Sulaimaniye, Erbil et Garmiyan (Duhok n'étant pas touché), sur 1408 femmes, 72.2 % étaient excisées. Mais parmi ce groupe, on observe que les femmes de moins de 20%, ont 57% d'excisées, tandis que celles de plus de 58 ans en sont à 95.7%, ce qui confirme

l'opinion généralement exprimée parmi les Kurdes qu'il s'agit d'une tradition vouée à disparaître de plus en plus.

Une enquête récente de l'ONG WADI a eu lieu à Kirkouk – hors Région du Kurdistan, donc – dans des conditions plus difficiles en raison de la situation politique de Kirkouk et du peu d'entente entre le GRK et le gouvernement central. Kirkouk est aussi considéré comme un laboratoire d'observation intéressant car regroupant d'autres ethnies irakiennes, ce qui permettrait d'évaluer la possibilité que l'excision en Irak ne touche pas que les Kurdes, même si ces derniers sont les seuls à l'admettre publiquement.

Sur un total de 1807 personnes, il a été relevé 738 femmes mutilées soit 41%. Si l'on relève le critère de l'appartenance religieuse, on voit que chez les musulmans sunnites chaféites, arabes ou kurdes, cette pratique est bien plus élevée que parmi les chiïtes. L'ONG reconnaît cependant que les districts kurdes ont toujours été privilégiés par les ONG du fait que les zones arabes ou turkmènes sont trop dangereuses pour ce genre d'exploration et il n'est ainsi pas sûr que l'excision soit un problème 'kurde', même si, en comparant le quartier kurde de Rahimawa, à Kirkouk, on arrive à un taux de 65.9% d'excisions contre 17.8% dans le quartier arabe de Key Al Mutanaza. Le quartier turkmène de Yayjy Awsheshly ne présente aucun cas d'excision sur 43 femmes examinées. Par contre, dans la ville de Dubz, dont la population est à la fois kurde, turque et arabe, 66% des femmes examinées – toutes ethnies confondues – étaient excisées. Il semblerait donc que cette pratique puisse exister au-delà des régions kurdes, que ce soit par contamination ou même source religieuse – le chaféisme.

Interrogés ou sommés de s'exprimer sur l'excision, les avis des ulémas kurdes divergent, car il n'existe pas de parole claire, pour ou contre, l'excision des femmes dans le Coran ou les hadith. La jurisprudence chaféite la classe dans les obligations religieuses. Mais l'imam de la mosquée Hadji Osman Alaf a déclaré, en décembre 2010, lors d'un sermon en chaire, que ne pas considérer l'excision comme recommandée par le prophète Muhammad était une marque 'd'ignorance'. L'imam Mala Yassin Hakim Piskandi a, au contraire insisté sur la 'sunnah' de cette pratique, c'est-à-dire le fait qu'elle soit 'recommandée' mais pas obligatoire selon les trois écoles islamiques, hanbali-

te, malikite, hanafite. C'est aussi l'avis d'Ali Qaradakhi, Secrétaire général de l'Union internationale des Savants musulmans (IUMS) qui avait récemment écrit, dans un journal local, que l'excision n'était pas obligatoire : « L'excision est une vieille question qui refait surface. Les docteurs musulmans ont des avis divergents à ce sujet. Selon moi, l'opinion la plus pertinente est que l'excision n'est pas nécessaire en islam. »

Cette pratique ne rencontre aucun soutien de la part du Gouvernement kurde qui, au contraire, a plusieurs fois exprimé sa désapprobation. Mais un pas politique concret a été franchi le 25 novembre dernier, quand des représentants du GRK ont, en présence de plusieurs diplomates étrangers, annoncé publiquement leur détermination à lutter contre les crimes d'honneur et l'excision. Une campagne publique d'information a été lancée durant 2 semaines pour alerter la population sur les nuisances et les risques de l'excision, tandis que, dans le même temps, le gouvernement kurde commandait à deux universités britanniques des missions d'étude sur les crimes d'honneur.

L'ONG 'Stop FGM' a reconnu et loué les efforts de la Région kurde et son engagement public pour éradiquer les violences contre les femmes. S'opposant à la plupart des ulémas kurdes qui s'accordent à dire que l'excision, si elle n'est pas une obligation est cependant un acte qui va du méritoire à non illicite, le ministre kurde de la Santé avait déjà annoncé, à la fin d'octobre 2010, sa volonté d'interdire l'excision, et a appelé le Comité des Fatwa de la haute Commission religieuse du Kurdistan à condamner sans équivoque cette pratique. En 2007,

le ministre de la Justice du Kurdistan avait déjà décrété que toute femme pratiquant l'excision devait être arrêtée, jugée et condamnée mais cela avait été suivi de peu d'effet. En 2008 et 2009, les autorités kurdes ont renforcé la législation contre l'excision et se sont engagées à mener ou soutenir des campagnes éducatives pour inciter la population à abandonner ces mutilations. Mais là encore, les actions mises en œuvre étaient restées à l'état de promesses.

En février 2010, 51 ONG avaient mis en œuvre une campagne contre l'excision.

Mais même au sein des cercles religieux certains avis divergents : Déjà, en Égypte, l'université religieuse la plus influente du monde sunnite a émis récemment un avis défavorable sur l'excision en raison des complications qui pouvaient nuire à la santé des femmes. Le Dr. Mustafa Zalmi, un expert kurde reconnu de la Charia formé à Al-Azhar, s'est ouvertement prononcé pour l'interdiction de l'excision. Mustafa Zalmi, qui a enseigné les sciences religieuses à l'université Mustansiriyah à Bagdad, a publié récemment un livre contre cette pratique et s'est dit prêt à débattre publiquement de cette question avec tout interlocuteur dont la position serait divergente, arguant que l'excision est interdite par le Coran dans pas moins de 11 versets. Autre argument : le fait que les lieux fondateurs de l'islam ne la pratiquent pas, ce qui infirme la thèse de la 'prescription religieuse' : « L'excision n'est pratiquée ni à La Mecque ni à Médine, or les Kurdes ont bien reçu l'islam de ces lieux, aussi pourquoi pratique-t-on l'excision au Kurdistan ? »

D'autres autorités religieuses,

membres de la Commission des Fatwa appuient Mustafa Zalmi. Ainsi, Mullah Ahmad Shafi'i : « Puisque tous les avis médicaux sont unanimes sur l'excision et que tous les médecins conviennent que l'excision est néfaste pour la santé d'une personne, alors nous prononcerons une fatwa contre cette pratique. »

En août 2010, une enquête du journal kurde Rudaw auprès des jeunes Kurdes célibataires avait montré un changement de mentalité important concernant « l'atout » pour une fille à marier que constituait, aux yeux des générations plus âgées, le fait d'avoir été excisée. Certains jeunes hommes souhaitent en effet épouser une fille non exci-

sée car ils craignent que les relations sexuelles au sein du couple ne soient insatisfaisantes. Une évolution confirmée par le journaliste Runak Faraj Rahim, qui effectue des enquêtes sur les problèmes féminins dans la société kurde, qui y voit le signe d'un accroissement des informations de la population sur cette question.

IRAN : EXÉCUTION D'UN PRISONNIER KURDE À OURMIAH

Un Kurde d'Iran, Hossein Khezri, âgé de 28 ans, a été exécuté par pendaison dans la prison d'Ourmiah, sans que son avocat ou sa famille en aient été avertis. Il avait été condamné à mort pour appartenance au PJAK (branche iranienne du PKK)

Il avait été arrêté en 2008, accusé d'avoir participé au meurtre d'un officier de police à Ourmiah en 2005. Après deux et demi de détention, les tortures et les mauvais traitements l'avaient quasiment rendu aveugle. Il avait passé 8 mois en isolement complet, ce qui avait considérablement affecté son état psychique et l'avait amené à deux tentatives de suicide.

Dans une lettre envoyée le 7 novembre 2010 aux ONG de défense des droits de l'homme, Hossein Khezri exposait lui-même son cas et ses conditions de détention. Le 17 novembre, la Cour suprême émettait une note de service à la prison d'Ourmiah ordonnant son exécution, tandis que son avocat se démettait du dossier dans des conditions suspectes. Le 19 novembre Amnesty International lançait un appel urgent aux autorités iraniennes en faveur de Hossein Khezri.

Le 6 janvier, son frère et d'autres membres de sa famille ont pu se

rendre visite à la prison d'Ourmiah et les autorités ont clairement présenté cela à la famille comme leur dernière visite. Ses parents craignent alors une exécution imminente.

Le 13 janvier, sa famille ne peut obtenir aucune autre information. Les autorités leur disent simplement que Hossein Khezri a été envoyé à Téhéran pour l'exécution de sa sentence. Ils craignent alors qu'il n'ait été secrètement exécuté.

Le 15 janvier, plusieurs sites annoncent sa mort, mais la famille n'a aucune confirmation. La rumeur court seulement qu'un prisonnier a été pendu à Ourmiah, et les mouvements kurdes nomment Hossein Khezri. Le 16 la nouvelle est reprise par les agences de presse kurdes comme peyamner.com.

Lettre de Hossein Khezri, datée du 7 novembre 2010.

Moi, Hossein Khezri, suis un prisonnier politique condamné pour activités menaçant la sécurité nationale par la 10ème Chambre du tribunal révolutionnaire d'Ourmiah. La condamnation a été confirmée par la 10ème Chambre de la Cour d'appel de la province d'Azerbaïdjan occidental et par la 31ème Chambre de la cour suprême. Je suis condamné à mort.

Je vais essayer de montrer les méthodes utilisées durant mes interrogatoires, l'enquête et le procès, malgré les efforts de la Cour pour interdire au peuple d'Iran et à la communauté internationale toute mention de tels agissements, ainsi que leur refus de prendre en compte ma lettre ouverte au département de la Justice ; en dépit de tous leurs efforts, je vais essayer de relater au monde un peu de la situation dans laquelle je me trouve, dans l'espoir que quelqu'un entendra ma voix.

Je suis détenu depuis le 31 juillet 2008. J'ai été arrêté à Kermanshah par la branche Nabi Akram des Sepah (Gardiens de la révolution) et suis resté entre leurs mains 49 jours. Durant cette période, j'ai été soumis à de graves tortures mentales et physiques, dont ce qui suit :

1. Battu plusieurs heures, quotidiennement ;
2. Pressions psychologiques et intimidations durant les interrogatoires ;
3. Menaces d'impliquer mon frère, mon beau-frère et ma famille dans des "activités illégales" contre le gouvernement ;
4. Coups de pied sur mes parties génitales, causant des saignements et une enflure pendant 14 jours ;

5. Plaie ouverte à ma jambe droite, de 8 cm de long, résultat de coups de pied durant les interrogatoires, plaie qui est toujours ouverte ;

6. Coups violents portés sur tout le corps avec une matraque pendant 49 jours, causant des contusions et une inflammation de tout le corps ;

Selon l'article 38 de la Constitution iranienne, la torture est strictement interdite pour extorquer des aveux et obliger une personne à témoigner, avouer ou prêter serment sous la contrainte est illégal, et tous les aveux obtenus par de telles méthodes sont considérés comme nuls et invalides. Par ailleurs, les mêmes lois déclarent que les contrevenants doivent être poursuivis et condamnés. Maintenant, c'est la question : Qu'en est-il de cette loi ? Comme je l'ai dit auparavant, j'ai été torturé à Kermanshah, au centre de détention, et soumis à des pressions physiques et psychologiques. Pourquoi donc les preuves obtenues dans de telles conditions sont non seulement considérées comme recevables par la Cour, et que ce sont ces preuves là qui ont servi à me condamner si lourdement ?

J'ai été transféré de la prison des Nabi Akram Sepah de Kermanshah à celle de Sepah Al Mahdi d'Ourmiah le 18 septembre 2008. Dans cette nouvelle prison, j'ai été soumis à des pressions psychologiques et de sévères tortures physiques.

J'ai encore été transféré au département d'information d'Ourmiah le 6 janvier 2009 et ensuite au quartier général du ministère du Renseignement le 15 février 2009, et à nouveau torturé. Après avoir été transféré à la prison d'Ourmiah le 11 mai 2009 j'ai comparu devant le tribunal pour

la première et la dernière fois, à l'une des chambres du Tribunal révolutionnaire d'Ourmiah.

Le représentant du ministère du Renseignement était présent au tribunal, aux côtés du procureur d'Ourmiah. Avant le procès on m'a averti que je ne pourrai parler de la torture et qu'il ne m'était pas non plus permis de mentionner une seule des méthodes d'interrogatoire ni ce qui s'était produit durant ces séances. J'ai été aussi menacé afin que je n'indique pas que ma 'confession' avait été obtenue sous la torture.

Avec un tel climat dans ce tribunal, et aussi du fait que l'on ne m'avait donné aucun temps pour préparer une déclaration, ni assez de temps pour exposer mon cas, comment mon avocat aurait-il pu me défendre contre des accusations si graves, en moins de 10 minutes, même si j'étais innocent ?

Et voici une autre question : quel était le but de ma présence dans une telle parodie de tribunal, si ce n'est juste pour prouver que j'avais eu un 'procès' et que j'avais été 'condamné' à ce procès ?

En dépit des menaces et des pressions, j'ai déclaré au juge à la tête de la 1ère Chambre du tribunal révolutionnaire, qu'en vérité j'avais été torturé et que les aveux n'étaient pas valables puisqu'ils m'avaient été dictés par une sévère contrainte, mentale et physique. Je lui ai dit aussi qu'on m'avait averti de ne pas mentionner la torture ni de me rétracter. Hélas, il a procédé au jugement sans essayer aucunement d'enquêter sur mes plaintes de torture et a rendu sa sentence en 10 minutes. La même sentence a été prononcée par les cours d'appel et le 8 août 2009 a été rendue définitive et

l'on m'a envoyé à la prison centrale d'Ourmiah.

Je dois dire qu'entre la première sentence et la cour d'appel, je n'ai pas baissé les bras, et le 27 juillet 2009, deux semaines avant le verdict final, j'ai envoyé une plainte officielle pour traitements inhumains et illégaux au procureur général des tribunaux militaires d'Ourmiah, plainte portée au dossier le 31 décembre 2009. Le 16 février 2009, mon frère a été averti que j'avais porté plainte pour la façon dont j'avais été traité durant mes interrogatoires par les agents de renseignement de la prison d'Al-Mahdi le 7 décembre 2009 et que je voulais un examen médical officiel.

Ma plainte auprès du tribunal militaire a été portée devant les tribunaux principaux, et malgré mes plaintes au sujet du comportement des interrogateurs et des officiers de la branch Al-Mahdi des Gardiens de la révolution (Sepah), et les preuves médicales de torture que je leur ai présentées, ainsi que ma demande d'être examiné par un médecin officiel, le procureur de la 8ème Chambre n'a même pas demandé à ce que je sois soumis à un examen médical pour vérifier si je disais ou non la vérité.

Le 2 février 2009, juste après avoir envoyé ma plainte et présenté les preuves du médecin légiste, j'ai été emmené au ministère du renseignement sous escorte armée et détenu là-bas trois jours. Durant ces trois jours ils m'ont menacé au sujet de ma plainte, et m'ont demandé pour quelle raison j'osais porter plainte, et me disant que maintenant j'allais devoir être filmé et lire les aveux qu'ils avaient écrits pour moi et nier que j'avais été maltraité d'aucune manière. Ils m'ont dit que si je coopérais, ils pourraient réduire les accusa-

tions et la peine. Ces menaces sans fard, et leur essai de créer une réalité factice pour les gens, c'était comme s'ils faisaient du troc avec des vies humaines.

Quand ma famille a appris que j'avais été transféré au ministère du Renseignement, elle a été terrifiée, et alors que mon père cherchait à obtenir une quelconque information, on ne lui fournissait que des réponses confuses et contradictoires. Il a eu si peur que je puisse être exécuté qu'il eut une attaque cardiaque fatale au ministère du Renseignement et a été envoyé à l'hôpital où il est mort, ajoutant ainsi un autre chapitre aux crimes de la République islamique qui cause une telle peur aux parents d'un prisonnier politique, ce qui est pire qu'une exécution réelle. Qui répondra de tels crimes ?

20 jours ne s'étaient pas écoulés depuis la mort de mon père que j'ai été soudain transféré à la prison de Qazvin. Vous pouvez imaginer mon état d'esprit, surtout après avoir passé des heures menotté et aveuglé sans aucune explication sur ce qui allait arriver. Après des heures dans ces conditions, ils ont mentionné, par hasard, que j'étais transféré dans une autre prison et de ne pas 'm'inquiéter'. Jusqu'à présent, personne n'a donné suite à mes plaintes ou ma demande d'être examiné par un médecin légiste et ils n'ont donné aucun motif pour leur refus de prendre en compte ma plainte.

Le 19 avril 2009, la 104ème Branche du tribunal militaire d'Ourmiah a rendu son jugement : personne, aucun représentant du Renseignement ou des Gardiens de la Révolution ne m'a expliqué quoi que ce soit ; je n'ai passé aucun examen médical et je ne sais toujours pas sur quoi se fonde ma condamnation. Un acte d'accusation émanant du ministère du Renseignement et du tribunal fait de moi, Hossein Khezri, un combattant armé. Je n'avais aucune arme quand on m'a arrêté, ma lutte était seulement politique, et je n'ai jamais porté les armes contre l'Iran. Mais j'ai passé 8 mois en isolement dans différentes cellules, de Nabi Akram à Kermanshah, Al-Mahdi et le ministère du Renseignement à Ourmiah, dans les pires conditions physiques, sauvagement torturé, humilié et constamment menacé.

Les 8 mois que j'ai passés au secret ont affecté ma condition psychique à un point tel que j'ai tenté deux fois de me tuer. Je pensais que la mort était de bien loin préférable à cette torture quotidienne et des conditions de vie si inhumaines. Comment est-il possible dans le monde d'aujourd'hui de torturer quelqu'un pendant 8 mois sans lui permettre une seule visite, ou même un contact avec un avocat, pas même par téléphone ?

En conclusion, moi, Hossein Khezri, suis un prisonnier politique condamné à mort et gardé

au secret de sorte que quand ma lettre ouverte est parvenue au tribunal, la prison a refusé d'identifier mon nom ou mes empreintes digitales, et la lettre elle-même a été confisquée. Le moment de mon exécution ne m'a pas été révélé. Je ne sais si ce sera demain, ou le surlendemain, ou cette nuit, et je ne suis pas admis à recevoir des visites et ne peut même dire à personne que je suis toujours en vie.

C'est dans ces conditions que je demande à tous les défenseurs des droits de l'homme et aux organisations concernées par les droits de l'homme et les droits des prisonniers d'accepter ma requête et d'être ma voix pour l'humanité.

À partir de maintenant, je vous reconnais tous, officiellement, comme mes avocats et vous demande de m'aider à ce que mon dossier soit porté devant un tribunal juste et équitable, sans secret, et je répondrai ouvertement à toutes vos questions.

Enfin je demande au Commissariat de droits de l'homme des Nations Unies de bien vouloir lire, publier et se pencher sur mon dossier.

Respectueusement,

Hossein Khezri

Prisonnier politique dans les couloirs de la mort, prison centrale d'Ourmiah, cellule 12.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH : RAPPORT ANNUEL 2010

L'organisation américaine de défense des droits de l'homme HRW vient de publier son rapport annuel 2010 dont voici des extraits :

TURQUIE

Déjà critiquée pour la lenteur de ses avancées en matière de droits

de l'homme, malgré beaucoup de promesses, le bilan demeure "mitigé" pour 2010 : détentions arbitraires, poursuites judiciaires s'apparentant à du harcèlement, condamnations pour "terrorisme" injustifiées, même si l'AKP a pu réformer partiellement la constitution héritée du coup d'État de 1980.

Mais l'ONG juge que la fameuse "ouverture" avance à pas de tortue. La Cour constitutionnelle a dissous le parti pro-kurde DTP en décembre 2009 pour "activités séparatistes" et des centaines de membres de ce parti, ainsi que du parti qui lui a succédé, le BDP, sont jugés pour appartenance au KCK (Union des

Communautés du Kurdistan), organisation accusée d'être une émanation du PKK.

Même si l'on parle de plus en plus d'un règlement politique du conflit, les accrochages entre armée et guérilla se poursuivent. L'attaque d'un bus à Hakkari a fait 9 victimes civiles, sans que l'on puisse déterminer clairement si les auteurs en sont le PKK ou les forces de sécurité turques. Le PKK est également soupçonné d'être à l'origine du meurtre de 2 imams à Hakkari et Şirnak.

Des exactions anti-kurdes ont eu lieu dans le reste du pays. En juillet 2010, des biens appartenant à des Kurdes vivant dans la province de Bursa, ont été saccagés.

Bien que le débat soit de plus en plus ouvert en Turquie, sur des questions autrefois tabous, des personnes font encore l'objet de poursuites pour des prises de position non violentes, déclarations, discours, écrits, manifestations et sont maintenues en détention en attendant leur jugement.

Journalistes et éditeurs sont aussi harcelés judiciairement, soit pour "tentative d'influer sur une procédure judiciaire", soit pour "violation du secret de l'instruction", soit pour "propagande terroriste".

Le rédacteur du journal Azadiya Welat, Vedat Kursun, a ainsi été condamné à 166 ans de prison en mai 2010 pour 103 délits de "propagande terroriste" et "appartenance au PKK". Toujours emprisonné, il attend son jugement en appel.

L'accès à certains sites Internet est toujours interdit, par exemple YouTube. Des journaux pro-kurdes ou de gauche sont sujets

à des fermetures arbitraires. En 2010, la Cour européenne des droits de l'Homme a condamné la Turquie à plusieurs reprises pour viol de la liberté d'expression, par exemple pour avoir usé de sa loi Anti-terreur aux fins d'interdire la publication de périodiques.

Cette loi Anti-terreur sert encore pour poursuivre des manifestants pro-PKK de la même façon que s'il s'agissait de combattants en armes. Beaucoup d'entre eux sont longuement détenus en attendant leur jugement et sont ensuite condamnés à de lourdes peines. Cette loi a seulement été amendée en juillet dernier de sorte que les mineurs y soient soustraits.

Des centaines de responsables et de militants du parti pro-kurde DTP et son successeur le BDP (qui comprend 20 députés) ont été poursuivis en justice cette année, par exemple pour leurs liens avec l'Union des communautés kurdes (KCK), une organisation accusée de dépendre du PKK.

En octobre 2010, 7 maires, plusieurs avocats et un défenseur des droits de l'homme figuraient parmi les 151 responsables et militants jugés à Diyarbakir pour séparatisme et appartenance à KCK. Les maires ont déjà passé 10 mois en détention, 53 autres accusés 18 mois, tandis que dans tout le pays, près de 1000 membres du DTP ou du BDP, suspectés de faire partie de KCK sont eux aussi en détention provisoire.

Muharrem Erbey, vice-président de l'Association des droits de l'homme et président de la branche de Diyarbakir, arrêté en décembre 2009, pour appartenance au KCK, est lui aussi toujours en détention. Vetha Aydin, présidente de la branche de Siirt

pour cette même association, a été arrêtée en mars pour le même chef d'accusation et est aussi toujours emprisonnée au moment de la rédaction de ce rapport.

Les violences policières restent un problème, surtout lors des manifestations et des arrestations qui s'ensuivent. La torture et les mauvais traitements en détention ont déçu.

Les gendarmes ont abattu au moins 9 contrebandiers dans les zones frontalières de Van, Şirnak et Urfa.

Actuellement, un colonel en retraite, des gardiens de village et des informateurs sont en jugement pour le meurtre de 20 personnes entre 1993 et 1995 à Cizre.

IRAN

Entre emprisonnements pour délits d'opinion et exécutions, rien ne s'est amélioré, pas plus que le traitement réservé aux prisonniers.

En 2010, Farzad Kamangar, Ali Heidarian, Farhad Vakili, Shirin Alam Holi et Mehdi Eslamian ont été pendus le 9 mai 2010 à la prison d'Evin, Téhéran, sans que leurs avocats ni leurs familles aient été informés. 16 autres Kurdes sont condamnés à mort, accusés d'appartenance à un mouvement armé.

L'Iran continue de persécuter ses minorités, qu'elle soient religieuses, comme les Baha'i ou les Yarsans, ou même les sunnites, ou ethniques, comme les Kurdes, les Arabes, les Azéris ou les Baluches.

KURDISTAN D'IRAK

L'excision des filles est répandue, et en novembre 2010 un rapport du ministre de la Santé au Kurdistan donnait le chiffre de 41% des femmes et filles kurdes à avoir été mutilées. Le 6 juillet 2010,

l'Union des docteurs de la loi musulmans du Kurdistan, par sa haute commission des fatwa, a déclaré que l'islam ne prescrit pas cette pratique, mais n'a pas appelé à son interdiction. La commission parlementaire des droits de la femme au Kurdistan a pu faire passer un projet de loi sur les violences familiales en y incluant l'excision et le ministre de la Santé a annoncé des plans pour informer le public sur les conséquences négatives de cette pratique. Mais le gouvernement n'a pas encore interdit l'excision, pas plus qu'une campagne réelle pour l'éradiquer n'a été initiée.

Le 4 mai, des inconnus ont enlevé, torturé et tué Sardasht Osman, un étudiant de 23 ans, qui écrivait pour des journaux en free-lance. Sa famille, ses amis et d'autres journalistes accusent les partis au pouvoir d'être à l'origine du meurtre en raison des articles critiques dont Sardasht Osman était l'auteur. De nombreuses plaintes de journalistes visent les forces de sécurité kurdes pour harcèlement, intimidation, menaces, arrestations et agressions de journalistes. Des responsables politiques ont poursuivi des journaux en justice après avoir été mis en cause dans la presse.

SYRIE

Aucun changement n'a été observé dans les pratiques répressives de la Syrie. Les mêmes violations ont lieu contre les militants politiques, les défenseurs des droits de l'homme ; des sites Internet sont censurés, des blogueurs emprisonnés ou empêchés de sortir du territoire.

L'État d'urgence décrété en 1963 est toujours en vigueur, permettant aux forces de sécurité d'arrêter des personnes sans mandat et de les détenir au secret pour de longues périodes. La Cour suprême de sécurité condamne dans des tribunaux d'exception des Kurdes et des islamistes sans qu'il y ait procès régulier. Des dizaines de militants kurdes ont été ainsi condamnés à des peines de prison en 2010, la plupart membre du PYD, une branche syrienne du PKK, mais pas seulement. En avril 2010, 4 membres du parti Yekitî (qui ne prône pas la lutte armée), Yasha Wader, Dilghesh Mamo, Ahmad Darwish, et Nazmi Mohammad ont été condamnés à 5 ans de prison pour avoir tenté "d'amputer le territoire syrien". Trois autres hauts responsables de Yekitî, Hassan Saleh, Muhammad Mustapha, et Ma`ruf Mulla Ahmad sont actuellement poursuivis pour les mêmes chefs d'accusation.

En juin 2010, un juge militaire a condamné Mahmud Safo, membre du Parti kurde de gauche, à un an de prison pour "incitation à des conflits sectaires" et appartenance à une organisation interdite".

En mars, les services de renseignements militaires d'Alep ont emprisonné `Abdel Hafez `Abdel Rahman, qui appartenait à la direction d'une association (interdite) pour les droits de l'homme, MAF ("droits" en kurde) avec un autre militant de cette association, Nadera `Abdo. Les services secrets ont relâché `Abdo alors que `Abdel Rahman était

jugé pour des actions visant à amputer le territoire syrien. Il est libéré sous caution depuis septembre. Son procès est en cours.

En avril 2010, les autorités ont enfin relâché sous caution l'écrivain et homme politique Ahmad Mustafa Ben Mohammad (connu sous le nom de Pir Rostem), qui avait été arrêté en novembre 2009 pour des articles publiés sur l'Internet (ainsi qu'une autre fois, en mars 2008).

Les militants continuent de se voir refuser de sortir du pays. Ainsi Radeef Mustapha, à la tête du Comité kurde des droits de l'homme. Par ailleurs, toutes les associations de défense des droits de l'homme sont interdites en Syrie, le gouvernement refusant systématiquement d'agrèer leur enregistrement.

La politique syrienne est particulièrement sévère concernant les discriminations contre les Kurdes, qui sont en Syrie la plus grande minorité non-arabe. Parmi eux, plus de 300 000 kurdes sont privés arbitrairement de nationalité. L'expression de l'identité kurde est interdite ainsi que l'enseignement du kurde dans les écoles.

En mars 2010, les forces de sécurité ont tiré sur des Kurdes qui célébraient leur Nouvel An dans la ville de Raqqa, afin de les disperser, faisant au moins un mort. En juillet, 9 Kurdes accusés d'avoir participé aux célébrations de Raqqa ont été condamnés à 4 mois de prison pour "incitation aux conflits sectaires".

CULTURE :

« MANDOO » PREMIÈRE FICTION DU RÉALISATEUR EBRAHIMI SAEEDI

Dans son film Mandoo, qui est sa première œuvre de fiction, le réalisateur Ebrahim Saedi, un Kurde iranien né à Mahabad, se penche

sur le sort des Kurdes après la chute de Saddam, en 2004.

Mandoo raconte en effet l'histoire de Kurdes ayant fui l'Iran pour l'Irak en 1979, après la révolution

islamique et les persécutions du nouveau régime et qui ont dû vivre des décennies dans des camps de réfugiés contrôlés par le parti Baath. Ils décident, après 2003, de retourner dans leur lieu

d'origine. Dans le même temps, une cousine, Shihan (jouée par Rojan Mehemed) revient de Suède après 20 ans d'exil, où elle exerce la profession de médecin. Loin d'encourager le reste de sa famille à retourner en Iran, elle tente de les persuader d'émigrer en Suède. Elle se heurte en cela à l'avis de son cousin Shaho, qui souhaite accomplir la promesse qu'il a faite à son père mourant, celui de le ramener dans son village natal pour y mourir. Le film se présente donc comme un road movie sur les routes d'Iran.

Ebrahim Saeedi avait auparavant évoqué le destin de ces Kurdes cantonnés dans des camps au sud de l'Irak au moyen de documentaires. La découverte de fosses communes dans cette même zone lui avait aussi inspiré le tournage de 'Toutes mes mères' en 2009.

S'exprimant sur son identité de Kurde, Ebrahim Saeedi relie son expérience personnelle à l'intrigue du film : « Je ne me considère pas comme appartenant à un lieu particulier. Oui, je suis Kurde et je livre un point de vue sur ces gens, parce que je suis lié à eux, et que mes personnages sont issus de ce peuple. Durant les quatre décennies durant lesquelles j'ai vécu au Kurdistan iranien et irakien, je suis passé, personnellement, au travers de maintes crises, tous les hauts et des bas que les Kurdes ont connus, et c'est la raison pour laquelle j'ai voulu raconter cette histoire. »

De l'avis du réalisateur, la chute de Saddam n'a pas entraîné pour les Kurdes le contrôle de leur destinée. « Cela valait-il la peine, pour les Kurdes, de passer par tant de

situations de crise ? Ce que je peux dire, c'est qu'aucune de ces crises n'a été initiée par les Kurdes eux-mêmes. Il y a toujours eu un tiers à l'origine des problèmes que les Kurdes ont eu à subir. La famille que je filme, même dans un voyage pacifique, doit faire face continuellement à des crises qui ne sont pas de son fait. »

Ce voyage est ainsi une illustration symbolique de l'histoire du peuple kurde : la famille, en route, doit se garder d'individus tentant, par la ruse, de les détourner de leur chemin, ou bien doit se soumettre aux interrogatoires de soldats. Sur la question de l'avenir des Kurdes, Ebrahimi se garde de faire preuve d'une confiance trop optimiste :

« Il y a une crainte constante à laquelle les Kurdes sont confrontés : « Quel sera l'avenir ? Que va-t-il apporter ? » L'Histoire s'est, jusqu'ici, constamment répétée. Dès qu'une opportunité s'offrait aux Kurdes, ils étaient poignardés dans le dos avant même de pouvoir la saisir et se retrouvaient seuls. À cause du passé, les Kurdes envisagent tout ce qui les entoure avec un point d'interrogation. » Pour la même raison, selon Saeedi, le peuple kurde a essentiellement soif de paix.

Mandoo a été présenté dans plusieurs festivals internationaux comme celui de Dubaï en décembre dernier ou celui de Locarno cet été.

Par ailleurs, on apprenait, le 3 janvier 2011, la mort d'un acteur renommé en Israël, Josef Shiloach, qui a succombé au cancer à l'âge de 69 ans. Né au Kurdistan d'Irak en 1941,

Shiloach avait émigré avec sa famille en Israël à l'âge de 9 ans. Sa carrière d'acteur avait débuté en 1964 et il n'avait cessé de tourner depuis, la plupart du temps dans un répertoire comique, soit dans des films israéliens, soit dans des shows télévisés. Entre les années 1980 et 1990, il avait aussi tourné dans des productions comme Rambo 3, Mummy Lives, où il jouait aux côtés de Tony Curtis.

Josef Shiloach avait souvent joué de son origine pour peaufiner un personnage de juif 'persan' s'exprimant avec un fort accent. Parti avec toute sa famille, de son Kurdistan natal, pour atterrir dans un camp au sud de Tel-Aviv, il avait connu la pauvreté et avait dû travailler très tôt, au lieu d'étudier. C'est en travaillant comme homme de ménage dans une salle de cinéma qu'il avait eu la passion du 7^{ème} art et l'ambition de devenir acteur. Josef Shiloach sortit ainsi parmi les premiers de la plus prestigieuse école de cinéma du pays, Beit Tzvi. C'est alors qu'il put surmonter, selon lui, le sentiment d'exclusion qu'il avait connu dans son enfance, quand les autres enfants allaient à l'école.

Cette précoce expérience de l'injustice a sans doute été aussi à l'origine de son engagement contre l'occupation de la Cisjordanie et de la bande de Gaza. Dans les années 1980, il quitta même Israël pour vivre un certain temps à Paris, ne souhaitant pas rentrer dans son pays tant que la paix ne serait pas instaurée. Il ne rentra qu'en 1991, après que la conférence de Madrid ait initié une phase de négociations diplomatiques entre Israël et ses voisins arabes.

Irak

Le Kurdistan, havre de paix pour les chrétiens

Endeuillée par les nombreux attentats dont elle a été la cible, la communauté chrétienne de Bagdad a trouvé refuge auprès des Kurdes.

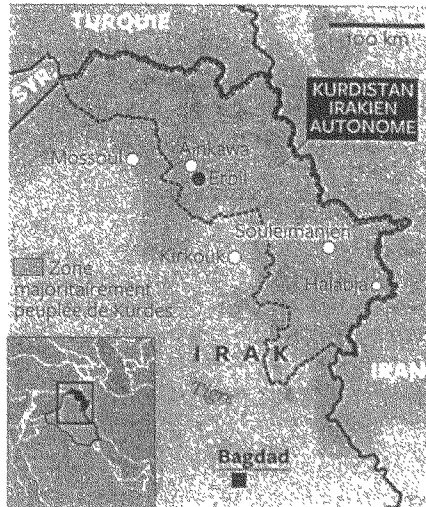
Asharq Al-Awsat (extraits) Londres

Les habitants du Kurdistan ont passé le nouvel an en compagnie de milliers de concitoyens chrétiens qui les avaient rejoints pour profiter de la sécurité et de la paix qui règnent dans les villes de cette région. Les réjouissances de cette année ont eu la particularité d'être accompagnées de pluies en plaine et de neige dans les montagnes, éloignant la crainte d'une nouvelle sécheresse. La brusque chute de température n'a pas empêché des dizaines de milliers de jeunes de descendre dans la rue pour participer à la fête.

Dès les premières heures de la journée, les mesures de sécurité ont été renforcées, avec patrouilles de police dans les villes et de nombreux points de contrôle dans les rues. Cela a rassuré les habitants et les a incités à sortir de chez eux pour se réunir dans la rue sans crainte, malgré les rumeurs concernant l'intention d'Al-Qaïda de s'en prendre aux villes-kurdes à l'occasion des fêtes.

A Erbil, on a commencé par des feux d'artifice tirés de la citadelle historique qui ont rempli le ciel de la ville de couleurs, visibles depuis les faubourgs les

A l'abri des violences



plus lointains. Des dizaines de milliers de personnes se sont attroupées, jeunes et vieux, hommes et femmes, au point qu'on avait du mal à passer et que la police a dû fermer la plupart des rues à la circulation automobile.

Dans la localité d'Ainkawa, à majorité chrétienne, la fête a atteint son paroxysme. Les cafés, restaurants et hôtels étaient pris d'assaut pour des concerts de musique privés. Le plus remarqué a été celui du chanteur irakien Haitham Yousef, qui se produisait à guichets fermés. À Souleïmanieh, c'est dans la rue Salem que se sont réunies des dizaines de milliers de personnes. Parmi elles de très nombreux

chrétiens, dont certains étaient arrivés depuis plusieurs jours. Ainsi, l'accent typique de Bagdad était bien représenté dans la foule. Mounir Kourkis, un jeune chrétien, explique que c'est la première fois qu'il vient au Kurdistan et que c'est aussi la première fois qu'il se sent en sécurité au moment du nouvel an. "Ma famille est toujours à Bagdad, mais ma tante s'est installée à Souleïmanieh depuis un certain temps. Elle m'a décrit l'ambiance ici et m'a demandé de venir passer les fêtes avec elle. En fait, ici, c'est totalement différent de Bagdad, en particulier pour la sécurité qu'on trouve ici, alors qu'elle fait défaut là-bas. Ajoutez à cela la générosité de l'accueil, dont nous avons perdu l'habitude dans la capitale", reconnaît-il.

Rony Zia, un autre chrétien, a quitté Bagdad après l'attentat [le 31 octobre] contre l'église de Notre-Dame-du-Perpétuel-Secours. "Nous sommes ici en sécurité, explique-t-il. Mais nos cœurs sont avec nos frères restés à Bagdad. D'autant qu'ils ont été visés une nouvelle fois juste avant le nouvel an. Je les invite à nous rejoindre au Kurdistan, où règnent la sécurité et la stabilité. La population est accueillante et on ne se sent pas étranger parmi nos frères kurdes." Karadhan Othman, un jeune Kurde, affirme pour sa part que cela lui importe peu que les gens soient chrétiens ou musulmans. "Le nouvel an chrétien est peut-être une fête pour tout le monde. Je suis très content quand j'entends parler différentes langues et dialectes, arabes et kurdes, dans cette ambiance joyeuse."

Shéhrazade Shikhani

AFP

Irak: le parti de Barzani retire ses plaintes contre les médias

ERBIL (Irak), 10 janvier 2011 (AFP)

LE PARTI démocratique du Kurdistan (PDK) de Massoud Barzani, président de la région autonome du nord de l'Irak, a annoncé lundi, dans un "geste de bonne volonté", le retrait de l'ensemble de ses plaintes contre les médias kurdes.

Cibles de dizaines de poursuites, de nombreux médias de la région avaient ces dernières semaines dénoncé une campagne d'intimidation des autorités, et une atteinte à la liberté de la presse.

"Dans un geste de bonne volonté, nous annonçons que nous avons décidé de retirer toutes les plaintes en justice déposées contre les journaux et les écrivains", a déclaré lors d'une conférence de presse Najirvan Barzani, un haut dirigeant du PDK.

"Nous espérons que les journalistes feront preuve d'un plus grand esprit de responsabilité dans leur travail", a ajouté celui qui est en outre le neveu de

Massoud Barzani.

L'organisation Reporters sans frontières (RSF) s'était également alarmée mi-décembre de la cascade de plaintes.

"Et ce ne sont plus uniquement les médias non partisans qui se trouvent dans la ligne de mire. Aujourd'hui, les directeurs de publications passent leur temps dans les couloirs des tribunaux", indique RSF dans un rapport intitulé "Kurdistan irakien: des procès comme s'il en pleuvait".

Ahmed Mera, rédacteur en chef de Lvin avait recensé pas moins de 27 plaintes en justice contre son magazine, parmi lesquelles "au moins sept à caractère politique" déposées par le PDK.

Ce parti réclamait en outre, selon l'Observatoire de la liberté de la presse en Irak un milliard de dollars de dommages et intérêts à Roznama, une publication qui appartient au chef du parti d'opposition Goran (changement), Nicherwan Moustafa.

Lundi, Najirvan Barzani a affirmé que son mouvement n'était "pas opposé à la liberté d'expression".

"Nous pensons que la critique du travail du président de la région et de son gouvernement est quelque chose de normal", a-t-il dit. "Nous nous sommes tournés vers les tribunaux pour faire valoir la loi et les journalistes savent très bien que saisir un tribunal n'est pas en violation de la loi."



9 morts, 19 blessés dans des violences en Irak

BAGDAD —2 janvier 2011 — (AFP)

AU MOINS NEUF personnes ont péri et 19 autres ont été blessées dimanche dans plusieurs attentats en Irak, dont une série d'assassinats en début de soirée dans la capitale, a-t-on appris auprès des services de sécurité et de santé.

Entre 18H00 et 20H00 (15H00-17H00 GMT), un colonel de la police de la circulation, deux policiers, un capitaine de l'armée et un ingénieur ont été abattus par des hommes armés dans cinq attaques distinctes dans différents quartiers de Bagdad, a annoncé un responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur sous couvert d'anonymat.

Un colonel travaillant au ministère de l'Intérieur a été grièvement blessé par des hommes armés qui ont pris la fuite, selon ce même responsable, qui a précisé que les mesures de sécurité avaient été renforcées dans le centre de la capitale après ces attaques.

Plus tôt, une patrouille de l'armée a été la cible d'un attentat à la voiture piégée vers midi (09H00 GMT) dans la localité d'al-Qayara, à 320 km au nord de Bagdad, selon le lieutenant Khattab Mohamed.

L'explosion a fait deux morts, dont un soldat, et trois blessés. La province de Ninive, où se trouve al-Qayara, reste l'une des plus violentes d'Irak, en raison des tensions ethniques entre Arabes et Kurdes.

Plus au sud, un policier a été tué dans l'attaque du point de contrôle où il était posté dans le secteur d'Al-Filahat, à l'ouest de Fallouja, ville située à 60 km à l'ouest de Bagdad, a annoncé le capitaine Omar al-Filahi, membre de la police locale. Quatre autres policiers ont été blessés.

A Balad, à 70 km au nord de Bagdad, une femme a été tuée et huit personnes ont été blessées, dont trois femmes et un enfant, quand des inconnus ont attaqué le domicile d'un procureur, Hardan Khalifa, selon une



source hospitalière.

Et deux bombes ont explosé à Baqouba, à une soixantaine de kilomètres au nord-est de la capitale, blessant trois personnes, dont le chef des biens religieux sunnites dans la province de Diyala, Mal Allah Abbas Ahmed, ont annoncé des sources policière et médicale.

Ces nouveaux attentats sont intervenus au lendemain de l'annonce par le gouvernement du bilan des violences de décembre, révélant que davantage d'Irakiens avaient péri en 2010 qu'en 2009, alors que la tendance était à la baisse depuis plusieurs années.

Si l'année 2010 a été marquée par une baisse du nombre de victimes civiles, davantage de policiers et de militaires ont péri dans les violences, ce qui peut s'expliquer par le fait que les forces de sécurité irakiennes ont opéré de plus en plus seules en 2010, avec la fin de la mission de combat américaine le 31 août.

Le Premier ministre, Nouri al-Maliki, reconduit le mois dernier pour un second mandat, a cité la sécurité comme l'une des priorités de son nouveau gouvernement.



Turquie : découverte d'une fosse commune pendant une enquête sur des Kurdes disparus

ANKARA, 5 janvier 2011 (AFP)

LA JUSTICE TURQUE a découvert mercredi dans l'est de la Turquie une fosse commune contenant les ossements d'au moins 12 personnes à l'occasion d'une enquête sur le sort de Kurdes portés disparus depuis de nombreuses années, a rapporté l'agence de presse Anatolie.

Saisi par des familles de disparus, le procureur de Mutki, une ville de la province de Bitlis, peuplée en majorité de Kurdes, a ordonné mercredi le lancement de recherches dans un terrain vague servant de décharge publique à la sortie du bourg, selon l'agence.

"Dans la première zone où des excavations ont été effectuées, les corps de neuf personnes ont été dégagés sans qu'il n'y ait de confusion. Les ossements ont été mis en sécurité", a déclaré le président du barreau de Bitlis, Eris Gül, présent sur les lieux en qualité d'observateur.

"Les os de trois autres personnes sont mélangés parce qu'elles ont été enterrées ensemble", a poursuivi l'avocat, cité par Anatolie.

Des fouilles similaires ont abouti à l'exhumation au printemps 2009 d'ossements humains et de vêtements dans la province de Simak, voisine de celle de Bitlis.

Elles ont conduit à l'ouverture en septembre du procès de sept prévenus, dont un colonel de gendarmerie, accusés d'avoir participé aux exécutions



sommaires de 20 personnes dans les années 1990, quand la rébellion kurde battait son plein dans l'est et le sud-est de la Turquie.

La région, peuplée en majorité de Kurdes, a été le théâtre de violents affrontements entre les forces armées turques et les rebelles kurdes du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), qui a pris les armes en 1984 pour l'indépendance de la région.

Le conflit a fait environ 45.000 morts, des dizaines de milliers de déplacés et a donné lieu à de nombreuses allégations de violations des droits de l'Homme par les deux camps, incluant des exécutions extrajudiciaires.

Çandar: polls, Kurdish issue, new constitution will occupy agenda



Yonca Poyraz Dogan / ISTANBUL

The new year will be full of key events in Turkey as there will be general elections in June followed by a debate regarding the making of a new constitution and solving the Kurdish issue, a veteran journalist has said.

Writer and journalist Cengiz Çandar told Today's Zaman for Monday Talk that the Turkish domestic political arena will be occupied by those important issues as the political parties have already started to use election rhetoric, which carries risks.

"The signs in the last days of 2010 indicate a fierce fight. Especially the debate concerning the acceptability of bilingualism and Kurdish autonomy in Turkey," he said, adding that civil initiatives are gaining more power in the country.

In the area of foreign policy, he expects issues regarding Iran and Israel to be at the forefront.

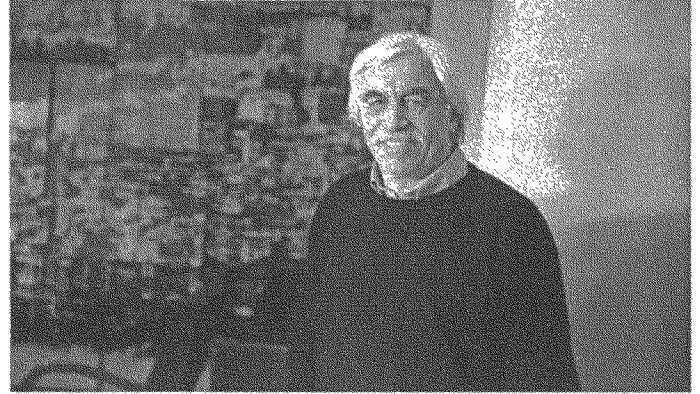
Answering our questions, he elaborated on domestic and foreign policy issues that are expected to keep the nation busy.

What domestic political issues do you expect to occupy the agenda as we enter 2011?

No doubt, elections come first. The first half of the year we will be occupied with the election campaign, and the formation of the government will probably not occur earlier than August. Then we will see preparations for a new constitution, which will be followed by the course of the Kurdish issue in connection with both the elections and the making of a new constitution.

If we first talk about the elections, do you think we will see fierce fights during the process, as currently political leaders' speeches seem to be signaling an unyielding stance?

Yes, the signs in the last days of 2010 indicate a fierce fight. In particular the debate regarding whether or not bilingualism (Turkish and Kurdish) and Kurdish autonomy can be accepted in Turkey is a discussion that is occupying the arena. Unfortunately, the debate is not on a healthy course as it is being victimized by electoral campaigns. Meanwhile, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) announced a cease-fire until the end of the election, but they will have a re-evaluation of that decision in March. If common sense does not prevail in that period of time and if harsh polemics do not end, we can see a derailment.



Do you mean that arms could replace words?

Yes, an armed conflict could flare up. A few clashes are enough to occupy the agenda as we saw after the referendum when a suicide bomber struck in Taksim Square -- even though he was the only victim, it engrossed everybody. As we have seen before and after the referendum took place on Sept. 12, the political atmosphere was poisoned by attacks. If armed conflict comes to the fore between March and June when the elections are held, a few attacks are enough to challenge the elections process.

'TURKEY'S HISTORY FULL OF KURDISH UPRISINGS'

Is it possible to talk about a new constitution in such an environment?

It would be hard to make a new constitution in an environment like that, especially when we talk about a new constitution because we want to change not only its wording but its evil essence. The new constitution should be pro-freedom and stress individual rights and freedoms instead of being centralist, statist and pro-censorship. And we are considering those matters at length as the Kurdish issue has reached a certain maturity. The most important part of the new constitution will be to include Kurds in the new and pro-freedom judicial system in a way that they want to be included. So there are demands from Kurds. How is the preamble of the constitution going to be formulated? How is the language concerning the definition of citizenship going to be worded? The 1982 constitution made education in a mother tongue impossible. Now, the entire Kurdish community of Turkey demands education in their mother tongue. Therefore, the atmosphere in the first half of 2011 will determine how the atmosphere will be in the last half of the year after the election in terms of constructive dialogue.

Do you ever wish that elections were not near as it creates an environment of conflict and issues cannot be discussed in healthier way?

No, I don't because in Turkey nothing is discussed if there is no conflict. The Kurdish issue has always been Turkey's number one problem. Since the 1938 Dersim events -- also the year Atatürk died -- until the start of the armed struggle by the PKK in 1984, the issue was dormant. Nothing has been done to address the problem; on the contrary, the problem has gotten even worse. There have been

several Kurdish uprisings in the history of the Turkish Republic, including the 1925 Sheikh Said rebellion. All of those rebellions were put down, and the rebel leaders were killed. But the current Kurdish uprising has a leader, they have their armed men in the Kandil Mountains, and they are spread throughout a wide area. In addition, there is a Kurdish diaspora. Therefore, Turkey faces a big problem in regards to how the Kurdish rebellion will be solved. The issue is more than terror events.

It s a long-lasting, burning issue ...

It s an important issue, and when issues like autonomy and bilingual education, which are burning issues, are being discussed, there is an environment of conflict.

KILIÇDAROĞLU DOESN T HAVE MUCH TIME TO CHANGE COURSE

When we talk about the political actors in the debate we see the pro-Kurdish party BDP [Peace and Democracy Party], the ruling AK Party [Justice and Development Party], which has started to take a nationalist stance, and the main opposition CHP [Republican People s Party], which has a leader from Dersim. Although he has not yet offered any meaningful solutions to the Kurdish problem and has been criticized for not doing so, do you think he can change the course of the debate for the better?

There are only six months to the election, and Kemal Kiliçdaroglu has been the leader of the party for about six months. During his referendum campaign, he made 140 speeches, and in those speeches he has not even uttered the word Kurd. Everybody has made their calculations prior to elections. We see that the prime minister has adopted a nationalist stance on the issue because as he tries to obtain votes from nationalists who would vote for the MHP [Nationalist Movement Party], he aims to have a majority of seats in Parliament in order to make the new constitution without having headaches. At the same time, he demonizes the BDP. In this picture, the CHP does not have much space unless it comes up with brand new ideas. Still, we can t exactly guess how political dynamics will develop in Turkey. Kiliçdaroglu took over the party first from Deniz Baykal and then from Önder Sav. Kiliçdaroglu s choices for the party administration show that he is making changes in the party, and those changes are good. On the other hand, he took over the CHP, which carries major baggage as it was the first, single party in the country for a long time and then became an integral part of the tutelage system in Turkey. Therefore, it is not easy for Kiliçdaroglu to come up with new ideas. There is a big question mark about it.

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE GOOD FOR TURKEY

It seems like we have talked a great deal about conflict and clashes of ideas. There should probably also be reasons to have some hope in 2011. Do you agree?

There is hope, and I m not pessimistic at all. As long as we acknowledge that there is a risk of conflict, we can overcome it. Turkey has started to get rid of the tutelage system that has held the country captive. We now dis-

cuss everything that has been insufficiently debated in the past. New discussions naturally bear conflict. Regarding the discussions of autonomy, the interior minister has said that the debate makes the nation nervous. However, some part of the nation becomes more relaxed by having this discussion. Turkey has the intellectual capacity to have those debates. There is nothing wrong with that. Civil disobedience is good for Turkey. If there is civil disobedience, armed struggle becomes meaningless. A clash of words is better than armed clashes. In addition, we have already seen signs in 2010 that civil initiatives are becoming stronger in Turkey. On April 24 of last year, Muslim Turks commemorated the killings of Armenians in Turkey. This was a significant development. We have a number of reasons to be hopeful this year.

THERE CAN BE A POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE SITUATION IN IRAQ

Now, in the area of foreign policy, what issues do you expect to occupy the agenda in 2011?

Relations regarding Iran and Israel. There is also one issue, not at the forefront like Iran and Israel, and that is Iraq. The United States is going to withdraw its remaining combat troops from the country soon. There won t be any uniformed Americans left in Iraq. We have to watch developments in Iraq with regard to how Iraq s fragmented structure will be affected by this development. Iraq s main actor is the Kurds. Turkey s policies also affect Iraq. Iraq does not look too bad right now, but it could become a trouble spot in 2011. In addition, Lebanon is waiting for a decision from the international tribunal soon. There could be a potentially explosive situation that would have repercussions for the whole Middle East, where Turkey has an active foreign policy.

When it comes to relations with Israel, what can we expect?

Turkey doesn t have much elbow room in that regard. For the start of normalization of relations Turkey has two preconditions: apology and compensation. Apology is the most important, the minimum, requirement. Turkey cannot move toward normalized relations with Israel in that area -- even an inch -- at least until the end of the elections. The Israeli government is not apparently planning to issue an apology, and the Turkish government does not plan to have normalized relations with Israel, not just for pragmatic reasons but also for philosophical reasons.

This is an area that probably would have an influence in the area of relations with the United States. Another issue that will not progress in that regard is probably approval of protocols signed by Turkey and Armenia in October 2009, right?

During election time, no government would bring out issues that opposition parties could make use of. There are already enough controversial issues.

Bloomberg

Iraq Agrees to Pay Companies Pumping Kurdish Oil, Exports to Resume Feb. 1

January 23, 2011 -

By Kadhim Ajrash and Nayla Razzouk

THE IRAQI government will pay foreign oil companies producing in the country's northern Kurdish region under a deal reached to resume crude exports from the area, Oil Ministry spokesman Asim Jihad said.

The ministry in Baghdad will pay producers including DNO International ASA and Addax Petroleum Corp., by way of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government's Natural Resources Ministry, Jihad said in an interview last night. He gave no further details about the payment arrangement.

Oil exports from Kurdistan began in June 2009 and halted in October of that year after a dispute erupted between the regional and central governments over money generated by the sales. Foreign companies operating in the Kurdish region are still owed between \$400 million and \$500 million in unpaid revenue, Natural Resource Minister Ashti Hawrami said Jan. 17.

Iraq, home to the world's fifth-biggest oil reserves, needs foreign investment and expertise to help ramp up energy exports and pay to rebuild an economy shattered by years of conflict, economic sanctions and sabotage.

Iraq has signed 15 gas and oil licenses since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that ousted the regime of former President Saddam Hussein. It expects current oil output to rise to more than 3 million barrels a day by the end of this year, compared with 2.4 million barrels a day in December, and is counting on exports from Kurdish

fields to contribute to the increase.

FEBRUARY START

The national Oil Ministry agreed to pay the companies in Kurdish areas as part of an accord that Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul Kareem al-Luaibi signed with Hawrami on Jan. 17. The two sides are allowing for oil exports from the Kurdish province to start again on Feb. 1, Jihad said.

"Nobody benefits from the current situation, including the central government, the Kurdistan province and the foreign companies working there," said Falah al-Khawaja, an independent petroleum and engineering consultant on Iraq. "The important factor for all parties concerned is to increase exports, and this agreement is a first step toward resolving tensions."

The agreement specifies that Kurdish crude oil and naphtha would flow at a combined rate of 100,000 barrels a day through a pipeline from northern Iraq to the Turkish terminal of Ceyhan on the Mediterranean Sea, Jihad said. He did not provide details of the respective volumes of oil and naphtha to be exported.

The agreement requires that Kurdistan produce an additional 50,000 barrels a day of crude to feed its own refineries and help meet local demand, the spokesman said.

CRUDE HALTED

DNO, Addax and other companies halted crude exports after Iraq's central government stopped reimbursing them for expenses, amid the escalating dispute between the ministry in Baghdad and the provincial government.

The central government considered that production-sharing agreements between Kurdish authorities and foreign companies were invalid. The accords allocate to foreign companies a share of the oil they produce, in contrast to service contracts adopted by the national Oil Ministry that pay foreign producers a per-barrel fee.

Hawrami said on Nov. 30 the Kurdish government would consider making adjustments to the 38 contracts it has signed with foreign oil companies. He said these agreements would "stand" under a new Iraqi oil law that is likely to go into effect by June.



Energy Resources

Kurds upbeat on end of Iraqi oil hangups

ERBIL, Iraq, January 25, 2011 (UPI)

Leaders in the semiautonomous Kurdish north of Iraq said they hoped disputes with the central government over oil would be settled soon.

Oil companies are up against political obstacles in Iraq because the Kurdistan Regional Government and the central government in Baghdad are at odds over laws governing the country's energy sector.

Kurdish President Massoud Barzani said during a recent session with international diplomats that he felt the end to the bilateral dispute was near.

"I am optimistic about the resolution of the dispute with Baghdad over oil exports and the contracts with foreign oil firms," he said in a statement. "There have been positive signs recently that this dispute may soon be over."



Iraqi PM visits Kurdish region of northern Iraq

Norwegian energy company DNO, one of the first to start working in post-invasion Iraq, said after Iraqi lawmakers reached a power-sharing deal on a new government in November that 2011 would be productive for the company in Iraq.

DNO stopped exporting crude in part because of payment disputes with Iraq officials.

Oil flowed for just four months after it started in June 2009 because of legal disputes between the Kurdish government and Baghdad.

Iraqi officials said during a recent interview with Bloomberg News that a possible deal for exports through Turkey was in the making.

Resurgent Turkey Flexes Its Muscles Around Iraq

By ANTHONY SHADID

ZAKHO, Iraq — A Turkey as resurgent as at any time since its Ottoman glory is projecting influence through a turbulent Iraq, from the boomtowns of the north to the oil fields near southernmost Basra, in a show of power that illustrates its growing heft across an Arab world long suspicious of it.

Its ascent here, in an arena contested by the United States and Iran, may prove its greatest success so far, as it emerges from the shadow of its alliance with the West to chart an often assertive and independent foreign policy.

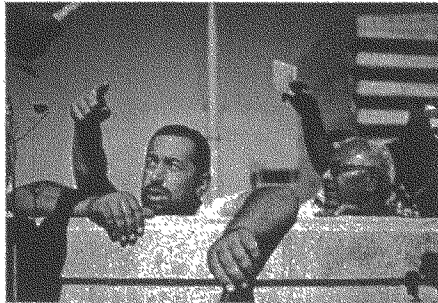
Turkey's influence is greater in northern Iraq and broader, though not deeper, than Iran's in the rest of the country. While the United States invaded and occupied Iraq, losing more than 4,400 troops there, Turkey now exerts what may prove a more lasting legacy — so-called soft power, the assertion of influence through culture, education and business.

"This is the trick — we are very much welcome here," said Ali Riza Ozcoskun, who heads Turkey's consulate in Basra, one of four diplomatic posts it has in Iraq.

Turkey's newfound influence here has played out along an axis that runs roughly from Zakho in the north to Basra, by way of the capital, Baghdad. For a country that once deemed the Kurdish region in northern Iraq an existential threat, Turkey has embarked on the beginning of what might be called a beautiful friendship.

In the Iraqi capital, where politics are not for the faint-hearted, it promoted a secular coalition that it helped build, drawing the ire of Iraq's prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, along the way. For Iraq's abundant oil and gas, it has positioned itself as the country's gateway to Europe, while helping to satisfy its own growing energy needs.

Just as the Justice and Development Party of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has reoriented politics in Turkey, it is doing so in Iraq, with repercussions for the rest of the region.



Ayman Oghanna for The New York Times

Iraqis in Erbil waited for visas to visit Turkey outside the consulate, which issues as many as 300 a day.

While some Turkish officials recoil at the notion of neo-Ottomanism — an orientation of Turkey away from Europe and toward an empire that once included parts of three continents — the country's process of globalization and attention to the markets of the Middle East is upsetting assumptions that only American power is decisive. Turkey has committed itself here to economic integration, seeing its future in at least an echo of its past.

"No one is trying to overtake Iraq or one part of Iraq," said Aydin Selcen, who heads the consulate in Erbil, which opened this year. "But we are going to integrate with this country. Roads, railroads, airports, oil and gas pipelines — there will be a free flow of people and goods between the two sides of the border."

By the border, he meant Zakho and the 26-lane checkpoint of Ibrahim Khalil, where 1,500 trucks pass daily, bringing Turkish building materials, clothes, furniture, food and pretty much everything else that fills shops in northern Iraq.

The economic boom they have helped propel has reverberated across Iraq. Trade between the two countries amounted to about \$6 billion in 2010, almost double what it was in 2008, Turkish officials say. They project that, in two or three years, Iraq may be Turkey's biggest export market.

"This is the very beginning," said Rushdi Said, the flamboyant Iraqi Kurdish chairman of Adel United, a company involved in everything from mining to sprawling housing projects.

"All of the world has started fighting over Iraq. They're fighting for the money."

Ambition, in 4 Languages

Mr. Said's suit, accented by a black-and-white handkerchief in the pocket, shines like his optimism, the get-rich-quick kind. In some ways, he is a reincarnation of an Ottoman merchant, at ease in Kurdish, Turkish, Persian and Arabic. In any of those languages, he boasts of what he plans.

He has thought of contacting Angelina Jolie, "maybe Arnold and Sylvester, too," to interest them in some of his 11 projects across Iraq to build 100,000 villas and apartments at the cost of a few billion dollars. So far, though, his best partner is the singer Ibrahim Tatlis, the Turkish-born Kurdish superstar, whose portrait adorns Mr. Said's advertisement for his project the Plain of Paradise.

"The villas are ready!" Mr. Tatlis says in television ads. "Come! Come!"



Turkey's President Abdullah Gul (L) welcomes Iraq's President Jalal Talabani, a Kurd, in Istanbul. December 22, 2010. Photo: Reuters.

Come!"

Erbil, the Kurdish capital in the north where Mr. Said lives, has become the nexus of Turkish politics and business, made possible by the sharp edge of military power.

About 15,000 Turks work in Erbil and other parts of the north, and Turkish companies, more than 700 of them, make up two-thirds of all foreign companies in the region. Travel requirements have been lifted, and the consulate in Erbil issues as many as 300

visas a day. A Turkish religious movement operates 19 schools in the region, educating 5,500 students, Arabs, Turkmens and Kurds mingling in a lingua franca of English.

Turkish officials talk about transforming the region into something akin to the American-Mexican border, a frontier as ambiguous as any line on a map is precise. Even some Kurdish officials have embraced the idea, though interpreting the notion differently.

While Turkey sees integration as a way to tap nascent markets in the Middle East, some Kurdish officials have seen it more emotionally, as a way to bind them to Kurdish regions in neighboring countries that no degree of political negotiations could ever achieve.

"The borders between us were not drawn by us," Kamal Kirkuki, the speaker of the local Kurdish Parliament, said of the frontier with Turkey, Iran and Syria, all with Kurdish minorities, "It's a de facto border and we have to respect it, but in our hearts we don't see it. We want to integrate the people without any bureaucracies keeping them apart."

Kurds represent nearly 20 percent of Turkey's population, and Turkish governments have long viewed calls for their self-determination as a fundamental threat to the state. The same went for Kurds in Iraq, whose autonomy might provide an inspiration to Turkey's own minority. Since 2007, those assumptions have undergone a seismic shift.

Over the smoldering reservations of the Turkish military, which has carried out repeated coups against elected governments, Mr. Erdogan has undertaken halting steps to reconcile with Turkey's own Kurds in what the government has termed "the Kurdish opening." They have met with mixed success, but the new climate reflects the changes: Turkish diplomats here casually refer to Iraqi Kurdistan — the K-word long being a taboo — and Massoud Barzani, that region's president, no longer talks about Greater Kurdistan.

Diplomatic Balancing Act

Less publicly, American officials in late 2007 began to support Turkish military action against Kurdish rebels in Turkey who have sought refuge in northern Iraq. Turkey still keeps as many as 1,500 troops here, officials say, and the cooperation has allowed them, as a senior American official put it, "to quite effectively strike" the Kurdish rebels.

Iraqi officials in Erbil and Baghdad

have protested, requiring a measure of American diplomacy to soothe their resentment. But at least for now, Kurdish officials have viewed their alliance with Turkey as a greater priority in a region still contested by Iran.

"Kurdistan is not against the interests of Turkey," Mr. Kirkuki said simply. A surprising feature of Turkey's success is the image it has managed to project in Iraq. On the road from Erbil to Baghdad, its pop culture is everywhere.

Posters of Turkish television serials — from "Muhannad and Nour" to "Forbidden Love" — sell by the tens of thousands. The action series "Valley of the Wolves" is a sensation, the lead actor lending his name to cafes. His own posters are computer-altered to show him in traditional Kurdish or Arab dress — grist for a graduate school seminar on the adaptability of cultural symbols.

Its political influence in Baghdad is no less widespread. Unlike Iran and the United States, it has cultivated ties with virtually every bloc in the country, though relations with Mr. Maliki have proved difficult at times. (At one point, his officials tried to revoke the Turkish ambassador's credentials to enter the Green Zone. "A misunderstanding," Turkish diplomats called it.)

Turkish diplomats stay for two years, unlike the one-year posting for Americans, and over that time, they have managed to reach out to unlikely partners, namely the followers of the populist Shiite cleric Moktada al-Sadr.

Most of Mr. Sadr's bloc of lawmakers traveled to the Turkish capital, Ankara, for training in parliamentary protocol. In October, Turks were the only diplomats to attend a commemoration the Sadrists held at Baghdad University. "It is not a group to be excluded," one of them said.

Courting the Sadrists, though, is a sideshow to the real prize being sought in the prolonged months of negotiations over a new government.

Turkey strongly backed the fortunes of a coalition led by Ayad Allawi, a secular Shiite politician who enjoys the support of the country's Sunnis. More than any other country, Iraq's Arab neighbors included, it is credited with forging the coalition in the first place.

American and Turkish interests did not always line up on the government's formation, and some diplomats questioned whether American officials were perceived as backing Mr. Maliki too strongly.

"A high-wire act," said the senior American official, describing Turkish-American relations generally.

Yet those interests are roughly aligned now, and the degree of power Mr. Allawi's coalition eventually plays in the government will vividly illustrate Turkey's relative weight in Iraq.

"I'd say the Turks put a lot of effort into it," the official said, "and they still are."

Building Connections

In southernmost Iraq, the old Ottoman quarter in faded Basra is crumbling. Its windows are patched with cinder block, though the stench of sewage still seeps in. Across town is the Basra International Fair Ground, built by Turks and opened in June. Three fairs have already been held there, including one organized in November for Iraq's petroleum industry.

Oil is still king in Iraq, and as much as anything else, underlines Turkey's interests here. The pipeline from Kirkuk, Iraq, to Ceyhan, Turkey, already carries roughly 25 percent of Iraq's oil exports.

The Turks have signed on to the ambitious \$11 billion Nabucco gas pipeline project, which may bypass Russia and bring Iraqi gas to Europe. Turkish companies have two stakes in oil contracts, and two more in gas projects, potentially worth billions of dollars. In a land of oil, no place has more than Basra.

Turkish ships offshore provide 250 megawatts of electricity a day. Turkish companies have refurbished the Sheraton Hotel in Basra and are helping to build a 65,000-seat stadium. The Turkish national air carrier is planning four flights a week from Istanbul to Basra; only one is offered now, by Iraqi Airways. Vortex, Crazy Dance and other amusement rides in Basraland are Turkish. So are the sweets sold there.

"No one is working here except Turkey," said Mr. Ozcoskun, the Turkish consul in Basra.

It was a bit of overstatement from the garrulous diplomat, but not by much.

"Basra is virgin," he said, a phrase Turkish diplomats volunteer about the rest of Iraq, too. "Who comes first, who establishes first, who makes contacts first will make the most profit in the future. I don't feel any competition right now. Not at all."

Iraq's new government

A tricky cocktail

BAGHDAD

Nobody knows how the long-awaited administration will actually work



AFTER nine rudderless months, Iraq's parliament finally, on December 21st, endorsed a new government. It is not clear, however, whether Nuri al-Maliki, who has retained his post as prime minister, will be able to provide Iraq with the things it most needs: physical security; government stability; decent public services, especially electricity; less corruption; and a growing economy to create jobs for millions of resentful Iraqis.

It may be some time before a new balance of power becomes evident. Mr Maliki was widely blamed, by his fellow majority Shias as well as by Iraq's Sunni Arab and Kurdish minorities, for accumulating too much personal clout in his past four years in the job. The new deal is meant to bring checks and balances. The Sunnis have won some beefy ministries. But if they still feel left out of real decision-making, Iraq's stability will continue to be shaky.

Posts have been awarded largely along ethnic and sectarian lines. The 33 cabinet jobs so far allotted have been roughly split between a Shia alliance headed by Mr Maliki, a largely Sunni block, known as *Iraqiya*, headed by a secular Shia, Iyad Allawi, and a Kurdish alliance which has

held onto the foreign ministry, still under Hoshyar Zebari, and the presidency, retained by Jalal Talabani. Parliament's agenda-setting speaker is Osama al-Nujaifi, a powerful Sunni from the still-violent city of Mosul. The defence minister, yet to be named, is expected to be another Sunni.

Mr Allawi, whose *Iraqiya* front won 91 seats to Mr Maliki's 89 in the 325-strong parliament, has endorsed the new government. But much will depend on whether a strategic council which he has been assigned to head will have real heft or a merely advisory role that Mr Maliki may choose to ignore. As Mr Maliki widened his coalition in the past few months, Mr Allawi frequently threatened to walk away from negotiations altogether. Had he rejected a deal, the division between Shias and Sunnis would have become dangerously wide. His co-operation is crucial.

There has been further progress towards ending some niggling quarrels. Three *Iraqiya* parliamentarians, barred from taking office by a commission which can veto people with alleged links to Saddam Hussein's regime, have been reprieved. One of them, the vocal and popular Saleh al-Mutlaq, has become one of three deputy

prime ministers, along with Roj Nuri Shawis, a Kurd, and Hussein al-Shahristani, the powerful former oil minister, who is close to Mr Maliki.

Some say Mr Shahristani's departure from the oil ministry could herald a breakthrough in long-stalled negotiations over the control of oil and gas in the Kurds' autonomous region. The new oil minister, Abdulkarim Luabi, is friendlier to the Kurdish authorities, who want to export the hydrocarbons found in their area and reap more of the profits directly rather than send them first to Baghdad. This is unlikely to happen, but since Mr Maliki is indebted to the Kurds for their continuing political support, a compromise may be found.

The biggest worry is over the failure so far to name three "power ministers" to run interior, defence and national security. Until those posts have been allotted, Mr Maliki will hold them himself. He has already shown a tendency to use the police and army for his own political ends, so the sooner they are dished out the better. In any event, it is vital for Iraq's future that they fall under civilian control and do not become political fiefs. The followers of Muqtada al-Sadr, a populist Shia cleric backed by powerful militias who have committed sectarian atrocities in the past, are keen that their lot wins one of those ministries. But if that happened, many Sunnis and quite a few secular-minded Shias would be scared. Mr Maliki hopes that the Sadrists will instead be content with some of Iraq's key service ministries.

So the new government has not quite yet been settled. And no one knows, once it is finalised, if it will stick together.

Kurdistan Says It Is World's Sixth Richest Oil Region

By RUDAW

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: With an estimated 45 billion barrels of oil reserves, Iraqi Kurdistan – if it were a country – would be the world's sixth richest in oil, said a senior advisor to Kurdistan's Natural Resources Ministry.

"If we talk about Kurdistan separately from Iraq, it is the sixth richest oil location in the world," said Ali Hussein, advisor to Iraqi Kurdistan Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami, in reference to the three provinces of Erbil, Sulaimani and Duhok which comprise the official area of the semiautonomous Kurdistan region of northern Iraq.

The semiautonomous region's 45 billion barrels of proven oil reserves

make up about a third of Iraq's entire oil reserves, estimated at 143 billion barrels.

Iraqi Kurdistan, which has signed 37 oil and gas contracts with 42 companies from 17 countries, has the capacity to export 100,000 barrels of oil per day (bpd), and this is expected to reach 200,000 bpd by the end of 2011, according to Hussein.

However, as a result of disputes between Iraq's central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) over these oil contracts, no oil is being officially exported from Kurdistan at present.

Because the Iraqi central government has refused to pay expenses or interest to the foreign oil companies operating in Kurdistan, oil exportation was suspended in Iraqi Kurdistan in September 2009, after having commenced just a few months previously in June 2009.

"If the Iraqi government fails to grant rights to the [international] oil companies, we will not resume oil exportation," said Hussein, adding that, according to an agreement recently reached between the KRG and Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Maliki's newly formed government, oil problems between Kurds and



An oil field in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Baghdad needed to be solved within six months.

The new government has replaced Hussein Shahrastani with Abdul-Karim Luaibi as oil minister. Shahrastani was often at loggerheads with the Kurds over oil issues.

However, Luaibi is seen by Kurdish politicians, including Hussein, as a more moderate man, who is willing to negotiate to solve outstanding problems between the KRG and Baghdad over oil.

As of last Monday, Luaibi expected that the exportation of Kurdish oil would resume "soon," without giving any specific date.



5 JANVIER 2011

Par RFI

Le chef radical chiite irakien Moqtada Sadr, tête noire des Américains, est rentré ce mercredi 5 janvier 2011 d'Iran, où il a passé quatre ans après un bras de fer sanglant avec le Premier ministre irakien Nouri al-Maliki. Mais pour se maintenir au pouvoir, Maliki a dû faire alliance avec ce rival de toujours.

C'est en allié de Nouri al-Maliki que Moqtada Sadr revient en Irak, à Najaf, la ville sainte du chiisme dont il incarne un courant radical. Depuis son exil de Qom en Iran, le 15 mai dernier, il avait déjà levé son veto à la reconduction de Maliki dans le fauteuil de Premier ministre.

L'heure était grave, la liste de son frère ennemi chiite était arrivée en deuxième position seulement aux législatives du 7 mars, derrière la formation

Moqtada Sadr fait son retour en Irak après 4 ans d'exil



Un poster de Moqtada Sadr brandi dans la foule, à Sadr City, Bagdad.

(Photo : Reuters)

laïque d'un Iyad Allaoui fort des voix sunnites.

Et finalement en octobre dernier, sous la pression de Téhéran sollicitée par Maliki, le père fondateur de l'Armée du Mahdi, Moqtada Sadr, a surmonté le

fossé de sang qui sépare les deux maisons chiites.

Un sadriste valide le gouvernement

Depuis sa création en 2003, la milice sadriste avait en effet longtemps tenu tête aux troupes américaines et irakiennes lancées à l'assaut de ses bastions, jusque dans les faubourgs de Bagdad, à Sadr city. Mais après des combats acharnés, Moqtada Sadr avait dû prononcer sa dissolution puis partir en exil.

Aujourd'hui, ce sont ses partisans, quarante députés sur 325, qui ont redonné à Maliki les clefs du Parlement dont le vice-président est un sadriste. Le 21 décembre, il a validé le nouveau gouvernement composé de vingt chiites, de dix sunnites, de quatre kurdes et d'un chrétien.

Le Monde
7 janvier 2011

Le projet de mur à la frontière entre la Grèce et la Turquie embarrasse Bruxelles

Athènes relève « l'hypocrisie » des critiques et souhaite le maintien des gardes-frontières européens

Bruxelles, Istanbul
Correspondants

L'embarras règne à Bruxelles après l'annonce par la Grèce de son intention de construire un mur de 3 mètres de haut sur une partie de sa frontière avec la Turquie. Le projet, dévoilé le 1^{er} janvier par le ministre de la protection citoyenne, Christos Papoutsis, vise à limiter l'immigration irrégulière dans une zone où aucun obstacle physique n'empêche les passages. Cette bande est devenue un point d'entrée privilégié pour des migrants désireux de pénétrer dans l'Union européenne (UE) –quelque 90 % des clandestins passent désormais par la Grèce.

Le projet concerne une portion de 12,5 kilomètres, en Thrace. Au sud de la rivière Evros, qui fait un coude en Turquie, la zone dite du « triangle de Karaagaç » est très perméable : quelque 128 000 clandestins y sont passés en 2010, selon M. Papoutsis.

La Commission européenne a exprimé ses réserves sur le projet du gouvernement grec. « Les murs et les grillages sont des mesures à court terme », a jugé un porte-parole. Bruxelles dit attendre « des réponses structurelles sur la gestion des frontières et l'asile ». Prudente, la Commission ne veut toutefois pas s'immiscer dans « un débat politique » ou condamner trop sévèrement « des mesures qui ne sont pas encore en place ».

Les discussions avec Athènes s'annoncent difficiles. Le gouvernement grec a dénoncé « l'hypocri-



Le 5 janvier, à Athènes, des migrants afghans se sont cousu la bouche et ont entamé une grève de la faim afin d'obtenir le statut de réfugiés. PETROS GIANNAKOURIS/AP

sie » des critiques qui lui sont adressées et la nécessité de « protéger les droits des citoyens grecs ». Jusqu'ici la Grèce était visée par ses partenaires à la fois pour ses manquements dans la surveillance de ses frontières, l'inadaptation de ses centres de rétention et le sort qu'elle réserve aux demandeurs d'asile politique.

La France et l'Allemagne s'inquiètent de l'avenir de l'espace Schengen, compte tenu, notamment, des afflux de clandestins via la Grèce. Le Royaume-Uni, les Pays-Bas et la Suède ne renvoient plus les

clandestins vers Athènes, même s'il est prouvé qu'ils sont entrés sur le sol européen via la Grèce. Enfin, des capitales soupçonnent désormais les autorités d'Athènes d'avoir lancé l'idée d'un mur pour faire pression sur l'UE et obtenir la prolongation de la mission de l'agence européenne Frontex. Celle-ci a déployé, en octobre, 200 gardes-frontières dans la zone concernée par le projet de mur, mais la mission doit s'achever fin février.

La dernière inquiétude des Européens concerne les relations avec la Turquie, même si le gouvernement grec affirme que son projet vise plutôt à améliorer la coopération avec Ankara. Le projet soulève des critiques en Turquie. « Ce mur signifie que l'on déclare physiquement à la Turquie qu'elle se trouve en dehors de l'Europe. Il ne va probablement pas arrêter l'immigration, mais il peut annihiler la confiance entre les deux voisins », estime Beril Dedeoglu, professeure de relations internationales à l'université Galatasaray d'Istanbul.

Le gouvernement turc paraît toutefois ne pas vouloir envenimer le débat. Peut-être parce que la Turquie, située au carrefour des migrations venues des pays troubles du Moyen-Orient (Iran, Irak), d'Asie (Afghanistan), du Caucase et de plus en plus d'Afrique et du

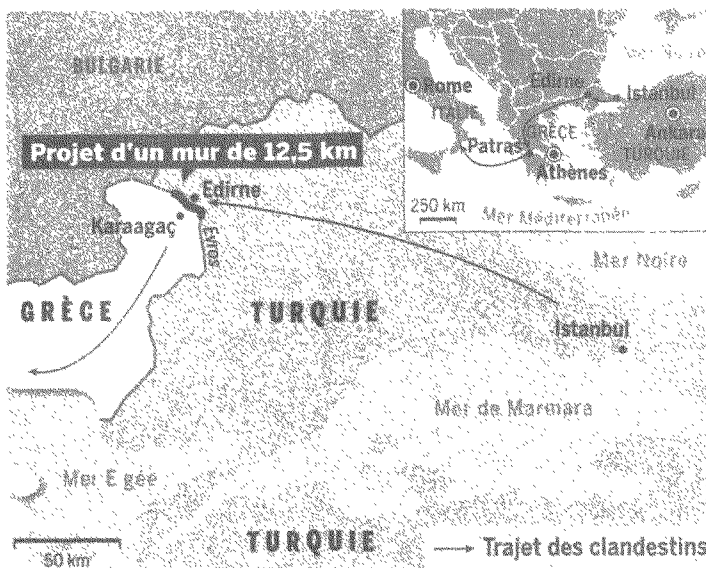
Maghreb, connaît, elle aussi, des difficultés. Des dizaines de milliers de migrants passent par Istanbul, porte vers l'Europe et plaque tournante des trafics. Les centres de rétention des clandestins sont pleins et les atteintes aux droits de l'homme, très fréquentes. La Turquie maintient aussi des restrictions à l'application de la conven-

Des dizaines de milliers de migrants passent par Istanbul, porte vers l'Europe

tion de Genève sur les réfugiés et accorde très peu l'asile politique.

Les dirigeants turcs sont eux-mêmes soumis à la pression de Bruxelles, qui veut leur faire signer un accord de réadmission des clandestins passés par leur territoire. Un tel accord poserait problème, Ankara ayant adopté une politique ouverte de visas avec une soixantaine de pays du Moyen-Orient, d'Asie et d'Afrique. Par ailleurs, la Turquie ne veut pas sous-traiter pour l'UE la gestion des clandestins alors que les négociations en vue de son éventuelle adhésion sont quasiment bloquées. ■

Jean-Pierre Stroobants et
Guillaume Perrier



Iraqi cleric makes bold return from exile in Iran

BAGHDAD

His supporters jubilant, Sadr can stake a claim to center stage of politics

BY JOHN LELAND
AND ANTHONY SHADID

Moktada al-Sadr, the radical cleric whose followers waged deadly warfare against American troops after the fall of Saddam Hussein's government in 2003, returned to Iraq on Wednesday after three years of voluntary exile in Iran. Mr. Sadr pursued clerical studies in Iran while avoiding an arrest warrant for the killing of a rival cleric in 2003.

In the Shiite holy city of Najaf, where Mr. Sadr appeared on Wednesday, a jubilant crowd of about 3,000 gathered outside his house to welcome him back. "Long live the leader," some shouted.

The mercurial and enigmatic Mr. Sadr returns as a vastly different figure than the one who left three years ago, with a claim on the center stage of Iraqi political power. In last year's national election his party, the Sadrist Trend, won 40 seats in Parliament, a show of strength and organization that party members said demonstrated their transition from a militia force to a mainstream political entity. Mr. Sadr's surprise decision in August to throw support behind the bid of his longtime antagonist, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, for a second term as prime minister effectively decided the election in Mr. Maliki's favor.

On Wednesday, it was unclear whether any criminal charges hung over Mr. Sadr. Jawad Khadhumi, a Sadrist member of Parliament, said that there was no warrant for the cleric's arrest.

"That was just from the previous government to target the Sadrists, to take us away from the political process," Mr. Khadhumi said, adding, "We proved to everyone that we are an important part in Iraq and the political process."

A lawmaker from Mr. Maliki's winning bloc, Hussain al-Saffi, said the government had "no intention or tendency to raise any legal issues related to Mr. Moktada."



Moktada al-Sadr, the radical Shiite Muslim cleric, arriving in his stronghold, the holy city of Najaf, on Wednesday after more than three years of voluntary exile in Iran.

Mr. Sadr's surprise alliance with Mr. Maliki was widely believed to have been brokered by the Iranian government in order to create a governing Shiite alliance in Iraq. Sadrist militias had fought lethal battles against Iraqi Army troops sent against them by Mr. Maliki in 2008 in Baghdad and in Basra, Iraq's second-largest city.

Mr. Sadr's return has long been rumored. In the weeks before the election last March, many supporters were convinced that his journey back was imminent, in part to rally support before the vote. This time, the return came as a surprise, and most of his followers learned of his arrival from television. In Sadr City, a vast slum that bears the name of his father, one of Iraq's most revered ayatollahs, reaction was muted to his return, coming as it did during a somber month in the Shiite calendar.

There were conflicting reports, too, on whether Mr. Sadr's return was permanent or merely a visit. Even some of his supporters seemed unsure.

"It's up to his eminence to stay permanently in Najaf or go back to Iran," said Balqis al-Khafaji, a candidate with Mr. Sadr's bloc in the election.

Mr. Sadr remains a divisive presence here. More than any of Iraq's political figures, he captured the voice of populist anger against the U.S.-led invasion, as he antagonized foreign troops from the pulpit and on the battlefield. But to many, especially among Iraq's Sunni minority, he remains synonymous with black-clad Shiite death squads that terrorized the country as it descended into

a sectarian civil war in 2006 and 2007.

His return now, said Ahmed Abdul Khaliq, 58, a shop owner in Baghdad's largely Sunni Adhamiya neighborhood, meant that Iraqi life "will be disrupted again," and that "the militias will return and dominate."

He added, "Spending three years in Iran will change him worse than before."

Omar al-Jawoshi and Duraid Adnan
contributed reporting.

Iranian minister visits Iraq

Iraq's new foreign minister was pushing to cement ties with Iraq on Wednesday at a time when American troops are preparing to go home and Tehran's influence is on the rise, The Associated Press reported from Baghdad.

Officials from around the Middle East have been streaming into Iraq since the new Shiite-led government was sworn in last month. The visit by Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi of Iran came after Jordan and Egypt sent delegations.

Iraq and Iran were long bitter rivals, especially under Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated regime, and fought a brutal eight-year war in the 1980s, in which hundreds of thousands were killed on both sides.

Iraq's foreign minister, Hoshiyar Zebari, said the two discussed "in detail" an Iranian opposition group, the Mujahideen Khalq, that Iran wants expelled from Iraq. His comments suggested that Iraq may finally be ready to tackle an issue that has long angered Iran.

JANUARY 8-9, 2011

Sadrists lay claim to the future in Iraq

NAJAF, IRAQ

With return of its leader, group shows maturation and a new confidence

BY ANTHONY SHADID

It was fewer than seven lines of handwritten Arabic on a small piece of paper, bearing his stamp. But with it, Moktada al-Sadr, son of a revered ayatollah and scourge of the American occupation, made clear that he was in charge again of a group that has begun shaping Iraq as the United States withdraws.

"The lack of discipline of some of you as I performed my religious rituals bothered me and hurt me," he said in the message made public Thursday, scolding his followers for the rapturous welcome the day before. "Please exercise discipline and refrain from excessive chants and pushing, which harms me, others, you, your reputation and the reputation of the Sadr family."

Or, translated more loosely, this is not yesterday's movement.

Mr. Sadr returned Wednesday from more than three years of exile in Iran, and signs abound of the new face his movement is projecting, with him in charge. Not least was a security detail outfitted in gray suits or khaki that looked borrowed from a mercenary outfit.

On dirt packed by the feet of pilgrims, under imperious flags of piety, his supporters speak with a new confidence, even arrogance, about a future they claim.

On Friday they trekked in cars, taxis and rickety vans festooned with portraits of the populist cleric. Many were fervent, some simply curious. And by morning, they had made their way to the Kufa Mosque, where sun lighted the gold domes like a quarter moon. There, under a cloudless sky, they waited.

"He'll come, he'll come," one promised his young friends.

Another grasped for words to describe his anticipation.

"A hunger," he offered.

"This is not a normal day," shouted a guard at a checkpoint near the forbidding brick walls of Kufa Mosque, one of the oldest in Islam, where Mr. Sadr's father built a sprawling grass-roots movement before he was assassinated in 1999. "This day is exceptional."

Mr. Sadr is the rare figure in Iraq who carries both religious mystique and political authority, heeded by a movement with a canny sense of the street



A vendor selling images of Moktada al-Sadr outside the Kufa Mosque on Friday. Followers of the cleric had gathered at the mosque, hoping to catch a glimpse of him.

and an ability to fashion itself as the opposition, even when it plays the role of kingmaker, as it is doing now.

Ryan C. Crocker, a former American ambassador to Iraq, once suggested that the followers of Mr. Sadr "could revolutionize Iraqi politics." He made the remark months ago, but these days, the prediction seems closer to reality.

In conversations across Najaf, a portrait emerged of a movement less at a crossroads and more on the verge of synthesis of all its disparate elements, perhaps made possible by Mr. Sadr's return.

"Now that he's back, he can begin solving our problems," Sadeq Ibrahim, 38, a veteran of Mr. Sadr's ostensibly disbanded militia, said Thursday. "He's the man who can do it — a religious leader and a political leader — and it takes both to solve the problems of Iraq."

Such fervor is nothing new for a populist movement that emerged after the American invasion as one of Iraq's most unpredictable forces, building on the following of Mr. Sadr's father. In 2004, its militia twice fought the American military, and its language, as religious as it is nationalistic, remains decidedly anti-American.

These days, though, it is a far more sophisticated movement, recovering from military defeats in 2008 to win 40 seats in Parliament and to offer decisive support for Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Mahiki's return to power last month.

Many here have viewed the group's success as a sign of its maturation. Its own cadres, almost entirely free of the menace and suspicion of their Shiite rivals, deem it simply the natural outcome of their longstanding grass-roots support. In the long months of negotiations over the government, some of Mr. Sadr's rivals complained of his delegates' rollicking arrogance about their power, a haughtiness echoed in the streets.

"God willing, we'll rule the country, but we'll do it by way of justice, with our brothers, through our thoughts and intellect that will gather Iraqis together," Mr. Ibrahim said Thursday. "The pen is our weapon now, and so is our knowledge."

Whether that is the case remains a debate here. The current American ambassador, James F. Jeffrey, has said he has seen no evidence that the Sadrists have renounced, "in practice or in theory," the idea of using force against opponents. Through the months of negotiations after last year's parliamentary elections, American diplomats worried

Moktada al-Sadr is the rare figure in Iraq who carries both religious mystique and political authority.

about the Sadrists playing a decisive role in the new government.

But the reaction to Mr. Sadr's return was subdued in Washington. In 2004, an American spokesman in Baghdad called Mr. Sadr "a two-bit thug." On Wednesday, the State Department spokesman, Philip J. Crowley, called him "the leader of an Iraqi political party that won a number of seats in the March 2010 election."

In fact, he is neither, a reality that was evident on Thursday. Mr. Sadr set out from his office in the style of a Baghdad potentate, riding in a convoy of silver BMWs escorted by sport utility vehicles. A few miles away, at the Kufa Mosque, his supporters spoke in millennial terms of Mr. Sadr as a savior, a mystic and a herald of the coming of the Hidden Imam, who will reveal himself at the end of time, bringing order and justice and taking revenge on God's enemies.

On Friday at the mosque, rumors that Mr. Sadr would appear punctuated the hours. Pandemonium erupted at one entrance, as shouts of his imminent arrival

sent worshipers surging through towering wooden doors.

Just before the prayers began, a murmur rippled across the courtyard that his BMW had pulled up behind the mosque. His arrival, they said, was imminent.

"He's on his way! He's on his way!" shouted Ahlam Nouri, a 48-year-old woman who pulled her black veil toward her face in a gesture of decorum. "Our hearts tell us so."

She took her seat, and at 12:13 p.m., the sermon began.

In a sign of the times, the Americans come up far less than they once did. Posters still demand their departure, and one worshiper warned that if they don't leave by 2012, "all the events that happened will happen again."

But in Sheik Asad al-Nasari's speech, they were mentioned only cryptically. It is an Iraqi moment, and the movement, striving for the discipline and influence of another Arab Shiite movement, Lebanon's Hezbollah, warned trouble-

makers in the group not to smear the Sadrists' "clean reputation."

"Some wrongdoings were one of the reasons that drove your leader away from you all this time," he told the worshipers. "Do not allow this to happen again."

After all, he said, Mr. Sadr is "a blessing of God."

Fifty-six minutes later, the sermon ended, and Mr. Sadr had yet to appear.

The winter breeze picked up, and worshipers dusted off their pants and fumbled for their shoes. Ms. Nouri passed them, shaking her head in disappointment. "Why didn't he come?" she asked. "Why could we just have a glimpse of his eyes?"

She shrugged before joining the legions of others walking into sun-soaked streets, bound for distant towns of an undecided country, where they awaited their reckoning.

INTERNATIONAL
Herald Tribune JANUARY 6, 2011
THE WORLD'S DAILY NEWSPAPER

Turkey vows faster justice as ruling lets militants go free

ISTANBUL

FROM NEWS REPORTS

Turkey promised to speed up its judicial system on Wednesday after more than 20 suspected militants, including members of an extreme Islamist organization, were released from Turkish jails after a Supreme Court of Appeals ruling that limits to 10 years the time detainees can be held without being sentenced.

Justice Minister Sadullah Ergin defended the release and promised to shorten trials, responding to public outrage over the impact of the new law.

"Of course, some releases might have caused outrage in the public and irritated all of us," said Mr. Ergin. "But the judges must deliver rulings based on the law, rather than their conscience."

Eighteen members of Turkish Hezbollah — a Sunni Muslim organization unrelated to the Shiite Hezbollah group active in Lebanon — and five members of the outlawed P.K.K., an armed Kurdish independence movement, were set free after having spent more than 10 years in jail awaiting the endorsement of their sentences by the Supreme Court of Appeals.

Under the Turkish legal system, any local court conviction has to be approved by the Supreme Court of Appeals before a sentence can be put into effect.

The practice of jailing detainees indefinitely without sentence has long disturbed human rights advocates, who were only slightly mollified by the court ruling. They say the 10-year limit, which was based on a recent amendment to the Turkish criminal code, does not go far enough in securing detainees' rights.

"There are numerous verdicts by the European Human Rights Court that limit imprisonment of detainees to reason-

able terms," said Suheyli Donay, a criminal law professor at Istanbul University. "This term is often not more than two years, so this ruling is a wrong one."

The released detainees will not be able to leave the country and must report regularly to the local police. Nevertheless, the prisoner releases and the prospect of many more to come — the Turkish news media have reported that more than 50,000 have applied for a review of their cases — have raised concerns.

In court, as media reports repeatedly reminded the public, forensic experts testified that the Hezbollah members had executed numerous victims by burying them alive, their hands and feet tied together.

Television video showed dozens of supporters celebrating as a senior member of the Turkish Hezbollah network was released from a jail in Diyarbakir, in southeast Turkey. The militant,

Edip Gumus, was arrested in 2000 and given a life sentence in December 2009 for belonging to a terrorist organization and participating in the murders of more than 100 people. He has denied the murder charges but acknowledges his affiliation with the group.

Mr. Ergin said about 14 percent of the cases against Turkey at the European Court of Human Rights were related to complaints about lengthy jail terms. He said the new law was part of a reform process, but acknowledged that the 10-year limit was long. He said about 1,000 suspects are expected to be released under the law.

"In the past, there was no limit and people could stay in jail without a final verdict for 20 years," he said. "We are working to shorten the trial process."

He said the country's appeals courts have more than 1.5 million cases waiting to be addressed. (NYT, AP)

With the P.K.K. in Iraq's Qandil Mountains

By STEPHEN FARRELL, SHIHO FUKADA AND STEVEN LEE MYERS



MaryShiho Fukada for The New York Times

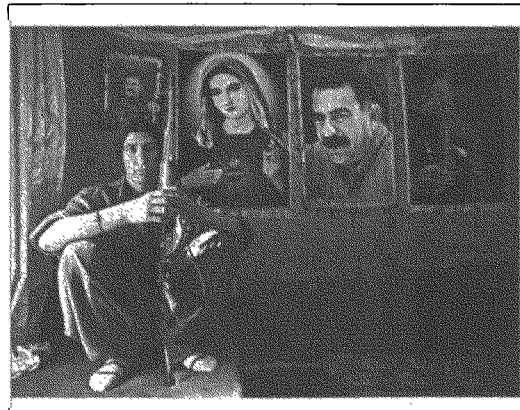
Big Brother: Painted on flat stones laid on a hillside, one of many portraits of the P.K.K. founder Abdullah Ocalan stares down from a hillside in the Qandil Mountains of northern Iraq. The remote and sparsely populated mountain range near the Iranian and Turkish borders provides a haven for the leftist Kurdish separatist group, also known as the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

QANDIL, Iraq — It is not easy to visit the mountainous borderlands of northern Iraq where the Kurdistan Workers' Party operates, but it is not impossible either.

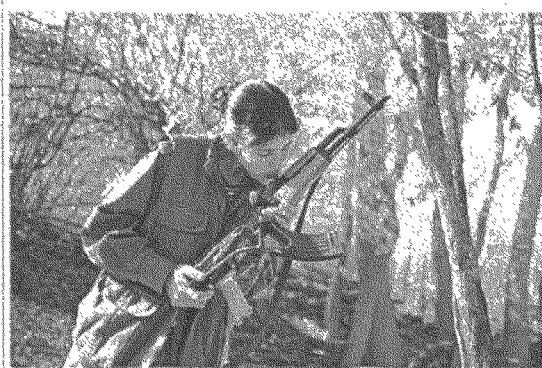
Such is the peculiar position of a group of committed insurgents against Turkish rule in Kurdish lands — even as Turkey and Iraq seek deeper and deeper ties, through diplomacy and trade, especially with Iraq's semiautonomous Kurdish region.

Turkey's ambitious desire to wield influence in Iraq — an assertion of soft power through culture, education and business — has done more perhaps than any military operation to isolate the party and its fighters, known as the P.K.K. and designated as terrorists by the United States and the European Union.

At the same time, the warming of relations could also provide the framework at least for the end of a conflict that has lasted more than a quarter of a century



Sarya Agiri, 22, at a P.K.K. sewing factory where she works in the Qandil Mountains. She is from Maku, Iran, and has been with the P.K.K. for four years. She is a guerrilla fighter and carries her own gun. Although there is a picture of the Virgin Mary on a wall of the factory beside one of Mr. Ocalan, none of the women working there are Christian. They say they chose the image because it is a symbol of a strong woman.



GunShiho Fukada for The New York Times Rengin Ararat, 31, from Syria, blowing dust off her Kalashnikov assault rifle outside the sewing factory. She has been with the P.K.K. for 12 years.

and cost at least 40,000 lives in Turkey.

The P.K.K.'s commander, Murat Karayilan, suggested in a recent interview here in Qandil that the group was prepared to end its fight and seek a political accommodation not unlike what Kurds now have in Iraq. His tone, while still blustery, reflected a tempering of the movement's demands.

"They have murdered tens of thousands of our people," he said of the Turkish state. "They have imposed sanctions on us for years. They have tried every possible means, but we are still here and we want a democratic solution."

In northern Iraq, the contrast could not be starker. In the Kurdish regional capital, Erbil, a Turkish-built shopping mall offers a temple of consumer prosperity. A few hours' drive away, the P.K.K.'s fighters live a spartan existence in the mountains where Iraq's borders with Iran and Turkey meet. Officially, the Kurdish regional government in northern Iraq denies providing safe haven for the rebels and restricts access to the areas where they operate, but not particularly vigorously. Two separate visits by The New York Times — negotiated over several weeks — involved bouncing, surreptitious journeys over dirt roads that evaded the last official checkpoints of the Iraqi state.

Once in the area surrounding Qandil, the party's presence was indisputable. In the case of a massive hillside portrait of the party's imprisoned founder, Abdullah Ocalan, it seemed taunting.

The party's uniformed fighters, men and women, control checkpoints or patrol the roads and tracks that wind through the harsh, craggy terrain. The party has a sewing factory to make its uniforms, a clinic to treat its wounded and a cemetery to bury its dead.

A German doctor, Medya Avyan, now works at the hospital. She has no Kurdish roots, but volunteered to help the Kurdish cause after learning of it from friends in the 1990s. Her name is a Kurdish one she assumed after moving to northern Iraq in 1993. (She declined to give her original German name, saying only that she was from Celle in Lower Saxony and had studied medicine in Hamburg.)

On a bookshelf in behind her in the hospital was Mr. Ocalan's photograph,

a volume on Hippocrates and a history of the P.K.K. Asked how she reconciled treating people in a hospital operated by an organization accused of killing thousands, she replied with remarks that many in Turkey would dispute.

"The P.K.K. don't kill any civilians," she said. "That's very important. They are killing those who kill them. They defend themselves, nothing else."

All of the party's members — its leaders, its fighters, its volunteers — defended their fight and their cause with a romanticism that makes it difficult to imagine their laying down arms and returning to peaceful civilian life. Many have been in the mountains for years.

"I have been a guerrilla for 18 years," Gorse Mereto, 32, a uniformed fighter, said during a break in the improbable shooting of a propaganda film. (The set was a campfire at night, illuminated by stage lights hanging from trees.) "I have seen many difficulties. In all the situations in which I myself was present, no civilian was killed, but soldiers were."

He had his own rationale, a history, viewed through Kurdish eyes, of Turkish oppression. It suggested a cycle of vio-



P.K.K. actors/guerrillas dancing in a scene from the movie, enacting celebrations around a campfire.

lence that would take time to break. "They have destroyed a lot of villages," he said. "They have killed innocent civilians. They have killed many of our men."

He continued, "Anybody, even an animal, defends itself."

Read Sebnem Arsu from Istanbul in the Times: 'Step by Step, Gulf Between Turkey and Kurds Narrows':

It is highly unlikely that Mr. Erdogan would consider autonomy for the Kurds, but analysts expect him to at least entertain notions like restructuring election laws to allow minority parties

to have greater access to Parliament and allowing wider use of ethnic languages like Kurdish...

Publicly, the ruling party refuses to negotiate with the P.K.K., which is listed as a terror organization by the European Union and the United States. But behind the scenes, it has been reaching out to Kurdish activists to find common ground on which to build a viable solution."



Turkish investigators unearth mass grave at military post

ISTANBUL - Daily News with Wires

Bones belonging to at least 12 different people have been unearthed in the eastern province of Bitlis in an area used as a landfill for a gendarmerie station, news agencies reported Wednesday.

Excavations began Wednesday in the Mutki district after repeated calls for investigations in the area by relatives of people missing since 1999.

Relatives said nine people were killed by soldiers as they traveled to join the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK, which is listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey, the United States and the European Union. The additional bones are believed to be those of PKK members.

A Bitlis public prosecutor, Bitlis Bar Association head Enis G, I and Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, Bitlis provincial head Mehmet Can Demir were present at the scene along with members of the Human Rights Association, or OHD.

Serdar «elebi, a member of the OHD's central board, called on those responsible for the deaths to be brought to trial.

Several hooks were also found beside the bones, but their purpose remains unknown.

The excavations centered on four locations in a vacant lot near the Mutki-Kavakba_1 road next to the local gendarmerie station.



Excavations began Wednesday in the Mutki district of Bitlis after repeated calls for investigations in the area by relatives of people missing since 1999. AA photo

The families of missing people have pointed to other suspected burial locations, «elebi said, adding that they would follow developments closely.

It is claimed that at least 36 people were killed and dumped in similar mass graves in the area between 1993 and 2003.



Reuters factbox: Oil companies active in Kurdistan Region

5 January 2011 (Reuters)

OIL OUTPUT from the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan helps boost exports that provide Iraq with about 95 percent of its federal revenue.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) says it holds reserves of 45 billion barrels. That has not been verified and contrasts with other estimates, such as the 2 billion barrels in proven reserves given by the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul Kareem Luaibi says the 2011 federal budget includes the expectation of shipments of 150,000 barrels per day from the KRG through the Iraqi export network.

Kurdish officials have said they only have the capacity to export 100,000 bpd.

Exports for Iraq as a whole are roughly 2.0 million bpd, out of total production that has now reached 2.7 million bpd.

KRG shipments stopped in 2009 because of a dispute between the KRG, which runs three provinces in northern Iraq, and Baghdad, which meant companies were not being paid.

Baghdad has declared illegal more than 40 production and exploration deals signed between the KRG and international oil companies and prevented companies working in Iraq's Kurdish region from taking part in two oil-field tenders held in 2009.

Luaibi has said he expected the halted shipments to resume soon.

Iraq still lacks a new oil and gas law that would cover the whole country, while the KRG agreed its own hydrocarbons law in 2007.

Thorny issues to resolve include a clause in the hastily drawn-up post-invasion constitution that Kurdish officials interpret as meaning KRG rules apply in the event of a legal disagreement between Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan.

Authorities also need to work out how to align the production sharing contracts agreed by the KRG and the service contracts Baghdad negotiated with foreign companies.

The following outlines some of the companies present in Kurdistan's more than 40 oil blocks.

The two biggest northern producing fields - excluding Kirkuk which lies outside the Kurdish region and is operated by the federal authorities - are

Tawke and Taq Taq.

According to documents obtained by Reuters from Kurdish opposition officials, and the KRG Ministry of Natural Resources, Norway's DNO (DNO.OL) has a 55 percent share in Tawke and Turkey's Genel has 25 percent, with the rest held by the KRG.

Genel is also active in Taq Taq, together with Sinopec unit Addax Petroleum.

North America: Numerically, the United States and Canada have the strongest representation in Iraq's Kurdish region. U.S. companies established there include Aspect Energy, Marathon Oil Corporation (MRO.N), Hillwood International Energy, Hunt Oil, Prime and Murphy Oil (MUR.N). Marathon and Murphy are recent entrants to the region.

Canada: Canadian companies are Forbes and Manhattan (FMC.TO), Western Zagros Resources, Talisman Energy Inc (TLM.TO), NIKO Resources (NKO.TO), Ground Star and Shamaran.

Norway: Norway's DNO International has been the most prominent oil company investing in both downstream and upstream sectors in Iraqi Kurdistan. Its share price has fluctuated in line with uncertainties on the ground.

OTHERS:

South Korea: Korea National Oil Company

Turkey: Genel Enerji, Petoil, Dogan

Britain: Gulf Keystone Petroleum, Sterling Energy, Heritage Oil plus Anglo-French company Perenco

The following countries all are believed to have one company active in the Kurdish region.

Austria: OMV AG

China: China acquired a significant presence in Iraqi Kurdistan after Sinopec Group bought Addax Petroleum in 2009.

Hungary: MOL

India: Reliance Industries

Papua New Guinea: Oil Search

Russia: Norbest

United Arab Emirates: Dana Petroleum

BBC NEWS

January 26, 2011

Heritage Oil discovers huge gas field in Kurdistan, Iraq

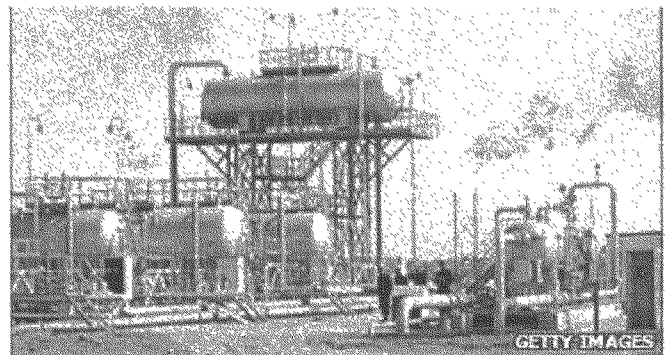
BRITISH EXPLORATION firm Heritage Oil has announced the discovery of what it is calling a "major gas discovery" in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Heritage said it estimated the field could have up to 12.3 trillion cubic feet of gas, with a flow rate of 75m cubic feet per day when the field is operational.

However, shares in the company fell 75.9p, or 17%, to 360.7p on the news.

Investors had been expecting Heritage to find oil in the Miran West field.

The infrastructure for getting gas to its ultimate markets is not

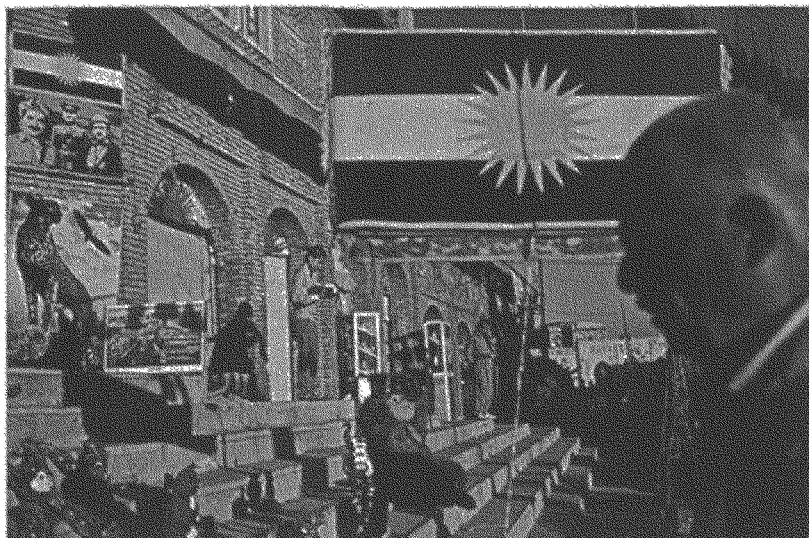


as highly developed in the region as the infrastructure for oil.

"The discovery of a major gas field with exceptional flow rates makes this one of the largest gas fields to be discovered in Iraq," said Heritage chief executive Tony Buckingham.

One potential option for the company is to route gas from the field to wealthy European markets via the planned Nabucco pipeline, although the pipeline itself is not due to be operational before 2015.

The New York Times January 6, 2011



Shiho Fukada for The New York Times

A bazaar in Erbil, part of the semiautonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq.

It's Iraq but It's Not, Part 1

By YASMINE MOUSA

ERBIL, Iraq — On a recent trip to the Kurdistan region in the north of Iraq, duty required us to drive to a place here in its capital that we didn't know. My colleagues and I, all Iraqis, stopped by the first police officers we spotted, naturally enough, to ask for directions. We asked in Arabic, then I tried in English.

The young officer did understand us, which is how I discovered the language barrier that is slowly emerging here, dividing the country not only linguistically, but also generationally.

We were in Iraq, so we presumed that Arabic remained the common lan-

guage, but the trip to the Kurdish region, my first since before the war, taught me that Arabic will only go so far.

A pattern emerged. Person after person, especially the young, spoke almost exclusively Kurdish, struggling with Arabic if they spoke any at all. This, too, is a legacy of Saddam Hussein's rule. After the Persian Gulf war in 1990-91, the international community created a protectorate for the Kurds in the north, patrolled by aircraft in the "no fly" zones.

The region, nominally autonomous since the 1970s under the Baath Party, began to separate itself from the central authority in Baghdad. The Kurdish language's revival became part of a broader move toward freedom, if not

independence outright.

Now, over time, a new generation has emerged, still Iraqi, but not necessarily Arabic speaking. Only the older people, it seemed, speak Arabic well. In a government office, for example, the mayor spoke it, but his younger aides, like the police officer, spoke hardly a word at all.

Not everyone is pleased by the evolution.

Khudaida Haj, 55, learned Arabic in school and Kurdish from his family. After the war, he said, "For nine years not a single word of Arabic was heard."

Standing by Mr. Haj's side was his niece, 10. "She is in the fourth grade," he said, "but she barely has one lesson of Arabic a week. The rest is in Kurdish."

He mused about her future, noting Iraq's newly re-elected president, Jalal Talabani, a Kurd. "What if she wants to run for parliament?" he said of his niece. "How could that work?"

Then, as if thinking out loud, "We are in Iraq, after all."

We found a simple fix to the reporting challenges the language barrier posed. We sought out the elderly. A man gave us precise directions the police officer could not.

At restaurants, too, we passed the young waiters and headed directly to the old man sitting, inevitably, behind the cashier. To him we gave our orders, and the young men would politely, but silently, bring us our traditional dishes of kebab and tikka.

The New York Times JANUARY 7, 2011

The 41 places to go in 2011

From the beaches of Mexico to the wilds of Kurdistan, the places on this year's list take you to the end of the world and back.

34. Iraqi Kurdistan:

Safety, history and a warm welcome in a stable corner of Iraq.

As United States forces withdraw from Iraq, a handful of intrepid travel companies are offering trips to the semiautonomous Kurdish region in the north, which has enjoyed relative safety and stability in recent years.

Geographic Expeditions is conducting a 21-day tour to

Kurdistan and Eastern Turkey, about half of it spent exploring Kurdistan along the Hamilton Road, which connects strategic gorges, and the other half devoted to the Anatolia region of Turkey. Distant Horizons has been taking small groups of Americans to Kurdistan twice a year since 2008, has a trip this spring, The Changing Face of Iraqi Kurdistan, which will explore Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaimaniyah. And last April, after a 20-year break, Lufthansa resumed service from Frankfurt to Erbil, the Kurdish capital and fourth-largest city in Iraq.

While the State Department continues to warn American tourists to avoid Iraq entirely, the British Foreign and

Commonwealth Office says the Kurdistan region is an exception. "The risk of terrorism in the Kurdistan Regional Government-controlled provinces of Dohuk, Erbil and Sulaimaniyah is markedly and statistically lower than in other parts of Iraq," states its Web site.

Visitors can tour significant cultural landmarks like Erbil's citadel, which dates to the Assyrian empire, and the site of the Battle of Gaugamela, which ended in the defeat of the Persian

king Darius III by Alexander the Great and led to the fall of the Achaemenid Empire. The biggest lure is the opportunity for authentic cultural encounters. "Authenticity is something that can be lost so quickly as development occurs," said Janet Moore, of Distant Horizons.

By Michelle Higgins

The New York Times January 7, 2011



Shiho Fukuda for The New York Times

A young man chats on his cellphone atop the Citadel, overlooking the Kurdish city of Erbil.

It's Iraq but It's Not, Part 2

This is the second of two posts that look at the difference between life in Baghdad and the country's northern Kurdish region.

By OMAR AL-JAWOSHY

ERBIL, Iraq – We arrived at the checkpoint that separates Iraq from Kurdistan and waited to get in, counting the seconds. It felt as if we were in a prison and now waited to be released to a place where other Iraqis feel free – and fearless.

We live in Baghdad, the capital, which in most countries would be the cleanest and most developed city. Now, nearly eight years after the invasion, we feel only disappointment. The lack of security and services made us excited about leaving.

We were traveling to another part of Iraq, the Kurdish region in the north, but it felt like we were visiting another country.

The checkpoint, on the road from Kirkuk to Erbil, feels like a border. You don't need a visa, but you can't just cross either, the Kurdish authorities checking everyone, especially Arabs from the rest of Iraq.

The Arab-Kurd divide in Iraq is often called a potential flashpoint, a "trigger line" of a conflict not yet resolved. It's more than a political barrier; it is an ethnic one, a social one, a psychological one.

"That checkpoint seems to be a separate line – between paradise and

hell," one of my colleagues said.

We passed into Kurdistan and started making plans, just like tourists. We didn't want to waste a single moment, to take photos of everything.

One of the most striking things in Erbil – almost inconceivable in Baghdad today – is a shopping center, the newly opened Majidi Mall.

It could be in the United States or Europe, in another country in other words. "It looks like we are in a dream," my colleague said. "The lighting, the floor, the shops – and even the people are different."

He complained, not unhappily, that the quality of the goods for sale – many of them from Turkey – "took my attention and took my money".

Such a mall is new to Iraqis. In Baghdad, despite improved security, such a place would just be a target for attack.

Most Iraqis would love to see the time when one could be built there, in Baghdad. Another friend back home told me he dreamed of a place where he could go with a girlfriend "watch a movie and eat popcorn as any other man in the world."

Maybe that day will come. Until then, we have Erbil. On the road back to Baghdad, getting closer to the checkpoint again, we felt sadness again, but also eagerness to return the next time.

Turkey's Kurds campaign for more language rights

By CHRISTOPHER TORCHIA and CEREN KUMOVA

The Associated Press

ANKARA, Turkey -- As a child, Emrah Kilic couldn't understand a word his grandmother was saying. That's because she was speaking Kurdish, the family's ancestral language, whose public use was harshly suppressed in the name of forging a unified Turkish nation. Raised by parents who shed their ethnic roots to blend in with the Turkish mainstream, he now finds himself in a quandary. "I am confused about whether I should pursue the roots," he says. "But I am scared that it will change things, open a Pandora's box."

The 28-year-old's dilemma is understandable. As Turkey's Kurds struggle for recognition of their ethnicity, their embattled Kurdish language is making a comeback that is testing Turkish society's tolerance of diversity. The current government, more accepting of minority aspirations, has loosened the language curbs, but this is provoking a backlash from nationalists who fear the country's identity is under threat.

Turkey's 20 percent Kurdish minority has been a traditional target of state discrimination and the more militant among them have waged a 26-year insurgency that killed tens of thousands. The violence has ebbed for now, but ahead of parliamentary elections in June, the nationalists worry that the escalating push for language rights masks a more ambitious goal - autonomy.

"When you go to the weekly bazaar, you hear nothing but Kurdish," grumbles Ikbal Erdogan, 36, a dentist in Adana, a city with a large Kurdish population. "I do not shop from those who try to make it clear that they are Kurdish. I think we should protest those who try to break our unity under our noses."

For Turkey, a NATO partner and growing economic and diplomatic power, the Kurdish issue is a drag on its aspirations to be recognized as

a model for democracy in an overwhelmingly Muslim country. It wants to join the European Union, but that quest is hindered by accusations that it neglects the rights of Kurds.

Most of Turkey's Kurds live in the southeast, though in past decades large numbers headed to Istanbul and other western cities to escape war and poverty. Many blended successfully into mainstream society. The worst era of discrimination has ended, and the Islamic-leaning government that took office after decades of doctrinaire secularism has sought to turn a page with its restive minority.

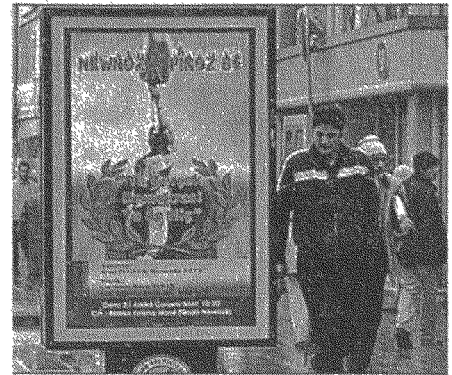
But the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party is leading a charge for more rights that government officials fear will undo the good will. "At a time when we started to see our differences as richness rather than something to be feared, as in the past, a more responsible and careful conduct on everyone's part would further open our way," warns President Abdullah Gul.

The language demands may seem harmless to outsiders - dual-language welcome signs when Gul recently visited the southeast last month, or a campaign for bilingual shop signs. The bilingual sign on the municipal office in the eastern town of Eretepe that reads "Belediye Baskani" in Turkish and "Seroke Saredariye" in Kurdish. Both mean "mayor."

Nonetheless, the military, which considers itself the guardian of the constitution, last month expressed "grave concern" about the spread of Kurdish.

"There are intense efforts to take recent public debates over 'our language' to a point that could radically change the foundation philosophy of our republic," it said in a statement. "History is full of bitter examples of the consequences of a nation without a unified language."

Particularly provocative to mainstream Turks is the use of Kurdish in official settings.



In 1991, Kurdish lawmaker Leyla Zana was vilified for adding a few words in Kurdish to her oath of office. She later served 10 years in prison, convicted of belonging to a Kurdish armed group, a charge she strongly denied.

The unyielding stance on language was evident again just last November, when dozens of Kurds, including elected mayors, went on trial on charges of having links to a rebel group. When one started to read a statement in Kurdish, his microphone was turned off and Turkish media quoted the chief judge as saying the defendant was speaking in an "unknown language."

The government points to steps it has taken to expand the use of Kurdish, including radio and television broadcasts, letting politicians campaign in the language and allowing prison inmates and visiting relatives to speak it. Kurdish is not taught in schools but private instruction is no longer illegal. Last year, a university in Mardin city offered the first graduate studies program on the Kurdish language.

But Selahattin Demirtas, chairman of the Peace and Democracy Party, is impatient.

"From now on, we will not wait for the state to make legal arrangements," he recently told reporters. "The menus in the restaurants should be in two languages. The names of shops should be written in two languages."

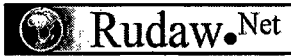
Perihan Yilmaz is a 27-year-old minority rights activist in Ankara, the Turkish capital. Though not Kurdish, she's interested in the subject but had a hard time finding texts and grammar books. Fellow students were so taken aback that she pretended she was studying Greek. "Kurdish language is perceived as a challenge in this society, even today," she says.

Most Kurds are scattered over four countries and enjoy varying levels of freedom. Kurdish and Arabic are official languages in Iraq. Iran recognizes Kurdish as a regional language but keeps a tight lid on Kurdish political activism. Syria imposes harsh restrictions on the language.

Emrah Kilic's parents spoke only Turkish to their children and moved west, away from the Kurdish heartland, to the Mediterranean city of Antalya, where Kilic runs a hotel and is married to an ethnic Turk. "People get surprised when I tell them I am Kurdish," he said.

"The least of my parents' concerns

was identity, or language," he said. "We never talked politics in the house, and still we never do. They chose to merge with the rest and I respect the decision."



10 January 2010

Poll Says Kurdish Govt Doing OK, Parliament Not

By SAMAN BASHARATI

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: Although a majority of Iraqi Kurds believe interference from the ruling parties in the government's affairs has increased, most of them think the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) performed well in 2010, according to a recent poll by the non-governmental Kurdistan Institute for Political Issues.

The poll's results were published last week and were drawn from a random survey of 9,800 people from the provinces of Erbil, Sulaimani and Duhok, the three provinces under the official jurisdiction of the semiautonomous Kurdistan region of Iraq.

Asked by the poll to evaluate the performance of the KRG in 2010, 46.33 percent chose "fine," 18.98 percent "very high," and 25.51 percent "very low."

In regard to Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani's performance, the majority (55.22 percent) said they were "satisfied," 27.17 percent were "somewhat satisfied," and the rest (17.4 percent) were "unsatisfied."

However, more than 30 percent of the participants – the largest number – said the ruling parties' interference in governmental affairs had "dramatically increased" in 2010, while 24.80 percent said it had decreased.

The poll also revealed that the majority of people are dissatisfied with the Kurdish parliament's performance,



unemployment is high, and many people have serious power or water supply problems.

However, it seems that peoples' unhappiness with parliament concerns the ruling party lawmakers' rather than those of the opposition.

The poll says a majority agreed that the opposition parties – Gorran, the Kurdistan Islamic Union and the Kurdistan Islamic Group – worked "to make the concerns of the public known and have them solved."

In addition, most residents of Duhok and Sulaimani were not satisfied with the performance of their governors and said they would not vote for their re-election in the upcoming provincial elections, due by mid-2011.

This is in stark contrast with Erbil, Kurdistan's capital and present boom-

town, where a majority of residents polled – 40.58 percent – preferred current Governor Nawzad Hadi to stay on in his job, although 20.90 percent said they would not re-elect Hadi, and 35.65 percent were undecided.

The results suggest that most people are concerned with the region's high cost of living and want the government to address the problem.

In addition, more than 25 percent of those polled were worried about unemployment, and 12.55 percent said the electricity supply should be the KRG's "priority."

Nechirvan Barzani Lifts Lawsuits Against Ruling Party's Critics

By RUDAW

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) is to withdraw all defamation lawsuits it has filed against the media and authors for disparaging the party and its leadership, said Nechirvan Barzani, deputy chairman of the KDP, on Sunday.

In the last six months the semiautonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan has seen a spate of litigation cases lodged against the media by political parties – 60 in total – that has alarmed both local civil society organizations and international media watchdogs.

The KDP, as one of the two ruling parties in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), has faced particular criticism, because it has been the major complainant in these cases, and it has targeted only independent and opposition journalists and writers.

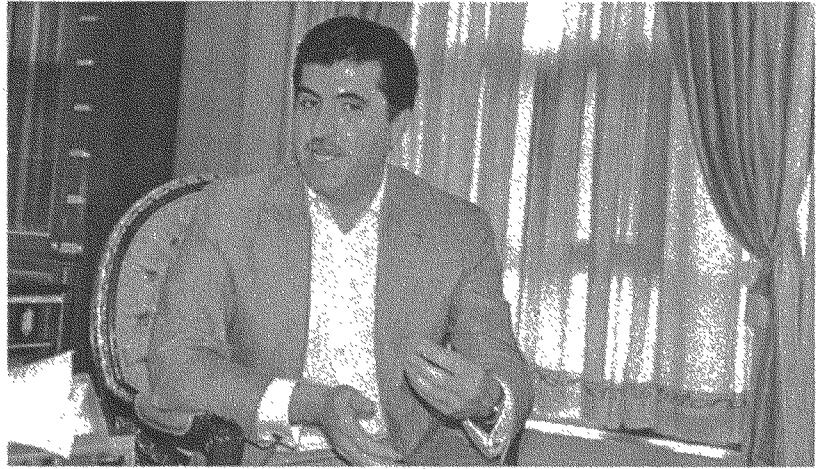
“The KDP is not against freedom of expression at all,” said Barzani, in an exclusive interview with Rudaw – his first with the media since he was elected KDP deputy chairman in mid-December.

“We have always said there should be dialogue between journalists and the authorities, rather than hatred and animosity. Journalists should have free access to information.”

The KDP and the KRG have recently been subject to some searing criticism over the passing of the Demonstration Law, which is viewed by many as an attempt to suppress freedom of speech, and has caused a wave of protests throughout the region.

However, with the lifting of the defamation lawsuits, Barzani, who has pledged reform in the KDP, is taking his first concrete step toward supporting freedom of the press in Iraqi Kurdistan.

“I applaud him [Barzani] and this is perhaps part of the reform measures he has promised to undertake,” said Sirwan Rashid, managing editor of *Rozhnama*, an opposition Gorran



“The KDP is not against freedom of expression at all,” said Nechirvan Barzani in an exclusive interview with Rudaw on Sunday.

party newspaper.

“Personally, I believe it is a progressive step taken by the KDP and particularly by Kak Nechirvan,” said Rashid, using a respectful Kurdish word for “mister,” adding that he hoped there would be more reforms on the way from the KDP.

Just hours before Barzani announced his pledge to rescind the lawsuits, Erbil’s Primary Court ordered non-partisan *Lvin* magazine to pay the KDP 35 million Iraqi dinars (approximately US\$30,000) as a result of a defamation lawsuit lodged by the party. *Lvin* is appealing the case.

“These lawsuits have damaged the KDP’s reputation a great deal,” said *Lvin*’s deputy editor, Hemin Baqir. “We see this as a reasonable decision from the KDP. It will restore part of the KDP’s damaged reputation.”

But, Baqir said other influential KDP members had often prevented Barzani’s promises from eventuating in the past.

“He can’t make final decisions,” said Baqir. “[But] since he is now the actual deputy-chairman of the KDP, we hope that the KDP respects his decision.”

Barzani said the work of journalists and writers was to provide information, criticize and promote dialogue.

“Not only are we not against that, but also we see it as our duty to safe-

guard their freedom,” he said, adding that he hoped his initiative would pave the way for a media, which saw its sole duty as being to report facts, rather than to publish libel.

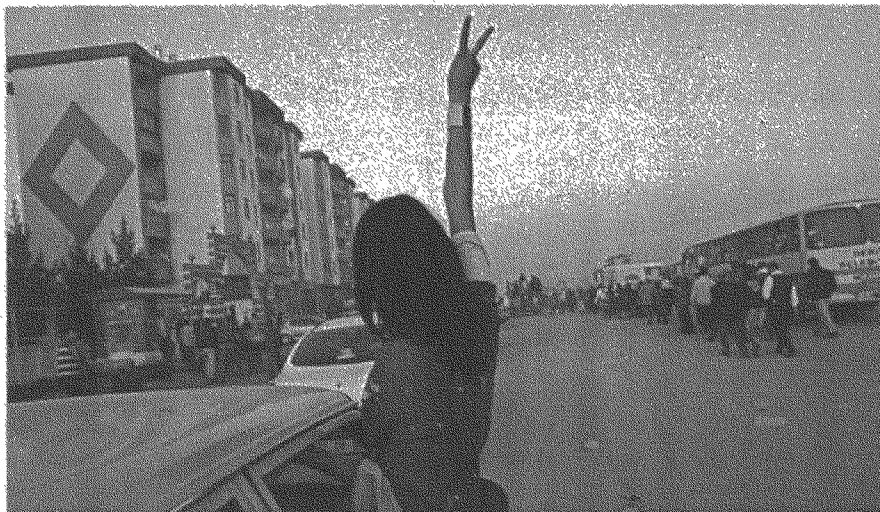
“We hope that this step is taken in good faith,” said Barzani. “[We] urge journalists to become more responsible. Journalists should not work with hatred, [as] this has nothing to do with freedom of speech or the media.”

Barzani said everyone in Kurdistan was subject to criticism, without exception.

“We believe criticizing the work and performance of the President of the Kurdistan Region and the government is normal and positive,” he said. “It is the people’s right as President Barzani is the leader of the people, and the government is the government of the people.”

The New York Times JANUARY 10, 2011

Step by Step, Gulf Between Turkey and Kurds Narrows



Tyler Hicks/The New York Times

Kurds in Diyarbakir, Turkey. President Abdullah Gül has visited the country's Kurdish region three times since taking office.

By SEBNEM ARSU

ISTANBUL — For years, Kurds in Turkey knew better than to air demands for more rights in public. In a country that has often valued loyalty to the state above free speech, discussion of placing any distance between the Kurds and the state was tantamount to a prison sentence.

Now, the Web site of the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party has published a manifesto that includes a demand for “democratic autonomy.”

No one has been arrested. And although the president traveled to the country's Kurdish region to try to rein in further talk of autonomy, analysts said that the fact he went at all was the latest sign that the government was continuing its outreach to its most restive minority despite pushback from the nation's powerful nationalists.

The trip was President Abdullah Gül's third to the region since taking office in 2007, a drastic shift from the past, when the country's leaders rarely visited.

The changes, analysts say, are partly the result of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's longstanding policy of trying to reconcile with the Kurds. But it might also be good politics: with

a general election just months away and a population increasingly weary of armed conflict, many Turks are ready to make at least some concessions to the Kurds. Reconciliation could also help the country's continuing efforts to jump-start troubled talks on entry into the European Union.

“The government has the chance of winning Kurdish hearts by quitting the traditional state rhetoric,” said Umit Firat, a Kurdish intellectual. “And in any new formula, both Kurds and Turks are now aware that the outdated principle of ‘everyone is a Turk’ needs to be changed.”

Kurdish militants, meanwhile, have been staging their own public relations offensive. The Kurdistan Workers' Party, or the P.K.K., has extended a unilateral cease-fire after the group's violent struggle that lasted more than a quarter-century and cost 40,000 lives, and one of the group's top leaders, Murat Karayilan, has been arranging interviews with journalists to talk of peace from his redoubt in the mountains of northern Iraq. Many in Turkey are likely to question Mr. Karayilan's sincerity, but his pronouncements of the need for a political solution follow important moves by the government to quell Kurdish discontent.

A round of reforms in recent years allowed such liberties as the use of the Kurdish language in public, on public

television and during prison visits, all of which had been previously banned. Those reforms, motivated mainly by aspirations to join the European Union, were part of gradually improving relations over the past decade.

More recently, the ruling Justice and Development Party has been promising to introduce a new constitution, replacing one that was imposed after a military coup in 1980 and is considered by many to be oppressive. Although the government has not said how the new constitution would affect the Kurds specifically, Mr. Erdogan has promised that changes would be made in consultation with community leaders and non-governmental organizations.

It is highly unlikely that Mr. Erdogan would consider autonomy for the Kurds, but analysts expect him to at least entertain notions like restructuring election laws to allow minority parties to have greater access to Parliament and allowing wider use of ethnic languages like Kurdish.

Extending the rights of Kurds could help the government in its quest to make further inroads with the country's 14 million Kurds, including supporters of the Peace and Democracy Party, and allow Mr. Erdogan to work around the party, which the government considers a political wing of the P.K.K.

It is unclear if the changes being considered by the government will meet Kurdish expectations, but with even the P.K.K. talking about peace, the chances for real breakthroughs are greatly improved.

Publicly, the ruling party refuses to negotiate with the P.K.K., which is listed as a terror organization by the European Union and the United States. But behind the scenes, it has been reaching out to Kurdish activists to find common ground on which to build a viable solution.

The government will also have to be careful not to inflame nationalist sentiments, since Kurdish rights remain a politically explosive issue.

There have been setbacks before in relations with the Kurds.

A small group of P.K.K. members were invited by the government to return to Turkey as a political gesture in 2009, which was greeted with such hostility by nationalist groups that the program was abruptly halted.

Later that year, hundreds of Kurdish political activists were arrested on ter-

ror charges in an effort to appease the nationalists, and the government has since taken a more cautious tone in addressing the conflict. As recently as last week, the government sounded the same tone: "A single country, a single nation, a single state and the only official language, Turkish — this is the basis of our politics," Cemil Cicek, a government official, said after a cabinet meeting.

And more violence, following a suicide bombing in Istanbul in October that injured more than 30 people, could chill relations again. Although the P.K.K. said

it was not responsible, the Kurdistan Liberation Hawks, a group known to carry out urban attacks on behalf of the P.K.K., later took responsibility.

Still it is clear that the public mood is shifting, as people have been getting used to the relative calm since the P.K.K. declared its cease-fire.

Recently, thousands of Turks staged an unusual gathering in central Istanbul to demand peace with banners that read, "End the operations, establish peace," and "Embrace your brother, let the peace be."

"Democracy, for us, is indispensable, and the resolution should definitely be a political one," Cesim Soylu, a member of the pro-Kurdish party, said, and he warned against violence in case politics failed. "If the deadlock deepens, it is inevitable that forces other than our political party would resort to other methods, which surely also worries us."



13 January 2011

Walking The Walk of Good Governance



THURSDAY COLUMN

By DAVID ROMANO

Last week, I decided that my next column would try and spell out some of the concrete changes necessary for better governance in Iraqi Kurdistan. Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) authorities definitely "talk the talk" of democracy, liberalization and good governance. By regional standards, they're not doing too badly either. But given the region in question, that's not setting the bar too high.

I was pleasantly surprised earlier this week, therefore, to learn of at least one modest but concrete step towards better governance by the KRG. Kurdistan Democratic Party vice-chairman Nechirvan Barzani announced that his party would drop all the lawsuits it had launched against various non-aligned and independent news organizations. Stifling the media with ruinous litigation based on accusations of defamation and slander does society no good. The healthiest of political leaderships put up with even irresponsible media, ignoring or rebutting their attacks without setting out to destroy or permanently silence them. The next positive step would involve institutionalizing Mr. Barzani's positive gesture, by passing new laws that increase freedom of speech in Kurdistan, narrow the legal interpretation of defamation and limit the amount of damages that can be sought in such cases.

For every step forward, unfortunately, it seems there must be at least one backwards. The new KRG bill requiring prior authorization for all demonstrations seems like a recipe for trouble. As the resulting avalanche of criticism from all sectors of Kurdish civil society makes clear, people don't trust the authorities on the matter. Nor should they — democratic checks and balances need to be designed with the assumption that flawed people wield political power. The Kurdistan Democratic Party and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan should ask themselves, before passing any such laws, if they would like to see a Gorran or Islamic Kurdish government enact similar legislation while the KDP and PUK is in the opposition. If the answer is 'no,' they should reconsider. The same logic applies to a new election law in Kurdistan, of course. If the potential for abuse seems high, such as when we ask the foxes to watch over the hen coops, then it's probably not good governance and institution building.

Good governance also requires taking the fight against corruption and nepotism seriously. If these two corrosive forces become too strong in emerging democracies, it becomes very difficult to accomplish anything else. Innovation, foreign investment, the rule of law and the competency of the civil service all wither under corruption's rot. The KRG "talked the talk" of good governance some two years ago when it hired international consulting firm Price Waterhouse and Coopers to deal with corruption. "Walking the walk" of good governance would involve making their report and recommendation publically available now. Assuming the world's

largest consulting firm wasn't just hired for publicity reasons, we do hope they prepared such a report and list of recommendations or will finish doing so shortly.

Although the list of recommendations for better governance could go on a good deal more, these to me seem like the most important issues for the KRG to address first. It does seem necessary to also add mention of Islam in Kurdistan, however. Recently, a number of Kurdish intellectuals and women's rights activists requested that the KRG strictly control the content of Friday sermons and pronouncements of Imams in Kurdistan. This would be to help prevent some of the incitement against liberals and women's organizations that occurred recently in some religious quarters. This too, unfortunately, would put too much power in the hands of political leaders. Well crafted laws targeting the incitement of extremist imams, as well as official rebuttals of offensive statements and views would serve Kurdistan much better than censorship and tighter government control. The mosque, just like the church in the West, often serves as an important check on government power and a moral compass.

David Romano has been a Rudaw columnist since early August 2010. He is the Thomas G. Strong Professor of Middle East Politics at Missouri State University and author of The Kurdish Nationalist Movement (2006, Cambridge University Press).

TIME January 10, 2011

Top 10 Aspiring Nations

Sudan held a referendum on Jan. 9 to decide whether to split into two sovereign countries. Here's a sampling of other places vying for independence — some with more legitimate claims for freedom than others

Full List - To Be or Not to Be

* Scotland * The Basque Country * Tibet * South Ossetia * Kurdistan * Quebec * Western Sahara * The Republic of Cascadia * Padania * Second Vermont Republic

Kurdistan

By Ishaan Tharoor

Following the collapse of the world's great empires and the birth of a whole slew of new nations from Eastern Europe to the Middle East, it's fair to say the Kurds got a raw deal. Their homeland was carved up by the borders of Iran, Syria, Iraq and Turkey. To this day, the majority of the world's Kurdish population (some 30 million) live in this contiguous territory as ethnic minorities in other nations.

In a bid to subdue Kurdish identity, Turkey's founders deemed Kurds "mountain Turks" and forbade the use of the Kurdish language until 1991. An outlawed Kurdish guerrilla group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party or the PKK, waged a high-profile insurgency starting in the 1970s that led to over 30,000 deaths in Turkey. Hostilities have died down in recent years, though tensions remain. Kurds have fared somewhat better in neighboring Iraq. Following the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan in the north — which already had de facto autonomy from Baghdad ever since the



THOMAS KOEHLER / GETTY IMAGES

end of the 1991 Gulf War — has seen relative stability and an economic boom. Much to the chagrin perhaps of dyed-in-the-wool Kurdish nationalists, the biggest economic sponsor in the region is currently Turkey.

Rudaw.Net 13 January 2011

French minister calls for support for Kurdistan for accommodating Christians

By RUDAW

Erbil, Kurdistan - French Minister of Foreign and European Affairs Michèle Alliot-Marie has called upon European countries to provide "concrete" help to those regions that have welcomed Christians fleeing violence in Iraq and elsewhere in the Middle East, singling out Iraqi Kurdistan as a prime example of one of these regions.

Iraq's Christians have often come under attack from Islamic extremist groups in Iraq since the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

However, their situation became much more uncertain after a bloody attack on Our Lady of Salvation Church in Baghdad on October 31st, in which more than 50 people died.



This attack and subsequent threats have promoted a steady exodus of Christians to the semiautonomous region of Kurdistan in northern Iraq and other locations outside of Iraq.

More than 1,000 Christian families, or roughly 6,000 people, have

fled to Iraqi Kurdistan from Baghdad, Mosul and other areas in Iraq, according to the United Nations refugee agency.

In an interview published on January 8th in the French magazine *Le Figaro*, Alliot-Marie said there were now 50,000 Christians living in Iraqi Kurdistan, where last month they celebrated Christmas in an atmosphere free of violence.

Christmas celebrations and church services were largely cancelled in Baghdad and other areas outside the official territory of Kurdistan.

"Together, Europeans should find a concrete way to cooperate with those states where Christians live for the safety of the Christians there," said Alliot-Marie.

She added: "In northern Iraq, for

example, the Kurdish area is home to many Christians who have fled there since 2003...In a case like this, could not the European Union help local authorities to cope with this influx, so that refugees are accommodated as best as possible?"

Christian refugees living in

Kurdistan have said that they face serious problems in their new home, such as unemployment and the difficulty of enrolling their children in Kurdish universities.

However, neither the Iraqi authorities nor the international community have done much to solve their pro-

blems.

Iraq's Christians once numbered about 1.5 million. There are now believed to be about 850,000, out of a population estimated at 30 million.

**REPORTERS
SANS FRONTIÈRES**
POUR LA LIBERTÉ DE LA PRESSE

7 JANVIER 2011

L'ancienne rédactrice du quotidien kurde Azadiya Welat condamnée à 138 ans de prison

Reporters sans frontières apprend avec effroi la condamnation surréaliste d'Emine Demir, ancienne rédactrice d'Azadiya Welat, seul quotidien en langue kurde de Turquie, à une peine de 138 ans de prison pour « propagande en faveur des rebelles kurdes » et « appartenance à une organisation terroriste ».

La journaliste peut encore faire appel de la sentence. Son avocat, Servet Osen, a demandé l'acquiescement de sa cliente au nom de la liberté d'expression. Il a souligné qu'Emine Demir n'était pas aux ordres du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) et que ses articles devaient être considérés comme des reportages, et non comme des actes de propagande. La cour a émis un mandat d'arrêt contre la journaliste qui ne s'est pas présentée à l'audience.

Emine Demir, âgée de 24 ans, est accusée d'avoir soutenu la cause du PKK, considéré comme une organisation terroriste par de nombreux Etats, dont la Turquie, l'Union européenne et les Etats-Unis. La rédactrice a été condamnée le 30 décembre 2010, en vertu de l'article 314 du code pénal turc et de l'article 7 alinéa 2 de la loi anti-terroriste (LAT), à un an et demi de prison par publication, pour 84 articles écrits entre 2008 et 2009. Reporters sans frontières réitère sa condamnation de l'usage abusif et insensé de la loi anti-terroriste par les autorités turques.

Le journal Azadyia Welat a déjà été suspendu huit fois par la justice turque. Au moins neuf journalistes du quotidien sont actuelle-



ment en prison, dont deux autres anciens rédacteurs en chef, qui ont été inculpés pour les mêmes motifs qu'Emine Demir. Le 13 mai 2010, Vedat Kursun a été condamné à une peine de 166 ans de prison. Le 9 février 2010, Ozan Kilingç avait été condamné par contumace à 21 ans de prison. Il a également été privé de ses droits civiques. Ainsi, les trois anciens rédacteurs en chef totalisent pas moins de 325 ans d'emprisonnement.

Ce véritable harcèlement judiciaire contre le seul journal en langue kurde du pays contraste avec les déclarations politiques en faveur de l'ouverture à la minorité kurde prononcées depuis 2009. La question kurde reste taboue et prétexte à la poursuite judiciaire de trop nombreux médias et journalistes en Turquie.

Ainsi, le rédacteur en chef du journal Hawar et responsable des Editions Aram, Bedri Adanir, encourt 50 ans de prison pour la publication d'articles au sujet du PKK et l'édition de livres rassemblant les plaidoiries réalisées dans le cadre du procès du leader du PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, devant la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme (CEDH). Le procès de Bedri Adanir, incarcéré depuis le 5 janvier 2010, se poursuivra le 3

mars 2011.

La journaliste Berivan Eker, ancienne rédactrice en chef du Renge Heviya Jine, est également exposée à une peine de 21 ans de prison. Elle a été arrêtée le 5 décembre 2010 et inculpée pour "appartenance au PKK" et "propagande de cette organisation". Elle doit comparaître le 25 janvier 2011. La procureur estime qu'elle a commis un délit au nom de cette organisation même si elle n'en fait pas concrètement partie. Ce qui illustre, une fois de plus, l'instrumentalisation de la loi anti-terroriste, dont les textes en eux-mêmes sont déjà condamnables.

Cette partialité a d'ailleurs été avouée à demi-mot à travers la libération du journaliste Erdal Güler, ancien rédacteur en chef du quotidien Devrimci Demokrasi. Le 26 octobre 2010, la cour d'assises d'Istanbul a établi que la décision de sa condamnation prise en 2007 ne lui avait pas été annoncée conformément à la loi. Bien que cette libération soit largement motif de réjouissance, elle illustre les dissensions au sein de l'appareil judiciaire turc lorsque la loi est détournée au profit du politique.

Reporters sans frontières appelle la cour d'assises de Diyarbakir à annuler le mandat d'arrêt contre Emine Demir et la cour d'appel à rejeter la condamnation inique et démesurée de la journaliste. L'organisation demande à nouveau la modification de la loi anti-terroriste et la libération de Berivan Eker, Bedri Adanir, Vedat Kursun, Ozan Kilingç et de tous les autres journalistes emprisonnés en vertu de cette loi et pour leur activité journalistique.



Arab league chief visits Iraqi Kurdistan

January 11, 2011 - Matt Frazer, Press TV.ir

ARBIL, While Iraq is of course a member nation of the Arab League, the north of the country is populated by Kurds, a non-Arab people who have since the early 1990s rebellion have largely run their own affairs.

In his time Saddam Hussein had the support of the Arab League, in spite of his genocidal campaigns against the Kurdish people. Now times have changed, and relations between Kurdish President Mesud Barzani and Arab League chief Amru Mousa are cordial.

Mr Mousa's visit is aimed at discussing an upcoming Arab League summit due to be held in the Iraqi capital Baghdad on March 23. Some sensitive questions were put to the Arab League chief, one of them being what would be the League's reaction if Kurdistan declared independence. Mr Mousa replied that such an event would be the concern of President Barzani and Iraq, and not the Arab League.

President Barzani answered the question delicately.

Mr Mousa was asked about the lack of condemnation from the Arab League with regards to the actions of Saddam Hussein.



Kurdish President Masoud Barzani (R) speaks with Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Moussa during a meeting in Erbil, January 10, 2011

Nevertheless, the mere fact that this topic was under discussion, represents a singular break with the past.

Behind me a sight that would have been unthinkable during the rule of Saddam Hussein - the flag of Kurdistan alongside that of Iraq and the Arab league. This goes to show the great change that has occurred with regards to the Kurds' role in Iraq and the wider region.

Mr Mousa spoke positively about the Kurdistan region, even going so far as to say the speed of development in Kurdistan can serve as an example not just to the rest of Iraq, but to the Arab world.



Kurds hailed for role in Iraqi govt.

January 8, 2011 - Press TV.ir

Iran's caretaker Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi has hailed the role of Iraqi Kurd officials in the establishment of Iraq's new government.

"Kurds proved that their presence and action is important in uniting Iraqi factions," Salehi said in a meeting with Iraqi Kurdistan Prime Minister Barham Salih on Saturday in Tehran.

Salehi added that Iran has always helped Iraqi Kurds whenever they encountered problems, especially during former Iraqi Dictator Saddam Hussein's government.

"This trip is a good opportunity [for you] to become acquainted with our country's capabilities and we are ready to offer you our experiences and facilities," the Iranian official said.

Salehi suggested a conference on investment opportunities in Iraq's Kurdistan to be held for merchants and traders from both countries, and inform them of existing capacities.

Salih said he is was conveying the message of Iraqi officials including President Jalal Talibani, President of the Kurdistan



Iran's Caretaker Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi (L) and

Regional Government Massoud Barzani and other Kurdish officials for expanding ties with Iran.

Salehi visited Iraq last week and held talks with senior Iraqi officials on bilateral relations and regional issues.

He was welcomed by Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari at Baghdad International Airport upon his arrival.

In addition to holding meeting with prominent political Iraqi figures, the Iranian top foreign ministry official held talks with Iraq's senior Shia cleric Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani.

TUESDAY, JANUARY 11, 2011

Sanctions against Iran are working, U.S. declares

ABU DHABI

Nuclear arms capability has been slowed, Clinton says in forceful remarks

BY MARK LANDLER

Iran's ability to produce a nuclear weapon has been delayed by sanctions, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said here on Monday, the strongest claim yet by the Obama administration that its pressure campaign is hampering Iran's nuclear ambitions.

"Iran has had technological problems that have made it slow down its timetable," Mrs. Clinton said at a televised town-hall meeting at a university in the Gulf emirate.

"The sanctions are working," she added. "Their program, from our best estimate, has been slowed down."

Her blunt statement, which comes after similar comments by Israeli and European officials, is sure to color the debate in the Middle East. Iran's neighbors have watched its drive for nuclear status with increasing alarm, with some pressing the United States to act against Tehran soon.

Mrs. Clinton did not detail the problems with Iran's program, how long a delay they might cause or the precise sources of her information. But she argued that the difference between a one-year development cycle and a three- or four-year cycle does not alter the strategic choices that confront Iran's neighbors or the rest of the world.

Speaking to students on the first day of a four-day visit to the region, Mrs. Clinton urged Arab states not to waver in enforcing sanctions. Abu Dhabi and Dubai, where she traveled later on Monday, have curtailed their banking relationships with Iran, under pressure from the United States.

"If Iran gets a nuclear weapon," Mrs. Clinton said, "won't you believe you have to have a nuclear weapon?"

Raising the prospect of a calamitous nuclear arms race in the Middle East, she said, "It's first and foremost in the

interests of the region to persuade Iran not to pursue nuclear weapons."

Iran has repeatedly asserted that its nuclear development program is for peaceful civilian purposes.

Last week, Meir Dagan, the departing director of Israel's intelligence service, said he believed Iran would not be able to make a bomb until 2015, at the earliest, "because of measures that have been deployed against them."

There is evidence of computer sabotage from an unknown source that has caused glitches in the functioning of the centrifuges that Iran uses to enrich uranium. American officials have also said that Iran is having trouble obtaining materials like carbon fiber to build the centrifuges.

The administration says the sanctions are squeezing Iran's leaders in other ways, depriving them of access to financial markets and turning the Iranian state shipping line into a pariah in foreign ports.

Although Mrs. Clinton's remarks were the most public statement of the effect of sanctions on Iran's program, in written testimony to the House Foreign Affairs Committee in December, the undersecretary of state for political affairs, William J. Burns, said, "Sanctions have hindered Iran's development of a nuclear capability and the means to deliver them."

Mrs. Clinton's trip has other elements — including a stop Monday at a solar-energy research facility — but her meetings have been dominated by what to do about Iran.

The fear of Gulf leaders about a nuclear Iran was palpable in the diplomatic cables made public by WikiLeaks, the anti-secrecy group.

Mrs. Clinton said the success of the sanctions may have bought the international community some additional breathing room. But she seemed determined to avoid complacency.

"We have time, but not a lot of time," she said to three female hosts of a program called "Sweet Talk."

Aside from a question about how Mrs. Clinton met her husband at law school, there was little sweet talk on the program, much of which revolved around the threat from Iran and the administration's fruitless efforts to broker a peace agreement in the Middle East.

Mrs. Clinton continually linked the two issues, accusing Iran of stoking the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians as a way of deflecting attention from its nuclear activities.

"If they can shift attention away from their own internal decisions about whether or not to pursue nuclear weapons, they will be very happy about that," she said, adding, "We cannot let that attention get diverted."

Despite the recent setbacks, she said the United States remained committed to a two-state solution. Direct negoti-

ations between the Israelis and Palestinians fell apart late last year because of a deadlock over the construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

On Sunday, tensions were inflamed further when Israel began bulldozing the Shepherd Hotel, a decaying, but symbolic building in East Jerusalem once owned by Palestinians, to make way for new Jewish apartments.

She said in a statement that the demolition "contradicts the logic of a reasonable and necessary agreement between the parties on the status of Jerusalem."



KARIM SAHIB/AFP

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Iran links Israel to killing

Claiming to have infiltrated Israel's Mossad spy agency, Iran's Intelligence Ministry said Monday that it had broken up an international network of agents linked to the assassination of an Iranian physics professor last year, William Yong reported from Tehran.

After a broad investigation, Iran succeeded in arresting "the main agents behind the terrorist incident and dismantle a network comprising Israeli spies and terrorists," the state-owned Press TV quoted the semiofficial Fars news agency as saying.

It said Israeli intelligence services "had used bases in certain European and non-European countries as well as Iran's neighboring states in an attempt to achieve its inhuman and non-Islamic goals."

Those same "bases" had been "used in the assassination of Dr. Masoud Ali Mohammadi," a physics professor at the University of Tehran who was killed by a remote-control bomb attached to a motorcycle outside his home in northern Tehran last January. Iran blamed Israel and the United States for the killing, whose motives have never been fully explained.

Sadr return complicates US troop presence in Iraq

Anti-American Cleric Complicates Question Of Whether US Troops Will Stay Longer In Iraq

By REBECCA SANTANA and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA
Associated Press

Iraqi politicians face the contentious question this year of whether to ask U.S. troops to stay beyond an end-of-2011 deadline for their departure. That decision has become far more complicated with the return to Iraq of anti-American cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

The future of U.S. troops in Iraq was a topic of talks between Vice President Joe Biden and Iraqi leaders Thursday during the first visit by a senior U.S. official since Iraq's new government was formed.

The case for an extension centers around concerns that Iraqi forces may not be ready to keep security. Many Sunnis want U.S. troops to stick around for their protection, fearing domination by the Shiite majority. Kurds see the Americans as a guarantee of their autonomous region in the north. And some in the party of Shiite Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki also want the U.S. forces to stay.

But al-Sadr, a Shiite who came home last week from nearly four years in voluntary exile in Iran, is a formidable obstacle. He immediately put the government on notice that he and his movement, which is a pivotal member of the ruling coalition, will not tolerate any lingering American troop presence.

"We heard a pledge from the government that it will expel the occupier, and we are waiting for it to honor its word," he said during a speech.

No decision on an extension

will come at least until al-Maliki has chosen a defense minister. If Iraq requests an extension, the overriding question will be whether al-Sadr is willing to risk bringing down the government over it.

Under a deal agreed upon in 2008, the approximately 47,000 American troops still in the country must leave by the end of 2011. Privately, many in Iraq and the U.S. long assumed that the two sides would re-negotiate for an American troop presence in some form past that deadline. Iraq's top military commander has said U.S. troops should stay until Iraq's security forces can defend its borders - which he said could take until 2020.

The U.S. officially doesn't rule out an extension. Biden told American troops Thursday that the U.S. should make sure Iraq's stability and democracy are strong enough to make it "a country that was worthy of the sacrifices" American troops have undergone.

He also said the U.S. would continue to train and equip Iraqi forces beyond 2011, highlighting the continued uncertainty about the future of America's troop presence.

An aide to Biden said the vice president reiterated Washington's longtime position that the U.S. would listen to any request by the Iraqi government for troops to stay longer but that Baghdad has not asked. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks.

Biden met Thursday with al-Maliki, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani and other officials, but not with al-Sadr, in keeping with long-standing practice on both sides.



U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, left, shares a light moment with Iraq's Parliament Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi, right, in Baghdad, Iraq, Thursday, Jan. 13, 2011. Vice President Joe Biden arrived in Iraq early Thursday for talks with the new government's leaders about the future of American troops in the country as they prepare to leave at year's end.- Maya Allieruzzo /AP Photo

The topic had been sidelined for most of the past year, with Iraqi politicians deadlocked after national elections in March failed to produce a clear winner. But with al-Maliki's formation of a government, the issue is now under discussion.

Publicly, al-Maliki has rejected an extension, telling a November news conference and then The Wall Street Journal last month that there is no reason for U.S. troops to stay past the deadline.

But a lawmaker from al-Maliki's bloc said an American troop presence is likely to remain past 2011. He did not have specific information on how many, but said any remaining forces would help with specific tasks such as protecting Iraqi airspace, training Iraqi forces and logistics.

He acknowledged that such an extension would be "embarrassing" for the government, especially after al-Sadr's return. The lawmaker did not want to be identi-

fied because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Al-Maliki faces a dilemma.

Asking for American help would be difficult politically, considering he won his new term only with al-Sadr's reluctant support. A senior Sadrist lawmaker, Bahaa al-Aaraji, said al-Sadr returned in part to ensure that al-Maliki keeps his promise to stick by the deadline.

A longer-term presence would also infuriate Iraqis who are fed up with nearly eight years of warfare and American occupation.

But many quietly acknowledge that Iraq may not be ready for American forces to leave, given continued violence, sectarian divisions and political instability.

Bombings on Thursday near three Baghdad mosques - two Sunni and one Shiite - killed two people and underscored the security challenges that are likely to remain well beyond this year.

U.S. combat forces withdrew in August. The troops that remain continue to be involved in counterterrorism and training Iraqi forces. Even at a reduced size, they also provide a concrete foundation for a U.S.-Iraq alliance at a time when Iran is increasing its influence.

An extension would likely have Kurdish and possibly Sunni support.

Saleh al-Mutlaq, a Sunni who became deputy prime minister in the new government, said it will take months to decide whether U.S. troops are needed past the deadline, suggesting he and others are waiting to see how the new government behaves and whether its factions can work together to keep security without American backup.

Azad Jundiani, a senior official in the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan party, said "Kurdish public opinion supports the U.S. forces staying." But he said the Kurds would abide by whatever the government decides and predicted there would not be enough votes in parliament to support an extension.

For al-Maliki and many in the Shiite-majority government, a U.S. presence is a useful balance against Iran. Despite Iraqi officials' close ties with their mainly Shiite neighbor, there is a deep nationalist streak that bristles at too much Iranian influence.

John Nagl, a former U.S. Army officer who now heads the Center for a New

American Security, said the need for American military help in the years to come is clear, especially to protect airspace. He estimated a force of 5,000 to 20,000 could do the job.

"It wouldn't take much more than one air base. It wouldn't have to be a very visible U.S. presence at all, with a low likelihood of U.S. casualties," he said.

The U.S. ambassador to Iraq, James F. Jeffrey, has played down any possibility of a further American combat troop presence. Jeffrey said there will be a security relationship between Iraq and the U.S. in the future. But he suggested it would be limited to a few dozen personnel attached to the embassy, tasked with assis-

ting in the sale of U.S. military equipment to Iraqi forces and training them to use it.

"This is a normal part of a normal embassy in an area of the world where we have a large number of military sales and a robust security relationship, and it has nothing to do with stationing troops," he said.

Associated Press writers Lara Jakes and Barbara Surk in Baghdad and Yahya Barzanji in Sulaimaniyah, Iraq contributed to this report.

FIRAT NEWS AGENCY11 JANUARY 2011

Karayilan: We will not withdraw our autonomy demand

PRESIDENT of the KCK's Executive Council Murat Karayilan says they will not withdraw their demand for Democratic Autonomy under any circumstances.

Speaking to ANF Turkish Service Karayilan said the "Democratic Autonomy" proposal of Kurdish organizations can be debated and reformed but there is no way that Kurdish people will step back and accept another solution.

Karayilan underlined the fact that Democratic Autonomy Project does not include maximum demands for Kurdish people and is an acceptable solution project for Kurdish people.

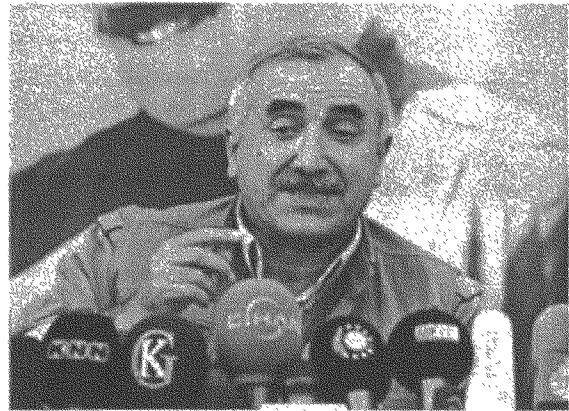
"If you don't want to assimilate us, if you want to protect Kurdish language and culture you should recognise a separate statue (for Kurdish people)" Karayilan said.

Karayilan said Kurdish Question can not be solved with the "individual rights" perspective. "Collective rights of Kurdish people must be recognised" he added.

"Nobody offered us any solution project for Kurdish Question until now. Why? Because they don't want to solve the problem. They didn't give up assimilation politics. They should have a project and perspective"

Underlining Turkey's need for a constitutional reform Karayilan said the centralized government practice must be abandoned and it's not possible to govern the country from Ankara.

Karayilan also said that Democratic Autonomy Project will help



Democratic Autonomy" proposal of Kurdish organizations can be debated and reformed but not withdrawn, says Karayilan

democratization of the Turkish Republic and the state actors.

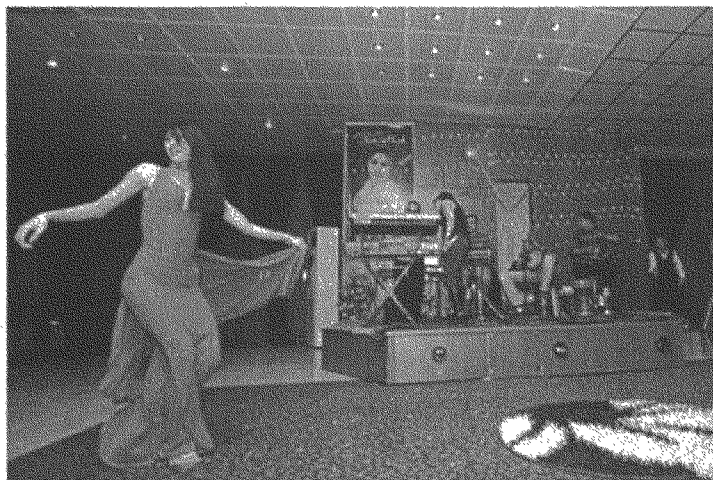
He insisted that Kurds don't demand a separate state but they want to live in a democratic state where Kurds, Turks and other ethnic groups can enjoy their cultural rights.

Karayilan harshly criticized the Turkish government, especially Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan for his remarks which defends Turkey's official "one language, one nation, one flag and one homeland".

He said the move for Democratic Autonomy showed the real face of Erdogan, who says he favors rights of Kurdish people.

Speaking on the upcoming trial of the Kurdish politicians in Diyarbakir, Karayilan said the judges should let the defendants make their defense speeches in Kurdish. ANF / NEWS DESK

Kurdish club scene booming as Baghdad bans alcohol



In this Jan. 1, 2011 photo, Nada Ahmed, 19, left, a dancer performs at the Baghdad Nights nightclub in Sulaimaniyah, 260 kilometers (160 miles) northeast of Baghdad, Iraq. Over the last month dozens of dancehalls and clubs have opened across the Kurdish region as the Kurds seek to capitalize on a crackdown against alcohol in Baghdad.... (AP Photo/Yahya Ahmed)

By YAHYA BARZANJI

The Associated Press

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq -- Dozens of men gathered in the smoky little club to watch five scantily clad dancers sway their hips to the beat of a drum and the grooves of an electric piano. Once a common sight in Iraq's capital, Baghdad, the scene can now only be found in the more liberal Kurdish north.

Dozens of dance halls and clubs have opened across the Kurdish region during the past months, capitalizing on a crackdown against alcohol in Baghdad, where officials in November began closing clubs serving booze and banned alcohol sales at stores.

That prompted the capital's nightlife - its musicians, dancers and impresarios, and the patrons who flock to them - to migrate north.

"Baghdad has become a dead city where there is no more amusement, no drinks and no music. They have dressed the capital in religious clothes," said Hameed Saleh, a Baghdad Academy of Music graduate who plays the drums and oud, the Arabic forerunner to the lute, at Kurdonia Club. "Now I play music in Sulaimaniyah and my life is secure."

Baghdad in the 1970s and 1980s was renowned for being the capital of Middle East nightlife with the most raucous nightclubs and an endless flow of whiskey. U.N. sanctions and Saddam Hussein's newfound piety dimmed its star a bit in the 1990s, but it was the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, the violence that ensued and the rise of conservative Islamic militias that all but snuffed it out.

Nightlife in Baghdad tried to rise from the dead after violence declined in 2008, but the final blow came when religious conservatives began enforcing a Saddam-era ban on alcohol in clubs and added a ban in stores.

Now artists and entertainers have joined the refugees who over the past seven years streamed from other parts of Iraq into the three provinces that make up the Kurdish Autonomous Region in the north, seeking a safe haven from violence.

At the Love Club in Sulaimaniyah, Muhanad Hamad, a 26-year-old trader from the city of Tikrit, 80 miles (130 kilometers) north of Baghdad, was showering one of the singers with wads of cash.

"This is the only place in Iraq where I can enjoy my personal freedom and seek joy far from security worries. Nobody can question me about what I am doing," he said.

Many of the clients in these places hail from Baghdad and other provin-

ces to the south, said club owner Haithem al-Jabouri, himself from Baghdad. He picked Sulaimaniyah to open his club in November because it's so much more secure than the rest of Iraq.

It was security that also drew Raghad Abdul-Wahab to the city. The 26-year-old used to dance at clubs in one of Baghdad's wealthier neighborhoods but religious leaders near her home tried to convince her family it was immoral. She always felt unsafe when she would leave the club in the evening, and then when Baghdad officials turned off the alcohol, she decided to move north.

"I am free here, and I can dance as I like. I just do my job and I get some money," she said.

The Kurdish government's tourism department has given licenses to at least 10 clubs and bars in the province over the last month, said Mustafa Hama Raheem, director of the licenses office in the tourism department. Many more clubs have opened in people's homes or private buildings without licenses, he said.

He said the clubs and dance halls are a boost for the local economy.

"We have to attract tourists to stay for a longer time here and our young men who used to travel to other countries seeking their personal freedoms," he said.

The clientele is a mixture of Kurds and people who come from the rest of Iraq for entertainment, he said. The women are mostly from Baghdad, Basra and some southern provinces. Many of them went to places such as Syria and the United Arab Emirates in 2006 and 2007 but returned to work when things became safer in Iraq.

The nightlife boom has not been to everyone's liking.

An imam at a mosque in Sulaimaniyah, Hamza Shashoi, said the government should be more concerned with addressing issues like unemployment among young people than opening clubs that promote vice.

"Opening the nightclubs is very risky. ... We are a Mushim society," he said.

But the difference between Baghdad and Sulaimaniyah is that those religious beliefs don't dictate society's rules for everyone, said a spokesman for the Kurdish Ministry of Religious Affairs, Meriwan Naqshabandi.

"In the Kurdish region, the clerics or religious men have no role in the government of the region, they cannot exercise any pressure on the government's resolutions," he said.

Until nightclubs can once again freely operate in Baghdad, artists and dancers like 23-year-old Muna Maad will stay in Kurdistan. One recent night she was dancing among a group

of young men, her eyes lined darkly with black eyeliner and wearing a short white skirt. Periodically the men would slip Iraqi dinars into her tight white shirt in a show of appreciation.

It's a long way from a moment six months ago in Baghdad, when a group of gunmen raided the dance hall where she was working.

"When they found us dancing they

insulted us ... and forced us to leave," she said, adding "I will not return to a place where no rules and laws exist."



7 JANUARY 2011

Where should we look to see how to make a success of a small country? All eyes are on Kurdistan

news.scotsman.com

By John McTernan

A country of five million people with oil reserves and a huge potential for renewable energy. Part of a larger country and sitting to the north of its more populous neighbour. Proud of its culture, history and progressive politics. With a parliament that's over a decade old with a far better record on women's rights than the national parliament. Governed by a nationalist party committed to self-determination. Where is this? Not Scotland but Kurdistan. This week, with the All-Party Parliamentary Group, I'm a guest of the parliament of Kurdistan. It's an eye-opening experience.

In the abstract the establishment of democracy is often quoted in defence of the Iraq War. The Kurdish people look back further to the Gulf War and give John Major the credit for the no fly zone - US and UK planes protecting Kurdistan with daily patrols - which made the region a 'safe haven'. One of the first institutions, in 1992, was the parliament. But economic development has only come with liberation and democratic government across Iraq. The consequent revenue sharing has led to a boom in public spending. Health care and education have rapidly expanded. As have universities where nearly half of the students are women.

Not everything is perfect. Kurdistan is still in many ways a traditional culture and women's rights have a long way to go. Abortion is illegal. Divorce rare. Domestic violence unreported. Honour killing still too culturally acceptable. The Kurdish government have acted. Polygamy is illegal. The President and

Prime Minister have said there is no honour in honour killings and they are treated by the police and courts as murder. Female genital mutilation is an appalling 25%, halved under cultural changes driven by the government, including fatwas, but remains a priority for elimination. Yet this is a story of real progress and the correct comparison is with regional neighbours, including other parts of Iraq. This is not just a progressive government but an example of what can be done. It is telling that the Christian minorities escaping violence in Baghdad and Mosul have fled to Kurdistan.

There are real business opportunities too. Most of the Kurdish regional government's budget is capital spending on infrastructure - \$5-6bn a year. Tenders are being issued for masterplans, industrial parks, airports and highways. The irony is that French companies are doing far better than British ones despite France opposing the Iraq War. There is a real desire for British companies to work here. Indeed, the areas of growth would suit many Scottish companies. Water collection, irrigation and hydro-power are priorities. Suitable for Scottish Water with its new remit, perhaps? Oil and gas exploration is expanding. Modern industrial parks and manufacturing - from steel to pharmaceuticals - for the wider region are government priorities. And foreign companies get land free and no taxes for ten years. As for security, the Top Gear team declare Kurdistan as safe as Cheltenham in their Christmas special. Surely it's time for one of SCDI's excellent trade delegations?

Trial of Kurdish leaders sparks clash in southeastern Turkey

SAFAK TIMUR
Hürriyet Daily News

DIYARBAKIR - The explosion of green and red flares mixed with the sound of police firing tear-gas rifles in central Diyarbakir on Thursday as the city's central Elazi Avenue became covered in a cloud of white, eye-burning smoke.

The clash between police and protesters occurred in front of the Diyarbakir municipality building and the courthouse, where some 150 defendants are standing trial, accused of links to the Kurdistan Communities Union, or KCK, the alleged urban wing of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party, or PKK.

Family members and other demonstrators, a mixed crowd of all ages, from children to grandmothers, originally gathered in Istasyon Square at noon on Thursday to protest the case, which resumed this week after its last hearing in 2010. The gathering in support of the defendants was organized by the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, or BDP, and the Democratic Society Congress, or DTK, an umbrella organization of pro-Kurdish groups.

The scene at the square was initially peaceful, with people dancing, chanting slogans and listening to speeches before marching to the courthouse. Small-scale tension between police and some groups of protesters during the march heightened after the crowd arrived at the courthouse. Once the tear gas came out, reporters, cameramen, pedestrians and even police without gas masks ran from the scene, taking shelter in the market of a nearby gas station. Amid continuing explosions at an indeterminate distance, protesters hurled stones, fireworks and Molotov cocktails at police, injuring some, the Doan news agency, or DHA, reported.

Clashes between demonstra-



Protesters carry stones amid tear gas smoke in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir. AA photo

tors and police also broke out in the Southeast Anatolian province of Hakkari and its district of Yüksekova. Shops did not open in the cities of Nusaybin, Cizre and Kiziltepe.

The scene had calmed in Diyarbakir by late afternoon, although the area around the courthouse remained crowded with police on guard as protesters sang while waiting for the court hearing to conclude for the day.

The case is political not legal

Defendants in the case at the Diyarbakir courthouse, which has been ongoing since October, include Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir and 11 other mayors from Southeast Anatolia, as well as local politicians. More than 100 defendants have been under arrest for a period of around 1.5 years.

I want my sons to be released, 70-year-old Nazlihan said while waiting Thursday morning in front of the municipality building near the courthouse. Nazlihan, who spoke in Kurdish and declined to give her surname, said her two sons are among the defendants. Of her nine children, she said, three died in unsolved murders and two died fighting for the PKK.

I want peace, she said. I do not believe that the AKP [ruling Justice and Development Party] will make peace, but I still have hope.

Another person outside the building, a 70-year-old Kurdish man who declined to give his name, said he has come for every hearing. I am here because this case is against my language, identity and culture. This is a political case, it has nothing to do with the law, he said. Also, my daughter is in the mountains [with the PKK]. She left June 12, 1991; she was in her final year at law school. She saw how I was tortured during the 1980 military coup period.

Protesters and people gathered outside the courthouse also objected to the accused not being allowed to defend themselves in Kurdish.

The defendants should not step back from their stance on Kurdish defense, said an 18-year-old man selling tea outside the courthouse. He said his boss had ordered him to sell tea there, but that he was happy to be working the spot since one of his relatives was inside as a defendant. I can hear from him in this way, he said.

The hearing was still ongoing when the Daily News went to press.

Biden: Iraq's success in U.S. interest

By Lara Jakes / Associated Press

BAGHDAD (AP) — Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. emphasized to Iraqi leaders Thursday that the United States wants nothing more than for Iraq to be a free and democratic country during a daylong visit that officials said would focus on the departure of American troops from the country.

Mr. Biden's trip marks the first visit by a top U.S. official since Iraq approved a new Cabinet last month, breaking a political deadlock and jump-starting its stalled government after March's inconclusive elections. Three explosions that killed two people in the capital, however, demonstrated the lingering security challenges facing the country's young democracy.

"We have one overwhelming desire, the single best thing, that could happen to the United States, literally, is for you to be a free, prosperous democracy in this part of the world," the vice president told reporters before a meeting with Iraqi President Jalal Talabani.

Officials said they expected the issue of whether to keep some U.S. forces in Iraq beyond the Dec. 31 deadline to dominate the agenda with Mr. Talabani, Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and Kurdish President Massoud Barzani.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to be able to discuss the sensitive diplomatic issues frankly.

Under a security agreement between Washington and Baghdad, all American troops are to leave Iraq by the end of the year. However, Iraq's top military commander, Gen. Babaker Shawkat Zebari, has said U.S. troops should stay until Iraq's security forces can defend its borders — which he said could take until 2020.

But Mr. al-Maliki, under pressure from hard-line Shi'ite Muslims, has signaled he wants American troops to leave on schedule. Last weekend, the influential and anti-American cleric Muqtada



U.S. Vice President Joe Biden (L) meets with Iraq's President Jalal Talabani during his visit to Baghdad January 13, 2011. Biden flew into Iraq on Thursday for his first visit since Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki was reappointed for a second term and cost-cutting Republicans took over the House of Representatives. Photo: Reuters.

al-Sadr returned to Iraq after nearly four years of exile in neighboring Iran, in part to insist that the U.S. "occupiers" must leave on time or face retribution among his followers "by all the means of resistance."

Iraq must walk a careful line, balancing its relationship with the United States and its Shi'ite-majority neighbor, Iran, to the east. Iran views a continued U.S. military presence along its western border with suspicion and is believed to be lobbying its Iraqi allies to adhere to the time line.

Mr. Talabani emphasized the importance Iraq puts on its relationship with the United States.

"We remain grateful to you ... and we know you are one of our best friends," Mr. Talabani said.

Both Washington and Baghdad refused to discuss publicly any possibility of U.S. troops staying until after Iraq installed its new government. Mr. Biden congratulated Iraq on accomplishing that political feat, which took months of negotiations.

"I'm here to help the Iraqis celebrate the progress they've made. They've formed a government, and that's a good thing," Mr. Biden told reporters before meeting with U.S. Ambassador James F. Jeffrey and Gen. Lloyd Austin at the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad.

The Obama administration has maintained it would leave on time unless Iraq's officials asked the United States to reconsider the

security agreement and allow at least some troops to stay.

About 47,000 U.S. forces remain in Iraq, and American military leaders have said privately they will need to start planning by early spring on how to get them home unless told otherwise.

Keeping troops in Iraq presents a political headache for both President Obama, who is up for reelection next year and promised to end the war in his 2008 campaign, and for Mr. al-Maliki, who held onto a second term as prime minister only with Mr. al-Sadr's support.

The visit is Mr. Biden's seventh since January 2009. He arrived in Iraq after stops in Afghanistan and Pakistan, where the United States has refocused its efforts against al Qaeda and allied extremist groups that threaten American security.

Mr. Biden was last in Baghdad in September for a military ceremony at the end of U.S. combat operations in Iraq.

Iraqi police officials said three mosques — two Sunni and one Shi'ite — were targeted by the roadside blasts Thursday morning. Eleven people also were wounded. The blasts were outside the fortified Green Zone, which houses the U.S. Embassy and Iraqi government offices where Mr. Biden's meetings were likely to take place.

Iraqi to not arm Kurdistan Peshmarga forces

January 15th 2011 Reported by Hajar Mohammad

Erbil – Iraq signed a \$13 billion contract with the United States to buy advanced weapons. The Kurdistan Peshmarga forces will not be armed with those weapons, said spokesman of Iraqi Defense Ministry.

Mohammed al-Askari "The new weapons are not for Kurdish forces," Mohammad Askari said. "The weapons are airplanes, helicopters, armors, missiles, ship ware and other light weapons."

The contract is active until 2013, he said.

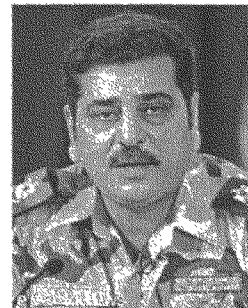
Kurdistan Peshmarga ministry, Jaafar Mustafa, said the Kurdistan Peshmarga forces are not parts of the Iraqi defense ministry, which is why the contract excludes them.

"If the contract is on the ministry's budget, it will

not include Peshmarga forces as they are not parts of the ministry but parts of the Iraqi defense system."

To provide Kurdistan Peshmarga forces with weapons is to buy weapons from the 17% budget allocated for Kurdistan from Iraqi national budget, but nothing has been given to us as of yet, Mustafa noted.

Four years ago, the Iraqi parliament issued a decision that the Iraqi government should pay the Kurdistan Peshmarga forces a budget, but it has so far paid them nothing, he added.



Peshmerga to Lose 130,000 Soldiers

By **HEMIN BABAN** and
SAMAN BASHARATI

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: Kurdistan's top military official said Wednesday that the semiautonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan was ready to downsize its armed forces to 70,000, one third of its current size, a step that could resolve one of the longstanding problems between the Kurds and Iraq's central government.

The decrease in the number of peshmerga troops – currently 200,000 – will be made in order to meet a requirement from Baghdad, which has refused to add the region's forces, at their current size, to the Iraqi defense forces' payroll, said Sheikh Ja'afar Mustafa, Kurdistan's minister of peshmerga affairs, adding that the 130,000 retired troops would either be given pensions or provided with government jobs.

Although the solution of the peshmerga issue is included in the 19-point list of conditions presented by the Kurdish parties when they joined the newly-formed coalition of Iraq's re-elected Prime Minister Nuri Maliki, and to which he has formally agreed, Mustafa said the previous government had urged the Kurdistan Regional



Government (KRG) to have no more than 70,000 troops.

"We have never said that we need all the troops we have now," said Mustafa. "We don't need any more than 70,000 peshmerga troops, but we need to have an organized and well-armed force, capable of protecting the Kurdistan region."

Although Mustafa was not specific about what he meant by a "well-armed" force, he said that Kurdistan did not need sophisticated weapons, such as the F-16 jets that the Iraqi government is expected to purchase from the United States, and that the protection of Iraq's international borders would be the task of the Iraqi army.

The issue of the funding of the peshmerga, whose commander-in-chief is Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani, is one of scores of interrelated and contentious matters between the Iraqi central government and the KRG, which remain unresolved.

These issues mainly concern oil, the final status of the disputed regions, and the official boundaries of Iraqi Kurdistan.

US officials and political observers have described the disputed regions as a flashpoint between the Kurds – who see the regions as historically Kurdish – and the Arabs and Turcomans, who want the contested territories to remain under the jurisdiction of the Arab-dominated Baghdad government.

"Peshmerga is our guarantee that we can face any possible threat," said Mustafa, adding that having a more organized Kurdish force, as part of Iraq's defense system, was of particular importance, since the issue of the disputed regions remained unsettled.



Heurts dans le sud-est de la Turquie à l'occasion du procès de 151 Kurdes

DIYARBAKIR (Turquie), 13 jan 2011 (AFP)

DES PROTESTATIONS contre le procès de 151 Kurdes, dont de nombreux élus, encourant de lourdes peines pour des liens supposés avec la rébellion, ont dégénéré en affrontements jeudi à Diyarbakir (sud-est de la Turquie), a constaté l'AFP.

Plusieurs milliers de manifestants se sont réunis pour exprimer leur soutien aux prévenus dans ce procès, considéré comme un test majeur par les militants de la cause kurde alors que le gouvernement islamo-conservateur a lancé une nouvelle initiative en vue d'un règlement du conflit kurde, vieux de 26 ans.

Les heurts sont survenus lorsque des manifestants, qui participaient à un cortège prenant la direction du Palais de justice de Diyarbakir, ont jeté des pierres, des cocktails Molotov et des feux d'artifice sur des unités anti-émeutes de la police stationnées aux alentours.

La police a riposté en faisant usage de canons à eau et de gaz lacrymogène.

Dans la salle d'audience, l'ambiance était également tendue, la cour refusant aux prévenus le droit d'assurer leur défense en kurde, qui n'est pas considérée comme une langue officielle utilisée dans une procédure judiciaire.

Les juges ont ainsi interrompu à plusieurs reprises des prévenus qui s'exprimaient en kurde.

"Vous persistez à nier l'existence d'une langue parlée par des millions de personnes. Mais votre déni ne change rien: ces gens continuent de la parler", a déclaré devant la cour Me Ibrahim Usal, un des avocats de la défense.



Le procès a débuté en octobre. Les prévenus sont poursuivis pour des liens supposés avec l'Union des associations du Kurdistan (KCK), organisation accusée de terrorisme et de complicité avec le Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK), mouvement en lutte armée contre l'autorité centrale en Turquie.

Le ministère public demande des peines allant de cinq ans à la prison à vie, pour des chefs d'accusation tels que "direction ou appartenance à une organisation terroriste", "atteinte à l'unité de l'Etat", ou "diffusion de propagande terroriste".

Parmi les accusés figurent Osman Baydemir, maire de Diyarbakir, et onze autres maires appartenant au principal parti kurde, le Parti de la paix et de la démocratie (BDP).



Affrontements entre militants kurdes et police à Istanbul

ISTANBUL, 16 jan 2011 (AFP)

LA POLICE TURQUE a utilisé des grenades lacrymogènes et des canons à eau pour disperser des dizaines de jeunes manifestants kurdes qui lançaient des cocktails molotov et des pierres, dimanche à l'issue d'une manifestation à Istanbul, a constaté un photographe de l'AFP.

Les violences ont commencé après une manifestation rassemblant environ 2.000 personnes, sur l'avenue Istiklal, la plus grande rue piétonnière d'Istanbul. Celle-ci était organisée pour protester contre le procès en cours d'environ 150 activistes kurdes, dont de nombreux élus, accusés de liens avec la rébellion armée kurde.

Environ 200 jeunes, le visage caché par un foulard, ont commencé à lancer

des pierres, notamment sur des autobus, débordant les manifestants qui tentaient de leur barrer la route.

Les policiers anti-émeutes ont tiré des grenades lacrymogènes et utilisé des canons à eau.

Ils les ont poursuivis dans les rues adjacentes, tandis qu'un hélicoptère survolait la scène. Un véhicule de pompier a été incendié.

Istanbul, la plus grande ville de Turquie, compte une importante communauté kurde venue du sud-est du pays, où les rebelles du Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan (PKK) mènent depuis 1984 des attaques contre les forces de police et l'armée, réclamant l'autonomie des régions kurdes.



Iran: pendaison d'un rebelle kurde pour meurtre

TEHERAN, 15 jan 2011 (AFP)

UN REBELLE kurde iranien, membre du mouvement séparatiste Pjak, reconnu coupable d'avoir tué un garde-frontières il y a six ans, a été pendu, a rapporté samedi le site de la télévision d'Etat.

La pendaison a eu lieu à la prison d'Oroumieh (nord ouest), selon le site qui n'a pas donné d'autre précision.

Les régions frontalières de l'Irak et de la Turquie, où vit une importante minorité kurde, sont le théâtre d'affrontements périodiques entre les forces iraniennes et des mouvements rebelles armés kurdes, notamment le Komala et le Pjak (Parti pour une vie libre du Kurdistan), interdits par le pouvoir iranien.

Le Pjak a été classé par les Etats-Unis parmi les organisations terroristes.

Au moins 34 personnes ont été pendues en Iran depuis le début de l'année, selon un décompte de l'AFP établi à partir d'informations publiées par les médias locaux.

En 2010, au moins 179 personnes avaient été pendues. L'Iran est l'un des pays où se déroule le plus grand nombre d'exécutions dans le monde, avec la Chine, l'Arabie saoudite et les Etats-Unis.

Le meurtre, le viol, le vol à main armée, le trafic de drogue et l'adultère sont passibles de la peine de mort en Iran, où les autorités estiment qu'une application sévère de la loi est indispensable pour maintenir la sécurité, mais assurent qu'elle n'est appliquée qu'après une procédure judiciaire exhaustive.

Istanbul lance la privatisation des sociétés municipales en vendant sa compagnie de transports maritimes

Au total, 23 entreprises seront cédées. La prochaine sera l'enseigne de distribution de gaz naturel

Istanbul (Turquie)
Correspondance

Istanbul privatise. Le tout-puissant maire de l'agglomération, Kadir Topbas, a lancé, début janvier, la procédure de mise en vente d'Istanbul Deniz Otobüsleri (IDO), l'entreprise de transports chargée de toutes les liaisons maritimes intra-urbaines.

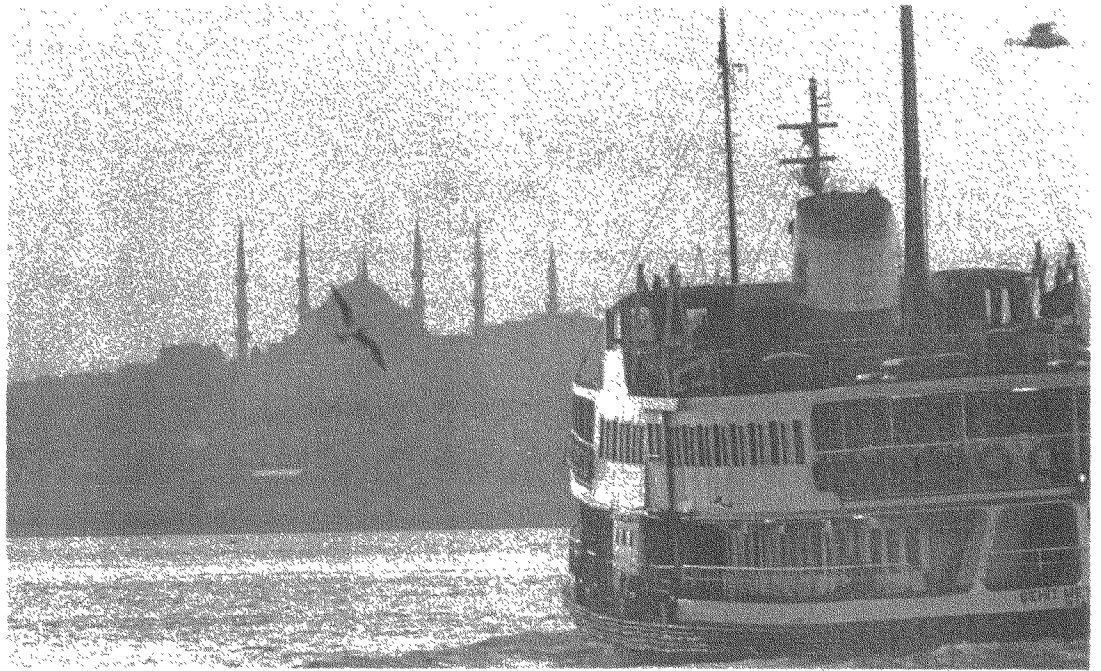
Avec 108 millions de passagers et plus de 7 millions de véhicules transportés en 2010, IDO est le premier transporteur maritime mondial, rappelle Kadir Topbas, dans les locaux du port de Yenikapi. « C'est une entreprise en pleine réussite. La ville d'Istanbul et le transport maritime se développent vite », souligne le maire, un proche du premier ministre, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, lui-même ancien maire d'Istanbul.

« Bus de mer »

Les candidats ont jusqu'à fin mars pour déposer leurs offres. Selon le journal *Sabah*, proche du gouvernement, une vingtaine d'acheteurs potentiels auraient manifesté leur intérêt, tels que le groupe de transports routiers Ulu-soy. Des consortiums entre entreprises locales et étrangères seront sur les rangs, a déclaré le directeur général d'IDO, Ahmet Paksoy. Selon lui, le chiffre d'affaires de sa société avoisinera, en 2011, les 190 millions d'euros pour un profit net de 35 millions d'euros.

L'entreprise, créée en 1987 avec dix bateaux, possède aujourd'hui plus de 90 navires : des « bus de mer » empruntés chaque jour par des milliers de Stambouliotes pour traverser le détroit du Bosphore, et des ferries rapides, qui rayonnent autour de la mer de Marmara.

De nouvelles lignes ont été



La société IDO a transporté 108 millions de passagers en 2010. FRANÇOIS BAUDIN/DPPI

ouvertes, comme les liaisons parallèles au détroit du Bosphore, pour alléger le trafic routier. La mairie a investi plus de 150 millions d'euros pour moderniser sa flotte et son réseau de 86 embarcadères.

IDO est la première des 23 compagnies municipales à être privatisée. D'autres sont programmées en 2011. « L'enseigne de distribution de gaz naturel, Igdas, sera la prochaine », confirme M. Topbas, qui « espère plus de 7,5 milliards d'euros de ces deux ventes ».

Avec 4,5 millions d'abonnés et un réseau de distribution raccordé à 99 % des foyers de la mégapole, Igdas suscite la convoitise des étrangers. L'italien ENI, le russe Gazprom, les allemands EWE et EnBW sont sur les rangs mais « les principales intéressées sont françaises »,

affirme M. Topbas. GDF Suez, qui avait déjà acquis, en 2008, la compagnie gazière d'Izmit (Izgaz), dans la banlieue industrielle d'Istanbul, n'est plus aussi intéressée.

Après le gaz, ce pourrait être au tour des parcs de stationnement, avec Ispark, qui gère depuis 2005 les parkings de la ville. Ou de la construction de logements, avec Kiptas. « Pour le reste, il n'y a pas d'urgence, tempère M. Topbas, tout dépendra des besoins financiers de la municipalité. »

Le revenu de ces privatisations sera réinvesti « dans les transports et dans les infrastructures, là où il y a les plus gros besoins », assure le maire. La vente d'IDO financera ainsi l'extension du métro, prévue pour 2013. Mais le principal parti d'opposition, le Parti républicain

du peuple (CHP), qui dénonce la gestion opaque des entreprises de la mairie, s'élève contre ces ventes. Son représentant local, Berhan Simsek, s'est déclaré prêt à « déposer plainte » contre la cession d'IDO.

Au niveau national, l'agence turque pour les privatisations (OIB), qui a déjà supervisé la vente de dizaines de secteurs de l'économie pour environ 30 milliards d'euros, a annoncé une vague de cessions pour 2011 : les ponts sur le Bosphore, 2 000 kilomètres de routes, des ports à Istanbul et Izmir... La privatisation des centrales électriques sera la priorité, promet Ahmet Aksu, le directeur de l'OIB. Des parts de Turkish Airlines, et du géant de la chimie Petkim, pourraient aussi être cédées. ■

Guillaume Perrier

LE FIGARO mercredi 19 janvier 2011

La guerre secrète contre l'Iran retarde la bombe

Le virus informatique Stuxnet, réputé avoir provoqué l'arrêt d'un cinquième des centrifugeuses atomiques installées par Téhéran, aurait été mis au point par Israël et les États-Unis.

ISABELLE LASSERRE

NUCLÉAIRE « Nous sommes en guerre contre l'Iran. La plus grande partie de cette guerre est clandestine. Et les deux parties ont intérêt à ce qu'elle reste secrète », affirmait hier Efraim Halevy, ancien directeur du Mossad, les services de renseignements israéliens, invité du Center of Political and Foreign Affairs (CPFA). Cette « guerre secrète », dont il ne dévoile pas les détails, s'incarne, pour les observateurs de la scène iranienne, par un virus nommé Stuxnet, dressé pour dévorer, ou au moins blesser, le programme nucléaire iranien. En infectant un logiciel Siemens utilisé par ce programme, il a entrepris de saboter le fonctionnement des centrifugeuses iraniennes produisant de l'uranium enrichi.

Restées jusqu'à présent très discrètes sur le sujet, assurant que les dégâts de Stuxnet avaient été limités, les autorités iraniennes ont récemment accusé les États-Unis, par la voix du négociateur Saeed Jalili, d'être derrière cette cyber-attaque aussi puissante que sophistiquée. Dans un article paru samedi, le *New York Times* affirme que les services de renseignements américains et israéliens ont collaboré au développement du

virus. Citant des experts militaires, le quotidien révèle même que l'efficacité de Stuxnet a été testée à Dimona, dans le complexe qui abrite, au milieu du désert du Neguev, le programme atomique non déclaré israélien.

En novembre dernier, le virus infor-

Après une rapide progression des activités d'enrichissement en 2007 et 2008, les travaux nucléaires iraniens semblent avoir été ralentis

matique aurait, selon des spécialistes, provoqué l'arrêt d'un cinquième des centrifugeuses et retardé la capacité iranienne à fabriquer ses premières bombes atomiques. À l'œuvre depuis deux ans, Stuxnet continue à agir. Mais d'autres moyens, les sanctions notamment, sont utilisés pour faire fléchir Téhéran. Les scientifiques nucléaires iraniens sont parfois la cible d'attaques ciblées. Après l'assassinat, en janvier 2010 à Téhéran, du scientifique Massoud Ali Mohammadi, le ministère des Affaires étrangères iranien a récemment fait savoir son intention de porter plainte contre Israël.

Plusieurs années de répit

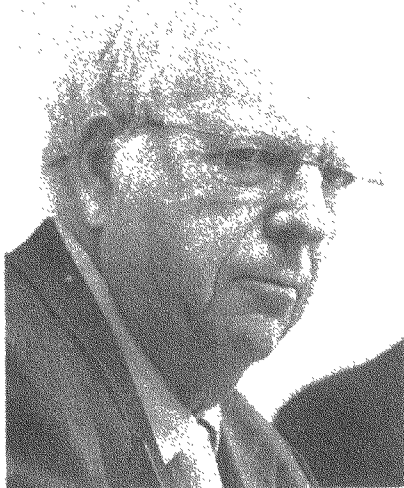
Pendant longtemps, les grandes agences de renseignements travaillant sur le programme nucléaire iranien avaient considéré la fin de l'année 2009 comme une ligne rouge. Au-delà, prévenaient-ils, il ne sera plus guère possible d'empêcher l'avènement de la bombe iranienne. Ensuite, plus rien. Après une rapide progression des activités d'enrichissement en 2007 et 2008, les travaux nucléaires iraniens semblent avoir été ralentis. Et certains de ces mêmes experts affirment aujourd'hui que l'Iran pourrait ne pas arriver à ses fins avant 2012, ou même 2015. « Nous avons plus de temps que nous le pensions », reconnaît le général Michael Hayden, ancien directeur de la CIA. Faisant état de récentes « difficultés », le ministre des Affaires étrangères israélien, Moshe Yaalon, a récemment affirmé que l'accession de Téhéran au statut atomi-

que avait été retardée de plusieurs années. Au début du mois, Israël a officiellement revu son évaluation des progrès nucléaires des Iraniens, estimant, « grâce aux mesures déployées contre eux », bénéficier de quatre années supplémentaires.

Régulièrement agitée en Israël, où l'armée s'entraîne à cette perspective, l'option d'une frappe militaire contre les installations nucléaires iraniennes semble donc s'éloigner. Trop compliquée, trop risquée et trop peu soutenue par Washington qui, du temps de l'Administration Bush déjà, avait refusé aux Israéliens la possibilité d'utiliser l'espace aérien irakien en cas d'attaque contre l'Iran. À Tel-Aviv, certains vont même jusqu'à dire que le programme nucléaire iranien « ne représente plus, pour l'instant, une menace existentielle pour l'État d'Israël ». Quant au chef d'état-major de l'armée, le général Gabi Ashkenazi, il s'est dit persuadé il y a quelques jours que « commencer une guerre n'apportera que le désastre à Israël ».

Ces nouveaux développements redonnent du temps, ainsi qu'une chance nouvelle, à la diplomatie, qui montrait pourtant ses limites dans le dossier nucléaire iranien.

Néanmoins, cette vision optimiste n'est pas partagée par tout le monde en Israël. Au sein du pouvoir, de nombreux responsables politiques et militaires considèrent toujours le programme nucléaire iranien comme une menace mortelle pour le jeune État. En tout état de cause, affirme une source israélienne proche du dossier: « Il est salutaire que les Iraniens pensent que nous pouvons utiliser la force contre eux. » ■



Efraim Halevy, ancien directeur du Mossad : « Nous sommes en guerre secrète contre l'Iran. »

HOSATTE/GAMMA/EYEDEA PRESSE

Iran has hanged 47 people in three weeks, say human rights groups

An average of one person every eight hours has been executed so far this year, including two political activists

Saeed Kamali Dehghan

Iran has hanged almost 50 people during the past three weeks, according to human rights groups.

The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran (ICHRI) said 47 prisoners, or an average of about one person every eight hours, have been put to death since the beginning of the new year. Most of the executions are believed to be related to drug-trafficking crimes, although at least two were of political activists.

The news came as it emerged today that Iranian officials had apparently suspended the sentence of hanging for Sakineh Mohammadi Ashtiani, a 43-year-old woman whose sentence of death by stoning for adultery sparked an international outcry.

Zohre Elahian, head of the parliamentary human rights committee, wrote in a letter to the Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff: "Although the stoning sentence has not been finalised yet, the hanging sentence has been suspended due to her children's pardon." According to Elahian, Mohammadi Ashtiani has been sentenced to 10 years in jail.

In recent weeks, Iranian officials have made confusing and often contradictory comments about the fate of Mohammadi Ashtiani in hope of distracting attention from the executions or arrests of the political activists.

Drewery Dyke, of Amnesty International, said: "Issuing old news about the fate of Sakineh Mohammadi

Ashtiani, by way of a letter from a parliamentarian to the president of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, is being used to distract from the more pressing news about the rate of executions in the country."

According to the ICHRI, Iran executes more people per capita than any other country, and in absolute numbers is second only to China. Iran executed at least 179 people in 2010 and 388 in 2009.

The two known political activists hanged recently were Ali Saremi, accused of waging war on God, and Hossein Khezri, a Kurdish prisoner accused of belonging to the Pejak, an armed Kurdish opposition group.

Hadi Ghaemi, executive director of the ICHRI, said: "There are many questions about proper legal proceedings, charges against executed people, and even their identities. There are serious concerns about the abuse of the judiciary by intelligence and security forces to push their agenda through such widespread executions."

Activists believe that Iran has launched a campaign against active members of its Kurd minority. According to the ICHRI, at least 14 Kurdish activists are in danger of execution.

Today HRANA, a human rights website, reported that a 16-year-old high school student was facing imminent execution in Iran. Fatemeh Salbehi, a juvenile offender, is sentenced to death after being convicted of murder.

Syrian opposition hails Tunisia as democratic model

LONDON - Opponents of Syria's autocratic leader said on Tuesday that the overthrow of dictatorship in Tunisia undermines claims by Arab governments that repression is the only alternative to either chaos or extreme Islamist rule.

"The uprising of the Tunisian people has proved that peaceful democratic change is possible, and that the line these dictatorial regimes peddle about chaos or fundamentalism does not wash," an opposition group, The Damascus Declaration, said in a statement, which was sent to Reuters.

It contrasted the limited bloodshed in Tunis and efforts to form a national unity government with the chaos that followed the US overthrow of Saddam Hussein in

Iraq in 2003 and the violent Islamist challenges which many Arab states, including Syria, highlight when justifying hardline security policies.

The Damascus Declaration is a rights movement named after a document signed in 2005 by Syrian opposition figures, including Riad al-Turk, who spent more than 17 years in solitary confinement under late President Hafez al-Assad, whose son Bashar al-Assad succeeded him a decade ago.

"The Tunisian uprising is an opportunity to break the barrier of fear overwhelming the peoples under repression," the group said. "The Syrian people deserve freedom just like Tunis."

"We are confident they'll march on the road to freedom and demo-

cracy."

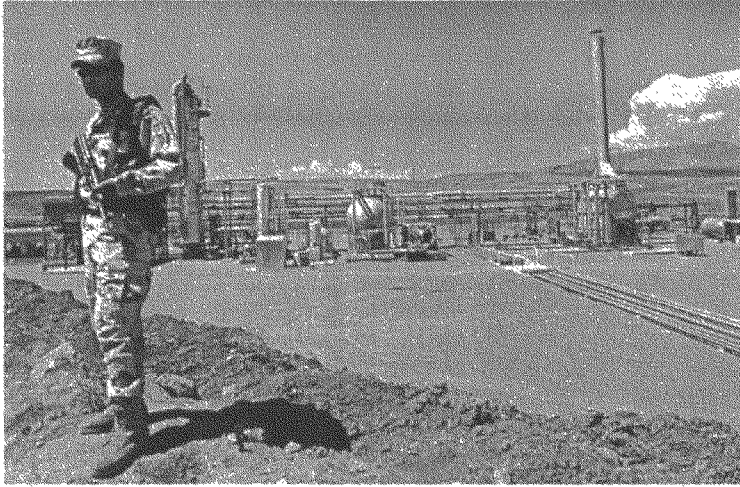
The Damascus Declaration demands the lifting of bans on freedom of speech and assembly and the abolition of emergency law, under which Syria has been governed since 1963 when the ruling Baath Party took power and banned all opposition.

The movement includes liberals, Islamists and ethnic minority Kurdish political groups. Among its members is writer Akram al-Bunni, who was arrested in the 1980s during his final year in medical school and jailed for 17 years.

Bunni and 11 other figures in the Damascus Declaration were arrested in 2006 and sentenced to two and half years on charges of "for weakening national moral."

The weeks of protests over poverty and unemployment which forced Ben Ali out prompted speculation across the Arab world that other repressive governments might also face unrest. **(Reuters)**

Iraq, Kurds agree to resume oil exports in Feb



* Exports to start on Feb 1 at 100,000 bpd

* Contracts legality, payments to be discussed later

* Kurdish oil exports held since 2009

By Shamal Aqrabi (Reuters)

ARBIL, Iraq - Iraq's semi-autonomous Kurdish region agreed with Baghdad to resume oil exports at the start of February, officials said, taking the two sides closer to resolving bitter disputes over oil and land.

Around 40 companies, such as Norway's DNO, have invested in Kurdistan, but revenues have been curtailed by their inability to sell oil for export, because Baghdad has deemed the contracts they signed unconstitutional.

The news of a possible resumption in exports sent shares of DNO up as much as 6 percent on Tuesday.

Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh told Reuters on Tuesday a deal had been reached with the Kurds to resume exports on Feb. 1, starting at 100,000 barrels per day, but issues like paying the companies were still to be resolved.

The office of the Kurdish prime minister, Barham Salih, said earlier in a statement sent to Reuters the resumption of oil exports from the

region was agreed in a meeting on Monday with Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.

Iraq said last May it had approved a deal with the Kurds and expected Kurdish oil exports to resume quickly. Exports remained blocked, however, while negotiations over forming a new government after a March election continued.

Last year's deal between the central government and the KRG involved the Ministry of Finance in Baghdad paying foreign oil firms operating in Iraqi Kurdistan their expenses but not covering profits.

Dabbagh said all issues related to the Kurdish contracts signed with international oil firms working in the region, and how the companies will be paid, will be discussed later.

"We have agreed... to discuss the issue of the region's contracts at a later stage within the constitutional framework," he said, when asked about the terms of the deal.

The statement from Salih's office said the deal on oil was part of a broader agreement to resolve all outstanding issues between Baghdad and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

One of the other issues is the inclusion in Iraq's draft budget for 2011 of a clause cutting the funds paid to the KRG if it does not export an average of 150,000 barrels per day this year. The budget has not been approved yet by parliament, and the proposed clause drove Kurdish lawmakers to walk out in protest on its first reading last month.

If oil exports resume from the

Kurdish region, flows would be about 100,000 bpd and could reach 250,000 bpd by the end of the year, Kurdish Natural Resources Minister Ashti Hawrami has said.

Kurdish exports from two fields -- Taq Taq and Tawke -- flowed briefly in 2009 but were halted when the Iraqi government refused to pay the oil companies working the fields, including DNO and Turkey's Genel Enerji.

DNO stands ready to export around 50,000 bpd if a deal is concluded. Currently it is confined to selling around 17,000 bpd to the local Kurdish market, where it receives less than half the international price for its oil.

Other companies including London-listed Gulf Keystone, Heritage Oil and Genel have also made large discoveries in the region.

LOGGERHEADS

The Oil Ministry in Baghdad has opposed independent deals signed between the companies and the KRG authorities, considering them illegal.

Iraqi Kurdistan and Baghdad have been at loggerheads over many thorny issues, which U.S. officials fear could be the spark of Iraq's next major conflict just as the sectarian bloodshed fades and as U.S. troops prepare to withdraw this year.

At the heart of the tensions lie disputed territories including the oil city of Kirkuk, which Kurds want to have wrapped into their northern region.

Iraq exports the majority of its oil from its southern fields around the city of Basra at an average of more than 1.5 million bpd now. Oil from the Kirkuk fields provides another 400,000 bpd or so in exports.

Baghdad's hand against the Kurds has been strengthened by a series of oil deals involving fields outside the Kurdish region, which could turn Iraq into one of the world's top crude exporters.

The deals could boost Iraq's output potential to 12 million barrels per day in seven years from around 2.7 million bpd now.

□ □ □

Nechirvan Barzani: Iraq Will End Up Like Sudan, If Kurds' Rights Not Respected

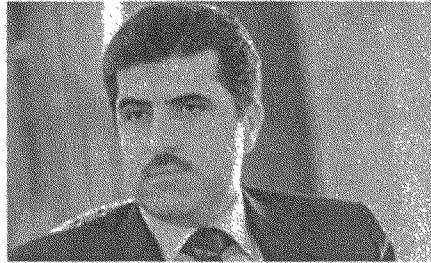
By RUDAW

Deputy chairman of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, former Kurdistan prime minister, warns the Iraqi government that it should solve its ethnic problems with the Kurds, especially that of the disputed oil-rich regions, in dialogue and in peace, and by no later than the end of 2012. Otherwise, he says, Iraq "will end up like Sudan," referring to the southern Sudanese, who held a referendum last week to decide whether to secede from Sudan.

RUDAW: There are a number of pressing issues between the Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), including, primarily, the issue of the disputed regions, such as Kirkuk. Now that the KDP has recently held its party convention, our readers are interested to know your views on these issues.

Nechirvan Barzani: In the convention, the issue of Kirkuk and other detached territories were discussed at length. It should have been discussed more, however, but it did lead us to come up with a working plan. That notwithstanding, our decision was to work for the implementation of Article 140. This was the basis upon which all of us in Iraq have agreed, and the United States supported it in a formal statement when [Iraq's] Election Law was passed.

Although some steps have been taken to implement [Article 140], the steps have been few and insufficient. The [Iraqi] Constitution required the article to be implemented by the end of 2007, and [if it had been implemented] the fate of those [disputed] regions would have been determined. The Kurdistan coalition's 19-point list of demands requires its implementation in two years' time, meaning by the end of



Deputy chairman of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iraq, Nechirvan Barzani, in interview with Rudaw at his Erbil home.—Photo by Rudaw.

2012, and His Excellency [Iraqi Prime Minister] Nuri Maliki has agreed to these demands.

It's now very important that Kurdistan's political parties; Kurdistan's people and media; Kurdistan's presidency office, government and parliament; Kurdish lawmakers in Baghdad; Iraq's deputy prime minister [Rozh Shawes]; and all Kurdish ministers and officials in Baghdad, including Iraq's president [Jalal Talabani] cooperate with the Iraqi government in the implementation of this constitutional article.

When the article was not implemented [by 2007], it was a constitutional violation. We had already agreed that the issue had to be resolved as per the requirements of the Constitution. And now, if we find that the Constitution is not being respected, we should really think of other political and legal means to enforce the implementation of this constitutional article, and our Iraqi allies should not go back on their promises in regard to this. Also, the US should put what it has been insisting on into practice, since peace and progress in Iraq are very much related to this issue.

RUDAW: The southern Sudanese have just held an independence referendum, which is regarded worldwide as being highly pivotal. For some, it is important because one of

the concerned parties is an Arab Muslim country. What does it mean to you, as a Kurd?

Nechirvan Barzani: As a liberal from Kurdistan – and one who is part of the world – I am happy that an ethno-national issue is being solved in a civilized way in a country that is at the same time Arab, Muslim and Eastern. I am also very happy to see voices from among the Arab intellectuals acknowledging that they have to apologize to the peoples of southern Sudan and Kurdistan. They have acknowledged that they were very unfair toward the Kurds and southern Sudanese. This shows significant awareness on the part of the Arab [intellectual] elite. I am also very happy, as I see the world supporting the process.

Since 1992, as a part of its right to self-determination, the Iraqi Kurdistan region has decided to choose federalism. In the past few years, the Kurds have proven to be a peaceful and unifying factor among the various Iraqi sectors. Therefore, all Iraqi parties concerned should consider the Kurds their real partners in the country, and implement the Constitution. Nations can only coexist in peace and with their rights respected, and not in war. Iraq has spent so much money and paid such a high price because of war. Because of the their [distinct ethnic] identity, Kurds have often been subject to oppression and mass murder throughout Iraq's history, which I don't think any Iraqi with a conscience is happy about. Iraq can only progress if it solves its problems. Through war and oppression, it will end up like Sudan.

Turkey back in power-broker role

BY JAMES TRAUB

In the autumn of 2009, relations between Serbia and Bosnia — never easy since the civil war of the 1990s — were slipping toward outright hostility. Western mediation efforts had failed. Ahmet Davutoglu, the foreign minister of Turkey, offered to step in.

It was a complicated role for Turkey, not least because Bosnia is, like Turkey, a predominantly Muslim country, and Serbia is a mostly Orthodox Christian nation with which Turkey had long been at odds.

But Mr. Davutoglu had shaped Turkey's ambitious foreign policy according to a principle he called "zero problems toward neighbors." Mr. Davutoglu defined his neighborhood expansively, as the vast space of former Ottoman dominion.

"In six months," Mr. Davutoglu told me in one of a series of conversations this past autumn, "I visited Belgrade five times, Sarajevo maybe seven times."

He helped negotiate names of acceptable diplomats and the language of a Serbian apology for the atrocities in Srebrenica. Bosnia agreed, finally, to name an ambassador to Serbia.

To seal the deal, as Mr. Davutoglu tells the tale, he met late one night at the Sarajevo airport with the Bosnian leader Haris Silajdzic. The Bosnian smoked furiously. Mr. Davutoglu, a pious Muslim, doesn't smoke — but he made an exception: "I smoked; he smoked." Mr. Silajdzic accepted the Serbian apology. Crisis averted.

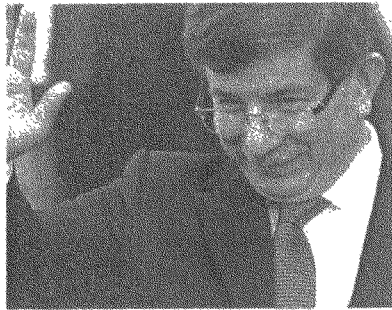
Mr. Davutoglu has many stories like this, involving Iraq, Syria, Israel, Lebanon and Kyrgyzstan — and most of them appear to be true. He is an extraordinary figure: brilliant, indefatigable, self-aggrandizing.

Mr. Davutoglu's abilities, and his worldview, matter because of the country whose diplomacy he drives: an Islamic democracy, a developing nation with a booming economy, a member of NATO with one foot in Europe and the other in Asia.

The Turkish prime minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, is a forward-thinking populist who has drastically altered Turkish politics. Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Davutoglu share a grand vision: a renaissance Turkey, expanding to fill a by-gone Ottoman imperial space.

THE GLOBAL 'WE'

Turkey is one of the great success stories of the world's emerging powers. The Turkish economy last year grew more than 8 percent and has become the



Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu has skillfully raised Turkey's diplomatic status.

17th-largest in the world. Turkey is the "soft power" giant of the Middle East, exporting pop culture and serious ideas and attracting visitors, including one and a half million Iranians a year, to gape at the Turkish miracle.

Mr. Davutoglu, who is 51, has climbed aboard the Turkish rocket. Turkey's success raises his status; his achievements do the same for his country.

Mr. Davutoglu has maintained close relations with both Mr. Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul — one of the few senior figures to do so.

He has filled the upper ranks of the Foreign Affairs Ministry with worldly, pragmatic diplomats who share his nationalist vision. They have done an extraordinarily deft job of balancing Turkey's regional and global ambitions, of advancing its interests without setting off alarm bells in other capitals.

Mr. Davutoglu began his career as foreign policy adviser at a moment when Turkey's bid for membership in the European Union had become a national obsession.

For Mr. Davutoglu, Mr. Erdogan and Mr. Gul, the Union offered Turkey crucial economic benefits but, more important, confirmation of its belonging in the

Turkey is an Islamic democracy and a booming economy with one foot in Europe and the other in Asia.

club of the West. Yet major European countries, above all France and Germany, seem determined to block Turkey's accession to the Union.

Last June, the U.S. defense secretary, Robert M. Gates, even suggested that "if there is anything to the notion that Turkey is, if you will, moving eastward," it was the result of having been "pushed by some in Europe refusing to give Tur-

Bridging two worlds

From *The New York Times Magazine*

key the sort of organic link to the West that Turkey sought."

This is a very common refrain, which Mr. Davutoglu is at pains to refute. On a flight to Ankara from Brussels, where he had just attended a NATO meeting, Mr. Davutoglu recited to me what he told his fellow foreign ministers: "If today there is an E.U., that emerged under the security umbrella of NATO.

"And who contributed most during those Cold War years? Turkey. Therefore when someone says, 'Who lost Turkey?' — there was such a question, because people said Turkey was turning to the East — this is an insult to Turkey.

"Why? Because it means he does not see Turkey as part of 'we.' It means Turkey is object, not subject. We don't want to be on the agenda of international community as one item of crisis. We want to be in the international community to solve the crisis."

To be part of the global "we" — this was the very definition of Mr. Erdogan's, and Mr. Davutoglu's, ambitions. This is why the Turks received the European rebuff as such a deep insult. In the aftermath, Turkey sought to raise its status in its immediate neighborhood.

THE INTERLOCUTOR

In 2007, Turkey put itself forward as a Middle East peacemaker. Many Turkish Islamists despise Israel, but Mr. Erdogan and his moderate Islamist party, Justice and Development, adopted a more diplomatic line.

Mr. Erdogan visited Israel in 2004, and in 2007, Turkey invited Israel's president, Shimon Peres, to address Parliament.

Turkish leaders then sought to broker talks between Syria and Israel over the return of the Golan Heights to Syria. Israel was eager for an interlocutor with Damascus. The role of go-between "was not assigned to Turkey by any outside actor," Mr. Davutoglu wrote in an essay in *Foreign Policy*. Turkey assigned the task to itself under a principle he called "proactive and pre-emptive peace diplomacy." This is what it means to be part of "we."

In 2008, Mr. Davutoglu brought both sides to Istanbul for five rounds of talks in separate hotels.

Israel needed to be convinced that Syria was prepared to stop sponsoring Hezbollah and to distance itself from Iran. Syria demanded that Israel clarify the territory from which it was prepared to withdraw.

By late December, Mr. Davutoglu and

his aides say, only disagreement over a word or two prevented the two sides from moving to direct talks. Ehud Olmert, then Israel's prime minister, held a dinner at Mr. Erdogan's home, in the course of which both men spoke to President Bashar al-Assad of Syria.

Mr. Davutoglu had reserved a hotel room for the direct talks. An Israeli official close to the negotiations confirmed this account, saying that Mr. Davutoglu "played a very important role, a very professional role" and agreeing that face-to-face talks seemed to be in the offing.

But only a few days after the meeting, Israel began its invasion of Gaza, Operation Cast Lead, inflaming the Arab world and humiliating Mr. Erdogan. The

talks collapsed.

Israel had not deceived the Turks, because Israel's cabinet authorized the invasion days after the Olmert-Erdogan dinner.

That's not how Turkey saw the sequence of events. It was, Mr. Davutoglu says, "an insult to Turkey." Turkey is a democracy, after all; and the public reaction to Gaza, on top of the rebuff from the European Union — and perhaps also the inherent logic of the "zero problems" policy — sent the country in a new direction.

IRAN AND ISRAEL

Turkey's regional interests coincided with those of the United States and the West. But its run of luck ended in Iran.

In September 2009, the Iranians, under pressure from the West to show that they were not seeking to build a nuclear weapon, offered to send 1,200 kilograms, or 2,650 pounds, of uranium abroad in exchange for an equal amount to be enriched for civilian use.

Iran did not trust any Western country to hold its uranium; but it might trust Turkey. Mr. Davutoglu sprang into action, flying back and forth to Tehran to work out the details.

The cables recently disclosed by WikiLeaks illustrate the tensions this produced with Washington.

In a meeting with a U.S. assistant secretary of state, Philip Gordon, in Ankara in November 2009, Mr. Davutoglu advanced his theory of Turkish exceptionalism: "Only Turkey," he said, "can speak bluntly and critically to the Iranians."

Mr. Davutoglu was confident that Iran was ready to strike a deal. A skeptical Mr. Gordon "pressed" him on his "assessment of the consequences if Iran gets a nuclear weapon."

Mr. Davutoglu insisted that Turkey was well aware of the risk. Mr. Gordon "pushed back that Ankara should give a stern public message" to Iran; Mr. Davutoglu replied that they were doing so in private.

Behind this tense exchange was the fear that Turkey was cutting Iran too much slack. Mr. Davutoglu is quite open about the fact that Turkey has interests in Iran that the United States and Europe do not have.

"Our economy is growing," Mr. Davutoglu told me, "and Iran is the only land corridor for us to reach Asia." Sanctions on Iran would hurt Turkey.

But Mr. Davutoglu also insists that Turkey's assessment of Iran's intentions is not affected by its interests. It is easy to see why Mr. Gordon was skeptical: Mr. Erdogan has dismissed fears that Iran wants to build a bomb as "gossip."

At President Barack Obama's nuclear summit meeting last April, Mr. Erdogan and the president of Brazil, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, proposed to Mr. Obama that they work jointly to persuade Iran to surrender the uranium. Administration officials made it clear that they feared Iran would try to hoodwink Turkey and Brazil.

Mr. Davutoglu nonetheless resumed his manic routine, flying back and forth to Tehran well into May, pushing the Iranians to make concessions. In his seventh and final session, he reached a deal.

Mr. Davutoglu was so excited that he called Turkish reporters from the plane to invite them to a briefing upon his arrival. But by the time the journalists returned to their offices to write their reports, they got word that the United States had rejected the deal.

The Turks had announced their diplomatic coup at precisely the moment the Obama administration finally induced Russia and China to vote for tough sanctions on Iran in the U.N. Security Council.

Mr. Davutoglu says he never took a step without informing the Americans, but U.S. officials said that the terms of the deal took them by surprise. The Turks mostly hid their hurt feelings.

But in early June, the rift with the United States played out in public when Turkey and Brazil voted against the sanctions resolution.

Turkish officials say the last thing they wanted was to defy Washington on a matter of national security, but President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran

Turkey is the "soft power" giant of Mideast, exporting pop culture and serious ideas and attracting visitors.

said he would consider the "swap deal" terminated unless Turkey and Brazil voted against the resolution.

They were, they insist, voting for continued diplomacy, not for Iran or against the United States and the West.

But Iran was only the half of it. The other half was Israel. In the spring of 2010, a Turkish charitable organization, I.H.H., chartered the flotilla designed to break Israel's blockade of Gaza.

Mr. Davutoglu says that he tried to persuade the group not to sail and then asked the organizer of the flotilla to turn aside if Israel stopped the ships. In late May, the day before the flotilla set sail, a senior Turkish official called the Israelis to alert them to the ships' embarking

and to say, "Please don't engage in violence."

Of course, it didn't work out that way. The flotilla refused Israel's demands to alter course, and an assault on the Mavi Marmara, the lead ship, turned deadly, with eight Turkish citizens and one American killed. The Gaza war had embittered Turkish public opinion; now angry crowds gathered across the country, denouncing Israel.

In a statement to the Security Council the day after the assault, Mr. Davutoglu said, "This is a black day in the history of humanity, where the distance between terrorists and states has been blurred."

Turkey seemed to have made a choice among its conflicting ambitions. Steven Cook, a Middle East scholar at the Council on Foreign Relations, recently wrote, "Erdogan and his party believe they benefit domestically from the position Turkey has staked out in the Middle East," and thus "the demands of domestic Turkish politics now trump the need to maintain good relations with the United States." Turkey may be turning in a new direction, in other words, not so much because it has been rejected by the West as because it is being so ardently embraced by the East.

'THE LITMUS TEST'

A few months before he became the Turkish foreign minister, Mr. Davutoglu visited Washington to meet with the incoming Obama team. He was dazzled.

Former President George W. Bush, he thought, had been America's Caesar; Mr. Obama would be its Marcus Aurelius, its philosopher-king. "There will be a golden age in Turkish-American relations," he predicted.

It hasn't worked out that way, and Mr. Davutoglu can barely process a setback so at odds with his grand intellectual and policy construct.

The truth seems to be that he misread the depth of feeling in the United States about both Israel and Iran, or perhaps overestimated Turkey's importance. This is the danger of postimperial grandiosity. "They talk as if they expect a merger between Turkey and the E.U.," says Hugh Pope, head of the Turkish office of the International Crisis Group. "They think they're more important than Israel."

Perhaps the setback is just a brief reversal in the upward path of one of the world's rising powers. On the flight home from Brussels, where he conferred privately with Mr. Gates and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and met with his European counterparts, Mr. Davutoglu was in an ebullient mood.

Turkey, the crossroads of civilizations, the land where East and West, North and South, converge, is pointing the way to the world's future. "Turkey is the litmus test of globalization," he told me. "Success for Turkey will mean the success of globalization." The world, as Mr. Davutoglu likes to say, expects great things from Turkey.

AP Associated Press

Iraq: Car bombs targeting Shiite pilgrims kill 26

January 24, 2011 By SAAD ABDUL-KADIR Associated Press

BAGHDAD -- Two car bombs tore through parking lots packed with Shiite pilgrims Monday in an Iraqi holy city, pushing the death toll from a week of attacks to more than 170.

The uptick in violence poses a major test for Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's new and somewhat shaky coalition government as followers of a powerful Shiite cleric and key ally demanded he fill key security posts.

The blasts struck Karbala as hundreds of thousands of pilgrims were massing for religious rituals marking the end of a 40-day mourning period for the Islamic sect's most beloved saint.

The first attack occurred about 7 a.m. in a parking lot near busloads of pilgrims on the eastern outskirts of Karbala, 55 miles (90 kilometers) south of Baghdad. Police and hospital officials said that six pilgrims were killed and 34 people wounded in that attack.

Another bomb was discovered nearby and dismantled before it could explode, police said.

More than four hours later, a second explosion struck pilgrims on the southern edge of the city, killing at least 20 people, including two soldiers, and wounding 42, the officials said.

There is a vehicle ban in Karbala for the holy period so pilgrims are dropped off at parking lots and walk in.

The police and hospital officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information.

Monday's attacks followed a triple suicide bombing last week along two highways leading to Karbala that killed 56 and wounded at least 180 - most of them Shiite pilgrims.

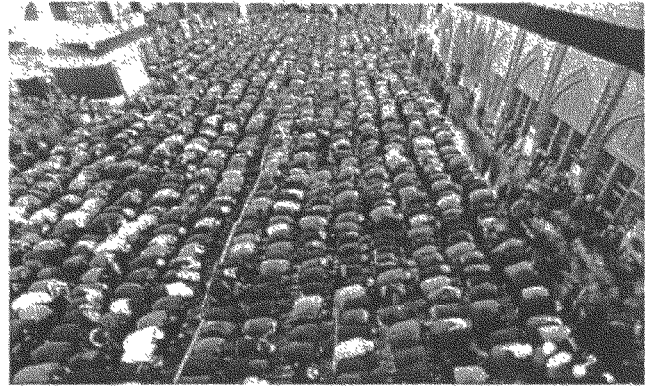
Hundreds of thousands of pilgrims are gathering in Karbala for Monday's ceremonies marking the end of Arbaeen, a 40-day mourning period to observe the seventh century death of the Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson.

His death in battle near Karbala sealed Islam's historic Sunni-Shiite split - the ancient divide that provided the backdrop for the sectarian bloodshed in Iraq after the 2003 U.S.-led war.

No group claimed responsibility for Monday's blast, but car bombs and suicide attacks are the trademark of al-Qaida in Iraq and other Sunni religious extremists.

Those groups have frequently targeted Shiites in a bid to reignite sectarian violence that pushed the country to the brink of civil war.

Since the end of Saddam Hussein's Sunni-dominated rule, Shiite politicians have encouraged huge turnouts at religious rituals, which were banned under the former regime, as a demonstration of Shiite power.



Shiite pilgrims pray at the Imam Abbas shrine in Karbala, 80 kilometers (50 miles) south of Baghdad, Iraq, Sunday, Jan. 23, 2011, as faithful flock to the holy city for Arbaeen, marking the end of the forty-day mourning period after the anniversary of the 7th century martyrdom of Imam Hussein, the Prophet Muhammad's grandson. (AP Photo/Ahmed al-Husseini)

Followers of anti-U.S. Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, who have been blamed for some of the worst sectarian violence in past years, criticized al-Maliki for not naming new defense, interior and national security ministers.

Al-Maliki formed a new government on Dec. 21 after months of political deadlock but has said he needs more time to find security ministers who are apolitical. He maintains control of the ministries in the meantime.

"We demand that the appointment of security ministers to provide security for the Iraqi people be expedited," said Fawzi Akram al-Tarzi, a member of al-Sadr's bloc in parliament.

Security forces also have been targeted in the latest spate of violence, which began last Tuesday with a suicide bombing targeting police recruits in Tikrit.

The Islamic State of Iraq, an al-Qaida front group, has claimed responsibility for the Tikrit attack as well as two bombings last week at security force headquarters in Baqouba that together killed 10 people.

Also Monday, police said two bombs in Baghdad killed an Iraqi army intelligence officer and his driver and wounded eight bystanders in separate strikes that hit a Shiite and a Sunni neighborhood. Hospital officials in Baghdad confirmed the fatalities.

In northern Iraq, police said unknown gunmen killed two members of a government-backed Sunni militia known as Awakening Councils, of Sahwa, as they were driving in their cars southwest of the city of Kirkuk, 180 miles (290 kilometers) north of Baghdad.

And a roadside bomb exploded near Tikrit as Salahuddin provincial Gov. Ahmed Abdullah al-Jubouri's motorcade was driving by, wounding five of his bodyguards, said police spokesman Col. Hatam Akram. The governor was not hurt in the blast near Saddam's hometown, some 80 miles (130 kilometers) north of Baghdad.

Violence has dropped dramatically in Iraq since the height of the war three years ago, but bombings and drive-by shootings still persist on a near daily basis.

L'Iran s'enfonce dans la dictature policière

Alors que Téhéran reprend aujourd'hui ses discussions avec l'Occident sur le nucléaire, le pouvoir durcit son contrôle social.

GEORGES MALBRUNOT

NOTRE ENVOYÉ SPÉCIAL À TÉHÉRAN

MOYEN-ORIENT Aux quatre coins du pays, les sentinelles veillent sur la jeunesse rebelle. « Dans les universités, de plus en plus de miliciens *bassidjis* assistent aux cours, sans avoir à passer les examens », peste Mohsen, un étudiant, qui pointe une autre dérive : ces va-nu-pieds à la solde de la République islamique ont pris en main la sécurité de chaque établissement, en lieu et place de la police.

Reliés directement au guide et numéro un du régime, Ali Khamenei, les *bassidjis* sont la force montante du pouvoir, après avoir été en première ligne dans la répression des manifestations qui ont suivi l'élection truquée de Mahmoud Ahmadinejad à la présidence de la République en juin 2009. Depuis, pour survivre, l'Iran s'enfonce dans la dictature policière. Aux côtés des *bassidjis*, les services de renseignements (Vevak) dominent la scène, y compris dans les ministères, et jusqu'au dispositif de protection des scientifiques impliqués dans les activités nucléaires (l'Ogab) qui vient de revenir dans le giron du Vevak.

Grâce à ce maillage serré, le contrôle de la rue s'est durci. La presse réformatrice a été muselée. L'opposition est sans voix. Quant aux défenseurs des droits de l'homme, la plupart sont sous les verrous. Mais au-delà de la chape de plomb qui s'abat sur la société, c'est le système institutionnel, qui a été modifié en profondeur. « Il n'y a plus comme avant une multitude de centres de pouvoirs qui se marquaient, constate un diplomate. L'Assemblée des experts et le Conseil de discernement, par exemple, ont perdu de leur influence. » Les pôles qui subsistent tournent autour du guide, du président de la République, de la nébuleuse sécuritaire, et enfin des gardiens de la révolution, que le régime « mouille » dans de juteuses affaires pour qu'ils ne soient pas tentés de le lâcher.

Dans les provinces, le pouvoir obscur d'Ahmadinejad s'appuie sur les gouver-

neurs, qui dépendent du ministère de l'Intérieur, qui lui est proche. Mais le président populiste y a également nommé un représentant des gardiens de la révolution, dont la mission générale a été revue. Pour contrer toute menace intérieure ou aux frontières, les *pasdarans* se transforment peu à peu en une force d'intervention rapide, plus légère.

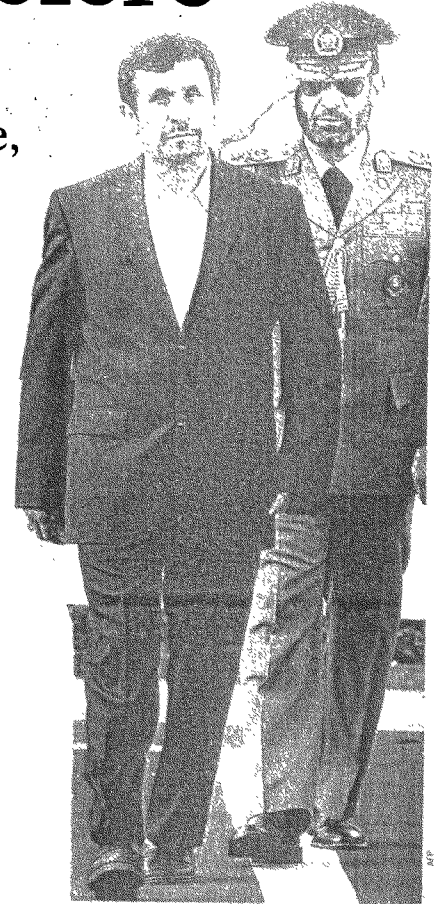
Dans les bastions conservateurs que constituent les campagnes, le troisième homme fort est le représentant du guide, qui a, lui aussi, renouvelé ses *apparatchiks*. À défaut d'être forcément unis, tous composent les nouveaux centres du régime. « Ils ont été choisis pour leur fidélité extrême, ce sont les plus durs des partisans d'Ahmadinejad et du guide », regrette un homme d'affaires, qui souligne la psychose qui s'est emparée, depuis dix-huit mois, des hautes sphères du régime : « Tout le monde se méfie de tout le monde. Les dirigeants se savent infiltrés. »

Mais où sont passés les *mollahs* dans cette nouvelle architecture du pouvoir ? Le nombre des représentants du clergé - l'un des principaux piliers de la République islamique - n'a jamais été aussi faible au Parlement. « L'Iran n'est quasiment plus un pays religieux », note un autre diplomate occidental, qui insiste sur cette seconde transformation en profondeur de l'Iran d'Ahmadinejad, le laïc.

Un nationalisme religieux

Fin tacticien, ce dernier n'ignore pas que ses compatriotes sont nationalistes,

42
journalistes
iraniens ont été arrêtés
depuis la contestation
de juin 2009.



Le président iranien Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, le 20 janvier 2010, à Téhéran. UPI/MAXPPP

avant d'être mystiques ou pratiquants. Pour redorer son blason, ces derniers mois, il a laissé son âme damnée, Rahim Mashaei, un de ses vice-présidents, recentrer son discours autour du « nationalisme religieux » qu'incarnerait un parti politique encore à créer. Curieux mélange de caporalisme et de mysticisme qui soutient que « le vrai islam est l'islam iranien ». « C'est un choix politi-

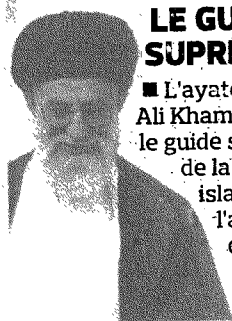
À Téhéran, l'Europe parle à plusieurs voix

DES FRANÇAIS farouchement opposés au programme nucléaire. Des Allemands, accusés de complaisance, mais qui sont embarrassés par l'affaire de leurs deux journalistes détenus. Et des Italiens surtout intéressés par le commerce. À Téhéran, l'Union européenne n'affiche pas l'unité. « Nous ne comprenons pas pourquoi les diplomates français sont les plus radicaux », s'interroge un de leur collègue européen. Les diplo-

mates allemands, italiens ou même suisses, qui représentent les intérêts américains, sont convaincus que la France mise sur « un changement de régime ». Sans le reconnaître formellement, les représentants français font valoir que le pouvoir a de plus en plus de mal « à interagir » avec le monde extérieur. Est-il encore amendable ? La question divise, plus que jamais, la communauté diplomatique à Téhéran. G. M.

que qui déplaît à la hiérarchie religieuse, car c'est une notion opposée à l'exportation de la révolution, mais cela peut séduire des Iraniens », note le professeur Hamidas Bavand. D'aucuns pensent qu'Ahmadinejad, inéligible à la présidentielle de 2013, prépare en fait le terrain pour son « dévot éclairé » Masha'ei.

Mais au sein du camp conservateur, sa soif de pouvoir est, plus que jamais, combattue par le président du Parlement, Ali Larijani. Entre eux, la guerre est totale. Ils ne se parlent plus. Fort de l'appui du Parlement, et avec son frère à la tête d'une justice très impliquée dans la répression, Larijani ne cesse d'entraver l'action du gouvernement d'Ahmadinejad, en pratiquant la surenchère. C'est lui qui a poussé le guide à s'opposer à l'accord sur le nucléaire concocté fin 2009 avec l'Occident. C'est encore lui qui s'apprete à faire voter par le Majlis la rupture des relations diplomatiques avec la Grande-Bretagne. ■



LE GUIDE SUPRÊME

■ L'ayatollah Ali Khamenei est le guide suprême de la République islamique, l'arbitre des conflits de pouvoir.

LES OUTILS DE LA RÉPRESSION

■ Les **bassidjis**. Une milice populaire implantée dans la quasi-totalité des localités iraniennes et forte d'environ 100 000 hommes entraînés.

■ Les **gardiens de la révolution**. Véritable garde prétorienne du régime dotée d'une composante terrestre et navale. Ils sont aussi de puissants acteurs économiques.

LES CENTRES DE POUVOIR DÉCLINANTS



■ L'**Assemblée des experts**. Ses 86 membres religieux sont chargés de désigner le guide et de le révoquer. Elle est dirigée par Ali Akbar Rafsanjani, l'ennemi juré d'Ahmadinejad.

■ Le **Conseil des gardiens**. Douze membres, nommés par le guide et le chef du Parlement qui veillent à la conformité des lois à l'islam.

LES OPPOSANTS CONSERVATEURS



■ **Ali Larijani**, président du Parlement, dispose de l'appui du Majlis, et de celui de son frère, Sadeq, qui dirige le tout-puissant appareil judiciaire en pointe dans la répression.



■ **Mohammed Galibaf**, maire de Téhéran, est un ancien pasdaran, réputé ouvert. Comme Larijani, cet ancien chef de la police a déjà été candidat à la présidentielle face à Ahmadinejad.

Le défi de la sauvegarde du régime

DANS son bureau des quartiers huppés de Téhéran, Kanani Moghadam a beau s'adonner avec brio à l'art persan de la dissimulation, cet ancien gardien de la révolution peine à masquer ses craintes. « La guerre est entre nous. Nous faisons face à la plus grave crise depuis la révolution de 1979 », reconnaît ce compagnon de route de l'ayatollah Khomeïni, comme l'attestent les photos aux murs le montrant aux côtés du fondateur du régime révolutionnaire.

Comme beaucoup de ses anciens camarades, Moghadam, qui rentre d'un voyage d'affaires en France, s'est lancé, ces dernières années, dans l'industrie. Opposé à Ahmadinejad, cet ingénieur influent peut être classé parmi les conservateurs réalistes sur l'échiquier politique. Sans le dire bien sûr ouvertement, lui et ses amis se demandent comment ils peuvent sauver un régime, ébranlé par la contestation interne. « Avec Galibaf (le maire de Téhéran, NDLR), Larijani et Rezaïe (l'ancien chef des pasdarans, NDLR), nous avons eu plusieurs meetings ces derniers mois pour nous accorder sur un candidat à la prochaine élection présidentielle. Nous devons désormais unifier le front anti-Ahmadinejad. »

Telle est, selon lui, « la nouvelle stratégie » du régime : trouver une face acceptable par une majorité d'Iraniens, afin de recréer un lien avec la population. Selon les observateurs, cet homme providentiel pourrait être Ali Larijani ou Mohammed Galibaf, le très dynamique maire de Téhéran, qui a su rester en retrait des troubles. Mais encore faudrait-il que le guide, Ali Khamenei, les

soutienne dans leur démarche, lui qui a toujours appuyé Ahmadinejad, depuis les émeutes postélectorales.

Perte de légitimité

« Khamenei veut lui aussi calmer le jeu en interne », affirme un Iranien, qui lui rend visite régulièrement. Le numéro un du régime n'a pas cédé aux sirènes de ceux qui prônaient « une épuration maximale », qui aurait jeté les ténors de l'opposition, Mir Hussein Moussavi et Mehdi Karubi, devant la justice. « Il préfère les garder sous la main, mais ils doivent se taire », susurre un journaliste local.

À court terme, Moghadam ne s'inquiète pas d'une éventuelle chute du pouvoir. Ces dernières semaines, avec de nombreux policiers déployés dans les rues, la suppression des subventions sur les prix de certains produits de première nécessité n'a pas engendré la moindre manifestation. Mais si Ahmadinejad a fait ce qu'aucun président n'avait osé entreprendre avant lui, c'est aussi parce que les caisses de l'État sont presque vides. En effet, même si, à court terme, les sanctions internationales contre le programme nucléaire iranien ne feront pas fléchir Téhéran, ces mesures pénalisent durement les banques et le secteur pétrolier iranien, qui ne peut plus importer la technologie occidentale, dont il a cruellement besoin.

Mais, à moyen terme, de l'avis de nombreux observateurs, « le pouvoir est condamné, car il ne pourra pas maintenir indéfiniment le couvercle sur 70 millions de personnes ». Le régime a perdu ses légitimités religieuse et répu-

blicaine. « Il a cassé la machine », résume un diplomate. Pourra-t-il la relancer ? « On ne lui fait plus confiance, jure Ali, un jeune chercheur, jamais, il ne pourra retrouver grâce à nos yeux. » « C'est vrai, lui répond en écho Kanani Moghadam, on doit ouvrir davantage notre système politique, et accorder plus de libertés aux gens. » Et l'ancien pasdaran d'estimer qu'« il faudra que nous ayons 40 millions de votants à la prochaine élection présidentielle », faute de quoi le régime serait privé de toute représentativité.

Mais la consultation aura-t-elle seulement lieu ? Prévues cette année, les élections municipales ont été reportées, le pouvoir craignant le verdict des urnes, selon l'opposition. À moins que des « circonstances exceptionnelles » ne conduisent le duo Khamenei-Ahmadinejad à instaurer l'état d'urgence, en cas de frappes occidentales contre les installations nucléaires de l'Iran ? ■ G.M.

Nucléaire iranien : l'évaluation de la menace fait débat en Israël

Six mois après les dernières sanctions de l'ONU, le groupe des Six et l'Iran ont repris des discussions à Istanbul

Jérusalem
Correspondant

Les représentants du groupe des Six (Etats-Unis, Russie, France, Royaume-Uni, Chine et Allemagne), qui se retrouvent, vendredi 21 janvier à Istanbul, avec le négociateur iranien sur le dossier nucléaire, Saïd Jalili, n'avaient certainement pas anticipé que leur position de négociation face à Téhéran serait affaiblie par... Israël. En quittant ses fonctions, le 6 janvier, l'ancien chef du Mossad, le service de renseignement extérieur d'Israël, Meïr Dagan a en effet lâché une petite « bombe » médiatique que les dirigeants israéliens s'efforcent depuis, péniblement, de désamorcer. En assurant que l'Iran ne sera pas en mesure de posséder une arme nucléaire avant 2015, M. Dagan a donné sans le vouloir des arguments à l'Iran, qui assure de son côté que son programme nucléaire n'est que civil.

Des discussions difficiles à Istanbul

Réunis à Istanbul les 21 et 22 janvier, le groupe des Six (Etats-Unis, Russie, Chine, Grande-Bretagne, France et Allemagne) et l'Iran devaient avoir des discussions difficiles sur la question de l'enrichissement d'uranium, au cœur du conflit opposant depuis plusieurs années l'Iran à la communauté internationale. Les précédentes discussions entre les parties remontent à décembre 2010 à Genève. Elles s'étaient achevées sans résultat

S'attirant les foudres du premier ministre israélien, Benjamin Nétanyahou, il a ajouté que si la politique occidentale envers Téhéran (sanctions et opérations clandestines) se poursuit, cette échéance pourrait même être reculée de plusieurs années.

De nouveau interrogé, le 17 jan-

Israël ne veut surtout pas donner l'impression qu'il est possible d'alléger les sanctions contre Téhéran

vier, par la commission des affaires étrangères et de la défense de la Knesset (Parlement), M. Dagan a dû avaler son chapeau : ces estimations de calendrier, a-t-il expliqué, ne changent rien au fait que l'Iran s'efforce d'obtenir des capacités nucléaires militaires et que,

tangible. Le rendez-vous de Genève avait mis fin à une interruption de quatorze mois. Téhéran a réitéré qu'il n'était pas question, à Istanbul, de faire le procès de ses activités nucléaires. Jeudi, la Russie s'est démarquée de ses alliés en déclarant que la levée des sanctions internationales imposées à l'Iran « devait aussi être à l'agenda » des discussions d'Istanbul, selon le chef de la diplomatie russe, Sergueï Lavrov.

« dans certains scénarios, il pourrait raccourcir le délai » nécessaire à la fabrication d'une arme, sous-entendu avant 2015.

Tout de suite après les déclarations de l'ex-chef du Mossad, M. Nétanyahou avait tenté d'allumer un contre-feu, expliquant que les propos de M. Dagan étaient « seulement des estimations » des services de renseignement, lesquelles s'appliquent à toute une série de scénarios. Il y a matière à des « estimations divergentes », avait-il insisté. Cet empressement à rectifier l'évaluation stratégique d'un homme qui a pourtant la haute main sur les capacités de renseignement humain et électronique d'Israël s'explique : M. Nétanyahou n'a jamais caché qu'il plaçait la question iranienne au premier rang de ses priorités, loin devant la résolution du conflit israélo-palestinien.

Israël, qui se targue d'avoir alerté et convaincu la communauté internationale du danger représenté par la menace nucléaire iranienne, ne veut surtout pas donner l'impression que celle-ci s'éloigne et qu'il est possible d'alléger les sanctions contre Téhéran. M. Nétanyahou s'est attiré une fin de non-recevoir de la part de Robert Gatés, le secrétaire américain à la défense, lorsqu'il a réclamé des Etats-Unis qu'ils brandissent une « menace militaire crédible » contre l'Iran, mais le débat sur la nécessité ou non d'une opération militaire préventive est loin d'être clos en Israël.

Le premier ministre et le minis-

tre de la défense, Ehoud Barak, font figure de « faucons » sur cette question, face à des hommes comme Meïr Dagan, Amos Yadlin, chef du renseignement militaire, Yuval Diskin, chef du Shin Bet (renseignement intérieur), ainsi que le général Gabi Ashkenazi, chef d'état-major des armées, qui sont nettement plus circonspects. Or si la menace iranienne est renvoyée à 2015 ou plus tard, d'éventuelles frappes militaires israéliennes contre les sites nucléaires iraniens n'ont plus de justification.

Les propos de M. Dagan soulignent les divergences qui s'expriment au sein de la communauté israélienne du renseignement à propos de l'état d'avancement du programme nucléaire iranien. Selon une source militaire qui connaît bien ces questions, l'Iran posséderait assez de kilogrammes d'uranium enrichi à 20 % pour, potentiellement, fabriquer deux bombes nucléaires.

Si le guide suprême iranien, l'ayatollah Ali Khameneï, « endonne l'ordre, l'Iran pourrait se doter d'une arme nucléaire d'ici un à deux ans », assure ce spécialiste, qui ajoute aussitôt que des considérations « technologiques et stratégiques » pourraient convaincre les dirigeants iraniens de ne pas franchir ce seuil. Parmi celles-ci figurent des actions de sabotage des installations iraniennes. Faisant référence à des experts militaires et des services de renseignement, le *New York Times* a confirmé, le 17 janvier, une étroite coopération israélo-américaine dans ce domaine.

Celle-ci se serait notamment manifestée par la mise au point du virus informatique Stuxnet, lequel aurait infecté le réseau de centrifugeuses (destinées à enrichir l'uranium) iraniennes. Selon le quotidien américain, Israël aurait utilisé le site de sa centrale nucléaire de Dimona (située dans le Néguev) pour tester le virus Stuxnet. Les autorités israéliennes n'ont pas commenté ces informations, mais les experts militaires reconnaissent que les actes de sabotage informatique sont la spécialité de l'unité 8200 de l'armée israélienne. ■

Laurent Zecchini

The Kurdish language stands on trial

by Estella Schmid

The trial of 151 leading Kurdish politicians and activists that began in October 2010 resumed on January 13 in a special court in Diyarbakir, south-east Turkey.

The trial was described as "clearly a political one" by London lawyer Omer Moore, a member of the four-strong British delegation.

The delegation of trial observers from Britain organised by Peace in Kurdistan observed the first few days of the reopening trial.

They have now returned and released their initial impressions of what they witnessed.

The delegation, consisting of Fr Joe Ryan, chairman of the Justice and Peace Commission of the Diocese of Westminster, Liberal Democrat politician and human rights activist Nasser Butt, human rights lawyer Sanya Karakas and solicitor Omer Moore from Trott & Gentry Solicitors, was in the region from January 13-19.

The mass trial, during which the accused were forbidden to speak in their mother tongue of Kurdish, was described by one of the delegation as an example of how the identity of the Kurdish people has been denied by Turkish authorities.

"The fact that 151 Kurdish people are on trial and not allowed to speak their own mother tongue is a denial of human rights," said Fr Ryan.

"The trial has now turned the tables - it is the Turkish nation



which is on trial for denying the Kurdish prisoners the right to speak in their own mother tongue," he said.

Moore took up the same theme: "The defendants made an ideological decision to speak in Kurdish. The response to it was the switching off of the defendants' microphones.

The mayor of Diyarbakir, Mr Osman Baydemir, used his five seconds of grace before the microphone was turned off to squeeze in one sentence, choosing Arabic words used both in Kurdish and Turkish so that both the judges and the audience would understand him.

He said: "Merhamet, zulum, adalet," meaning: "We don't want your mercy or oppression, we just want justice," she observed.

"It was an honour to be invited as an observer to the trial. Our presence was very much appreciated. This was obvious from the relatives of the prisoners whom we met.

While waiting in a large corridor before entering the courtroom, there was a chance to meet the families and friends of prisoners," said Fr Ryan.

Butt outlined the wider implications of the trial. "There may have been change in governments in Turkey over the last 80 years, but each regime has been trying to wipe out any reference to past cultures of all its minority communities.

"Hence minorities such as the Armenians, Syrian Christians and the Alveî Muslims have had to survive quietly behind closed doors. The biggest challenge for Turks has come from its biggest minority, the Kurds.

"There has been an onslaught on Kurds to lose their language, culture and identity as Kurds and instead to adopt all things Turk whatever that means.

"The current round of court trials of nearly 2,000 Kurds around the country is just another battleground, a new legal means to put the Kurd community under pressure and on trial in eyes of the country.

"But given the abuse of the whole legal and political framework to achieve these trials, Turkey has been itself put on trial in the eyes of the international community," said Butt.

Since April 14 2009, some 1,500 Kurdish politicians and activists have been arrested in

the country, the vast majority members of pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party, its youth and women's branches.

Among those arrested are several elected mayors and former mayors, elected members of regional assemblies, journalists and human rights activists.

Those on trial include several elected mayors, former parliamentarian and Democratic Society Congress co-chairman Hatip Dicle, Diyarbakir Mayor Osman Baydemir and Human Rights Association of Turkey vice-chairman Muharrem Erbey.

While the trial continues delegations from Britain will continue to observe the proceedings and report back at various stages.

The trial is expected to last some months and its outcome will have profound implications for the rights of the Kurdish people, the future of Turkey and its relations with the outside world.

A parliamentary meeting will be held on February 16 hosted by Lord Rea when the findings of the delegates will be discussed.

Their written report will be published at the beginning of February. More details on the public meeting will be announced soon.

Searching for a new paradigm in dealing with the Kurdish problem



COLUMNISTS

MARKAR ESAYAN

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A recent article titled *How would Gandhi solve the Kurdish issue?* elicited many comments from my readers. This is good. We are no longer a society which remains silent in the face of sacred taboos. Of course, every analysis possesses its own inherent errors, as columnists and political scientists are no Zeuses exhorting from on high at Mount Olympus.

The other day, I was speaking with a Kurdish friend of mine who directs the local Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in an Aegean town. My friend expressed great concern about the possibility of provocations that might happen in the Aegean region. He said he sensed that Ergenekon was organizing in the region and that it was preparing to implement some terrible plan. With our most critical current problem being the Kurdish one, and the clear and open existence of a very nationalist vein in the Aegean region, these are truly not just irrational delusions held by my friend.

The build-up of anger in the East, Southeast the Aegean regions are parallel in many ways when it comes to violence. According to calculations made, over the course of the 30-year war in Turkey's East, exactly 5 million people performed their military service in the hot clash zones of Turkey. I don't know what sort of numbers you would find if you were to add this to the numbers of clerks and salaried officers that have worked in the region. A rough estimate, however, shows that all these people, in addition to their families, amount to a mass of 25 million in this region representing the West, who have fallen victim to violence and misinformation about the Kurds. In addition, around 5,500 have lost their lives.

Kurds have never been equal citizens

From the Kurdish perspective, the situation is terrible. They have never been equal citizens. Efforts were made to assimilate them, and then they were simply marginalized and mistreated. A giant income gap developed between the West and the Kurdish region. The events of the Sept. 12 coup at the Diyarbakir Prison are counted as one of the reasons for the war that has continued up until today. But the real disaster was what happened during the 1990s. It was then that one of the bloodiest periods of this dirty war began. During this time, 4,500 villages were burned down and emptied, more than a million Kurds relocated and JITEM carried out thousands of still unsolved murders.

When unsolved massacres in areas like Bingöl and Güllükonak came to an end in the 90s, there were at least eight different peace processes and cease-fires taking place. In fact, the whole situation became so complicated that it is now alleged that many of the high-ranking officers being tried in the Ergenekon case carried out peace talks with Abdullah Ocalan and his outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). As the war continues, it gets clearer and clearer that this type of confusion and provocation will simply never end.

As for my personal proposal, it is quite radical and I still back it fully. While it may seem a bit romantic compared to the terrible atmosphere in the 80s, I am as sure as I am of my own name that we will never get anywhere by fighting violence with violence. What's more, I am saying this as an ethnically Armenian Turk whose people were unjustly treated during the great disaster of 1915. More violence means more

blood and tears. More violence means new dictatorship. I once asked, If the PKK had never existed, would more Kurds have died? In the 90s in Turkey, did horrific organizations such as JITEM not bring a certain legitimacy to the PKK through their efforts to destroy the group?

My goal is to not speculate about the past. As a writer, I am saying that from here on out my real goal is to help convince people to see that the Turkish-Kurdish issue has reached its capacity for violence. The past is filled with pain. And now, in order not to relive this all again, we need to change our paradigm, which is why it is now an absolute necessity that we view the past with a critical eye. When we view events from the past as legitimate or necessary, it means we will act similarly in the future when under the same circumstances.

So how will change come?

First of all, we must recognize that the past could have unfolded differently. Saying that it was only PKK violence that foisted the Kurdish situation on us is the same as saying that these methods must once again be used in similar situations. At the same time, Ocalan's words about how he will review the situation if the government does not take any steps by March really amount to the same thing: on with the war.

I observe on visits to the Southeast that those close to the BDP and the PKK are very angry, and rightly so. They say the Justice and Development Party (AK Party) has neglected its Kurdish initiative, that it has hesitated on many easy steps and that the initiative has been reduced to the level of TRT Ses. These same people also assert that we have lived for years with violence and death. For us, nothing has changed. It is quite clear that this is being asserted with anger, pain and even rebellion. But it is also clear that in such a negative situation, these will be the emotions that rule over all. I say emotions because reason is really not at work here. If we are not going to question this anger, which will only lead to more young deaths, now, then when will we do so?

Face to face with Ocalan

Look for a moment at how a new book called *Ocalan in Imrali Günleri* (Ocalan's Days on Imrali) presents Ocalan talking about his meeting with state authorities who came to meet him in 2000: They came to make inquiries. Some were commanders and they spoke with authority. They said to me, You have pushed your power outside the borders and have taken a one-sided step. I asked the commanders about the state's policy and they answered: The state will not pay attention to you with this low-intensity war. Raise the stakes of the war, and fight more seriously. Then they will pay attention. Of course, I did not do so. I was afraid and did not believe that the problem would be solved that way.

I do wonder just how many meetings like this occurred between the state and the PKK.

Writer Ismail Besikçi is another person who has claimed that the very existence of the PKK has been influential in the prominence of the general Kurdish reality. Here is some of what he said on the issue in an article that was published in the *Taraf* newspaper and at Rizgari.com:

We see that over the past few years there have been intense discussions and arguments over the Kurdish issue. How was this atmosphere created, how did we come to this point? If today we can argue and discuss Kurds, the Kurdish language,

Kurdish literature, Kurdish culture and the Kurdish problem in general, the role of the PKK in all of this is great, though this conclusion should be no barrier to criticizing the PKK itself.

What the PKK needs is not praise, but criticism. What will move the PKK forward is criticism and self-criticism. PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan, the BDP Party, and the DTK [Democratic Society Congress] need to think about all of this.

Those whose sons and daughters have been killed by state forces, whose villages have been burned down and who have been affected by unsolved murders can make their voices heard and fight for their rights. But those whose sons and daughters have been killed by the PKK or other Kurds have nowhere to go and so remain silent. If the PKK does not search out peace within its own ranks and other Kurdish organizations, and does not develop ties with Kurdish civil society organizations and Turkey, there will be no formation of peace with the state. The PKK will make no gains by excluding Kurds and Kurdish organizations and developing alliances only with Turkish leftist organizations.

One cannot help but agree with Besikiç's criticisms of the PKK. Unsolved murders and injustices wrought by the state are mentioned and recognized on even the level of the prime minister himself these days. So what about the crimes commit-

ted against the Kurdish people by the PKK? What about the PKK's cooperation with Ergenekon?

I think that the time has come and gone for self-criticism as we emerge from this crazy era. The bare minimum here should be the full rejection of violence no matter what the condition, leaving it outside the scope of negotiations. We need a new paradigm. From this perspective, the question of How would Gandhi have solved these problems had he been a Turk or a Kurd? should not be dismissed.

Some of the comments that were made in the wake of my recent article were correct in pointing out that Turkey is no India, and the Turkish state no Britain. The problems Gandhi faced in India were much more complicated than ours and the violence much worse. One example of this was the 500 or so people massacred in just one march that took place in the Punjab province of Amritsar, when the army fired on the crowd with automatic rifles. Still though, Gandhi entreated his people not to fight violence with more violence.

We do not possess the knowledge and ability to know how history would have been had it unfolded differently than it did. But we do possess the foresight to see that it is time to abandon methods that have been used over and over and have only resulted in disaster.

TODAYS ZAMAN

25 January 2011

Ocalan: State wanted me to kill «iller, but I refused



National Intelligence Organization (MIT), the Gendarmerie General Command and National Police Department as well as retired Col. Atilla Uur, who represented then-Chief of General Staff Gen. Hüseyin Kivrikoglu.

The book also says that Ocalan wrote many letters to top state officials including former President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, former Parliament Speaker and current Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and current President Abdullah Gül from prison. According to the book, Ocalan sent three letters to Erdoğan.

The journalist also argues in the book that some military commanders told Ocalan in 2000 to step up the terrorist group's fight against Turkish soldiers. According to the journalist, a few military commanders paid a visit to Ocalan in his cell in 2000. They reportedly told Ocalan that no one would take him seriously if the PKK continued its fight in small conflicts.

Jailed leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) Abdullah Ocalan said someone from the state wanted the PKK to kill former Prime Minister Tansu «iller but that he refused to do so, according to a recent book by journalist Cengiz Kapmaz titled *Ocalan'ın İmralı'daki Günleri* (Ocalan's Days in İmralı).

I don't remember whether I related this before or not. In 1996, someone from the state wanted us [the PKK] to kill «iller. They told me that they were going to prepare the necessary conditions and that we would just kill her. But I did not accept that. We have been against such conspiracy attempts from the very beginning, Ocalan was quoted as saying by Kapmaz in the book. Ocalan reportedly made these remarks in 2007 to his lawyers.

Ocalan, captured in 1999 in Nairobi, was initially sentenced to death but his sentence was commuted to life imprisonment when the death penalty was abolished in Turkey in August 2002. He has been serving a life sentence on İmralı Island in the Marmara Sea since his capture.

It is widely believed that the PKK has links with Turkey's deep state.

The prosecution in the case against Ergenekon -- a clandestine criminal network nested within the state, bureaucracy and military -- highlights various instances of collaboration and cooperation between Ergenekon and the PKK in the three indictments submitted thus far in the case. Hüseyin Yıldırım, the former right-hand man of Ocalan, recently said in an interview that the Ergenekon terrorist organization, an instrument of the deep state, is behind the conflict between Turks and Kurds in Turkey and that Ocalan is also under the control of the deep state.

Turkey has fought the terrorist PKK since 1984 when it was set up with the goal of establishing an autonomous Kurdish state in the eastern and southeastern parts of Turkey. More than 40,000 soldiers and civilians have been killed in clashes thus far.

Kapmaz's book is made up of accounts of Ocalan to his lawyers since his capture. The 500-page-long book has eight sections.

According to the book, Ocalan was interrogated by a special team for 10 days after he was brought to İmralı Prison. The team included high-ranking officials from the

Kurdistan: triumph of democracy

By Robert Halfon,
MP for Harlow

British MP for Harlow, Robert Halfon, has just returned from the Kurdistan Region where he was part of a UK Parliamentary delegation on a fact-finding trip to Kurdistan. While there he met the president and representatives of the Kurdistan Regional Government, visited an overcrowded prison and was shown one of Saddam Hussein's torture chambers known as the Red House. This week, writing exclusively for the Star, he recounts his experiences of an open, democratic and progressive nation determined to emerge from the shadow of genocide.

Imagine if, God forbid, a deranged dictator dropped chemical weapons - mustard gas - over Harlow. Imagine if 5,000 people had died in just a few days. Imagine too that a million people from Essex had been murdered by the same dictator in just 20 years and the intent was to kill everyone with Essex connections.

Impossible? Thank goodness. Unthinkable even? Absolutely. Tragically, such a scenario was not so unthinkable or impossible in Iraq, where more than one million Kurds were murdered during the reign of Saddam Hussein.

That is why, earlier this month; I decided to visit northern Iraq as part of a Parliamentary delegation.

Autonomous Kurdistan was only established in 2003. Whilst an important part of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government makes its own laws, controls its own army and decides its own pace of economic development.

In contrast to most other parts of Iraq, the Kurdistan Region is relatively terrorist-free, although there are continuous threats from Al-Qaeda. There have also been a number

of suicide bombings in recent years - two in 2004 which claimed 98 lives, two at our hotel in Suleimaniah in 2004 and 2007 and a truck bomb which killed one person in 2008.

But a real democracy has been created, one with property rights, religious tolerance, the rule of law with proper justice and courts, a free press and a vigorous political opposition. The economy is booming, with commercial relations strengthened with a number of countries, most notably neighbouring Turkey.

Universities, too, are flourishing, with new ones being built. Education is seen as the root to all success.

I was astounded by the levels of religious tolerance. Whilst Christians are being murdered and persecuted across Iraq - the October church massacre in which 44 Christians died being the most recent tragic example - in Kurdistan they are welcomed and supported. The Kurdish president has invited Christian refugees to take safe haven in his region.

Wherever we went we met Christians? including the Bishop of Erbil - who acknowledged the decency in which Christians were treated. I had not known that Iraqi Kurdistan once had a Jewish population of 17 per cent and came across an old Jewish quarter in the major city of Suleimaniah which was under a Government preservation order to protect its heritage.

But the genocide was a reminder of how the Kurdish story could have all been so different. A day spent at the Halabja Memorial Centre and Garden showed all too clearly the Saddam-led Baathist regime's determination to wipe out Iraqi Kurds. Starting in the 1970's, Kurds in Saddam's Iraq were first marginalised and then demonised before being destroyed.

On March 16, 1988, Saddam ordered planes to drop mustard gas over the Kurdish city of Halabja. Some of the citizens had an inkling of what was going



Robert Halfon, President Barzani, Serok Nadhim Zahawi and Lord Clement Jones pose for a photo, January 26, 2011./ KRG

to happen as all the Ba'athists had left the city some days before. They, too, left but returned a few days late, as they thought nothing was going to happen.

The mustard gas killed more than 5,000 Kurds. In order to achieve maximum effect, the pilots first dropped bombs in order to smash the windows of buildings so that few would be able to escape the effects of the chemical weapons.

Had Saddam stayed in power it is likely that, at some point, the rest of Kurdistan would have been covered with mustard gas. Yet inexplicably, the slaughter of the Kurds is not recognised as a genocide by the international community, most notably the United Nations.

If the Halabja Memorial Centre was a remembrance of genocide, it was arriving at a former Ba'athist torture chamber known as the Red House that was a reminder of Saddam's brutality. Blood still on the floors, hooks on the walls from which people were hung and torture instruments on tables.

Worst of all was a section known as the party room. It was an open area where Kurdish women were taken to be raped and assaulted by the guards. Outside, there was both a shooting gallery and a place for hanging prisoners. With all this suffering it would have been easy for Iraqi Kurds to draw in

amongst themselves, blame the world for their woes and even resort to terrorism. But in Iraqi Kurdistan, the opposite has been the case, despite significant problems.

The region remains deeply conservative. Whilst polygamy has recently been outlawed de facto, female genital mutilation remains at disturbing levels. Although the progressive Kurdish Women's Union suggested to us that it might be as high as 64 per cent, other figures put it at between 20 - 40 per cent. Illiteracy remains high and there is desperate need for a better health system. We were told by the health minister that the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) could not even get proper medicines into the country because they were compelled by the Iraqi government to buy specialised medicines via a particular agent, who happened to be a senior former Ba'athist supporter.

The penal system, too, is in need of great repair. During Saddam's time there were just a couple of prisons in the whole country, one of which was Abu Ghraib. As a result there are real pressures on dealing with prisoners in Kurdistan.

We visited one in Erbil - a former British-built railway station - which was desperately overcrowded. Taken to a smallish room, we saw more than 120 inmates, many sleeping on the floor. To the credit of the gover-

nor and prison warders, they took us voluntarily to see these prison cells. They were campaigning for better jails and asked us to take their message to the authorities.

Whatever these problems, in all our meetings with government officials and parliamentarians, everyone showed a recognition of the difficulties

Kurdistan faces. None were afraid to face up to the challenges. The reason for this is clear. Despite being surrounded by hostile neighbours, threatened by terrorism, challenged by Islamist extremists and Arab nationalism, Kurdistan remains an open society. The determination to learn from the past rather than live in it is something tangi-

ble. It's amazing to think what real democracy and a free economy can achieve in just seven years.

You can argue about the Labour Government's dodgy dossiers, you can disagree over United Nations resolutions; you can debate until the next millennium as to whether the Iraq war was justified. What cannot be

disputed, however, is that the removal of Saddam Hussein not only ended the genocide but also brought about an autonomous progressive, free nation in the shape of Kurdistan.

Harlow Star

Rudaw.Net 26 January 2011

Iraqi Kurds Still in Dispute with Baghdad over Budget

By RUDAW

ERBIL, Iraqi Kurdistan: Iraqi Kurdish Prime Minister Barham Salih has complained to Baghdad over Kurdistan's share of the Iraqi budget and Iraq's recently proposed draft law regarding this issue.

"If the draft law gets passed in its present form, the Kurdistan region's share in the 2011 Iraqi budget will be 665 billion Iraqi dinars less than that of the 2010 budget," said Salih to Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri Maliki on December 13th 2010 in a letter obtained by Rudaw.

"Unfortunately, I am going to have to make sure the draft law is not accepted in its current form, because of the draft's numerous violations against the KRG [Kurdistan Regional Government] and against the Iraqi Constitution," reads the letter, which requests Maliki to act as soon as possible to solve the issue.

Salih also said the expenses of the top executive offices in the Iraqi government had increased "without any explanation," and, as a consequence, Iraqi Kurdistan's share in the budget had been reduced.

He also pointed out that the KRG's budget for 2010 was 12.39 percent of the Iraqi Budget, while this year it had been reduced to 11.67 percent.

Rashid Tahir, the KRG's deputy finance minister, told Rudaw that Maliki had pledged to solve the bud-



Kurdistan Prime Minister Barham Salih said he will not accept Iraq's budget draft law because it decreases the Iraqi Kurds' share of the budget.

get issues.

"After deducting governmental and administration costs, the KRG's share shouldn't be less than 13 percent," he said.

Tahir also said last week's visit to Baghdad by a Kurdish delegation, which aimed to solve budget and oil issues, had not produced "concrete results."

"The Iraqi prime minister only promised to solve the issues, because we, the Kurdish delegation, were in Baghdad, [but] the Iraqi finance minister was in Jordan," said Tahir. "Maliki promised that any time the KRG reached an agreement with the Iraqi finance minister regarding the KRG's share [of the budget], he would accept it."

Meanwhile, Iraqi deputy finance minister Fazil Nabi told Rudaw that Kurdish officials in the Iraqi Parliament had "misunderstood" the 17 percent share designated for the KRG in the Iraqi budget.

"I want to make it clear that the KRG's 17 percent share will be given to the Kurdistan region, but only after deducting governmental and administration costs," said Nabi.

"When Kurdish officials...say the KRG's share has been reduced to 11.6 percent, they haven't taken [these] costs into account, and so they are wrong. In reality, the KRG gets its fair share."

StarTribune

January 30, 2011

Seizing on Egypt tumult, Kurdish splinter party calls on Iraqi regional govt to resign

The Associated Press

SULAIMANIYAH, Iraq -- An opposition party in Iraq's Kurdish north on Sunday urged the regional government to resign, saying protests in the Arab world should be a wake-up call for its leaders. The government quickly rebuffed the call.

The reformist group called Gorran, Kurdish for "Change," said the ruling parties in the three provinces comprising the semiautonomous northern region are corrupt and don't represent the people.

The kind of protests that have rocked Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere could happen in the Kurdish north if the government fails to reform, Gorran spokesman Mohammed

Tawfiq Rahim said.

The ruling parties - the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan and the Kurdistan Democratic Party - said Gorran was trying to take advantage of the situation in other countries to provoke instability in the relatively prosperous region.

"These demands have nothing to do with reality and are not legitimate," the regional government said in a statement.

"We realize that the Kurdish governing experiment is not free of shortcomings, and we have problems meeting the daily needs of the citizens," it said. "But we have started a campaign of reforms."

The ruling parties in the Kurdish region, which was relatively peaceful



during the Iraq war, have maintained a firm grip on power despite allegations of corruption and media intimidation.

AKnews

Agency of Kurdistan for News

Kurdish opposition called for talks with Barzani

January 19th 2011 Reported by Abdulla Shames

Baghdad, (AKnews) - The deputy of the Kurdish bloc (Change), (Goran) called Wednesday for talks between its bloc and Kurdistan Region's President, Massoud Barzani in order to avoid any crisis that may occur in the future in Kurdistan.

goran logo Chayann Saheed told AKnews that negotiating is the solution to resolve any crisis that may occur in the future of Kurdistan," calling for "adopting transparency principle to resolve problems.

"Goran bloc was a part of Kurdistan Bloc's coalition (KBC) and an internal system of political reform was established to separate the three powers and prevent partisanship within the security for-

ces but KBC has not met these promises so we withdrew."

"The bloc wants to prove to all that it does not pay attention to the positions and ministries, saying "We want to show that we have principles and calling us opposition we is early because we are in talks with the political blocs."

If we participated in the government we will control and account our ministers, as well as our work in the parliament to observe the rest of the ministers "

Goran bloc has eight seats, it withdrew from KBC and decided to have talks to form a government alone, but it did not get any position and decided to withdraw and be with the opposition.

AFP

Syrie: détentions arbitraires, torture, discriminations continuent

BRUXELLES, 24 jan 2011 (AFP)

LE POUVOIR syrien met en prison les militants politiques, étouffe la liberté d'expression, réprime la minorité kurde, isole les détenus du monde extérieur et souvent les torture, a dénoncé lundi l'organisation Human Rights Watch (HRW) dans son rapport annuel.

"Le registre noir de la Syrie s'est distingué (en 2010). Les jugements rendus à l'encontre de deux éminents défenseurs des droits de l'Homme, dont un âgé de 80 ans, montrent jusqu'où les autorités syriennes peuvent aller pour faire taire leurs adversaires", déplore HRW.

Ces deux militants, Mouhannad Hasni et Haytham Maleh, condamnés par la Cour pénale pour avoir "affaibli le sentiment national" et "propagé des informations mensongères", sont "les véritables héros de la Syrie en 2010", estime Sarah Leah Whitson, directrice pour le Moyen-Orient à HRW.

"Les efforts de la Syrie pour attirer les touristes et les investisseurs étran-

gers lui donnent de l'éclat, mais ses prisons et ses services de sécurité sont d'un autre temps", insiste Mme Whitson.

HRW cite au moins cinq détenus ayant trouvé la mort en prison en 2010, "sans que des enquêtes sérieuses aient été menées par les autorités", et indique que la torture est pratiquée en toute impunité.

Islamistes et Kurdes font l'objet d'une sévérité particulière, et plusieurs militants ont été condamnés à de lourdes peines de prison, note aussi le rapport.

"Les kurdes sont victimes de discriminations. Plus de 300.000 d'entre eux sont privés de cartes d'identité, biens qu'ils soient nés en Syrie", affirme HRW. Estimés à plus de 1,5 million de personnes, soit 9% de la population, les Kurdes de Syrie réclament la reconnaissance de leur langue et de leur culture.



Kurdistan Regional Government

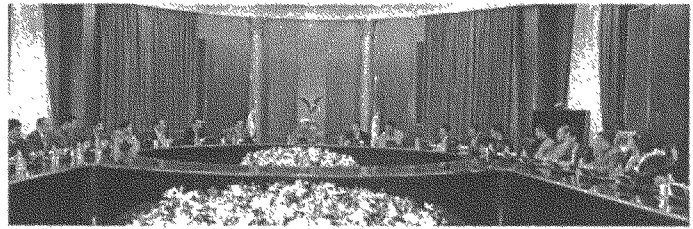
30 January 2011

Kurdistan Political Blocs Denounce Gorran's Call for Abolition of KRG and Parliament

Salahaddin, Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRP.org) - President Masoud Barzani chaired a meeting today in Salahadin of the KRG Council of Ministers, Kurdistan Parliament and leaders and representatives of all political parties in the Kurdistan Region, to discuss the extraordinary call by the Region's opposition group (Gorran) for the abolition of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Parliament.

The meeting concluded by a statement denouncing this call by Gorran and calling upon the people of Kurdistan to be wary of any attempts to jeopardize the security and stability of the Kurdistan Region.

"Any attempts for reform or change in the Kurdistan Region must be undertaken within the framework of law and regulations and must also respect the results of elections and the will of the people of the Region. We reject any attempts that would jeopardize the security, stability and peaceful coexis-



tence in the Kurdistan Region," said the statement.

The statement went on to say "we reiterate our belief in the importance of democratic values, including having differences of opinion and having a peaceful and legal opposition in the Region. We acknowledge the need for reforms and that there are shortcomings such as corruption in the Region, but we are determined that the government, the opposition, and civil society organizations should work together towards making progress in addressing these issues."

As well as the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), all the other main parties of the Region participated in today's meeting which included the Islamic Union of Kurdistan, the Islamic Group of Kurdistan, the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan, as well as parties representing leftists, nationalists, Turkomens and Christians.

AKnews

Agency of Kurdistan for News

Iraqiya: demand to change Kurdistan regime is logical

January 31st 2011 / Reported by Yazan al-Shammari

Baghdad, (AKnews) - AL-Iraqiya MP led by Ayad Allawi confirmed on Monday that the claims of Goran bloc to change the regime in Kurdistan and dissolve the Parliament is logical and acceptable, adding that AL-Iraqiya List, stands beside Gorran list.

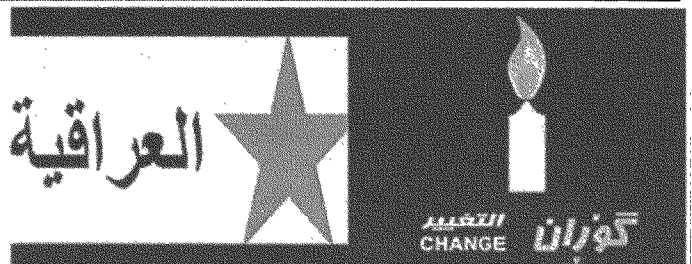
Logo goran iraqiaal-Obeidi, told AKnews that AL-Iraqiya List is on the side of Goran bloc is a logical of the list, especially that the demand came in accordance with legal procedures.

The Gorran opposing movement demanded in a statement issued on Saturday to dissolve the parliament and Kurdistan government, the statement of the movement caused reaction and controversy by Kurdistan presidency, the government and parliament of Kurdistan and the ruling Kurdish parties.

A special meeting took place between Kurdistan region's President and political parties in the province.

The political offices of Kurdistan Democratic Party and the national union issued clarifications to the world public opinion over the Goran movement calls to solve the parliament and Kurdistan Government, which included blaming the movement for any accident that may occur in Kurdistan.

On the possibility of transmission of demonstrations fever in



Baghdad ,al-Obeidi said "these demonstrations cant be transmitted to Baghdad as the case in the other countries that may happen in Kurdistan," noting that "Baghdad live a life of democracy ."

"the Kurdish citizen is following the events today through the media and what is going on in the countries is entitled to him to express his will and Goran list has support from the Kurds."

Goran enjoys wide support in Sulaimaniya city, Kuridstan's second largest city, where they headed the polls in the parliamentary elections. They have a significant minority of 25 seats in the 111-seat parliament of Kurdistan Region.

Goran was formed by the former PUK deputy secretary-general, Nashirwan Mustafa in 2009, after a long dispute between him and the "reform wing" within the party.

The major opposition faction won eight parliamentary seats in the Iraqi elections held March 7, 2010. After the elections it united with the rest of the Kurdish factions to the Iraqi parliament under the Kurdistan Blocs Coalition (KBC). However, before the formation of the new Iraqi government in December, the opposition party pulled out from the KBC as a result of disputes with majority in Kurdistan.

L'Irak s'interroge sur le retour d'un prédicateur chiite antiaméricain

Pour le meilleur ou pour le pire? Deux semaines après le triomphal retour d'exil de Moqtada Al-Sadr dans son pays le 6 janvier, l'Irak s'interroge. Et les Etats-Unis aussi. Le populaire et populiste prédicateur chiite radicalement antiaméricain qui lança ses milliers de miliciens armés dans deux batailles meurtrières contre les GI en 2004, puis dans un autre affrontement mortel contre l'armée irakienne en 2008, revient-il au pays pour aider à stabiliser la situation? Ou pour l'enflammer à nouveau comme en 2006 et 2007, quand ses séides, en riposte aux tueries de civils chiites perpétrées par Al-Qaida en Irak, multipliaient les massacres et les tortures sur des milliers de sunnites innocents?

A Washington, où l'on qualifiait volontiers le jeune prêcheur, aujourd'hui âgé de 37 ans, de « voyou de grand chemin » en 2004, le ton a radicalement changé. Le 6 janvier, quand Moqtada Al-Sadr, après un exil volontaire en Iran de près de quatre années, est réapparu à Nadjaf devant une foule d'au moins 20 000 supporters énamourés, l'intéressé était redevenu plus sobrement, dans la bouche de Philip J. Crowley, porte-parole du département d'Etat, « le leader d'un parti politique irakien qui a remporté un certain nombre de sièges aux élections ». Les Etats-Unis, a poursuivi le diplomate, « espèrent que ce parti jouera un rôle constructif », mais « ils n'ont pas à être pour ou contre » le retour du prêcheur.

De toute façon, même si le vice-président américain Joseph Biden a effectué le 13 janvier sa septième visite à Bagdad depuis l'élection de Barack Obama, c'est un fait admis par tous que l'influence américaine sur les affaires intérieures du pays est tombée à son plus bas niveau depuis l'invasion de 2003. Il reste 48 000 GI en Irak – contre 140 000 il y a deux ans – et, au terme des accords conclus fin 2008 entre les deux

Analyse

Patrice Claude

Service International

pays, tous devront avoir quitté le sol irakien au 31 décembre 2011.

Moqtada Al-Sadr n'a pas manqué l'occasion de le marteler depuis son retour : l'indispensable soutien qu'il a fini par accorder à la constitution, d'une nouvelle coalition de gouvernement sous la direction du premier ministre chiite, Nouri Al-Maliki, est directement lié « au respect de l'engagement pris », à savoir « le départ de toutes les forces d'occupation à la date prévue ». Ceux qui, à Bagdad comme à Washington, espéraient pouvoir négocier une « rallonge temporelle », ne serait-ce que pour former les forces irakiennes à l'utilisation des milliers de tonnes de matériels militaires commandés aux Etats-Unis par l'Irak, en seront pour leurs frais. « Nous sommes et serons toujours, a répété M. Sadr, des résistants à l'occupation étrangère. L'Amérique, Israël et le Royaume-Uni sont nos ennemis! »

L'influence de l'Iran sur l'approche politique du jeune leader peut ici apparaître patente. A Qom, la ville religieuse iranienne où il a suivi des études religieuses pour devenir ayatollah comme l'était son célèbre père Mohammad Sadek Al-Sadr, assassiné en 1999 avec ses deux fils aînés par des tueurs présumés à la solde de Saddam Hussein, Moqtada Al-Sadr a peut-être dû mettre un peu de pan-chiisme dans son nationalisme arabe irakien. Mais la rhétorique antiaméricaine a toujours été son credo.

Fort, aujourd'hui, de 40 députés (sur 375), dont un occupe la première vice-présidence du

Parlement, et de huit ministres en exercice (sur 45), Moqtada Al-Sadr est-il devenu, comme l'avance Juan Cole, l'un des meilleurs analystes américains de la situation irakienne, « un pilier du nouvel establishment »? A Bagdad, la réponse à cette question comme à d'autres, varie selon l'identité religieuse. Globalement, la minorité sunnite se méfie comme de la peste d'un homme imprévisible auquel elle n'a pas pardonné les horreurs subies. Dans la majorité chiite qui domine aujourd'hui l'Etat en reconstitution, les opinions à l'endroit du jeune prêcheur sont plus partagées.

Les plus optimistes relèvent que l'homme semble avoir mûri, qu'il apparaît plus réfléchi, plus responsable. Apparemment, même si ses miliciens, devenus invisibles, n'ont jamais vraiment déposé les armes, « le Sayyed Moqtada » comme l'appellent les Irakiens – « sayyed » est un titre honorifique réservé en Irak aux descendants présumés du Prophète – semble avoir décidé de jouer le jeu de la politique plutôt que de la violence.

Ses partisans font valoir que, sans lui, l'Irak, qui a connu huit mois d'impasse politique après les élections de mars 2010, n'aurait probablement toujours pas de gouvernement, en fonction. Plus ou moins forcé par Téhéran qui tient à l'unité chiite au pouvoir à Bagdad, c'est effectivement le « rabibochage » entre M. Sadr et M. Maliki qui a permis, dans les tout derniers jours de 2010, de reconstituer une majorité de gouvernement. Combien de temps tiendra-t-elle? C'est toute la question. En tout cas, signe de son importance retrouvée sur la scène politique nationale, le chef nominal de l'Etat, Jalal Talabani, a fait, vendredi 14 janvier, le voyage à Nadjaf (160 km au sud de Bagdad), pour le rencontrer dans sa résidence privée. ■

Courriel : claud@lemonde.fr



La Turquie condamnée à Strasbourg pour atteinte à la liberté d'expression

STRASBOURG (Conseil de l'Europe), 25 jan 2011 (AFP)

LA COUR EUROPÉENNE des droits de l'Homme (CEDH) a condamné mardi la Turquie pour avoir empêché une militante pro-kurde de s'adresser à la presse, en marge d'une manifestation de soutien au PKK (Parti des travailleurs du Kurdistan).

La requérante, Mme Güler Mentès, avait été condamnée à 10 mois d'emprisonnement pour avoir organisé et participé en 2000 à une manifestation illégale de soutien au leader du PKK Abdullah Öcalan et pour s'être adressée à la presse.

Elle était alors membre du Parti de la démocratie du peuple (HadeP), une formation qui par la suite (en 2003) avait été dissoute par la Cour constitutionnelle turque pour ses liens supposés avec les rebelles du PKK.

Selon la Cour de sûreté de l'Etat qui l'a condamnée, sa déclaration à la presse en faveur d'Abdullah Öcalan « était de nature à inciter à la violence et au recours à d'autres méthodes terroristes ».

La CEDH rappelle que dans le domaine de la liberté d'expression, « la marge d'appréciation dont jouissent les Etats contractants va de pair avec un contrôle européen (...) strict. Le besoin d'une éventuelle restriction doit donc se trouver établi de manière convaincante ».

Mais en l'occurrence « l'arrêt de condamnation ne contenait aucune information quant au contenu des propos sur la base desquels elle a été condamnée », note la cour de Strasbourg. « Ce constat suffit pour mettre en cause le respect du droit à la liberté d'expression de la requérante ».

Cette atteinte à la liberté d'expression de la requérante « n'était pas nécessaire dans une société démocratique », conclut la CEDH.

Comme la requérante n'a pas présenté de demande d'indemnisation dans les délais, la cour européenne ne lui en a pas octroyé.

Mme Mentès avait déjà obtenu gain de cause en 2007 devant la CEDH sur le même dossier, mais sous un autre angle juridique : la Cour avait à l'époque estimé qu'elle n'avait pas bénéficié d'un procès équitable.

A Istanbul, échec des discussions entre les grandes puissances et l'Iran sur son programme nucléaire

Le représentant iranien Saïd Jalili a insisté sur une levée préalable des sanctions internationales

C'est le *« blocage »*, constate une source proche du dossier. Les discussions tenues vendredi 21 et samedi 22 janvier à Istanbul entre l'Iran et le groupe des Six (Etats-Unis, Royaume-Uni, France, Russie, Chine, Allemagne) n'ont permis aucune avancée sur le dossier nucléaire.

La reprise de ce processus de pourparlers, après une première séance en décembre, à Genève – intervenant après quinze mois d'interruption – était attendue comme une occasion de jauger de la disponibilité iranienne à engager de vraies négociations, après la « main tendue » de l'administration Obama en 2009 et la montée en puissance des sanctions internationales en 2010.

Affecté par des difficultés économiques et les problèmes techniques apparus dans son program-

me nucléaire, l'Iran était censé se montrer plus souple, du moins soucieux de parvenir à un compromis. Il n'en a rien été, ont constaté les diplomates occidentaux.

Le négociateur iranien, Saïd Jalili, a surpris ses interlocuteurs par son insistance à fixer deux préconditions pour que des négociations de fond puissent s'engager. D'une part, il a demandé une levée des sanctions frappant l'Iran, les décrivant comme des « mesures » portant atteinte à la « souveraineté » du pays.

D'autre part, il a exigé que les grandes puissances reconnaissent le « droit » de l'Iran à enrichir l'uranium, alors que cette activité se poursuit en violation des résolutions votées à l'ONU depuis 2006. Ces textes demandent à Téhéran de rétablir la « confiance » sur la nature de son programme nucléai-

re, notamment en répondant aux questions de l'Agence internationale de l'énergie atomique (AIEA), qui restent en suspens.

Deux préconditions

La tactique iranienne, selon les diplomates occidentaux, visait à diviser le groupe des Six, qui a cependant préservé son unité. A la veille de la rencontre d'Istanbul, le ministre russe des affaires étrangères, Sergueï Lavrov, avait toutefois critiqué les « sanctions unilatérales » américaines contre l'Iran, qui « minent les efforts en faveur d'une solution commune ».

Les Six ont tenté d'amener l'Iran à accepter une version révisée de l'offre d'échange d'uranium enrichi mise en avant par les grandes puissances et l'AIEA en octobre 2009, qu'il avait rejetée. L'objectif étant d'enclencher une dyna-

mique de « mesures de confiance » qui auraient été assorties de gestes iraniens de transparence sur l'ensemble des sites nucléaires.

M. Jalili a rejeté ces propositions, annonçant que les deux préconditions s'appliquaient aussi à ce volet-là des discussions. Aucune date n'a été fixée pour une nouvelle rencontre. La haute représentante européenne, Catherine Ashton, qui représente les Six, a exprimé sa « déception », tout en ajoutant, comme l'a fait Washington, que la porte restait ouverte au dialogue.

En outre, M. Jalili a refusé tout entretien en bilatéral avec l'émis-saire américain, William Burns. A l'issue de cet échec, certains officiels occidentaux se disent en faveur de nouvelles sanctions, un sujet qui doit désormais être débattu entre les Six. ■

Natalie Nougayrède



Un vaste gisement de gaz découvert au Kurdistan irakien

LONDRES, 26 janvier 2011 (AFP)

LA COMPAGNIE pétrolière Heritage Oil a annoncé mercredi avoir découvert un vaste gisement gazier dans le Kurdistan irakien, l'un des plus grands jamais détectés en Irak, une nouvelle qui a cependant déçu fortement la Bourse de Londres.

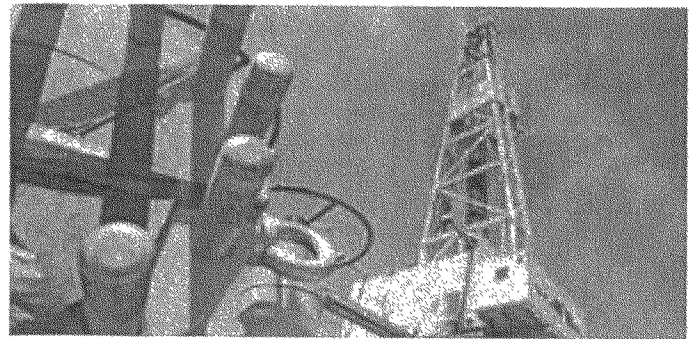
Ce gisement, baptisé Miran, pourrait détenir jusqu'à 348 milliards de mètres cubes de gaz, a estimé Heritage, compagnie d'origine canadienne cotée à Londres et à Toronto.

C'est le plus grand champ gazier découvert depuis plus de 30 ans en Irak, a ajouté l'entreprise dans un communiqué, et le sixième plus vaste jamais découvert dans le pays.

Il se situe dans le nord-est du Kurdistan, région semi-autonome d'Irak riche en hydrocarbures, et est détenu à 75% par Heritage Oil.

Heritage ajoute qu'elle étudie désormais les possibilités d'exploitation du champ, dont la production pourrait être exportée jusqu'en Europe via la Turquie, grâce au gazoduc en projet Nabucco. Elle dit viser une mise en production du champ en 2015.

Mais cette annonce a été mal accueillie à la Bourse de Londres, où l'action d'Heritage voyait son cours chuter de 19,61% à 351 pence vers 14H30 GMT.



Les courtiers s'attendaient à des forages plus prometteurs: ils se sont dits déçus que le gisement de Miran contienne du gaz, plutôt que du pétrole, qui aurait présenté une valeur marchande bien plus élevée.

De plus, ils ont émis des craintes à propos du coût des investissements nécessaires pour mettre en place les infrastructures permettant d'exploiter le gisement, comme la construction d'une conduite pour le relier au gazoduc Nabucco.

"La viabilité d'un tel projet, qui pourrait inclure la construction d'un gazoduc jusqu'en Turquie, donne des motifs d'inquiétude aux investisseurs", a estimé ainsi Sean Power, analyste chez City Index.

Globe Editorial

The plight of the Syrian Kurds - the forgotten kindred

By Bashdar Pusho Ismaeel

Repression, misfortune and suffering has been a common feature of recent Kurdish history across the Middle Eastern plains, but often the plight of the Syrian Kurds has been the most overlooked and forgotten—quite literally in the case of thousands of stateless Kurds.

While Kurds in both Iraq and Turkey may have had more focus under the international spotlight, the struggle and suffering of the Syrian Kurds goes on unabated as we enter a new year. The newfound prominence and strategic standing of the Kurds in Iraq is a major milestone in Kurdish nationalism, with the gains less notable but nevertheless significant in Turkey, where Kurds are slowly enjoying greater cultural freedoms and more state focus.

Amidst a new passage for Kurds in the Middle East, the Syrian Kurds have lagged behind without the same rights and privileges enjoyed by their ethnic brethren across the mountainous borders. In spite of increasing pressure from human rights groups and some Western powers in recent years, progress in Syria has been lacking substance and a sense of a genuine desire for reform. Only this week, a report by Human Rights Watch (HRW) continued to highlight the lack of freedoms and rights in Syria.

In a region hardly noteworthy for freedom and political liberalism, the assessment by the HRW belief that "Syria's authorities were among the worse violators of human rights last year" spoke volumes.

In the last several years, it is

fair to say that Kurds in Syria have found new leverage and confidence in protesting against the government and seeking greater reform. Many of these motions including rallies, protests and activist movements have been met with suppression by the Syrian government, often via violent means and at the expense of civilian lives.

In March of last year, security forces opened fire to disperse Kurdish Newroz celebrations in the northern city of Raqqa, resulting in many wounded and dozens of arrests. According to HRW, at least another 14 Kurdish political and cultural public gatherings have been harshly repressed by the state since 2005.

Only this week, more political activists were mercilessly killed. Two members of the People's Confederation of Western Kurdistan (KCK) were killed after being ambushed by Syrian security forces, leading to protests and rising anger in Kurdish circles. Other cases of disappearances, torture and death have not been met with enquiries, explanations or action by the government

The Syrian Kurds more than ever need international assistance and pressure from the main ruling bodies to entrench their campaign for recognition, cultural rights and greater freedoms. As such, a great moral, national and political responsibility falls on the Kurdistan Regional Government for diplomatic assistance of the fellow Kurds in Syria and pushing for reconciliation between the Syrian government and the disenfranchised Kurdish minority.

The Kurdish movement should be based on the ideals of international law, dialogue and peaceful resolution, the



Thousands of Kurds gather to celebrate the Kurdish new year or «Newroz» in Terbespi, near Qamishi, march 21, 2005. PRESS PHOTO

minimum that any ethnic minority deserves in this day and age.

The oppression and systematic coercion of the Syrian Kurds is not new. They have become the ubiquitous victims of Arab nationalist policies since the granting of Syrian independence from France. Much like Arabization policies of the fellow Baathist Regime in Baghdad, Syria created an Arab cordon (Hizam Arabi) along the Turkish border, resulting in 150,000 Kurds being forcibly deported and losing their lands and livelihood.

Of the numerous injustices committed against the Kurds, none requires greater attention than the plight of the 300,000 stateless Kurds that many say are being "buried alive," as in living but unable to live a life. As a result of a special census carried out by Syrian authorities in the densely Kurdish-populated northeast in 1962, thousands of Kurds were arbitrarily stripped of their citizenship, leaving them without basic rights, subject to systematic discrimination and in poverty.

Subsequently, most denationalized Kurds were categorized as ajanibs (or "foreigners") with identity documentation to confirm their lack of nationality and furthermore denied access to education, healthcare, judicial and political systems, and unable to obtain property, business or even marry. Some further 75-100,000 Kurds, compounded to an even worse status, were

labeled Maktoumeen ("hidden" or "unregistered"), with no identity documents, effectively no existence and having almost no civil rights.

In the year 2011, for a country to be able to deprive thousands of its people of nationality and citizenship and openly contravene international law is remarkable. Many of the Western powers and particularly the UN, whose existence is based on upholding such fundamental rights, have not done enough.

The 1962 census is itself a clear violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which provides the right to a nationality, while Syria is a party to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Prevention of Statelessness.

The Baath Party, headed by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, has ruled Syria since 1963 after seizing power in a coup and enacting an emergency law, which 50 years later is still in force. In this time, political opposition has been widely suppressed with the Arab nationalist ideological framework becoming a mystical cornerstone of the Syrian Republic.

Under the Arab nationalism banner, the Kurds have always been deemed to pose the greatest danger to the regime. After coming to power in 2000 and facing an increasing international spotlight, al-Assad softened the tone toward Kurds and a number of promi-

ses were subsequently made; however, in practice no real steps have been taken.

In fact, as the government drags its heels in implementing concrete steps toward expanding cultural freedoms and resolving the issue of stateless Kurds, the Kurds threaten to become a long-term danger for the establishment.

The Kurds are growing in confidence, and for a country that long was a part of the Washington "axis of evil," it can no longer ignore such a fundamental problem on its doorstep.

Syria does not need to look far to see how civil unrest can

spread like wildfire. From what started as an almost trivial social disturbance, Tunisian President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali was dramatically ousted after a 23-year grip on power, when a small protest led to countrywide chaos. In similar vain, growing protests in Egypt against Hosni Mubarak's government threaten to snowball. Once the masses have the confidence to take to the streets and challenge the government, no amount of artillery or firepower can withstand people power.

The EU, U.S. and UN must back up their condemnation of a lack of human rights with firm measures. Trade and political relationships should not

be promoted when a government openly commits atrocities against its own people and even refuses to grant rights and basic citizenship.

At this critical juncture, it is important for the historically fractured Syrian Kurdish opposition parties to become united and seek regional and international help on their quest for peaceful resolution of their goals.

The KRG evidently requires good relationships with the Syrian government, but the interests of the Kurdistan Region should not be safeguarded and prioritized while fellow Kurds are being repressed.

Ironically, while the Syrian government has provided decades of assistance to thousands of Palestinians and more recently hundreds of Iraqi refugees, they have continued to overlook stateless Kurds within their own borders.

The Syrian government needs to look no further than Turkey. A government cannot indefinitely ignore the rights and voices of such a significant minority. If not capped and addressed, the problems will only exasperate, grow and bite the government increasingly harder as the years ensue.



31 January 2011

Turkey Dominates Iraqi Kurdish Markets

By RAWA ABDULLA / Rudaw

SULAIMANI, Iraqi Kurdistan: More than 60 percent of Iraqi Kurdistan's imports, including food products, come from its northern neighbor Turkey, said the Kurdistan Chamber of Commerce (KCC) last week.

"Right now, Turkey provides 60 to 65 percent of Kurdistan's imports," said Mohammed Amin, director of the KCC office in Erbil, the capital of the semiautonomous Kurdistan region in northern Iraq. "And the amount is increasing."

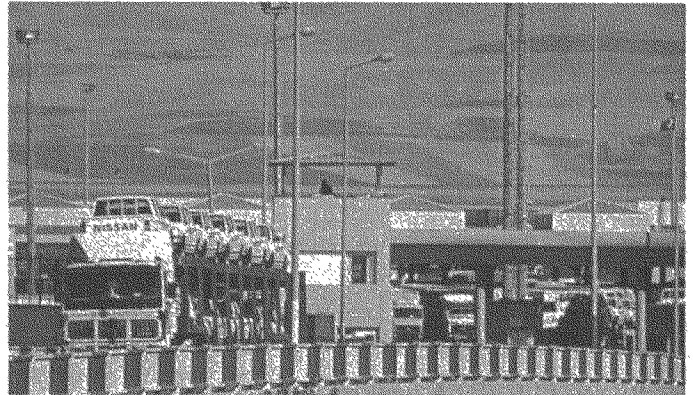
While Turkey has traditionally viewed Iraqi Kurdistan as a geopolitical threat, there has been a significant economic, as well as political, improvement between the two over the past few years.

Turkey now sees Kurdistan as a gateway to the rest of oil-rich Iraq, and for the landlocked Iraqi Kurds, Turkey is also a gateway through which they can send their oil and gas to Europe.

Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officials have said that, as of February, they are going to export oil via Turkey's Ceyhan Pipeline, the only pipeline currently available for the delivering of Kurdish oil to Western markets.

Furthermore, Turkish products are praised here by both Kurdish businessmen and everyday consumers for being of high quality, often being preferred to those of other neighboring countries, such as Iran and Syria.

"The main reason behind Turkish products leaving Iranian, Syrian and Chinese products far behind is that they have both a good quality and look," said Salih Ismaeel, the owner of a clo-



Iraq's northern Ibrahim Khalil border crossing where hundreds of Turkish trucks carrying imported products arrive in Kurdistan every day. ----- Photo/Reuters

thing store packed with Turkish-made products. "There is a rise in demand for Turkish products."

Abdul-Raman Taha, an Erbil-based expert on economics, added to this the recent political developments between Turkey and the KRG as a major reason for the increasing popularity of Turkish commodities in the north of Iraq.

"Representatives from the Turkish Chamber of Commerce frequently visit the Kurdistan region to exhibit new products," said Taha. "I believe the percentage of imports from Turkey is going to increase this year."

The Turkish Consulate General, which opened in Erbil in March last year, recently told various media outlets that it issued as many as 300 entry visas per day to Iraqi Kurds.

Blast at Baghdad funeral enrages Shiites

BAGHDAD

Residents shoot at police after yet another bomb kills nearly 50 people

BY JOHN LELAND

Anger at Iraq's security forces boiled over Thursday after a suicide bomber detonated a car filled with explosives beside an outdoor funeral service and residents began shooting at the police. The bomb killed at least 48 people and wounded 120, adding to a series of attacks that have killed nearly 200 people in 10 days.

Residents stormed into the street and opened fire in what appeared to be a show of frustration that the police had been unable to stop the bomber from reaching their neighborhood. Iraqi Army troops arrived to support the police, leading to a short lull in the violence. But then the crowd erupted again, with more people flooding the street, throwing rocks and bottles at the security forces. After dispersing the crowd, the military imposed a curfew to stop further demonstrations.

Iraqis have been watching scenes of unrest around the region and many say they wonder whether their own country would be further destabilized.

Prime Minister Nuri Kamal al-Maliki won re-election on promises to bring security to the country. But in recent weeks, there has been an increase in violence — nowhere near as much as during the worst years of sectarian strife, but enough so fears have been raised that the country might be slipping backward.

The suicide bombing struck a predominantly Shiite neighborhood, and other attacks have targeted Shiite pilgrims. Earlier in the day, four roadside bombs exploded around Baghdad, killing four people and wounding 16.

Unrest also shook the northern region of Kirkuk, where protests broke out in three cities over the lack of electricity, echoing demonstrations in the south last summer, which the government eventually banned.

One demonstrator linked the protests to the groundswell that toppled the government in Tunisia and was challenging other leaders as well.

"This is to warn them of Iraqi anger mixed with the ecstasy of Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon and Iran, to eliminate those who are corrupt," said Nozad Abdulali, from district of Al Dibs in northwest Kirkuk.

The funeral in Baghdad was for Hussein Aeed al-Sa'adi, who died of natural causes three days earlier during a Shiite pilgrimage to Karbala. His funeral was in the Shula neighborhood, a former center of sectarian violence that is now surrounded by concrete barriers and

police checkpoints. During the melee Thursday, Amal al-Mussawi, a resident, threw stones at the security forces and screamed, "We will keep on protesting and stay in the street until they find a solution. Let Maliki come and see what is happening."

Army soldiers seized him and handcuffed him but released him after a few minutes.

A woman who identified herself as Um Abed Own, or mother of Abed Own, yelled at the troops, "God shall take revenge on you. Enough of your games."

Another neighbor, who gave his name as Abu Mustafa, or father of Mustafa, called for the return of the Mahdi Army, the militia of the cleric Moktada al-Sadr, to restore security.

Many in the crowd accused the security forces of working with the suicide bomber. Hakim al-Zameli, a lawmaker from the Sadrist Trend, Mr. Sadr's political party, who was at the scene, said: "In the last weeks, people from the neighborhood were telling us about the battalion commander in the area, that he is not loyal to the Iraqi Army and that he is coordinating with Al Qaeda."

After the attack, the battalion commander was suspended pending an investigation.

Duraid Adnan, Yasir Ghazi and a New York Times employee in Shula contributed reporting.



Bagdad - 48 morts 121 blessés lors d'une cérémonie de condoléances

Bagdad a connu jeudi sa journée la plus sanglante depuis trois mois avec la mort de 48 personnes dans un attentat à la voiture piégée lors d'une cérémonie de condoléances dans un quartier chiite.

Cet attentat est le plus meurtrier d'une série d'attaques ayant fait au moins 53 morts dans la journée dans la capitale irakienne.

Il confirme la nette recrudescence des violences observée depuis 10 jours en Irak, qui pose à nouveau la question de la capacité des forces locales à contrôler le pays, à moins d'un an du retrait programmé des Américains.

Une voiture piégée a explosé vers 13 h 30 près d'une tente installée dans le quartier chiite de Choula, où une famille recevait les condoléances de proches, au lendemain du décès d'une personne âgée.

«L'attaque a fait 48 morts et 121 blessés», a déclaré un responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur.

Tous les habitants du quartier interrogés par l'AFP ont affirmé que l'attentat était l'oeuvre d'un kamikaze, ce qui n'a pas été confirmé de source officielle.

Quelques heures plus tard, le sol maculé de sang était jonché de chaussures et de vêtements. La tente de plusieurs dizaines de mètres de long où était rassemblée la famille endeuillée s'est partiellement effondrée, une dizaine de bâtiments ont été endommagés et six voitures calcinées.

Trois des enfants de Hussein Ayid al-Saadi, la personne âgée décédée mercredi, ont péri dans l'attentat.

Juste après l'explosion, des habitants du quartier ont violemment manifesté leur colère, lançant des pierres sur les militaires et les policiers, selon le responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur.

«Certains habitants ont ouvert le feu sur les forces de sécurité, ce



Une voiture piégée a explosé vers 13 h 30 près d'une tente installée dans le quartier chiite de Choula.

©AFP

qui les a obligées à se retirer», a-t-il dit. «Un régiment a ensuite été envoyé en renfort, et a dû tirer en l'air pour disperser la foule.»

Un habitant du quartier, Hussein Mohamed al-Saadi, a affirmé à l'AFP que cette manifestation avait été provoquée par l'attitude du premier officier de l'armée arrivé sur place, qui aurait minoré l'importance de l'attentat, et même accusé les habitants d'en être responsables.

«Le gouvernement arrête les terroristes pour les relâcher le lendemain», a accusé Abou Mohamed al-Saadi, un autre habitant âgé de 56 ans. «Qu'il débarrasse nos rues des criminels!»

Un couvre-feu a ensuite été imposé sur le quartier.

Le premier ministre Nouri al-Maliki, qui assure l'intérim à la Défense et l'Intérieur, a ordonné l'arrestation du responsable de la sécurité de Choula, selon la chaîne publique al-Iraqiya. La sécurité du quartier est sous le commandement du lieutenant-colonel Ahmed al-Obeidi, a-t-on appris de source proche des services de sécurité.

Bagdad a été le théâtre jeudi d'au moins quatre autres attentats, qui ont fait cinq morts et 21 bles-

sés, selon le responsable du ministère de l'Intérieur.

Il s'agit de la journée la plus sanglante depuis le 2 novembre dans la capitale, censée accueillir fin mars le sommet de la Ligue arabe.

Ces dix derniers jours, au moins 192 personnes ont été tuées dans des attentats, soit davantage qu'au cours du mois de décembre.

Ces attaques ont visé principalement les forces de sécurité et les chiites, qui se sont rendus par millions à Kerbala, à 110 km au sud de Bagdad, pour l'Arbaïn, un des pèlerinages majeurs du chiisme.

Cette recrudescence de violences contraste avec l'accalmie relative observée après la conclusion en novembre d'un accord de partage de pouvoir qui a permis l'investiture d'un gouvernement en décembre, neuf mois après les législatives.

Depuis la fin de la mission de combat américaine le 31 août, les forces irakiennes assument seules les missions de sécurité, mais bénéficient encore de l'expertise d'un contingent américain fort de 50 000 hommes.

